

# Voices Heard from behind the Windows

## Central Wall Windows

### A Worker

Morocco → Rome, Italy  
Language: Italian

*'...Because all you have are camels. You don't have any streets, you just walk around with camels.'*

*I'm sorry if there are any Italians in the room but they're so backward. They really don't know the world. They think that Morocco is a desert, that Africa is a desert, that there's nothing there, that people just ride around on camels. I'm sorry but they really don't travel abroad. They don't know anything about any other countries. And they think that Africa is all camels and horses and nothing more, that there are no cars there or anything.*

### Pauline R.

Africa [undisclosed country] → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: English

*After living in Poland for all these years, after seeking my refugee status, I find that the Polish people—this is the family I have been looking for. I find parents here and this is where I find the fathers I've been looking for and the mothers I've been looking for. This is where I find the brothers and the sisters, who really support me—emotionally, psychologically... They're always there when I need them. And this is why I feel comfortable, because I'm afraid to go back to my own family. I'm taking refuge in Poland because ... I'm afraid of my own people, my own family members. My mother ...*

*They terrorize me. They emotionally tear me apart. They call me all names—from "momma witch," a thief, anything... anything that brings me down. I get it from the people, my blood relatives, the people who should be giving me support, so I'm really afraid. I don't want to be with them, I want to be here. Cause here the people give me love and care...*

*My relatives do this, especially my aunties, my uncles, they do this because ...they know I don't have a father or a mother to support me. For them It's fine but for me it's tearing me apart. And the only way to cover myself is to stay as far away from them as possible. And that is why I want to be here.*

### Shukri Sahil

Libya → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Arabic

*Hello. Yes. I'm in Poland now, in Warsaw. I stayed in prison a month, in Brussels, then they put me on a plane accompanied by two big men and sent me to Warsaw. In Warsaw I applied for asylum as soon as I learned about it. But this country, my friend, is unbelievable in the way it treats refugees. There's no clarity, they don't tell you what to do or where to go. It's like they think you've been here before.*

*They interviewed me for an hour and a half and told me to go. But where? I don't know, it was extremely cold, and I didn't know where to go. What should I do? I really don't know. They gave me a card, written in Polish. I don't understand the language, and there was a number, 49283. Then, they gave me an address to go to. I asked some people but they couldn't speak English. I went right and then left without any success and the cold was really bad. I'm in a dilemma; only God knows how bad it is. I don't know what to do. The situation is very grave and they don't hand out any money or tell me what to do. You don't know how bad it is. Nobody to turn to, nobody to talk to. I just don't know.*

*They say that in Europe they have human rights and democracy. But where is it? Where is it? What was my mistake? Maybe it was that I was trying to help the oppressed people in our country. Or was it that I was trying to set up the human rights organization in Libya. I thought I could find refuge in Europe where they say they have human rights and democracy. But unfortunately they kept throwing me from one country to another. Like a ball. Using the "Dublin criteria" [Dublin Convention] as an excuse. Come here, go there. Throwing me from one side to another, back and forth. I didn't know my head from my tail.*

*It was done with utter disregard for the person involved. They didn't care about his psychological state, what he felt, what he suffered. The most important thing is that they have to get rid of you. They don't care what you feel, they just make you feel unwanted. They think you're a burden who ought to be eliminated so they don't listen to your case nor do they want to understand you. They just say: put him in prison and send him to Poland where he knocks his head against the wall. And that's it. Ok. Thanks for calling. Thanks. God bless.*

### **Ton Van Anh**

North Vietnam → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Polish

*It is not commonly realized that far away from Poland large numbers of Vietnamese are continuously fighting for their freedom from the communist regime. This is not understood in Poland and the West. Polish people do not have any information about what's happening in Vietnam and they are unable to help us. It is as if everything there were fine. We could almost hope that the Cold War wasn't over because then the Poles would better understand us with and speak on behalf of our freedom, our common freedom. Not a lot of people realized that there are a large amount of illegal immigrants from Vietnam in Poland who have escaped their own country and in Poland they have moved from one prison to another. What makes it a prison is that in Poland the Vietnamese secret police are everywhere. They even interrogate the Vietnamese in Polish deportation centers. I cried half the night when they deported one of my co-workers just after he had been interrogated. They sent him to the airport in the date of night without telling him what was going on. They denied him the right to call his family. We lost touch with him when he landed in Hanoi. We didn't want to imagine the worst, we wanted to believe that he didn't end up in a Vietnamese prison, that he was still alive. Because others in his situation were stabbed in bright daylight in the center of Hanoi.*

### **Rouslan**

Chechnya → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Russian

*I left here but they turned me back. There was one time when I left and they told me that they would have to restart my [immigration] procedure and that then they would let me stay. After four years I was once again told that I have to leave Poland. That's the situation. I mean I can't go any further, and I can't go back. I don't have any documents here. I don't have any work here. It's like Pushkin's tale, the old lady and the broken pot: I'm sitting here wondering what to do next. I'm here with all the family, my children, my wife. That's the situation.*

### **A Worker**

Romania → Rome, Italy  
Language: Italian

*I'd have this to say to Berlusconi: pay attention to people from other countries because Italians unfortunately made the law but they only do it for their own advantage.*

### **Rouslan**

Chechnya → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Russian

*The document I currently have is a visa, here it is. A visa they previously gave to you for a year, that's how long I got it for. Now they only give it to you for a month. It a refugee visa, the notification has to be sent somewhere, then they have to respond, send through the post, and that takes a month. And by that time, the visa expires. And this is the document I have on me at the moment, it's the only document I have. It's this card from the refugee center with number 26121. I got it four years ago, that's what I have. I also have a drivers license, but that's not a document, really. The documents I previously had, my internal passport is no longer valid, my foreign passport has expired a long time ago. So I have no papers, I have no job, and I don't know who I am. Am I a refugee? Am I a human being? Who am I? That's my situation; there's no way out.*

### **Ton Van Anh**

North Vietnam → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Polish

*Do they really have clean hands, those who helped the Vietnamese secret police enter Polish detention centers so that they can interrogate the Vietnamese and have full power over them?*

## Madina

Chechnya → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Polish

*...Is it true and why didn't you tell me? And he [my son] said, 'It didn't hurt much, let's go Mom.'*

*And then I said, 'No, the teacher doesn't have the right to beat you.'*

*What do you mean it didn't hurt? This girl says you were crying. And whenever I came to see the teacher she would speak to me in front of the class, in front of his classmates, but I'm a parent. And whenever I went to pick him up from school she would scream, she'd raise her voice and say bad things about him, but I don't know why she had to do it in front of the class. I'm not standing up for my son, but why did it have to be done in front of his classmates? I'm his parent, I'm his mother and his classmates were laughing. Couldn't she have waited until the other children left, then the teacher and I could have spoken and not in front of the entire class because I'm a parent. We changed schools, and we changed houses, then in 2006 a new law came out so I only spent three months in that center and then they told me, 'you have to leave the center, you have a residence permit, you have the right to live just like Polish people, leave the center.'*

*'Where do I go?' I asked, it was winter time, 'where do I go with my children, I don't understand where I should live, where I should go...'*

## A Poet

North Vietnam → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Polish

### THE CALLING

*I wake at midnight, a calling comes on the wind. The voice of my distant homeland.*

*Unclear pleading voices have been calling me for years, maybe it's the voice coming from my heart or maybe it's the forgotten traces of my sundered childhood, the roving voice of the soul, the crawling shade of days.*

*On such a day the sun does not shine nor can the birds be heard, but there is no silence but a storm that rages in my heart.*

## Antun

Yugoslavia → Rome, Italy  
Language: Italian

*Take my people, the Romani people from Yugoslavia. The matter of documents, for instance. The Romani people who have been living in Rome for four generations still don't have a residence permit. There is no work for the young. I'm trying to help this young man whose parents don't have any papers and neither do his grandparents. They were the first in the family to come here in 1960 and still don't have documents.*

*This young man was born in Italy, just as the other children of the Romani couple, and according to the law he has the right to study only until the age of 14. And that is why the Gypsy children cannot study at the University. They have absolutely no prospects in life and even when they are children they know that when they start school they can't study further after they turn 14. At that stage their intellectual and cultural life is blocked, is cut short and there is no further chance for development.*

*They refused to recognize our existence, and since there was no Gypsy holocaust, it's as if the Gypsies didn't exist, because if there was a Gypsy holocaust they would have been taken into account, we would have been recognized as a nation, because nobody recognized us legally. They don't see us as a legal group, but as a group of outlaws. You didn't even see us as a linguistic minority. Christ, and during the Second World War, 600,000 Romani, men, women, and children died. Some of them were the subject of medical experiments and even that is not reason enough to give us identification papers, as we don't have a history, because we are an invisible nation. And if I'm going down the street and I don't have any documents on me, then when somebody asks me to show my documents it's as if I didn't exist, because I don't have them.*

*And if I don't exist, then history doesn't exist either.*

## A Poet

North Vietnam → Warsaw, Poland  
Reciting/singing a poem in Vietnamese

## Ghizlane Bahraoui, A Political Activist

Morocco → Spain  
Language: Arabic

*This concept of widespread fear includes two aspects. There's a fear of going hungry and a fear that leads you to desperation to the point that you want to emigrate and escape from a country that doesn't give you any rights. So you risk your life and head to the unknown and you go to a place where the others are already afraid of you.*

voice from *On Translation: Miedo/ Jauf* by Antoni Muntadas, 2007

## Left Wall Windows

### Mira and Allina

Domestic Workers (Badanti)

Ukraine → Rome, Italy

Language: Italian

*All the years I've spent here, that's life, what can you do? Before I came to Italy I worked together with my husband. Then I came here and my husband stayed back home. We bought a house and I sent all the money back [to that] home every month. Before coming here I didn't speak Italian. My first job was looking after this old lady, I ran the house for her. She was a big woman, heavy. I have to look after her until late at night, help her walk, carry her, help her wash. It was very hard. I almost didn't sleep at night because that women would sleep in the day and at night she would watch TV until late at night and I had to get up early. As soon as I fell asleep, she would call me to help her go to the bathroom. As a result I couldn't fall asleep again. Sometimes she called me a couple of times a night. I would end up sleeping an hour and spending the next hour trying to fall back asleep. I worked hard for nine months, while I later found out that my husband was blowing off all of the money I sent him. I did it all for my two kids.*

*There was this woman who sent all the money she made back home, but when she got back her daughter says "what have you come back for?" and she didn't know what to do next. "My life is over," she said, "I worked hard, I sent all the money I made back home, and now I don't know what to do."*

### Kasia and Ola

Legal Aid for Immigrants

Warsaw, Poland

Language: Polish

*I was recently talking to Larissa, you know her. She's the Chechen mother of five, the one who recently won some sort of competition at the Polish language class, and she's the best Polish speaker in the group. She's a great woman and her [immigration] procedure is over. I recently tried to help her find a flat. I spent three months on the phone. What I love are ads such as: "no children, pets, or smokers allowed." Sometimes I can't even get as far as telling people that she's a foreigner, when I say that she has children they don't want to rent the apartment. People in Poland are unwilling to rent apartments to foreigners. We need to find some sort of institutional solution. Every week I've been getting people who want me to help them find a flat on the free market, but you know how high the prices are, and there's not a lot I can do with the resources I have and then there's the prejudice. People in Poland don't want families with children, they don't want foreigners.*

### A Worker

Romania → Rome, Italy

Language: Italian

*My friend was getting married in Romania. He was here 14 months. He worked well off the books, and he made six thousand [euros]. The boss said: go to Romania, I'll send you the money. I'll send you the money for the wedding. But he ended up getting married with someone else's money: friends, relatives, people who helped him.*

### Dancers and a Friend

North Vietnam → Warsaw, Poland

Language: Vietnamese

*Hi, hi. Nice dancing. And you? What's up? How's work? I'm working hard from nine a.m. to nine p.m. every day. I'd like to see someone from time to time, people from Vietnam but that's not possible, there's not enough time for that.*

### A Young Man

North Vietnam → Warsaw, Poland

Language: Vietnamese

*After the long journey to Moscow, I made my way across Ukraine, through the forest, often on foot. And when I reached Poland I thought I would be safe. I was arrested as an illegal immigrant. And if I had been deported it could have led to a nightmare even worse than the one I had fled. What I want is to be recognized by the Polish authorities, to be seen as worthy of protection, so that I might live in Poland as a refugee. I escaped across the sea in a boat, I crossed half the world running, and I really need a haven. I'm appealing to the Polish authorities to let me live, to listen to their conscience, and I'm appealing to the many Poles who listen to their consciences.*

## Right Wall Windows

### Paweł Grześ and Woman Friend

Białystok region → Warsaw, Poland  
Language: Paweł: Belarusian, Friend: Polish

**Woman Friend:** *I grew up in a Belarusian village in a small town. When we were together we spoke Belarusian and the family as well.*

**Paweł Grześ:** *Well didn't you have any Poles?*

**WF:** *No the Poles have only just started coming now, but it's not as if we felt we were living in another country, we felt at home.*

**PG:** *What about school?*

**WF:** *We were in the majority in school. But there were only two of us in our class and there was a situation where people didn't understand that we wanted to be taught in Belarusian. They told us to bring a note from our parents, whether our parents agreed to have us taught in Belarusian. While we weren't taught Belarusian at all and in our school nobody said anything about Belarus. When I was Orthodox and studied religions separately everybody thought I was Russian and I had to tell them I wasn't, while in my religion classes it was fairly confusing because they told us to learn old church Slavonic. The priest in church taught us Russian while in our class we were taught in Polish, it was schizophrenic. Nobody told us anything about our nationality.*

### A Worker

Romania → Rome, Italy  
Language: Italian

*You can't travel to another country without a permit. You can't work normally without a permit.*

*I have a permit. I worked legally. Everything was fine and I also worked off the books earlier even though I had a permit. And now they have you work off the books even if you have a permit. That way they don't have to pay taxes.*

### Youssef Touzani

Morocco → Spain  
Language: Arabic

*You grow to a certain age and you find yourself without a permanent job, without a job that gives you guarantees. Like I said before, a sense of the future. You look at the future and you see there is none. And the best solution is to get out of there, you think about getting out for any price and all young Moroccans think that way...*

voice from *On Translation: Miedo/ Jauf* by Antoni Muntadas, 2007

## Skylight Window

### A Worker

Belarus → Lodz, Poland  
Language: Russian

*Hello Dasha, hi sis. How's it going? Me? Fine, I'm working. Everything's fine. Yeah, I'm well, but how are you? Fine? It's not easy? How's Kola? Does his leg hurt? And the children? Lisa's sick? What is it? The flu? Listen, they'll pay me and then I can send you some money. You want me to buy you some medicines? And antibiotic? Can children take antibiotics? They can, ok. Fine, you just tell me what kind of antibiotics you want later on, ok? Yes, you'll tell me later what kind of antibiotics you want, write me or call me. And besides that, how's Nastia? She's studying? Is she getting good grades? Good girl. Wait up. Give her my love and give grandma my love, is grandma well? At the end of the month I'll send you some euros, about 5000, will that be enough? I won't have any more because I need some for myself. Great, that's it. Kisses, bye.*

### A Worker

Belarus → Lodz, Poland  
Language: Russian

*Yes, what? What is it? Kola? And, what about him? He wants shoes? Trainers? A pair of Adidas? What size is he? 46? Wait... 46 and a half. Good. No more than fifty. Fine, that's it. Love, bye.*

*That's a hard life. That's good. And one more. And now let's have a cigarette break.*

*Wait up. Yeah, sis, it's me. Everything's fine. I'm working in a high place. Wait, I'm listening. What happened? No, I'm fine, but how are you? What is it? Lisa is falling sick? What is it, the flu? Right. And antibiotic you want me to buy one. What kind? What? You'll tell me later. And how are you by the way? How's your husband, did he find a job? No... that's a shame. And Nastia? Nastia's at school? Great. And grandma, how is she? Good? She's going to a Dacha, that's good. And I'm fine, I'm working in a high place as you could see. And sis, by the end of the week or in a week's time I'll get paid and I'll send you as much as I can, 5000 euro for sure, will that be enough? I can't send you more, I don't have any money for myself. Fine. What is that? Buy Kola, a pair of shoes? Adidas? What size? 46? Fine. And, how much? Ok, I'll have a look at the sales. Why don't I buy you a phone? They have nice sales here, it's cheap. Ok, that's it. Don't spend any more money, I'll call you in a week or two and tell you when I'm sending the money, ok? Give my love to everybody, kisses, bye.*

*Family.*

*So what, that's it then?*

*What am I doing? I just got off work, so what, wanna have a beer? Or a vodka? Great. I'll call you when I'm done then, see you.*

*Everything's gonna be all right. Everything's gonna be all right, I know it.*