

MOJCA PAJNIK, PETRA LESJAK-TUŠEK,  
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# IMMIGRANTS, WHO ARE YOU?

RESEARCH ON IMMIGRANTS  
IN SLOVENIA



**Peace Institute**

Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies





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TITLE OF THE ORIGINAL: PREBEŽNIKI, KDO STE?

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DESIGN: IRENA WÖLLE  
PRINT: STANE PEKLJAJ

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THE PUBLISHING OF THIS BOOK WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE



EDITION POLITIKE



PUBLISHER: PEACE INSTITUTE  
INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STUDIES  
METELKOVA 6  
SI-1000 LJUBLJANA  
E: INFO@MIROVNI-INSTITUT.SI  
WWW.MIROVNI-INSTITUT.SI

EDITOR: ALDO MILOHNIČ

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

314.742(4)  
341.24(4)

PAJNIK, Mojca

Immigrants, who are you? : research on immigrants in Slovenia /  
Mojca Pajnik, Petra Lesjak-Tušek, Marta Gregorčič ; [translation Olga Vuković]. -  
Ljubljana : Peace Institute, 2002. - (Edition Politike)

Prevod dela: Prebežniki, kdo ste?

ISBN 961-90932-5-9

1. Lesjak Tušek, Petra 2. Gregorčič, Marta. - I. Tušek, Petra

Lesjak glej Lesjak Tušek, Petra  
116497920



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to express our gratitude to the Peace Institute for enabling us to carry out this research study, and to Saša Cuder for her cooperation and meticulously prepared database. Our thanks to all questioners in the research for their excellent work: Rok Ružič, Katja Pesjak, Bogdan Tušek, Bojana Jug, Ana Katarina Strnad, Tadeja Drolc, Jurij Alimov, Lucija Mulej, Nina Fabjančič, Tadeja Mihajl, Klemen Novak, Maja Ožbolt, Neva Kebe and Dejan Krhin. Thanks too to Matjaž Hanžek for his encouragement and information.

Special thanks to Rastko Močnik, Mitja Velikonja, Vlasta Jalušič, Igor Ž. Žagar and Aldo Milohnić who influenced the content of this book importantly by contributing several valuable comments that led us to reconsider certain viewpoints presented in it.

Our thanks to Samo Rovar for the photos. They were taken in October 2001 in front of the Center for Aliens and Asylum Seekers' Home in Šiška, Ljubljana, the Center in Veliki Otok near Postojna and during the concert of the band Rasta Movement at Metelkova in Ljubljana, on August 24, 2001.



## PREFACE

This book explores the period following 1990. That was the year when the EU Member States signed the Schengen Agreement which, on the one hand, strives for global openness and for a world without borders, while introducing selective methods characteristic of totalitarian regimes on the other. These methods are not only aimed at controlling the movement of people but they also indirectly determine what these people are allowed to do and what they are allowed to think. The Schengen project has assumed global proportions and radically surpassed the borders of the EU. It has been turning into a synonym for the politics of exclusion which, in consequence, becomes reflected in an increasing and all-present hostility and contempt toward people of different religions, races and cultures.

Slovenia, as a candidate for EU membership, yields to the demands dictated by the EU and accordingly, has to cope with all the consequences and activities arising from the political determination to become a member. Like an ant, Slovenia thus goes out of its way to join the big ant colony. It has agreed to the terms of the migration policy dictated by "the big," and committed itself to fulfill them in reasonable time. But the Slovene political elite proved to be quite clumsy. To start with, they failed to come up to the mark in their treatment of immigrants and protection of their human rights. Following the dictates from abroad, the politicians obediently took the rules imposed by the EU as their new duty which could be described as a "successful hunt for people." Indeed the Slovene police has proved to be very skillful in their hunt for immigrants; moreover, once they capture them, they also demonstrate how well they have learned to treat them as objects and completely dehumanize them. Their actions call to mind a wild game hunt. Once they have their prey, there follows interrogation, and finally immigrants are squeezed into the state run centers known as "centers for aliens," meaning that these people are removed from public view

and hidden away like smuggled goods. Quite accidentally, probably in the wake of some clumsy move on the part of senior state officials, the above-mentioned centers were visited by journalists.

Pictures of unbearable conditions in these centers sparked various reactions among the Slovene public. While in some they aroused sympathy, others were astonished and disgusted at the sight of different people. The latter, including the media (at least in the initial phase) responded by verbal violence towards fellow humans which was impregnated with more or less open prejudices that fuel racism. In the beginning of 2001, amidst this oppressive atmosphere full of hostility towards immigrants, certain NGOs, some individuals and various institutions set up a mirror for the domestic and foreign public, and above all for the state representatives at the national and international levels to see their own image.

We expected that the first to respond, in accordance with the law, would be the Ministry of Internal Affairs. But the case was just the opposite: those who set down the laws also violated them blatantly, and that in many ways. Almost as a rule, people who were caught in the act of illegally crossing the border were taken, without any explanation, to the police station and then to the centers for aliens scattered across the country. Immigrants were mostly not acquainted with their rights. The police put them behind bars, on the quiet, as if they were the worst criminals. Immigrants were living in impossible conditions: up to 40 people were crammed into a basement measuring 20 square meters in a building on Celovška street in Šiška, Ljubljana. This airless space was where they slept and where men and women had to pee in the same bucket. The screams that could be heard from behind the barred windows aroused pity, at least in some. Yet the authorities behaved as if deaf to the warnings by various experts, representatives of NGOs, individuals and fighters for human rights. They did not even pay attention to the warning issued by the human rights ombudsman about the horrible living conditions in these centers. To borrow Foucault's words "We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness, by which men [and women], in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbors, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness" (Foucault 1998, 5).

The inhumane treatment of these people is the original sin of the representatives of the ruling structures. Through such treatment – they even went so far as to smuggle people from one center to another in the middle of the night – they became the main culprits for what followed. In fact, a great part of the Slovene public braced for the struggle against the invisible enemy called immigrants. Various “civil initiatives” started to mushroom. They joined forces in their common goal to drive out the immigrants from their environment. The organizers of night vigils ordered villagers to put up barricades to prevent buses with immigrants from entering their villages. The media added injury to insult: in their accounts immigrants mostly appeared as squanderers of tax payers’ money, as strange people who present a threat to the Slovene nationality and who, through their difference (different skin color, habits and the like), spoil the idyll of the Slovene countryside.

The above is a brief description of the circumstances that surrounded the emergence of this book. When the situation eventually became absolutely unbearable, resistance was inevitable. This study was prompted by the manner in which officials treated immigrants, and by the media coverage of the events. Our ideas began to acquire palpable forms in February 2001, soon after the rally against xenophobia (solidarity with immigrants) was staged in Ljubljana. The basic goal of this study is to set our picture of immigrants against the official and media discourses in which immigrants are treated as goods that are seized at borders, stored in basements and sold to another country. We embarked on the study in search of information that could not be found in the media. Coverage of the “security measures” that were presumably introduced to prevent immigrants from entering Slovenia, on the one hand, and to “protect” Slovene citizens before them on the other, was profuse. Similarly abundant were the reports on how immigrants were “surrounded,” how many of them “slipped” out of police control and so on. But we went to the centers for aliens looking for different information – we wanted to meet immigrants, hear their opinions and learn about their experiences. However, our initial goal – to present the stories from behind the mute walls and iron bars of the centers in which, regrettably, innocent people were being confined at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, just as under the absolutist governments of the 17<sup>th</sup> century

– was widened as the study progressed. The scenes that researchers and questioners saw and experienced during the field study obliged us to disclose the conditions in which these people lived. As a result, this book brings together more aspects than initially intended. It presents life stories, quite often tragic, that emerged from the personal accounts and were interpreted with the help of various data. It describes the conditions in these centers which actually provide nothing but a roof under which resides an endless suffering. Finally, we could not refrain from presenting the discourse of some employees of these centers, who talked about immigrants as a second-class people, and even as “non-people.”

Like Foucault, who questioned the rationale of the 17<sup>th</sup> century asylums for lunatics in France, today we question the logic of the centers for aliens. Centuries ago asylums were the instruments of the monarchy and bourgeoisie (Foucault 1998, 45). By the same token, the centers for aliens are today an instrument of the modern ruling class. Bolting up people was, and still is, an “institutional creation” (Foucault 1998, 64). These centers stand for physical and symbolical social exclusion of those whose image, in the eyes of society, is horrifying. Centuries ago the poor, beggars and criminals played the role of the leper. Today this role is attached to immigrants. In the past the “ships of fools” carried the “insane”; today the passengers on those ships, that not so long ago were sailing the Pacific, are immigrants. When on board ships, they cannot wander around clean cities, spread “viruses” or infect “healthy” inhabitants; they are distant, the prisoners of their own departure.

The data and the stories presented in this book are our contribution aimed at provoking a reflection on absurdities experienced by the immigrants. “The Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of the passage,” said Foucault of a fool confined to a ship. Immigrants are the prisoners not only of the passage but of the departure as well, as departure is what marks them. In this study immigrants, who found themselves in Slovenia by more or less (un)lucky coincidence, speak for themselves. Their stories are undoubtedly comparable to those of many other immigrants who are locked up in similar fortresses outside the Schengen walls.

This study wants to contribute to the demythologization of the “difference” and to suggest an alternate way of reasoning: even though



we are all humans, our simple humanity dissolves into nothing through our attitude towards immigrants. "The difference should not lead us to observation that fragmentizes and is fragmentized itself." (Levi-Strauss 1994, 14). It is precisely the illusory sense of the threatening omnipresence of immigrants and their intrusive difference that gives rise to general intolerance towards them. This study presents a specific group of people in an attempt to stimulate reflection on how in fact discrimination is untenable and on the consequences of discrimination. At the same time it calls on the ruling power to think again about their conduct. The authorities should think twice before they state that conditions in the centers for aliens are "very good." They should also pause to think why there exists such a wide gap between their statements and actual circumstances.

The first condition that we had to fulfill before we could start our research was to acquire a permit for the field work. The field research was necessary if we wanted to achieve our goals, and it was also the only way to study the experience of immigrants and give ear to their stories. We first obtained a permit from Matjaž Hanžek, the human rights ombudsman. When we went to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for approval, we were sent from one door to another for several days but finally our permit was endorsed by the interior minister Rado Bohinc. Once we had the required papers and established contact with the officials in the centers, the project could go ahead and the field work started. All of us who gained a chance to have a glimpse into the lives of those behind the walls of the center, have an unforgettable experience. And the book which you, the respected reader, are now holding in your hands, presents some fragments of this absurd reality at the beginning of the new millennium.

MOJCA PAJNIK, PETRA LESJAK-TUŠEK, MARTA GREGORIČIĆ



## INTRODUCTION

This research study and monograph aims at presenting immigrants who were first dehumanized by the politics, then by the wider public in Slovenia, and presented as social vermin. Proof that this is so is the study itself. It combines quantitative analysis of survey results, the immigrants' life stories, and accounts of our own experience during the field work. We hope that readers will be able to identify multi-fold layers and intertwining aspects that were studied. The goal of this study is not solely to contribute to the elimination of intolerance and racism, but to open the door to reflection on "marginalized" groups and individuals, immigrants in our case. In this chapter we try to achieve these through the discussion of some concepts and by pointing to the absurdity of some dimensions in the attitude of one individual towards another.

We will try to show why today, in circumstances that could be called "new colonialism," immigrants are widely perceived as a threat not only to the Slovenes but to the entire "developed" world. This text is in the first place a response to the relations of inequality and uneven distribution of power, which throughout history were the result of the "dictate" of the institutions of ruling powers on both the national and international levels. Politics, led by the centers of political power and a handful of (s)electd people, invariably stigmatizes certain individuals and social groups – in the first place those who by one or another yardstick do not match that which is defined and recognized as "normal." The "normality" whose recognizability is determined by the centers of political power, triggers the discourse on universality. The consequence is: everything that is not "normal" is believed to be worse and undeveloped, even primitive. In line with this, some appropriate the right to define the concept of normality in accordance with their own criteria, thus creating ideological common sense, which then becomes unambiguous, while the "rest"<sup>1</sup> of

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<sup>1</sup> Tomlinson (1997, 123), for example, uses the well-known phrase "the west and the rest" when speaking about cultural imperialism as one of the modern forms of colonialism.

the world should follow the herd. In the circumstances in which such patterns of behavior, habits, customs and policies, for example, migration policy, are created and controlled exclusively by the power centers, immigrants, who find themselves in the position of outcasts, are not perceived as normal. They are different, and their difference is understood as something horrible or shameful, as something that threatens and jeopardizes others.

Why do the majority of people see immigrants as dreadful? When we find ourselves in unexpected circumstances, we start to reject moral, religious, social and aesthetic norms that are alien to us and to the group with whom we identify. "The habits of savages," "there is no such thing here," "we shouldn't allow this" and similar brutal reactions reveal the pangs of fear and resistance that we experience whenever encountering a way of life, belief or reasoning alien to us (Levi-Strauss 1994, 15). This thought may help us explain the circumstances in which immigrants in Slovenia found themselves. They fled from their native countries because they were persecuted. They wanted to escape a monolithic mindset into which they were plunged time and again whenever they dared raise their voices and assert different views publicly. They set off on their journey striving for a better life, sometimes in fear of war or political repression. But on arriving in Slovenia, more or less by chance, they again faced barricades. The public perceived them primarily as different, and in this case the perception of difference took on negative undertones and resulted in, say, stigmatization. Immigrants thus appeared as unequal in relation to us and, ultimately, as non-humans.

The mobilization of the Slovene political elite, which clumsily looked for a "suitable solution," and of the wider public, who felt compelled to separate immigrants from themselves in order to secure protection from their horrifying image, placed immigrants in the position of impotent victims. The difference between them and us assumed such proportions that grand ideas about equality and respect for others began to crumble under its weight. The meanings we attribute to the differences had fought for us, as McLaren (1994) would say, the ideological battle for domination which is mobilized in an attempt to create a special regime of representation whose purpose is to give legitimacy to specific reality. In our context, the reality of immigrants has been recognized as unreality, or as something

that exists but has no significance for us. This situation is a characteristic result of the power-impotence relation, in which the “organizations” of individuals point to difference with the purpose of maintaining their own power and privileges.

Those who are either physically or symbolically distant are seen as a homogeneous whole in which there is no room for exceptionality of the individual. What happened in the case of immigrants was that individuals became invisible and non-existent. The immigrants were treated as an indistinguishable group, which is an attitude that serves to enable us to accept them as different. Immigrants, others, appeared as stationary, but not because they really are such, but because they did not mean anything to us and because we could not evaluate their way of thinking and their habits in terms of any referential system valid in our world. We live within the framework of a specific referential system, so we can only perceive the realities that are external to it as deformations imposed by this system, and occasionally this goes so far as to prevent us from seeing anything.

When we stereotypically label immigrants as a threat, as not having the “right” values or “right” intentions, we should ask ourselves whether the inertia and stationary nature that we ascribe to others perhaps arise from our ignorance of the conscious and subconscious interests of individuals whose criteria may be different from ours. In other words, this could lead to our seeing each other as insignificant simply because we are not similar.

What could be an alternative to this ethnocentric attitude, one which would counteract a situation in which one group is recognized as the only proper and worthy one, a self-sufficient entity not interested in other entities, or interested in them only insofar as they pose a threat to it? To find such an alternative, we should first start to think what other people represent to us and what their difference means to us. Here we could resort to Levi-Strauss (1994, 16) who said that by denying humanity to those who are the most “savage” and “barbarous” among humans, we simply take from them one of their typical traits, as a barbarian is primarily a man who believes in barbarism. Taylor (1992) argues that everybody must be recognized in their inequality on the grounds of everybody’s right to equal dignity. This is an ethical attitude that arises from “universal humanity” that implies the idea of difference in equality. Universal humanity

means that all people are human beings to the same extent, that we all have equal essence, dignity or sublimity, and accordingly, equal elementary rights and duties. This potential is a property possessed by all people, so everybody deserves respect regardless of how and in which direction the potential has developed. When it comes to immigrants, it would thus be normal to expect openness arising from the simple ethical principle of respect for fellow humans. We should recognize others and when confronted with them we should be open and ready to alter our own criteria and viewpoints to make way for new recognitions. “We are equal in that we are different” (Lukšič-Hacin 1999, 35) or, as Rex (1996, 90) argues, the difference together with equal opportunities creates conditions for mutual acceptance among people. Therefore, we do not maintain that we should deny that immigrants are different from us; on the contrary, we argue that we should establish relations of respect in which one group would affirm and supplement the other through its difference. What is important is a dialogue that could instigate the transformation of our perceptions of reality.

McLaren talks of “solidarity” which, of course, is not expected to churn out like-minded individuals. On the contrary, solidarity relations begin when people dare to express opposing opinions. Solidarity is believed to proceed from frequent contacts and interactions, and it implies an openness and readiness of people to widen their own horizons of recognition. Taylor’s essay *The Politics of Recognition* is not simply an appeal to begin showing a keener and more active interest in each other, but he also calls on us to start viewing those with whom we share “our” space more closely and less selectively. This implies more than just recognizing others by acknowledging their existence. In other words, this is more than just being tolerant towards others, because tolerance presupposes that we accept the fact that somebody exists and we are not interested in more than that. What we argue for is intercultural competence implying that we do not just recognize others but also approach them and express the wish to learn more about them. For Dostoyevsky a foreigner was not simply someone unfamiliar to us, but someone who also uncovers secret worlds. A foreigner discloses the essence of all other people who, nevertheless, always remain foreign and enigmatic. And the book you are holding in your hands attempts to disclose a part of that enigma.

## METHODS

This study combines various research methods that were used interactively and on an equal footing. We used quantitative methods to analyze viewpoints, values and assessments gathered through the questionnaire, and qualitative methods for postulates (recognitions) that could not be quantified or which we did not want to quantify. Therefore, we combined quantitative and qualitative methods, namely a survey and a biographical method.

Several methodologists (Rangler, Bremer, Kanter) have pointed out the value of using more than one method simultaneously; the necessity of field research in case of “excluded” or “marginalized” groups was stressed by Bjørge (1997). We similarly started from the hypothesis that in studying individual groups (in this case people of various nations, races, religions etc.), the use of several methods was desirable, even essential. Immigrants, the group that was the subject of this study, displayed specific differences that distinguished them from other social classes in Slovenia. We can thus say that the subjects of our interest were people who in some way or other found themselves together in the same place and at the same time and who had cut ties (economic, social, societal etc.) with their home environment. They were “caught” inside Slovene territory because they crossed the border without documents and were put behind bars.

By using quantitative and qualitative methods we attempt to draw attention to their complementariness. Quantitative methods are often disapproved of on the grounds that they reduce individuals to mere “units” and determine their answers through pre-defined evaluation scales, so as a result, they cannot embrace social complexity. On the other hand, qualitative methods are often criticized for being “unscientific.” Yet it is precisely the subjective viewpoints of researchers that enable wider and deeper insight into a group, while this would be quite difficult to achieve using quantitative methods. Moreover, qualitative methods in particular enable us to step out of “our reality” and taste other, unknown realities.

It would be misleading and untrue to argue that we have completely met the criteria of objectivity<sup>2</sup> in the sense of evaluational neutrality. As researchers in this study, we were part of the “context” of immigrants (we were part of their environment, locked up with them behind the iron door several hours a day or all day long). It would be meaningless to assert that we were unbiased. Had it been so, this study would be anything but presentation, description and exploration.<sup>3</sup> The objective criteria were met on the technical level, that is to say, when collecting and processing data – the stage that is a prerequisite for scientific research. The research was based on mutual trust between researchers, questioners and respondents; and in this kind of work trust is a prerequisite for objectivity.

Research studies on immigrants are rare and they are usually based on police reports and data or other secondary sources supplied by the media or various interest groups. The reliability of research studies on marginalized groups is hence often doubtful, and on top of that, they are often full of prejudices and *a priori* conclusions. A serious problem in applying quantitative and qualitative methods when studying a specific group is posed by the plurality of interests and the very subject studied. Researchers most often select and develop indicators on a case by case basis and with regard to the purpose of the study. What this boils down to is the search for positive or negative continuums, while at the same time a number of other potential research areas remain neglected. As we have already stressed, it is primarily immigrants who will speak in this study. We concentrated on immigrants themselves, their viewpoints and also their attitudes to Slovenia. At the early stages of the study we were not interested in the attitude of Slovene citizens towards immigrants, but once the study got underway we realized that the statements and conduct of the staff working in the centers for immigrants simply could not be omitted. In this book we also present statements that have not been published or presented to the public before.

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<sup>2</sup> The objectivity of a study is invariably relative: a researcher brings to the study his/her own values and viewpoints, so when formulating questions for a survey he/she picks them on the basis of a subjective viewpoint that may accidentally direct the decisions. Objectivity is further uncertain owing to the social context and pre-determined importance of social issues.

<sup>3</sup> This book is a descriptive (presentation of the situation) and explorative study (opening up new issues, inductive methods serve to explain, describe an object/subject: for a social scientist an object is a subject at the same time, one that actively interferes with reality).



The survey<sup>4</sup> entitled *Immigrants, who are you?* was carried out in five locations (Center for Aliens and Asylum Seekers' Home in Ljubljana, Center for Aliens in Veliki Otok near Postojna, Transit Home for Aliens in Postojna, and Holding Center for Refugees in Kozina, in April and May 2001. One hundred and sixty seven immigrants were included: 80 of these lived in the centers for aliens, where they waited to be "removed" and/or establish their "identity," while 53 lived in the asylum seeker homes. We initially included 34 refugees who lived in holding centers and mostly came to Slovenia from Bosnia-Herzegovina years ago fleeing from war, but later we excluded these questionnaires from data processing.<sup>5</sup> The majority of respondents (64%) lived in Ljubljana (the Center for Aliens and Asylum Seekers' Home). The questionnaire followed three timelines: the first set of questions was about the journey, the second about circumstances in the immigrants' native countries, and the third about circumstances in Slovenia.

To overcome the language barrier we prepared the questionnaire in Slovene and in English, while the questioners themselves translated questions into French, German, Italian, Serbian, and Croatian. We additionally called on help from translators from Russian and Chinese, and immigrants themselves volunteered to translate from Arabic languages into English, from Turk or Kurdish into German and from Romanian into Italian or English. Even though the questionnaire was occasionally translated by the immigrants, the validity of answers is indisputable. They helped with translation only when there was no other option (for example, if the Arabic speaking questioner was not available on a specific day, which happened because immigrants were often moved around so we could not predict which language translators we would need). The immigrants were asked to translate only after we made sure that they understood the questions and that they knew how to ask them without changing the meaning (perhaps accidentally). We explained to them the meaning of each question just as we did to other questioners. The

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<sup>4</sup> The survey was based on established methodologies (questionnaires) (Toš, Inglehart et al.) that were occasionally adapted to suit the needs of the research.

<sup>5</sup> Once the field work began we found that some immigrants had been moved to the refugee centers in Postojna and Kozina owing to scarcity of space. Initially we had a plan to include all immigrants who lived in various centers at the time of our research. However, we later excluded refugees with temporary asylum because of their specific status and the terms on which they were allowed to stay in Slovenia.

volunteer translators were asked to first fill in the questionnaire themselves, and when translating questions during the survey, they also asked question in a language that researchers could understand. We thus monitored the filling in of the questionnaires and pointed out potential misunderstandings to reduce the possibility of errors to the minimum.

The biographical method<sup>6</sup> (the analysis of life stories) could be used only after trust between researchers and immigrants was established, which happened after we had made several visits to the centers, established closer contacts and started to develop friendships; whenever possible (mostly with asylum seekers who could leave the center), we held conversation outside of the center. In this presentation immigrants' accounts are intertwined with the interpretations of the answers in the questionnaire. The life stories are included in such a way that they logically relate to the context, and occasionally they complement or explain it. In contrast to the statistical interpretation, where immigrants are taken as a group and the prevailing opinions and viewpoints are exposed, the parts dedicated to immigrants' stories bring individual immigrants to the forefront. Since their accounts were recorded in personal styles, they are distinct from the summaries of survey results in both the style and the form of presentation. When we want to stress the communication between immigrants and ourselves – researchers – we assume the role of narrators and tell their stories in the first person singular or plural, depending on how many of us communicated with a particular immigrant. In other cases we ourselves summarize the stories, with the immigrants appearing as narrators. The quantitative analysis was therefore complemented by the qualitative one and the purpose of the study – to let immigrants speak for themselves – was achieved.

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<sup>6</sup> In our opinion the biographical research method is the most important form for analyzing the real lives of insiders who are the subject of a study. Academic research is too quickly confined to desktops and computers. A resistance towards field research is often evident in research work, but neither financial, moral nor any other reservations can be strong enough arguments to justify it. Since studies of immigrants are not available and useful data are inaccessible (the only accessible are secondary source data, for example, the media), our approach is an attempt to create a tentative framework for future studies – one within which we make a genuine effort to learn about the immigrants as much as possible by providing a platform for them to express their views. We make use of the biographical method to the extent to which it enables us to communicate to the public their life stories. This is not a view from the outside, but a view from inside the group, or an insight into the group being studied. Only the view from the inside enables essential objectivization of the study and makes analysis possible, while at the same time enhancing the complexity of our understanding.

TABLE 1

Immigrants waiting to be removed and Asylum Seekers, by Centers

Name of the Center	Immigrants waiting to be removed		Asylum Seekers		Together	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Asylum Seekers' Home, Ljubljana	2	2.5%	31	58.5%	33	24.8%
Center for Aliens, Ljubljana	45	56.2%	9	17.0%	54	40.6%
Transit Home for Aliens, Postojna			8	15.1%	8	6.0%
Refugee holding Center, Kozina			5	9.4%	5	3.8%
Center for Aliens, Veliki otok near Postojna	33	41.3%			33	24.8%
Together	80	100%	53	100%	133	100 %

Source: Research study "Immigrants, who are you?", April–May, 2001

Once we had drawn up the questionnaire, we explained to the questioners (we as researchers were among them) what and how to ask, so that there were no ambiguities during the field work. We did not insist on filling in the questionnaire at any cost, but only after we made sure that respondents really understood our questions and when it was possible to overcome language barriers (this was occasionally a problem when interviewing Kurds). The biographical method, on the other hand, was applied in accordance with different, unwritten rules – an author who gained the confidence of a certain immigrant surrendered to his/her story. Since the conversation was not directed but completely spontaneous, many immigrants imparted their life stories and confided in us their distress. Once the research was over, we stayed in touch with some asylum seekers. Our conversations held outside of the centers were much unlike those inside the centers (more open, more relaxed, flexible switching between topics etc.).

Altogether we interviewed 133 immigrants, among them 86% men and 14% women; most of the respondents were aged 20 to 29 (44%), and somewhat more than one fourth of them were 30 to 39. Younger people prevailed – only 10% of the respondents were 40 and over.

Before they left their home countries, most respondents (as many as one fourth) were employed as craftsmen, for example repairmen, masons, carpenters, bakers, while somewhat less than one fifth were employed in various services (sales, trade etc.). One tenth of them were involved in transport services or the like. 18% of the respondents attended secondary school or university, 12% had college or university degrees (engineers, experts, or professors). Only one tenth of the respondents had been unemployed in their home country.

Immigrants could speak a number of foreign languages: 84% of them spoke at least one foreign language, 42% of them at least two, while 22% of them could speak three or more foreign languages. The most frequently spoken foreign language was English (44%), followed by Serbian and Croatian (29%), and German (22%). As many as 89% of the respondents said that they were religious, out of this 73% were Muslims. Such a high percentage of Muslims is explained by the countries of their origin – the countries of the Near and Middle East were heavily represented as were the Muslim communities from Yugoslavia.

As for the regions from which they arrived, most of the respondents (45%) were from Asian countries (Iraqis, Chinese and Iranians were most numerous); one third of the respondents came from ex-Yugoslav republics (most of them from present Yugoslavia); other European countries and Africa were represented by one tenth of respondents each. As for the native country, the largest number of immigrants came from ex-Yugoslavia: most of these were Albanians from Kosovo and Roma. The next largest groups were from Iraq<sup>7</sup> (20%), Iran and China (8% each). Two respondents were from Slovenia.

To make the picture clearer, we occasionally grouped immigrants into three or four groups based on the native country.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The policemen we talked to said that the data about the number of Iraqi immigrants were misleading reportedly because Kurds declared themselves as Iraqis. The main reason is presumably the fact that Slovenia usually does not repatriate immigrants from Iraq, but it repatriates Kurds.

<sup>8</sup> It should be taken into account that statistical interpretations of immigrants' assessments are not representative for individual countries; other immigrants from the same countries may have different opinions.

TABLE 2

Immigrants by Countries or Groups of Countries

3 Groups of Countries	4 Groups of Countries	Countries	n	%
Europe		Yugoslavia	34	26.2
		Romania	8	6.2
		Macedonia	6	4.6
		Belarus	2	1.5
		Bosnia-Herzegovina	2	1.5
		Slovakia	2	1.5
		Russia	1	0.8
		Slovenia	2	1.5
Asia	Near and Middle East			
		Iraq	26	20.0
		Iran	11	8.5
		Turkey	2	1.5
		Lebanon	2	1.5
		Israel	1	0.8
	Asia	Pakistan	2	1.5
		Sri Lanka	1	0.8
		China	11	8.5
		Afghanistan	1	0.8
		Bangladesh	2	1.5
Africa		Sierra Leone	6	4.6
		Sudan	5	3.8
		Algeria	1	0.8
		Cameroon	1	0.8
		Liberia	1	0.8
		Morocco	1	0.8
Missing Values <sup>9</sup>			2	1.5
Total			133	100

Source: Research study "Immigrants, who are you?", April-May 2001

<sup>9</sup> Immigrants who did not want to reveal which country they came from.



## THE ROAD, THE PATHLESS LANDS, AND THE REVIVAL OF CAMPS

*To remain lying by the road; walk down the road; to search for the right way; to step out of one's way or make way for; they still have a long way to go; he didn't utter a word all along the way; he met many people on his way to; he's been on the road for three days now; the first road he took; the road to success is not easy; the road to knowledge is not easy/smooth; this is the only way to resist alienation; there are two more roads we can take; in this way we cannot achieve anything; to resort to a smooth way, to do something quickly, easily; to walk strange roads; to set somebody on an honest path; to remove somebody from the way, disable him/her; it stands in their way; to go only half-way, not conclude something; he went the way of the Cross from one torture house to another; to achieve something using legal ways.*

A collage of selected meanings of the term *pot* according to  
The Dictionary of the Slovene Literary Language

The word *pot* in Slovene, translated as way, road, path or journey into English, depending on the context, is multi-fold, dynamic, and when used in connection with immigrants it suggests many meanings ranging from aimless movement, search and wandering, to distant goals and even a warrior-like energy that propels the body even when it is empty and torpid – for the sake of children, of freedom, a better life, rights, or in search of (lost) family.

Several words in Slovene that are often used when referring to immigrants include the morpheme *pot* and can play a part in creating prejudices towards them. Such are, for example, the terms *potepuh* (vagabond), *popotnik* (traveler), *potomec* (descendant); or the words denoting documents or things that they need and either have or don't have, for example: *potovalka* (suitcase), *potni list* (passport), *potrdilo* (certificate); or those used to denote the manner in which something is done, say, *potuhnjeno* (stealthily), *potegavščina* (hoax) etc.

In this study *pot* (journey) is understood as completely contradicting the meanings that first come to mind when speaking about *potovanje* (journeying). In everyday life one associates a journey with adventurous pleasure, but in connection with immigrants adventure suggests a different meaning. Although probably everybody who

sets off on a journey possesses at least a grain of adventurous spirit, in connection with those who leave their native country for good, adventurousness can be considered an indispensable property that may help alleviate the physical or emotional pain that is experienced when one is shut in a suffocating tank, squeezed among the cargo in a railway wagon for several days, and when the journey is interrupted by a merciless bureaucratic hand.

In the case of immigrants the first step towards rescue is the decision to set off on a journey and the next the journey itself – a journey that may lead to success or to mere survival. Here the rescue should be understood conditionally. An immigrant probably thinks about rescue before starting the journey, when persecuted by the police, threatened by war or violence, or by a mandatory subjection to monolithic political mindset. That is the stage that leads to the decision to take a journey to the widely praised and presumably democratic west, where the hope for rescue however soon dissolves and turns into un-rescue, “enslavement,” “dehumanization,” and “devaluation of the body and soul.” The journey traveled then gives rise to a wish to return, to disappointment and anomy.

“Everyone must find his own road to rescue” (Freud 1930, 34–36). There is no golden rule that applies to everybody. The immigrants found out that the decision to take a journey does not automatically mean rescue, but a new recognition about the inferiority/superiority of man, about exploitation and pity.

#### WALKING THE EMBERS

<i>Life eh good too much</i>	<i>We travel everywhere</i>
<i>Ah make we live am well</i>	<i>Everywhere we go</i>
<i>Life eh good too much</i>	<i>I say life eh good oh</i>
<i>Ah make we live am well</i>	<i>Everywhere we go</i>
	<i>I say life eh good, eh good</i>
<i>Everywhere we go</i>	
<i>I say life eh good oh</i>	<i>Life eh good too much</i>
<i>Everywhere we go</i>	<i>Ah make we live am well</i>
<i>I say life eh good, eh good</i>	<i>Life eh good too much</i>
	<i>Ah make we live am, live am</i>
<i>Take ah good look</i>	
<i>I say life eh good, oh</i>	<i>Rap till the end</i>
<i>Take ah good look</i>	
<i>I say life eh good, eh good</i>	

Victor Fredrick – B.Fine  
Life



Migrations or individual departures have been known throughout human history. Understood as a wish or a decision taken by an individual to move from point A to point B or C for one or another reason, migration appears as something entirely spontaneous,<sup>10</sup> but in fact, today it is quite the opposite – it is recognized as a problematic act in the social, political and cultural senses. Migrating and moving to another place in order to survive, that is to say, in search of food or health, has been reduced to survival in a political and cultural prison subject to confinement and impositions. Even though deportations and evacuations, expulsions and repatriation, forced transfers and exiles are an essential part of European history (Sowell 1996), in the past few decades non-legal migrations have become the Achilles' heel of western society.

A number of recent theories that have been formulated within various research disciplines<sup>11</sup> explore how migrations influence cultural changes and “ethnic identity,” the demographic picture, legislation, and why countries encounter difficulties controlling migrations. Castels and Miller (1993, 8–9) have defined four migration trends in the next twenty years: globalization of migration (increasingly more countries are being included in the flow of global migrations), accelerated migration (rise in numbers, primarily in larger regions), differentiation of migration (various types of migrants, ranging from refugees to seasonal workers and permanent settlers, migrate simultaneously), and feminization of migration (in the past migrants were mostly men, today women are ever more numerous).

Our study does not deal directly with the listed questions and theories, because we start from the assumption that migration as such is not “problematic.” Anybody has the right to enter any country, especially if he/she is in jeopardy in his/her own country, or threat-

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<sup>10</sup>In Slovenia, for example, one could hardly imagine that somebody from the northern Štajerska region would not be allowed to move to the coastal region for economic reasons, or to another part where the standard of living is higher, job opportunities are better or some such reason. But, if the migrant is not a native of Štajerska but, say, of Pakistan, this turns into a point of radical breakdown – into a struggle for rights and opportunities that for some are a given fact while others have to struggle to achieve them, in some cases for even more than ten years. Moreover, if an immigrant obtains asylum or refugee status, he/she still cannot work because the bureaucratic red tape makes obtaining the various required documents a task next to impossible. The state institutions responsible send these people from one door to another.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Castles and Miller (1993); Soysal (1994).

ened with death, or tortured. In the next chapter we will give an overview of the reasons that lead immigrants to take a journey, we'll see how long they need to take the decision, where they get information, with whom they set off on a journey, how long they travel and the like.

### WHY?

Once “reliance” on the state, or social and legal institutions, was no longer possible, or to put it differently, once there was “no other possible way out” but to acquiesce to violations or informal norms in everyday life and when, metaphorically speaking, there was no more bread to give to children, the “enforced voluntary” decision to take a journey became urgent. The immigrants were asked to assess the reasons for their flight in five areas: political, economic, religious, personal and other. Most often, the decision was influenced not by one of the listed reasons only, but by a combination of several reasons, so the formulation of our question allowed them to choose several reasons and sort them by importance. Analysis showed that political reasons were prevalent (56%) but closely followed by economic reasons (55%). One fourth of respondents decided on a journey for personal reasons, and 15% for religious ones.

The majority of immigrants (44%) said that it was primarily political reasons that forced them to leave, the second most quoted reasons were economic (41%), while less than 10% said that the reasons for their departure were personal. Asylum seekers were most numerous in the group that gave political reasons as primary (59%), while the group that left for economic reasons had a larger number of immigrants who did not apply for asylum and were waiting to be “removed” (83%). The prevalence of political reasons among older respondents was statistically significant, while economic reasons compelled mostly younger people (up to 30 years of age) to set off on their journey. During our conversations immigrants often brought up the issue of the political situation in their home countries. Some of them, particularly those who too “loudly” expressed their views back home, said that they were persecuted by the police; still others said that they wanted to escape war. “Police took me because I was walking along the street with a woman one night. They locked me up

so my family did not know where I was for three days,” explained an Iranian. “I was beaten several times because I publicly stated my opinion about the ruling power,” said another immigrant. Analysis showed that it was mainly immigrants from African countries who set off on the journey for political reasons (73%).<sup>12</sup> A number of immigrants decided to depart because of war circumstances. We must also take into account that some had no other choice but to flee as they were caught in the cross-fire – they were persecuted by both warring sides, for example Roma and people from Bosnia and Kosovo. The immigrants from Europe decided on departure predominantly in search of better paid jobs, meaning that their reasons were economic interests rather than political (69%). This holds true in the first place for Romanians, Macedonians, and immigrants from Yugoslavia, while immigrants from other ex-Yugoslav territories and from Asia cited both reasons – political and economic – as equally decisive.

The greatest number of immigrants (nearly 54%) obtained the information needed for departure from friends and acquaintances, while 35% received information from the family (21% obtained information by themselves and 19% from the members of their family); 9% found information in the media, and just a few percent elsewhere (e.g. at a workplace, university). We should take into account that some immigrants had fled several times before.

Jurij<sup>13</sup> from Russia had much experience with fleeing. He participated as a questioner in our survey, but was soon expelled from Slovenia and returned towards the end of our research. Below is his story.

I came to Slovenia in January 2001, because I wanted to study history and get acquainted with Slovene culture. In fact, I was ready to learn anything new, I was interested in everything. However, I had a problem with the stay permit so I had to extend the visa every month at the Russian embassy in Zagreb. When in May I went

<sup>12</sup>The wars on some continents and in certain countries have been going on for several decades now. For example, the war in Sri Lanka between Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese, or the war in Sudan between Muslim Arabs in the north and Christians and animists from the south regions, or in Israel between Jews and Palestinians, or in Iraq between Kurds and Arabs.

<sup>13</sup>The names of the immigrants we use here are not real, save for those that already appeared in public. We also use real names if immigrants explicitly agreed to it (as in the above example).

to Zagreb for the third time, I was sure that my visa would be extended again. There were enough reasons for that, or at least I thought so: I participated in the research study "Immigrants, who are you?" and cooperated with Radio Student, and on top of that, I intended to study at the Ljubljana University. Unfortunately, they sent me to Moscow with the explanation that the allowed three-months stay in Slovenia was over and after that I had to return to Moscow and get a new visa for Slovenia there. The world caved in on me. I didn't know how to get to Moscow. I had only seventy German marks on me. I was afraid that the Russians were going to send me to war in Chechnya, and I did not want to defend the militaristic country which Russian Federation is. Therefore I had no other choice but to try to return to Ljubljana from Zagreb, as Ljubljana looked as the nearest town to me.

When I arrived at the Croatian-Slovene border I asked for asylum. However, police officers did not take this into account but sent me back to Croatia. It was hard for me. Police seized me in Bregana and took me to the police station. Within the next two hours I found myself at the court where I was met by a policeman, minutes-writer and a judge. They told me that they could secure a translator and a lawyer, but I had to pay for them. Of course, I could not afford it. The judge fined me 800 Croatian kunas, and as I had only 130 kunas, I "chose" prison instead. The eight days I spent in prison were really bad. I shared room with Albanians and Romanians who tried to illegally enter Italy. The circumstances in prison were really difficult – there was no radio, or television, or books. Even if I wanted to work, I was not allowed to. Twice a week you are taken out to get some fresh air, once a week you can take a shower and go to the prison shop. All I did was stare through the bars and sleep. There I recognized how important freedom is. Luckily, the food was good and we were not beaten. However, they treated us meanly, as if we were animals, and even worse, they looked through us or pretended we did not exist. Once I got out of the prison I didn't have other choice but to go to Hungary. I had to leave Croatia within one day, therefore I walked 30 kilometers, partly traveled by bus and train, and hitched a ride the rest of the way. It took me two days to reach Budapest, and I spent all the money. All I had was a phone number of some student I didn't know well at all. I borrowed a phone to call him, but he could not help me either – he was living at a campus and didn't have any money himself. It was a total crisis. I went to a church to ask for help. I remembered that the Church was a powerful social institution in the Middle Ages, so I thought they might have been able to help me now. I was grateful when it turned out that they could help me. They took me to a home inhabited by the Roma and Romanians. However, the next day I ended up in the hospital because I hurt my legs and had blood infection. I was so weak that I could not even walk. I spent five days in the hospital and they took care of me. However, when I returned to the home where I stayed before, the good Christians chased me away with the words: "Go away, we don't need you any more." So I was left on my own in a big city. It was difficult because nobody spoke English and I did not know where to go to. Luckily, my mother sent me some money so I could buy some food, some clothes and a bus ticket.

Since I did not want to go to Russia, I couldn't do other but try to enter Slovenia again. I wanted to visit my friend in Murska Sobota, but I got seized by the police in Lendava. I was imprisoned together with some Moldovans who were heading for Italy. They told me that in their closed-type communist country even those who have jobs earn just ten German marks a month. One of the Moldovian women was a

teacher, another one, a mother of two, had master's degree in law from the university in Chişinău. All of the Moldovans were very poor, without a job and without possibility to survive. Luckily, the Slovene policemen did not beat us, but they sent us back to Hungary, while the judge just issued a warning for the offence. In Hungary I ended up in a home for asylum seekers. I was given a translator to help me, but even with his help I got none of the things I asked for. The center was like a prison, the staff was very aggressive and they continually beat people. I was forced to sign a document that I did not understand, and when I tried to throw it into the dustbin, the policeman struck me on the head. He told me that he must keep the document. I had a number of documents in Hungarian so they were not useful at all. The prison food was utterly bad, I think it was long past the expiration date. The most I got there was a stale soup with bread.

In that prison I met Ronald, a truck driver from Germany, who traveled across Hungary with an expired passport. He got a certificate that he was waiting for a new, valid passport from the German consulate in Budapest. Later on he had to show that certificate to the policemen, who fined him five thousand German marks. They took everything he had, that is, four thousand marks, and they stole his watch. He was not allowed to call anybody, neither the German consulate nor his mother. After a few days I was taken to Ukraine, while Romanians and Moldovans were taken to Romania. They gave us money to buy some food, pay an overnight stay and take a bus. I got a visa for Slovakia and within one month I was with an acquaintance in Bratislava who helped me find job. I worked for one month, I packed vodka in some Slovakian village, so I earned money to return home. The country people were kind. Towards the end of June I returned to Russia and after two months I again left for Slovenia. I am now sorry that I wasted time striving for a senseless goal. It is senseless because of the iron bureaucracy typical of the EU candidate countries. I would like to study in Slovenia but I cannot enroll at the faculty because I have no proof that my mother will send me a high sum of money required monthly to support me.

### THE DIE IS CAST

For a number of immigrants departure was the only option if they wanted to survive. While some managed to flee, others had to stay and even risk being killed because they did not have money. The lives of those who could not pay an agent and flee immediately (e.g. because they were threatened with imprisonment or "removal"), or did not manage to flee to another country and apply for asylum, ended more or less tragically. Many of those who set off on the journey put everything at stake, and we'll see in the next few chapters what they think their odds are in this precarious gamble.

The majority of the immigrants (33%) started the journey on the spur of the moment, 6% of them took up to one month to decide, 19% took from one month to one year, 25% took one to four years, and 18% five years or more. The Roma from Kosovo stressed that they started to think about fleeing ten years ago when Yugoslavia began to

disintegrate. The immigrants who departed on the spur of the moment probably did not have time to ponder the decision – flight was urgent if they wanted to survive. Those who took a while to decide often sold their property and set off on the journey either alone or with family. Younger immigrants got money for the journey from their parents who hoped to secure them a better future while they themselves stayed at home.

We asked them what held them back and delayed their departure. The choice of reasons we offered included the situation in the country, money, family, fear or other. Most of them stated that the reason was money (50%), while for 26% of immigrants the delaying factor was the situation in the country (wars, border closed, non-democratic measures, some did not possess identification documents even in their home country, and so on). Fear held back 11% of them, family was a delaying factor for 13%, while somewhat more than 15% cited other reasons such as love, hope that the situation in the country would change for the better, and their being underage. Statistically significant differences were observed between the immigrants who applied for asylum and those who did not (the latter were living in the centers for aliens): the former did not depart immediately because of the situation in the country, and the latter because they did not have enough money to pay for the journey. The respondents mostly had to pay high sums to various individuals (agents) who promised a more or less safe passage to a target country.<sup>14</sup>

Yamin told us that identification documents in Iran (personal ID card, passport etc.) are extremely expensive, so sons often take over the documents from their fathers or other family members. “We, ordinary citizens, cannot afford them.” If one is stopped by the police in the street and cannot produce valid documents, the fines are very high, so people most often serve the term in prison instead. Yamin had a document that belonged to his older brother who died. So in his own country he identified himself using a false name and particulars (year and place of birth).

#### BUT WHERE TO?

Various sources<sup>15</sup> confirm that immigrants’ native countries are characterized by a high degree of inequality. The immigrants in our

<sup>14</sup> According to the data supplied by a police inspector, the journey from Teheran to Austria costs ten thousand German marks (if they travel illegally) and twice that much if they travel “legally” (with forged documents). Austria used to be an ideal target country for people from Iraq who asked for the American green card there, but now the US embassy issues the card only if they arrive there legally. Accordingly, immigrants from Iraq are supposed to be very few in Slovenia (5% at the most), because they travel straight to Austria.

<sup>15</sup> See WB (World Bank), 1999; HDR (Human Development Report), 2000.

research study assessed that in their native countries the greatest gaps were those between the poor and the rich, between those who abide by the law and those who do not, between the educated and uneducated, between country people and city dwellers. They stressed that they did not have opportunities to get jobs, that they could not influence societal decisions, that the rate of economic development was extremely low and the like. Accordingly, in the countries of their destination they expected to be able to enjoy equal opportunities, better living conditions in general, better job and educational opportunities, and respect for human rights. Their target countries were mostly those that they hoped could fulfill their expectations and the political, economic, or personal goals they set for themselves, for example, finding their lost family members, joining their relatives living abroad and so on. For immigrants with families the overbearing factor when taking the decision to leave were children and concern for their future and opportunities.

More than 60% of them wanted to reach one of the west-European countries: the majority were headed for Italy (17%) and Germany (17%), then France (8%), followed by Great Britain (5%), Spain (3%), and other European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands) or Canada. As many as 76% did not reach their target country (Slovenia was the target country for 24% of them), while 17% stated that any country would do.

Yamin, a film director and professor of literature, was on the road for several months before he managed to reach Slovenia, the country of his destination. Before the outbreak of war in the Balkans he wanted to go to Belgrade but then changed his mind and decided on Slovenia. During these attempts he was detained in many centers in east-European countries, but he always managed to escape and finally he attained his goal. Today he lives in the asylum seekers' home in Ljubljana and writes scenarios; he spends all of his earnings to search for his wife and children who he supposes live in one of the European countries. His wish is to acquire refugee status as soon as possible and thus get a work permit.

#### INCHING ONE'S WAY AND TUNNELS

The length of the journey and the time spent on it vary. Some found themselves in the Slovene centers within one day of their initial departure (5% of immigrants were traveling for one day only), while others arrived here after as much as five years on the run. On average, they spent nearly one month (27 days) on the road. Most of them (41%) traveled between one week and one month, 38% traveled less than one week, while 22% traveled more than one month.

Regardless of how distant the countries they came from, the average time they spent on the journey is the same. Some traveled across several continents or several tens of countries; others came by the Balkan routes hidden in tank trucks, vans, wagons or other vehicles, or even walked part of the way. Immigrants from more distant countries tried to cross borders arriving by planes or in transport vehicles (rail wagons), with forged passports or without them, while immigrants from the Balkans more often than others fled by car or on foot, or they often switched modes of transport.

A number of immigrants travel from France to Great Britain through the Channel Tunnel (Eurotunnel). A young Afghan, who identified himself as Rashid, said that in two and a half months he took this deadly route 41 times and said that he might try again soon. "The smugglers will tell us this afternoon whether we go again tonight," he said. In the last year the 9-hectare complex of concrete lanes and train tracks that converges at the mouth of the tunnel has become a fortress with barbed wire, electric fencing, floodlights, infrared sensors and police officers patrolling with dogs. But rare immigrants still manage to get through. For example, nine Romanian immigrants were found hidden in the undercarriage of a high-speed passenger train that arrived in London. Passengers heard them banging for help from below.

The inventiveness of immigrants overcomes all barriers. They jump onto the tops of moving trains, lurk around gas stations hoping to hide in a vehicle heading for the tunnel. Rashid has been beaten up by the police, beaten up by a truck driver. "I will keep trying because I have no way back," he said.<sup>16</sup>

"The companions on the journey" proved to be a factor that partly influenced the decision. The majority of immigrants (40%) set out on the journey on their own, 30% fled with friends and 29% with their family. The immigrants from African countries, who mostly fled for political reasons, went alone (as soon as they could); most of them departed in order to evade prison, some escaped from prison or penitentiaries. The immigrants from ex-Yugoslavia were fleeing alone or with families (63%), and many set out on the journey in search of family from whom they were separated during the war. Most of the Iranians were traveling with friends (46%).<sup>17</sup>

The immigrants who were younger than 20 fled alone or with their families, while immigrants aged 20 to 29 mostly were not alone but had their family with them or friends. While the immigrants who did not ask for asylum traveled alone or with family or friends, the asylum seekers, as expected, mostly fled alone.

<sup>16</sup> Excerpts from an article by Daley, Suzanne. 2001. Illegal Immigrants Seek the Light at the End of Eurotunnel. *Herald Tribune*, 16 March 2001, 1, 4.

<sup>17</sup> As for other countries, the sample is too small to establish any statistical significance.



## ON THE ROAD

<i>We move down from Babilon</i>	<i>Rasta move in the morning</i>
<i>Rasta move ...</i>	<i>Rasta move in the evening</i>
<i>Rasta move I say</i>	<i>Rasta move in the afternoon</i>
	<i>Rasta move anytime</i>
<i>Rasta move in the morning</i>	<i>Rasta move anywhere, I say</i>
<i>Rasta move in the evening</i>	
<i>Rasta move in the afternoon</i>	<i>Rasta move</i>
<i>Rasta move anytime</i>	<i>Rasta move</i>
<i>Rasta move anywhere, I say</i>	<i>Rasta move, I say</i>
<i>Rasta move</i>	<i>Rasta move Babilonians</i>
<i>Rasta move</i>	<i>Rasta move wicked people</i>
<i>Rasta move, I say</i>	
	<i>Rasta move</i>
	<i>Rasta move</i>
	Victor Fredirick – B.Fine
	Rasta Move

What have the immigrants experienced on the road? How were they “caught” or “seized,”<sup>18</sup> how long did the journey last, where did they sleep, how did they travel, where did their journey end? Their accounts vary depending on the time of journey and on the number of times their journey was interrupted.<sup>19</sup> We have already mentioned the reasons that prompted their journey, and in this chapter we would like to throw some light on the events that they experienced on the road including deception and violence on the part of the police. Agents often treated immigrants as goods to be transported; they were not interested in why they were fleeing but just wanted to know how much money they could extract from them.

The majority of the immigrants (76%) did not manage to reach the country of destination, while 91% of them still wanted to reach the country that they set as their goal. Most of them assessed that they were not accepted as “people,” that their human rights were violated (testimonies below will show which rights were violated and how). Whenever “seizing” an immigrant, the police should acquaint

<sup>18</sup>“Captured” or “seized” calls to mind the police diction. The Dictionary of the Slovene Literary Language gives the following examples: the captured people were soon released; to seize an enemy; to seize smugglers; to seize someone during the police raid. The terms are most often used in connection with criminal acts and offenses.

<sup>19</sup>Although they are few, we met some people who have been on the road since the mid nineties. Some of them lived in Slovenia for several years without citizenship and were deported to a center for aliens or asylum seekers’ home only later. For more in connection with this, see the following chapters.

the “seized” with his/her rights. We would like to stress that as many as 79% of immigrants stated that the Slovene policemen did not explain to them what rights they had! As many as 69% assessed that Slovenia does not make any effort, or not a sufficient effort, to enable them to exercise their rights.

The immigrants’ accounts of their journeys are often grotesque. They call to mind the films about world wars, hiding, flights and concentration camps. Sabar, who got to know a number of routes and ways of fleeing, described what she went through on her way, and how she experienced it. She lived in the centers in the EU countries and in the Balkans and had the chance to experience the health and social protections offered by those centers; she met dishonest agents, drivers and immigrants from all around the world and became familiar with the customary routes they took.

Fleeing political persecution in Iran, 22-year-old Shahrazad Sabar arrived in the UK last week after an epic four-and-a-half month journey via the Balkans. This is the route that Prime Minister Tony Blair and Italian premier Guilano Amato announced in February that they will try to close down. Blair and Amato also called for 14-year prison terms for those who profit from human trafficking. Sabar’s journey was facilitated by a vast network of traffickers. “In Iran I had a good job and was well paid, but my life was in danger. Women are second-class citizens and exist just to fulfil the sexual needs of men. You have to be covered-up all the time and can be flogged if even your hair is showing. Life is like a prison and everything is under control.”

“I didn’t intend coming to England, but wanted to seek asylum in Canada. A night before leaving, the agent, who I’d paid the equivalent of £3,000 to, gave me an air ticket in someone else’s name. The next morning I flew from Teheran to Turkey, then on to Sarajevo. When I arrived I realized the agent had lied. I wasn’t going to Canada. Along with three other Iranians and 10 Iraqi Kurds, I was taken to a house owned by an old woman who was paid to keep people like us. We drove for four hours, before stopping in a forest. Then we began to walk. We were tired and hungry, but the agents told us we couldn’t make a fire. It was so cold I thought I’d die. In the morning we tried to cross the Sava river into Croatia by a small boat. Many asylum seekers have died there. On the other side three cars were waiting for us. We got in, and after a short drive, were told to get out and wait for a lorry. But as we waited on the side of the road, a policeman came and arrested us.”

Thus began a cycle of capture, detention and escape. Sabar was fined 140 deutschmarks and sent back to Bosnia. “We were sent to the UNCHR camp. It was like a desert with lots of tents. There were so many people, lots of different nationalities. There was a lot of smuggling going on. We phoned the agent, and he told us to rent a car and come back to Sarajevo.”

Again Sabar was caught by the police in Croatia and sent back to Bosnia. This happened three times.

"Sometimes I was the only woman and had to lie in a room with 40 men. Some were nice, other weren't. I was sexually harassed. Once I was locked up for seven days without being allowed out."

"The fourth time we escaped, we were driven to Slovenia. A big lorry came and about 50 or 60 of us got in. We were taken to a house belonging to another agent who was also a policeman. Then we started walking through the forest from 5 P.M. through to 8 A.M. There were pregnant women and children. All my clothes were wet and dirty and I became ill after drinking from a pool of water. We were caught again by the Slovenian police walking along railway line and sent to Ljubljana. Each time I was caught I gave different details. All the Balkan countries are really poor and for them it's a game. A chance to make some money from the fines." Eventually Sabar managed to scale Fortress Europe – and cross into Italy.

"I crossed the border alone. Sometimes there are border patrols, sometimes not. Once you cross from one country to another, you have to destroy anything – money, cigarettes – that links you to the previous country. I slept a night in a train station and called an agent who told me to catch a train to southern Italy. There, another agent opened the front carriage to a train with a screwdriver and I hid in it all the way to Cannes, before traveling on to Paris and Germany, where I stayed for one month. I was still trying to get to Canada but, when I couldn't, I went to Antwerp and stayed for 25 days."

"We were caught in Calais and sent back to Belgium. I tried to escape again and this time was caught on a train in France by the police."

Sabar was sent to the notorious Sangatte holding camp in northern France. Sabar tried to escape from Sangatte 15 times in 30 days.

"Everyone knows Sangatte conditions are poor. There is no heating, the food is very bad. I had to queue for hours just to get a glass of milk. It's surrounded by barbed wire."

She decided to buy a false passport for 3,000 deutschmarks from an agent, but before she did so she finally managed to escape. Sabar hid in the back of the lorry which took her to Dover, where she has since claimed asylum.<sup>20</sup>

Almost half of the respondents (45%) expressed the wish to continue their journey from Slovenia or to make another attempt to reach their target country, 91% of them still want to reach their target country, while some want to return to their home country as their experience convinced them that "democracy" in developed countries is "antidemocratic." Only 9% of the immigrants altered their original goals and the countries in which they now hope to start new lives are Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Slovenia. As for the immigrants whose target country initially was not Slovenia, just three later changed their mind and wanted to stay in Slovenia any-

<sup>20</sup>Excerpts from an article by Olden, Mark. 2001. Human Traffic. *Big Issue*, April 23-29, 22-23.

way. If the original countries of destination were ruled out, 52% of immigrants would remain in Slovenia.

Many already have relatives or friends in the EU countries for which they were destined; nevertheless Slovene officials were probably going to repatriate them. A number of immigrants, particularly those who traveled in a group and were young, energetic, and striving for a better life (in bright Europe!), assured us that as soon as they had an opportunity they were going to flee again. They were convinced that the next time they would definitely reach Italy or Germany. Others, who were more experienced and had more ill-fated attempts behind them, no longer thought about fleeing but just waited to see what was going to happen.

Most of those who asked for asylum wanted to take care of themselves. If they could work they would immediately leave the centers and organize their lives (in Slovenia or some other country). The things they found most difficult to endure were confinement to airless rooms and idleness. The vast majority was convinced that Slovenia was not going to secure jobs for them, recognize their rights, grant them asylum or citizen's rights.

Voja from Montenegro did not object to the circumstances in the center in Postojna, although he admitted that they were bad. He was convinced that he was going to succeed in reaching Germany where he had relatives. He was confined in Ljubljana for several days, then moved to Postojna without any explanation. He felt lonely in the center. He traveled alone. Before he left he was pondering the idea of leaving Montenegro for several months. He hesitated because of fear and he is still afraid to think what the future will bring. He was curious to hear why we wanted to speak to him, because up to then he had not met anybody who wanted to hear how he felt. He said that he would work in Slovenia if he could, but thought that Slovenes were not ready to employ non-Slovenes.

#### SEIZED AND STUCK IN THE MUD

Similar reasons led different people to take an identical decision so they were bound into a group with various individual and some common experiences – that of farewell, flight, and uncertainty. They were stalled in holding centers in Slovenia, deprived of their rights, not knowing what to expect, with no information about the political and social situation in the world, or about their home countries and families, cut off from the world and crammed into shared rooms

with no privacy, waiting on those who know nothing about them or their lives to take decisions on how to “remove” them. They are outsiders in the eyes of the local people, their fellow prisoners, and eventually outsiders in their own eyes.

The act of seizing an immigrant, most often taking place near the national border,<sup>21</sup> is not even comparable with the stories involving Mafia, in which participants at least know what country they are in and what they did wrong, and they also know very well which lawyers to call to get them out of prison in no time. Neither can it be associated with “adventurousness,” as some designated the doings of immigrants in a discussion following the screening of the film entitled *Fortress Europe*.<sup>22</sup> When seized, immigrants quite often do not know even which country they are actually in. The countries they are promised as destinations, after paying high sums,<sup>23</sup> are Italy, Germany or some other west European country. Some of them sold their material or other property (if they had enough time to do that) in order to pay for flight, their own and that of their friends or family members. The agents (quite often they are policemen or some kind of entrepreneurs) who deal in trafficking with immigrants (in most cases each immigrant is entangled in a long chain of agents), unload them from trucks or other transport vehicles in the middle of the forest or a meadow just before the national border or immediately across it, probably because they want to make money quickly and taking as little risk as possible. They sometimes even take them directly to a center for aliens, telling them for example: “You are in Italy and this is your camp.”

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<sup>21</sup>We should not overlook the fact that, at the time of writing this text, Slovenia (ten years into its sovereignty) does not have all of its borderline mapped. Nevertheless, it is invariably known who crossed its borders and when! This is a phenomenon that could only be explained by Croatian and Slovene border police. How do they manage to strike the agreement? How is it possible that they have not yet locked horns while riding in their vans along prohibited coordinates? “Small” big stories in Slovenia simply do not exist until you stumble over them and thus present the country in a bad light.

<sup>22</sup>A documentary by Želimir Žilnik screened on 7 May 2001 in Cinematheque in Ljubljana. The presentation of the film and an interview with the director were organized by the Peace Institute and Slovene Cinematheque.

<sup>23</sup>The sums they paid for the journey ranged from a few thousands to fifteen thousand German marks – that is what could be concluded from our conversations with immigrants.

A group of the Roma from Kosovo wanted to go to Germany. Their relatives from Germany found an agent who organized their flight. A number of other agents accompanied them during the journey. The one that was supposed to take them to Italy left them in Slovenia, just before the Italian border. They had no time to lament, they had to cross the border immediately because they had to get in touch with another agent there. However, within a few days they were arrested by the Italian police and returned to Slovenia, where their journey ended for the time being. Even though the relatives in Germany paid in advance for the costs of their flight, the agent demanded additional payment to perform "further services." The older man who told the story was epileptic so he was supposed not to get too excited, but he could not calm down. He incessantly made calls to Germany and Italy, called relatives and agents in turns. The relatives tried to comfort him, while the agents assured him that the failure was his fault and they were not going to give the money back.

The documentary entitled *Fortress Europe* clearly shows the routine act of seizing immigrants – they are lying flat on the ground one next to another, while several policemen run around the forest and hunt those that may have managed to escape. Once the "hunt for prey" is over, the police put them into a van and take them to jail – in Slovenia the first stop is probably the basement of the center in Šiška – or, if this center is filled to capacity, they retain them for another day or two at a police station. Often it is precisely this time spent at the Šiška center that immigrants remember as a horrible experience of their life, or of Slovenia, as their stories presented in the next chapters confirm.

We could not assess what actually happened and still is happening in the basement in Šiška. Even though we tried in many ways to enter these rooms, officials repeatedly turned down our requests. The personnel working at the center told us that immigrants are locked in the basement for a day or more in order to "establish their origins and disinfect them." According to their descriptions, several tens of immigrants are crammed into rooms measuring a few square meters. They sleep on the floors because there are no beds in the basement rooms. Women, men and children all have to use the same bucket, as there are no toilets. They have meals in the same room. They are not allowed to be bothered by the stinking smell. They are not allowed to object.

A couple from Albania intended to cross over to Italy with a group of other immigrants, but the Slovene police seized them. The man was detained at a nearby police station, while the wife was transported to the center in Šiška the same night.

After waiting a whole day in the basement to undergo a medical check and be redistributed, the wife was allocated to the center in Šiška. The husband was brought to the basement only the next day, where he had to wait for the check as well. Three days later they met in the center by pure chance. While they were separated they asked police about each other but in vain.

















## A NEW HOME – ENDURING IN SLOVENIA

*The surroundings of the center changed over years; almost all the houses nearby have a new look, while the center itself remains dirty, gray and shabby, a socialist realist piece of architecture. Rusty metal window frames, brownish greasy window panes, walls darkened by smog. Welcome!*

There are two types of centers i.e. homes in Slovenia: the asylum seekers' home and centers for (the removal) of aliens (*Center za odstranjevanje tujcev* or *COT*<sup>24</sup> – unofficially known as the center for aliens. Despite the fact that the legally determined name “center for the removal of aliens” is not in use, the abbreviation COT persists. A look at the Dictionary of the Slovene Literary Language reveals that *cota* is a dialect word for a rug or cloth (e.g. to wipe with a clean cloth / clad in dirty rags / pick up your rags and leave etc.). However, we cannot blame the forming of prejudices against immigrants only on the delicate sense of smell or sight, or some telepathic or dramatic identification skills of the locals. When they were seized immigrants were not only dirty and in rags, but also frightened, disappointed, and in despair. And under the conditions in the COT center they are no doubt likely to remain in such a condition.

Even though we initially did not intend to look into the circumstances within these centers, the experience of researchers, questioners, volunteers, the ombudsman's deputy and of others involved obliged us to present them. Each particular center is a separate story. Nobody but immigrants can explain the feelings inspired by the sight of the iron prison door, airless and packed rooms, and dispassionate dehumanization and degradation of humans. The cum-

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<sup>24</sup>The fact that the name “the center for the removal of aliens” is not suitable was the conclusion of research commissioned by RTV Slovenia and conducted by Cati center on 4 and 5 February 2001 (the data are available at <http://www.tvodliv.cati.si>). The random sample, representative with regard to sex, age, education, and region, included 502 people between 15 and 75. 63% of the respondents thought, and 50% agreed, that the state should rename the center. At the time of writing this book the center was not yet renamed officially, but unofficially all centers are called just “centers for aliens” which is confirmed by signs displayed on the buildings.



bersome iron door in each center points to insurmountable barriers in communication and civilizational patterns, and to physical separation. People behind these doors were non-people, while in front of the doors, outside in the free world, “democracy” was at work – one they could observe but not experience.<sup>25</sup>

#### ASYLUM SEEKERS' HOME AND THE CENTER FOR ALIENS IN ŠIŠKA, LJUBLJANA

*As soon as we entered the house at 166 Celovška street, we spotted, on the ground floor notice-board displaying calls for interviews with immigrants, a notice in Slovene and in Serbian reading: “If you do not know what to do, please do not do it here.” We had to wait for official permission to enter, and then the policeman unlocked the iron door. We entered the center for aliens which greeted us with bad air and jam-packed rooms full of curious people looking through the doors that lined the corridor.*

As a rule homes for asylum seekers were different from the closed-type centers for aliens, so the feelings and testimonies of immigrants differed accordingly. We first went to the asylum seekers' home in Šiška, occupying the first three floors of the house. Compared to other centers this one was the most spacious and the cleanest, yet given the number of immigrants who lived there, it was nevertheless quite inappropriate for living. Several families with children lived there, mostly immigrants from Africa (Sudan, Sierra Leone), Yugoslavia and the Near or Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Pakistan). As a rule, the immigrants' stopover in the centers for aliens is shorter than that in the homes for asylum seekers. How long the former will remain in Slovenia depends on the speed of bureaucratic procedures.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the immigrants who apply for asylum may wait to be granted asylum or refugee status for much longer than six months. By the way, as a rule, refugee status is not granted save in exceptional cases.

People at the asylum seekers' home accepted us without many reservations and the conversation began. Mutual trust was estab-

<sup>25</sup>When we say this we have in mind the personnel employed by these centers (policemen, medical workers, social workers) whom the immigrants could see through the locked iron door.

<sup>26</sup>This assertion especially holds true for immigrants from China and some others. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the police cannot take any step before they receive documents on the basis of which they can “remove” immigrants.



lished at first contact, which was also confirmed later when we maintained friendly relations and met these people in the town, at concerts and on other occasions. The asylum seekers mainly objected to “curfew” and complained that asylum in Slovenia was practically impossible to obtain. A number of asylum seekers used to leave the center early in the morning and return only at night, to avoid the airless and confined conditions.

According to the house rules in the home, immigrants must return to the home by 10 P.M. or they face sanctions. They can apply for a few days of absence, and if their reasons are well-grounded, for example, health reasons, visits to various institutions or offices where they have to arrange status, or rehearsal with a musical group, they get permission. Immigrants without a permit who return to the center after 10 P.M. are punished: they have to stay in the basement room without bed and lavatory for as long as three days, sometimes together with several tens of other immigrants, say, “new arrivals” waiting to be interrogated or to undergo a medical check.

We met B.Fine several times and he furnished running reports on the developments in the asylum seekers' home in Šiška. In an interview, reprinted in whole on page 113 – 114, he explained that he was beaten and closed in a basement room without beds with approximately 50 other people, because he was late in returning to the home, that is, he did not have a permit to go out on that night. Even though the judge ruled in his favor (saying that the policeman unjustifiably attacked him), B.Fine doubts the justice of the procedure, since the policeman was not punished for the offense. He could tell us about many instances of violence and aggressiveness on the part of policemen, and he was convinced that their intolerance and aggressive attitude towards Africans was more pronounced than towards other immigrants, say, those from ex-Yugoslavia.

Nihad from Bosnia made contact with us soon after we arrived in the COT center in Šiška. Initially he was somewhat scornful, but later we developed friendly relations and after that we talked for several hours each time we visited the center. We did not meet him during our last two visits because he was moved to the asylum seekers' home. Although he was now allowed to go out and stay until 10 P.M. when we invited him to a party he did not want to leave the center. “I'd rather not go out than experience again the basement, followed by the fifth floor, then the third floor together with immigrants, maybe Dob again (a prison near Ljubljana) or some place similar.” Indeed that's been his way of life since youth – restricted movement, closed and airless rooms, justified or unjustified punishments. This tall man who understood and spoke several languages (Slovene, Serbian, Croatian, English, and German) and was among those rare ones who could communicate with the Chinese, informed other immigrants about his experiences. He was in a way “at home” there.

We were surprised to meet a Slovene man living with two Iranians in the center for aliens. We immediately made contact and he was ready to cooperate. He explained that he ended up in the center because there was no more room in the prison on Povšetova street where he was taken the night before. He too confirmed the story we heard several times before, that many people were “crammed” into the basement. He himself was there “since that is where you have to spend the first night or rather the first day in the center.” He was talkative so we made contact with him immediately. He soon stated that he would be glad to fill in the questionnaire describing his experience as a “TV story.” He thought that television-like was the very fact that he had to spend the night in the center for aliens instead of in prison. He guessed that they “ran out of space” in the prison on Povšetova street. When police stopped him in Ljubljana, he had no documents on him. He did not have a valid driving license because some time ago, while he was somewhere in the Balkans, it expired and he had no car with valid registration plates. He is a stateless person and does not know whether he will ever get Slovene citizenship. “I will probably take the Bosnian citizenship because it is easier to get than the Slovene,” he pondered aloud. He thought it was important to get a passport. He spent so much time in prisons that he learnt to speak Russian, Romanian and Hungarian quite well.

Immigrants formed bonds primarily on the basis of the languages they spoke or understood. Since asylum seekers could go out, they made contacts with people in Ljubljana. Some immigrants assured us that they wanted to leave the home. Immigrants cannot get work permits before they are granted asylum. The chances of getting refugee status in Slovenia are almost nil, as, following recent data, only 35 cases of asylum have been granted since 1991.

In the corridor of the asylum seekers' home we talked to a man from Lebanon who was ready to cooperate but could not speak German well. With the help of a Yugoslav who joined us when he noticed that we were having a conversation, we managed to translate several questions but we dropped the plan to fill in the whole questionnaire. The Lebanese excitedly explained to the Yugoslav that his stay was not extended. He explained that he was unhappy with such a decision and supported his explanation with a document. He brought from his room a part of the paper he received and alerted us to the incorrect translation into Arabian. He pointed to the discrepancy in numbers: the Slovene version of the document stated that he had to leave Slovenia within 14 days, while in the Arabian version it said 10 days. He pointed to the numbers several times and did not believe that it was a translator's error. He was convinced that they wanted to get rid of him within ten instead of fourteen days. He did not want to show us the details of the official explanation but he told us that he could not go back to Lebanon because he was going to be killed if he returned. As far as we could conclude from the documents we saw, our officials did not believe his story about children and family. He maintained that he had three children at home and would like to help them. He also showed the scar on his face and explained that an attempt was made to kill him and he managed to escape, but now death is definitely his destiny if he returns home. “How can I return then, tell me.”

Our research group was most astounded at the attitude of the personnel employed in the center at 166 Celovška street. We could not get over our astonishment at how employees perceived immigrants. One of the policeman repeatedly warned us that they stunk, that they had scabies, sexually transmitted and other diseases. They maintained that the immigrants were absolute egoists, so supposedly their only concern was the benefits they could extract in Slovenia. The policeman objected that the immigrants had girlfriends in the town and often changed them.

Above all we could not get over our surprise at how the policeman stationed at 166 Celovška street spoke of people who found themselves in the center by some chance or other. "These people are known for the diseases they suffer from. It has been established," said the policeman. "They transmit sexual diseases, including aids, and there also has been a suspicion of ebola." While describing "them" as carriers of diseases who should be avoided, he simultaneously spat stereotypes about the behavior of immigrants. "When they get an exit permit, they go out and find Slovene girls. They also roam hotels and look for Ukrainian girls. They are all students. One of them even has a university degree, and I cannot imagine where he got it because he hasn't got a clue about anything. All of them want to go to Italy. They try to get across the border, and if they fail, they return to Ljubljana. Here they get everything they need at any rate. They lack nothing at all." It was interesting to hear how our "informant" explained why the asylum seekers living on the first, second and the third floors could ask for a pass, while immigrants living on the fourth and fifth floors could not. "Those from the upper floors are uninformed and they do not know that they can ask for asylum." To our question of how it could happen that they did not have information, he replied: "Slovenia is not that much generous to acquaint everybody with their rights."

The center for aliens that is located in the fourth and fifth floors of the house on Celovška street is, compared to the asylum seekers' home, something quite different. It is separated from it by a black, creaking door. Right behind the door there were a lot of people crammed onto the staircase. When we came in, the immigrants thought we were either Russians or Yugoslavs. They were somewhat disappointed when we explained that we were researchers. Since we came to do "some research",<sup>27</sup> they turned rather sullen and dis-

<sup>27</sup> At first the immigrants were not sure where we belonged. But when we mentioned that we intended to write a book that would speak about them in the first place, they began to be interested in cooperation. They stressed that we were the first to come to the center asking about them and the first to want to talk to them. They were in need of information - what was going to happen to them, what the other centers were like (in case they were moved), who they can turn to and what they can ask for. Apart from needing a conversation and somebody's trust, they were obviously in need of legal assistance.

trustful. The atmosphere became a bit tense and it seemed that the interviews were not going to proceed as we planned, or rather, as our initial experience made us expect. However, after several hours of conversation held in the corridor, the immigrants accepted us and began to cooperate.

Two days later they were trustful; moreover, they were eagerly looking for those who had not yet been interviewed. If we could not understand the language (most often when talking to Kurds), they offered to translate themselves. We were delighted to hear how well some of them spoke foreign languages. Some immigrants could speak three foreign languages and were more than ready to cooperate and translate.

When we arrived in the Šiška center one morning, a social worker was allocating immigrants to their rooms. They were brought in overnight and even though the space in the basement was limited, they crammed at least thirty of them into the room measuring 20 square meters. They reportedly have to go through a medical check before they are allocated to the rooms in the upper floors, even though, according to Lia, an immigrant from Pakistan, the medical check consisted of a superficial scanning of hands in search of needle traces and signs of potential skin disease. In this group Lia was the only one who spoke English, so he assumed the translator's role. There were between thirty and forty people in the corridor waiting to be allocated rooms. Kurds were most numerous. We could not speak to them because of the language barrier, and even Lia could not help us there.

Lia kindly and enthusiastically invited us to the room he shared with three exhausted colleagues. One was his friend from Pakistan, while other two were from Bangladesh. Even though they could not understand us, they wanted to fill in the questionnaire. Lia racked his brain trying to find the words shared by the two languages, and made an effort to translate at least some of the easier questions. He himself described the situation in his own country, where owing to the violation of human rights, limited job opportunities and slow economic growth he did not see any possibilities for decent life.

The police caught him at the Slovene-Italian border while he and his friend were trying to cross to Italy. But they both ended up in the Ljubljana center. Having gone through many a bad experience, Lia questioned the sense of life, particularly life in Pakistan, and stressed that he would not wander around the world had the situation at home been good. He was most resentful at the economic under-development of his country, its non-peaceful politics, the low international reputation of his country and the lag in the development of science and technology. As a former activist in the union movement, he was critical of the US, which in his opinion exploited the less-developed countries in order to accomplish its own political and economic goals. He added somewhat scornfully that in Pakistan they do not play rugby – he remembered rugby because his roommates were talking about the option of playing football in the courtyard – and that in Pakistani factories even children have to make balls that are

exported to the American market. Not all of the group wanted to join in the recreation in the courtyard because they objected to police supervision, so a football game in such circumstances appeared absurd. Lia rejected lunch as well, declaring that the circumstances made him lose his appetite.

On behalf of the group he sought answers to the question of what options the immigrants who asked for asylum had in Slovenia and what they could expect from Slovenia, how long they were going to stay in Slovenia and what rights they had. He said that he felt like a prisoner, and that he was thinking about life which “he never imagined could become as wretched as it turned out to be.” He was sincerely interested in my view about the part of the world he came from and about Slovenia. He stressed that he did not want to return home at any cost. In order to be able to set off on the journey, he sold his entire property, including a small shop he owned, and thus managed to save approximately fifteen thousand American dollars. He came to Slovenia quite accidentally: he flew from Pakistan to the UAE, then to Turkey and Yugoslavia. He was concerned about what was going to happen to him in Slovenia, and mentioned that acquaintances living in Germany, where he wanted to go, could perhaps help him.

Lia's friend from Pakistan tried to be more optimistic and joked that with my help he was going to find a Slovene wife. He added that he did not like the fact that women in Pakistan did not have the right to decide about themselves and their own lives, and that he could not (was not allowed to) talk with them as he talked with me. I also checked my non-verbal communication skills and attempted to make contact despite the language barrier. We managed to establish just basic facts: name, age and the like. He gesticulated with his hands to explain to me that a woman in Pakistan would be flogged if she were seen speaking to a man. He explained that he liked our conversation. My “visit” was apparently too long, because a younger policeman came in to check what “was going on.” I could feel the tension mounting, even though the policeman was one of the more benevolent ones, perhaps because he knew two of our group. Thanks to this acquaintance we could give a telephone card to Lia. We wanted to give it to him as a gift, but he insisted on paying. We somehow managed to convince him to pay just half of the price, which obviously touched the feelings of the whole group. The immigrant from Bangladesh wished me farewell with clasped hands and a bow, which was an expression, as Lia explained, of his respect and gratitude.

The rooms were crammed and airless. The door at the end of the corridor could not be opened, so the corridors could not be aired. Up to ten immigrants were sitting in the same room talking (each room had three bunk-beds). Their eyes spoke of sadness and disappointment and pled for help. The groups gathered in the rooms were usually composed of immigrants of the same nationality or of those who spoke the same language. The most energetic were young men from the ex-Yugoslav republics (Macedonia, Kosovo and so on). They were determined to attempt to reach Italy, France, or Germany as soon as they left Slovenia. Wherever, just to get out – to the West! Throughout

our six-hour visit, an older man sat silent and motionless in the corridor. He had his leg in plaster and carried a crutch. The immigrants explained to us that the plaster had been reapplied three times but was never “fixed properly.”

A group of four young friends, Albanians from Macedonia, observed us suspiciously and rejected cooperation disregarding objections by others. On the next day the “informal leader” of the group approached me and hinted that they had decided to fill in the questionnaire. They fled from Macedonia in fear of war and recruitment. Their target country was Italy. They had friends there who could help them find jobs. They said that the policemen in the center explained to them that they could stay in Ljubljana just for two days, and after that they would probably be sent back to Macedonia. They nevertheless asked for asylum. When we returned to the center they had already been moved to the asylum seekers’ part of the center.

I made friends with several immigrants, especially children. Together with several other interviewers we heaped chocolate, fruit and juice upon them, and when these supplies were consumed, we searched our backpacks to find candy or chewing gum. I was most impressed by a small Romany boy three or four years old. He was beautiful. His shining longish black hair and black eyes made him look like a girl. He spent afternoons in the corridor together with his family and some Bosnian children. Despite the fact that the Peace Institute collected several thousand toys and clothes during the demonstrations, the children were cold and had no toys. Nihad from Bosnia, who stressed several times that he was losing hope and no longer saw any sense, seemed to have been instilling hope into many desperate immigrants. The small Romany boy looked at him with big, wide open eyes waiting to be asked to play. He beat out an animated rhythm clapping his hands and pounding his bosom, which made all the children and others present laugh. His performance was invariably followed by applause, and a woman from Maribor even danced. We returned to the asylum seekers’ home to say goodbye to Nihad towards the end of our research. Since he had asked for asylum, he could go out of the building, but we noticed that he often came back (with permission from the police) to the center for aliens to cheer up his friends.

What was happening to the immigrants closed in the basement? Why didn’t children receive clothes and toys? Why didn’t mothers know whom to turn to when their children needed medical assistance? Why was the only available telephone (which was the only connection with the outside world apart from ourselves and accidental visitors) out of order throughout our work in the center? These questions remained unanswered. Those in charge of the center could improve the impossible conditions by dint of just a little effort and good will. In such a case we would now be able to speak about “more

bearable” living conditions for immigrants in Slovenia. But they will probably maintain the status quo, while the Ministry will continue to create a false impression about our centers and paint the sun that never shone there.

A middle-aged lady explained that she had been confined to the fourth floor for one year. She was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and has been living in Slovenia for more than 20 years. Her difficulties began and ended with (rejected) citizenship. She could not get Slovene citizenship, although she has been trying for several years. She was sent from one door to the next, and finally ended locked up in the center. She has a husband in Maribor and two elementary-school children. Her distress is obvious when she talks about the children. She has not seen them for quite a long time. “I miss them and long to be at home when they return from school.” She said that she no longer trusted anybody, because she was promised all sorts of things. “They promise that they will arrange everything and that they will call me to announce good news, but nothing of it ever happens.” In her opinion the conditions in the center were bad. The food, she said, was not too good, and availability of the doctor limited. Years ago when she was in Germany she badly hurt both legs. She showed us quite serious wounds and said that her legs hurt. She was allowed to visit the doctor only once. She most regretted the fact that she had been closed behind the iron door for more than a year and that the possibility of getting out seemed to her increasingly less plausible. Everybody living on the fourth and fifth floors knew her. She often assumed the role of a mother and advised younger people on how to behave. She gives advice to boys on how to behave towards girls, and to girls how to choose boys. Young people often laughed and patted her on the shoulders: “Our mother is never short of advice,” joked a young man who went by.

“I would like to know how my children are getting on, I would like to call them in Maribor. But I have no money and the employees here moan that the phone calls are expensive.” Even if she had money she wouldn’t have been able to make a call, because the phone behind the iron door had long since been out of order. I suggested her to use my mobile phone. Her eyes lit up and she invited me to her modest corner in a room she shares with others. She lifted the mattress and pulled out her purse. That is where she keeps the phone numbers, just in case she forgets them. She talked of her children and could not hide her excitement at the prospect of hearing them again after a long time. Her husband picked up the phone and she explained that the situation for her did not seem to be going to improve soon. “They promised me again that I will be able to go home. Please see if you can do something because I don’t know if I’ll be able to endure here any longer.” Then the father gave the phone to the child, and the mother was overcome with emotion. It seemed that she could not find the right words to comfort the child she had not seen in a long time. “Are you well-behaved? Do you obey your father? How are you doing at school?” she asked. When the child asked when she was going to return home, she answered “maybe soon” and added that she loved both of them very much.

“Tomorrow I have an interview when they should tell me what they are going to do with me,” she explained. “I hope I will be able to go home, but I am afraid that some-

thing might go wrong again. Another difficulty is that I have no money for the train.” She wrote down my phone number and we agreed to travel to Maribor together. She was thanking me for so long that I felt embarrassed. So far I have not had a phone call from her, neither do I have any news of her.<sup>28</sup>

## THE CENTER FOR ALIENS IN VELIKI OTOK NEAR POSTOJNA

*It is not necessary to close up our fellow citizens into the madhouse  
in order to make sure that we ourselves are sane.*

Dostoyevsky, *The Writer's Diary*

The center is situated on the outskirts of town. It has been in operation for several years now, but no significant xenophobic reactions by local people, comparable to those in Šiška, Ljubljana or Vidonci, were recorded. From the outside the establishment seems not to be in use – a deserted house, formerly a part of the military barracks, once used as a washroom. There are no visible signs displayed, so one would think it completely deserted were it not for the “shipments” unloaded at its entrance and several policemen patrolling in front of it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>The policemen's story about this woman from Bosnia-Herzegovina was quite different. They assured us that she could go out but that she did not want to leave the center. They also showed us a permit allowing her to leave the center for several days. We can only guess why she did not take the opportunity and whether she knew about the permit at all. The inspector assured us that her situation was an extraordinary one and that they were doing their best to resolve her case.

<sup>29</sup>To get a permit to enter this center we had to turn to Darja Peharc, the head of the center. Since it was a holiday she could not provide official escorts who, in her opinion, were necessary. According to her, if we went to the center before the agreed date, our safety would be threatened. (Let us mention here that after the holidays we were allowed to visit the center without escorts.) Our group immediately communicated information about supposed violations within the center to Matjaž Hanžek, the human rights ombudsman. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 2001 (two days before our visit), the situation in the center was assessed by Aleš Butala, his deputy, and a consultant working for the ombudsman's office, Ivan Šelih. Their conclusions were similar to ours, even though before we went there the center had undergone a sanitary inspection. Butala and Šelih submitted a professional assessment of circumstances in the center seen from the perspective of respect for human rights (how much space is available for each immigrant, whether the number of toilets and wash basins was sufficient, whether bed linen and food were provided in sufficient quantities, how well the employees fulfill their tasks and whether they fulfill them, how well immigrants are informed and what activities they can pursue). Our research group, on the other hand, wanted to hear stories from the immigrants themselves, to hear what happened to them, how they experience life in the center and the like. Since we could not enter the upper floors of the building, we could not see or verify all that Butala and Šelih described in their report.



The deputy of the human rights ombudsman described the circumstances and living conditions of the immigrants in this center as catastrophic. Our opinion was similar. In contrast, the head of the Slovene police Marko Pogorevc was of the opinion that the “circumstances in the center for aliens in Veliki Otok were exceptionally good.”<sup>30</sup> On the basis of accounts given by the immigrants living there, and the events we witnessed, we concluded that violations were most frequent precisely in this center and that authorities did not take any care of the immigrants once they locked them up in the center.

We were surprised that nobody from the police department for stricter surveillance of foreigners could tell us much about the life of foreigners there. The shift superintendent referred us to the social worker, who redirected us to the nurse, who sent us to the housekeeper and the cleaning lady (maintenance worker). She explained to us the shower rules. Her everyday clothes and high-heeled shoes did not leave an impression on us that she was cleaning anything on that particular day. We were told that the tap water was not drinkable or not recommended for drinking. The immigrants got up to fifty liters of tea a day delivered to them in thermos pots. During our visit, at around 3 P.M., the tea pots were already empty. There are no screens or curtains separating showers, no privacy for the immigrants. They all have to take showers simultaneously in the same room, a scene as if taken from a film about some concentration camp. The amount and temperature of the water are regulated by the maintenance worker. According to the employees of the center, seventeen people can take a shower simultaneously; there are only seven hangers on the wall of the shower room, obviously too few. Five washbasins with separate taps for warm and cold water line the wall of the “bathroom.” The taps have no handles and cannot be used. The social worker and the nurse could not explain why this was so. They said that according to the rules the immigrants could take a shower twice a week and in practice more than twice a week, but immigrants did not confirm this information. On the day of our visit the washroom was dry and empty, so obviously nobody had a shower on that day.

We were surprised at the assertion of the employees that the center had neither house rules nor day schedules. The only time-markers for the personnel and the policemen were meals. We wondered why house rules, drawn up by the head of the police, were not applied at the Postojna center?

We had the impression that it was unclear who ran the center or took decisions, who had information about developments in the center, or who was responsible for the living conditions and state of the immigrants. Several pieces of information we obtained from the personnel turned out to be untrue when we spoke to the immi-

<sup>30</sup>See the article Generalni direktor policije obiskal postojnsko policijsko upravo (The Head of the Police visited the Police Headquarters in Postojna). *STA (Slovene Press Agency)*, 13 August 2001.

grants (for example, the shower-room rules and walk-time schedule, rules for changing bed linen, availability of tea, and of hygienic supplies – soap, toilet paper, cleaners and so on).<sup>31</sup>

One of the policemen told us that makeshift toilets were installed outside the center (not in it!) following the sanitary inspection. It is obvious that the immigrants cannot use them because they are locked up inside the house and cannot go out. The policemen mischievously admitted that the toilets served quite a different purpose – they were used to lock up immigrants who needed to be “cooled down.” Later we checked this apparently incredible information several times. All of the respondents confirmed it.

The immigrants from Romania told me that policemen shut up one of their group in this outside toilet. On the day before our visit a policeman had a confrontation with an immigrant who threw into the policeman’s eyes a splinter of wall plaster. The Romanians were concerned about their friend so they asked me if I could help. I inquired about the man during lunch and the shift supervisor responded that the Romanian was “out in the cold.” I asked him how long he supposedly needed to “cool down” and the policemen answered that the process lasted until he has cooled down which was supposed to mean a few days. When we returned to the center after lunch, the Romanians happily informed me that their friend was back. The shift supervisor could not explain in accordance with which rule, when and whom the policemen were allowed to lock up in an isolated cell or a separate room acting at their own discretion. Similarly to what Butala concluded, there was no book of rules regulating the conduct of the police. It is not surprising then that impossible living conditions led some immigrants to go on a hunger strike.

Our encounters with the personnel in the center were more than once a source of shock for us. We were puzzled at the strange statements by the policemen. In addition, we met two new social workers who first came to work on the first day of our visit and they could not tell us what their tasks in the center were going to be – “actually we haven’t got any task” they answered, adding that they did not yet know what they were going to be asked to do. During our visits nobody spoke to the immigrants save for us. Similarly, they had no opportunity to pursue any activity; around ten of them stood in the bleak courtyard without any greenery; they had no ball, or any other item for recreation.

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<sup>31</sup> The summary of the report by Butala, Aleš. 2001. Poročilo o obisku Centra za tujce v Velikem Otoku pri Postojni (The Report on the Visit to the Center for Aliens in Veliki Otok near Postojna), 16 May 2001. The report by the human rights ombudsman’s deputy can be found at <http://www.varuh-rs.si>.

Of course we were kept on edge by all we heard. During our visit we approached the policeman who had much to say several times (on the other hand, his fellows were most interested in how we were going to apply the results of the survey; we did not discuss other topics). He touched upon the communal issues as well. "People living in Veliki Otok complain about the center for aliens. They do not like the fact that the immigrants are situated right here in Postojna." I responded that the center was quite remote from the residential neighborhoods and hence could not possibly be in anybody's way. The policeman nevertheless insisted on his assertion, saying that immigrants had escaped from the center on several occasions, had broken into cars or even stolen cars; also there was allegedly plenty of prostitution, so dissatisfaction was entirely understandable. He was also worried about amnesty in Turkey – he had heard something about it – so he was concerned that "all of these Turks will now rush into Slovenia." In his opinion, immigrants earn money while on the journey, and seasonal workers are the best off in this respect and in general. At our request he opened the door leading to the courtyard surrounded by the high walls of the center. He allowed me to look for somebody who could speak English. Around thirty people approached the opened iron door, which made the policeman angry. The stinking smell of these people was too much for him, as he indicated with a sigh and a wrinking of the nostrils. The policeman informed me that in the basement immigrants with "special" diseases were incarcerated. He warned us to be "careful about coming in contact with them," as "you never know what disease they have, maybe such as we in Slovenia even do not know about." "You never know what you are going to discover in these people coming from exotic countries," a young policeman added.

The policeman was still absorbed in his own monologue so we had the impression that he did not attach any significance to us, the listeners. He was not interested in our opinion. All that he needed was an audience, so we performed this role obediently and extremely well. He continued in his characteristically naturalistic manner by reducing individuals to the level of material objects. "Romanians will arrive in the course of summer. They are all seasonal workers. They pick fruit in Italy and send money to their families. And, once the season is over, they swish across the borders back home." It was obvious that he enjoyed the talk as he proceeded to explain extensively his opinion about "those foreigners." He then started to describe how he felt at his workplace, stating that he lacked nothing, that he spent days in the office while others took care of "them". "There is nothing I could discuss with them," he snapped and in the same breath quickly added that they were dirty, that they came from south-Africa, brought "strange, exotic diseases" to Slovenia, and "had sex non-stop." "We had to separate Chinese women from Chinese men as they had sex non-stop. The women were transported to the Postojna hospital for abortion as on an assembly line." He also added that it was especially difficult to communicate with the Chinese because nobody among the personnel spoke Chinese. "I speak Slovene to all of them and I don't care. They came to Slovenia so they should learn Slovene."

After this "overture," which we obediently endured – such was our decision – we returned to the dining room where immigrants had just finished their lunch. The company of those boys now appeared even more friendly and pleasant. We continued

our interviews and conversations. I had a long conversation with a teacher of physical education and then the time came for us to leave. Some interviewers were finishing up their questionnaires, while others gathered in front of the center. The policeman opened the door, stepped out, peeked around the van in which the immigrants were sitting, and shouted: "Pack up and let's go." The frightened people calmly descended from the van one after another and followed the policeman. They walked with bowed heads dragging behind them big, almost empty black bags like those that are habitually used for rubbish. They probably used them to store their personal belongings. I was distressed at the sight of them and could not utter a word. Why? What did these people do? Why is anybody allowed to rob them of human dignity and thrust them into a situation in which they are rendered completely impotent?

Veliki Otok (in Slovene *veliki otok* means big island) is undoubtedly an isolated island that separates immigrants from the "civilized" inhabitants. It is an oasis for the lost dreams of immigrants on the one side of the iron curtain, and for the "policemen on vacation" on the other.

Our source told us that every three months a new "group of policemen is sent on a vacation to Veliki Otok." "The policemen guarding embassies and ministries in Ljubljana have a much harder job than we!" He boasted that he "was getting a suntan" even though "it was not always pleasant, as the wind occasionally got too strong." I commented that we were writing down all of his statements. He smiled, then said: "Write it down if you like." Later he again started to complain about the work he was supposed to do; he was most indignant that the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not care about them at all. When I commented that the Ministry did not care about the immigrants either, who were not accorded any rights and were in a situation that was quite different from his own, he replied that the immigrants had food and lacked nothing. Then he added: "I would not eat their meal anyway, I'd rather go to the nearby hotel and have lunch there or buy me a sandwich."

Lyotard may be convinced that we have seen the end of big stories, but small big stories are still taking place in centers like this one and these stories are both infinite and big. "Small is infinitely more secretive than big," says Virilio (1996) in the *La vitesse de libération* where he talks of the theory of nations. Size belongs to the past and smallness to the future. And infinitely secretive violations of human rights take place precisely within this smallness, no matter whether in Slovenia as a whole or in Veliki Otok in particular. They are so fluid that even when someone manages to expose them to the eyes of the public, or report them to the human rights ombudsman, or present them to the Ministry of Internal Affairs at a conference, the

people who should be accountable always manage to escape sanctions or judicial procedures, so that no changes are effected. These people even secure for themselves “legitimacy” to proceed with their tasks in the same way, and they justify their actions in the style of the police head Marko Pogorevc who thus explained the violations: “The police acted in accordance with the rules and in this case there were no violations.”

Matjaž Hanžek, the human rights ombudsman in Slovenia, informed us that the police replied to the report submitted by his office in the beginning of June. They later sent two supplements, the last one in August, informing him which deficiencies were made up. They were due to prepare a project for the renovation of the facility by the end of October, and it should have been drawn up in accordance with the safety and hygienic criteria and the standards of living conditions. According to them, the deficiencies that could be improved quickly had already been taken care of, heads of departments had been appointed, job positions revised and defined anew, and recruitment of additional workforce was underway. They also stated that an inspector responsible for the well-being of aliens visited the center on the daily basis and a book of complaints had also been set up. They asserted that they had arranged the presence of social services and public workers and started to outfit the living quarters. The number of individual interviews with immigrants had been increased as well, and they could talk to the representatives of the UN High Commission for Refugees. A physician was said to visit the center once a week, and immigrants were allowed to walk outside in the fresh air.

On receiving the reply from the police, the center was visited by a delegation of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. Despite assurances given by the police, the Committee established that the circumstances were very similar to those described earlier by the ombudsman at his first visit. “This leads us to believe that not much has been done save for the mentioned improvements related to the personnel and information system,” stated Hanžek.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Information on presumably improved living conditions in the center is indirect, because the ombudsman did not revisit the center. In mid October 2001 he stated that he planned to make another visit soon.

















## HOME ON FIRE

<i>Peace and love</i>	<i>Come throw down your peace</i>
<i>Me come fi give to everybody</i>	<i>Peace and love</i>
<i>Peace and love</i>	<i>Me come fi give to everybody</i>
<i>Come follow me ...</i>	<i>Peace and love</i>
	<i>Come follow me ...</i>
<i>Know peace in the world</i>	
<i>Anywhere I go</i>	<i>No more war</i>
<i>People are suffering</i>	<i>No more killing</i>
<i>Anywhere I go, I say</i>	<i>One and another</i>
<i>People are dying</i>	<i>No more discrimination</i>
<i>Oh God come and save</i>	<i>We want peace to the world</i>
<i>I and I</i>	<i>Peace and love</i>
<i>Oh Lord I say</i>	<i>Sent to everybody</i>
	<i>Especially to all the young men</i>

Victor Fredrick – B. Fine  
Peace and Love

## NATIONAL CAGE

The life stories tell a lot about the political and social circumstances that marked immigrants before they decided to take the journey. If we leave aside for the moment the complex of contributing factors, both subjective and objective, individual and social, we could say that their frame of mind is predicated on the culture from which they originated. Therefore, it is not possible to overlook their nationality or citizenship, that is, collective identities which in a way pre-determine their individuality. The scope of this study does not allow us to go into more detailed definition of or discussions about the complexity of collective identity, so for the purpose of this study we link this issue solely to nationality or country. As Wallerstein (1999) said, citizenship is a concept that was invented to include people into political processes, but since it includes, it also excludes. Citizenship secures privileges, which are protected by not including everyone. Rather than setting obvious barriers like those separating classes, the exclusions introduced in the name of citizenship erect national and secret barriers (Wallerstein 1999, 22).

We understand the state as a politically organized community and, in the widest sense of the term, as a political community of the ruling powers and people being ruled, one which is organized according to rules and principles that are accepted by all participants i.e. citizens either voluntarily or through enforcement (Sruk 1995, 75). Instead of acquiescing to voluntary or enforced conformism by submitting to the established and prevailing socio-political norms, immigrants, paradoxically, leave their countries voluntarily and/or because they are compelled to do so. In this case “voluntarily” could mean that they independently decided to leave when being “compelled” to do so by the circumstances in their country (e.g. war or a repressive system). In most cases their own lives or the lives of their relatives were threatened. Whatever they do in attempting to become separated from their nationality, it continues to define and “restrict” them, and eventually, determines their present and future. Among other things it entitles them to apply for asylum in an EU Member State or in a country at the doorstep of the Schengen borders. When their applications are “processed” the individuality of immigrants is usually reduced to their citizenship, which eventually determines them as aliens in a host country, meaning that their rights are a priori restricted. The country of their origin becomes their “national cage”, and immigrants themselves become the prisoners of their own departure.

The countries from which the immigrants come are here seen in their cultural and political context. Therefore, our questions relating to a native country refer solely to the economic, social and political situation, or in other words, social inequalities, equal opportunities, (dis)satisfaction with living conditions, all of which explain the immigrants’ reasons for leaving. Notwithstanding the differences, most of these countries are characterized by unstable political and economic situation (including wars and poverty), inequalities, and above all by violations of human rights.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>The standards according to which respect for human rights is assessed differ across the international community. The universal system of the protection of human rights is based on the international document which comprises the UN founding charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family,

When analyzing the viewpoints expressed by immigrants about the circumstances in their home countries, we grouped them on the basis of geographical criteria because, compared to alternative grouping criteria (political, economic or religious), geographical location proved to be the most neutral criterion. Apart from this, the geographical criterion additionally proved to be the most useful, owing to the diversity of countries and their uneven representation in our sample. Even so, the group of African countries was represented by fewer immigrants (15) compared to the Asian (57) or European (54) group. On the other hand, precisely this asymmetry reflects reality, as the data on the number of immigrants living in Slovenia at the time of our study (according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs database) showed that the greatest number of immigrants came from Asian countries and the smallest number from Africa.

#### TIGHTENING THE NOOSE

We tried to establish how the immigrants assessed various social factors that, taken collectively, could be interpreted as an “evaluation of the situation in their native country.” In order to achieve a clearer picture, we divided factors that are otherwise intertwined into several sets:

- economic (also social): the economic development of the country, job opportunities;
- political: peacefulness of politics, opportunities to influence societal decisions, the relations between religious institutions and the state, and the position of religion;
- education and science: educational opportunities, the development of science and technology;
- international reputation of the country which could be related to all of the above mentioned areas.

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including food, clothing, housing and medical care.” Everybody has the right to education, work and social security. Most of the countries that immigrants fled most seriously violate basic human rights. It is true that regional systems for the protection of human rights are being established, but it is also true that the development of African and Asian-Pacific system is slow. The African system is based on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights dating from 1986, but it is not respected in practice. Some Asian countries established national commissions for the protection of human rights, based on the Asian Human Rights Charter, but it remains a dead letter. The European system in principle places stress on democratization of society and realization of personal potential, but the possibility of exercising these rights in practice is disputable.

By concentrating on the key answers we arrived at a general conclusion that the evaluation of the factors mentioned was invariably negative regardless of the country. On a 1-to-5 scale<sup>34</sup> the lowest-rated area was the political area, particularly the possibility of influencing societal decisions (median 1.9) and the peacefulness of the national politics (2.4). Political reasons also headed the list of reasons that they said led them to leave the country. Similarly negative were their assessments of job opportunities and economic development in their home countries (1.9 and 2.0), while educational opportunities and the development of science and technology were assessed as somewhat better. Yet even the highest-rated status of religion (3.3) and relations between religious institutions and the state (2.9) did not rise above the middle of the scale (neither positive nor negative). Since for most of the countries in question it could be said that the religious is the same as the political and vice versa, we included religion in the set of what is perceived as political.

Dissatisfaction with the political and economic situation in their native countries has been expressed by a high percentage of immigrants (64%) who thought that citizens of their native countries had no job opportunities. Such a response was expected, given the social circumstances in which they lived, as the economies of many of those countries are inefficient for various reasons. Some of them are more or less isolated economically because of war or for other political reasons (Iraq, Iran, Yugoslavia); in others it is a long lasting civil war or tense internal/international relationships that hamper the growth of the economy (e.g. in Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan, Liberia, Algeria, and Sri Lanka), or the economy had been destroyed completely and regressed to mere self-sustenance of citizens (e.g. in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone). Some countries are strongly dependent on foreign financial aid (e.g. Bangladesh). As for the European countries included in this study, a difficult transition into the market economy (which is related to a number of other economic changes) resulted in rising unemployment among other things. An even higher unemployment rate than the one in European countries characterizes Asian and African countries, where on average one third of the active population is unemployed – given this fact, the low assess-

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<sup>34</sup>When evaluating assessments using scales, we use the 1-to-5 Likert scale where 1 means negative and 5 means positive.



ment of job opportunities and economic growth was expected. The following story sheds some light on the circumstances.

I am from Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The fighting has been going on in my country for many years.

When I was 14 I was injured by a bomb. It blew up close to me and I was thrown back into the air. My arm and leg were broken and I hurt my back. My father, my mother, and my little sister were killed by a bomb three years ago, when I was 15. It is very difficult for me to talk about this.

At two o'clock I came home and saw what had happened. My whole street had been destroyed. There was nothing left. No father, no mother. My home was finished.

When I saw this I fell to the ground. I was in hospital for one month. I couldn't speak at all – I couldn't even make a sound. After one month I started to speak again, very very slowly. It is still difficult for me to speak.

After my parents were killed I stayed in Afghanistan for two years, with my mother's sister. Then I went to Pakistan to live with my older brother and sister.

My brother and sister paid a man five thousand dollars to get me to England. For two months I did not speak to or see anybody. I slept and ate in the lorry. It was very hard. I was sick every day.

I only had enough food for one month. After this time all my food and water was finished. Five or six times I had to get out to steal food. I had never stolen before.

When the lorry got to England, five or six policemen got on the lorry and started looking everywhere. I escaped out of the top and hid outside, underneath the lorry. One man saw me but he put his finger to his lips and told me not to speak. He was a very good man.

I will be 18 next month. I can't go back to Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup>

The political systems in immigrants' home countries are democratic by definition, but mere definition of the political system is a far cry from real democracy. For example, Algeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Sudan, and Sri Lanka are all republics with a president as head of state, but in these countries power is in the hands of individuals, small political groups, or the military. The immigrants' assessments were distinctly influenced by non-peaceful politics, incessant conflicts and unstable political circumstances. To summarize their assessments of economic and political circumstances, 56% of the respondents were of the opinion that they had no chance of influencing societal decisions. Similarly, 46% of the respondents

<sup>35</sup>Excerpts from Abdul Rasid, 17 Year Old Asylum Seeker from Kabul, Afghanistan. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk>, June 2001.

negatively assessed the peacefulness of politics (they chose the lowest value on the scale). In contrast, their assessment of the status of religion and relations between religious institutions and the state was more positive: 37% and 25% of the respondents gave the highest rating to this area, which was expected because of the extent of their religiousness and knowing what great significance they attach to religion.

The direction of the country's development determines to a large extent the social, economic and political situation. Our study also revealed that these areas were highly interrelated, which is explained by the correlation coefficients.<sup>36</sup> Given the social context these correlations are expected and logical: the fewer job and educational opportunities, the slower the economic and technological development, which in turn determines the degree of the (non)peacefulness of politics. And vice versa: the higher the rate of economic development, the better job and educational opportunities, and scientific development. In the opinion of the immigrants, the negative international reputations of their home countries arise from the economic and political situation.

In the majority of the countries considered here religion is a significant integral part of politics. Secularization is most often not present at all, or not yet implemented, so religious institutions are most often understood as "untouchable" institutes. Even though 89% declared that they were religious, only half of them rated positively the area of religion in their home country. The Islamic law in its concision, systematism and far-reaching effects supercedes the solely religious and ethical minimum typical of social rules, and represents a complex of "teachings about duties" bringing together religious and ritual codes, social, political, and legal rules (Cerar 1996, 71).

Regional differences also came to light when assessing the status of religion and scientific development. Immigrants from Asian and European countries thus gave lower ratings to the status of religion (median 3.1 and 3.2) than immigrants from African countries.

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<sup>36</sup>The rating of the economic development of a country was most strongly positively correlated with the assessment of job opportunities ( $r = 0.47$ ), the development of science and technology ( $r = 0.39$ ), the peacefulness of politics ( $r = 0.32$ ), educational opportunities ( $r = 0.33$ ) and weakly correlated with the position of religion ( $r = 0.19$ ).

## DEMOCRACY WITHOUT PEOPLE

<i>Politic oh</i>	<i>In Sierra Leone – you're killing</i>
<i>Politic oh</i>	<i>our people</i>
<i>Politic oh</i>	<i>Cutting the children's hands</i>
<i>Politic of Benbela</i>	<i>You're killing our people them?</i>
<i>Politic oh</i>	<i>In Liberia you're killing our people</i>
<i>Propaganda – poligamy</i>	<i>In Kongo you're killing our people</i>
<i>Politicians can't you see</i>	<i>In Guenie you're killing our people</i>
<i>You're killing us with your</i>	<i>War in the east</i>
<i>lies and greed</i>	<i>War in the west</i>
<i>Power to the people</i>	<i>War in the north</i>
<i>African free</i>	<i>War in the south</i>
<i>Power to the people</i>	<i>Politicians them full of propaganda</i>
<i>Africa free</i>	<i>Politicians full of poligamy</i>
<i>Politician them</i>	<i>Politicians them you lie to the people</i>
<i>You're killing our people</i>	<i>Politicians them you're killing</i>
<i>Politicians them</i>	<i>the innocent one</i>
<i>Full of propaganda</i>	<i>African should be free</i>
<i>Politicians them</i>	<i>Africa should be free</i>
<i>Full of poligamy</i>	
<i>Politicians them – you're</i>	<i>Victor Fredrick – B.Fine</i>
<i>killing our people</i>	<i>American Politic</i>

Immigrants most often described absence of democracy in terms of the impossibility of influencing societal decisions, which is in general related to non-respect for human rights. Within such relations the ruling structures are the carriers of the dominant ideological discourse, while the non-ruling classes try to promote their own discourse. Both civil and political rights are increasingly more in the service of the interests of economic and political powers. Owing to the physical i.e. political, military and economic dominance of the western countries, a number of Islamic countries represented in this study are forced to accept non-Islamic norms. The majority of them have not yet signed international agreements on human rights, while those which joined the agreements or ratified them generally do not in practice implement the provisions therein (Jevtič 1991). As regards the possibility of influencing decisions in such societies, no statistically significant differences were observed between the regions (the median value was 1.9), which proves that all immigrants had low opportunities to participate in decision-making processes.

In the asylum seekers' home in Šiška we talked to a forty-year old man who fled from Slovakia because of disorganized circumstances. "The circumstances in Slovakia are impossible. Human rights are not respected and citizens have no influence on the developments." He did not want to describe in more detail his experience, but just said that he would try to find justice in Strasbourg. He will get in touch with the international court only when he leaves the center. He also told us that Slovene policemen did not explain to him what rights he had, and he also had an impression that Slovenia, much like Slovakia, does not respect human rights.

Non-respect for human rights in their native countries is reflected in the immigrants' opinion that they did not have opportunities to influence the decision-making processes. The arbitrary decisions of certain ruling circles, which point to poor and one-way communication between a ruling class and its citizens, have an impact on social developments, for example, on educational opportunities or the development of science and technology. The immigrants from Africa gave the lowest rating to the development of science and technology – the median value was 1.4, while the median value of ratings by immigrants from Europe was 2.2, and 2.8 for those from Asia. Somewhat higher ratings by immigrants from Asia could perhaps be ascribed to their specific understanding of the meaning of technology. Under the development of technology some understood arms technologies, others information science, and yet others infrastructure.

In a wider political sense, technological and scientific development could be considered as a part of the established relations of domination and interdependence in the international community, where African countries in particular have an inferior position, with their dependence only increasing with the emergence of new information technology centers of power. These countries often do not take care even of the literacy of their citizens.<sup>37</sup> A large percentage of the immigrants (46%) negatively rated educational opportunities as well. Many factors are responsible for the low assessment of the inter-

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<sup>37</sup> The data about literacy in countries included in our study show that the share of illiterate citizens is highest in the African countries (the data are for 1995): Sierra Leone 68.6%, Liberia 61.7%, Sudan 53.9%, Cameroon 36.6%; similarly high share is found in Asia: Iraq 42%, Iran 27.9%; in Turkey the share is somewhat lower i.e. 17.7%, and it is quite low in Israel 4.4%. The lowest rate of illiteracy is found in European countries, for example Yugoslavia 7%, Romania 3.3% (Natek 2001). The education index as defined in HDR (2000) is as follows: Sierra Leone 0.29, Bangladesh 0.39, Pakistan 0.44, Sudan 0.48, Iraq 0.52, Iran 0.73, Turkey 0.76, Israel 0.91.

national reputations of their home countries, with the median value in this area being 2.2. All immigrants, regardless of region, evaluated this area similarly low, with the Africans giving it the lowest rating (1.9).

An underlying irony is obvious in the following reply given by an immigrant from Pakistan to the question about scientific development. "What do you think, what kind of technology has been developed in my country? Arms technology, that is the only developed one. The same holds true for our neighbors and other countries in that part of Asia. If Americans want us to do something for them, they provide technology to our factories, and that's all. Due to all that the reputation of Pakistan is as it is." Then he asked: "What reputation would you ascribe to it?" I was surprised and answered, perhaps out of politeness, that the international reputation of Pakistan was rather good. "Oh?" he wondered and added: "That is generous. You value us quite high. I think that Pakistan's international reputation is nil."

#### BETWEEN TWO EXTREMES

Immigrants were not only dissatisfied with the living conditions in their countries but were also very critical of segregation, inequality and deprivation. By asking them to assess the differences between people, we obtained a basis on which to interpret their understanding of (in)equality. Members of individual societies do not all have equal access to jobs, education, information, and not all can equally exercise their rights. At this point we will not go into any deeper discussion about the meaning of (in)equality, but let us just point out Giddens's understanding of "new politics." He uses it to define equality as inclusion and inequality as exclusion. In its broadest sense<sup>38</sup> inclusion refers to citizenship, to the civil and political rights and obligations which citizens should have as a reality of their lives and not just formally. On the other hand, exclusion implies the impossibility of participation and isolation from "basic opportunities" (Giddens 2000, 107). We can thus talk of economic and political exclusion which can also trigger physical and cultural exclusion. An individual has an opportunity to "decide rationally" but this opportunity inevitably produces differences, or in other words, such decisions stimulate segregation and its reproduction.

<sup>38</sup>Giddens defines the "inclusive society," characterized by equality, as inclusion, limited meritocracy, recapturing of public space, positive welfare, and the social investment state (Giddens 2000, 110).

Respondents answered questions about segregation starting from the differences occurring on the level of politics, religion, the legal system, social system and the living environment. On the level of the political, we wanted to identify inequalities that existed between those who supported the government and those who opposed it. We were interested in how immigrants understood the political situation in their countries and sought to find out what their attitude towards national institutions was. As for the living environment, we explored their understanding of the separation between people living in the countryside and city dwellers. Our starting point was the idea about the existence of inequality based on the regions, on the basis of which we verified the presupposition about the discrepancies between life in the countryside and life in towns. In connection with religion, we sought to find out whether the differences between those who adhered to religious codes and those who did not separate people. We also explored the differences between those abiding by the law and those who do not, and on the level of social we looked into the inequalities separating the educated and the uneducated, the healthy and the sick, the poor and the rich.

Our analysis showed that immigrants from all countries thought that the degree of inequality was high in each of these areas. The biggest gap is the one separating the rich from the poor. As many as 62% of immigrants were of the opinion that the differences between the rich and the poor completely set people apart, the median value for this question was 4.3 and hence the highest of all. The answers confirmed the assumption that the differentiation occurs on the level of social stratification which is born of profiteering, that is, accumulating wealth in contrast with non-profiteering and poverty.<sup>39</sup>

The above-mentioned differences also emerged in conversation with questioners as well. The immigrants did not take any definite stance towards the concepts “rich” or “poor,” but they acted deliberately when ranking opportunities available to people with less money in their home countries. Many of those with whom we dis-

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<sup>39</sup>“Growing rich is growing rich in relation to the poor only, and poverty has social currency only in relation to wealth.” Therefore it seems that a global fact now being established is that the owners are increasingly more rich while the poor sink increasingly more deeply into poverty (Hanžek and Šuštaršič 1999, 13–14).

cussed this topic in more detail said that the worst was the fact that the lack of money most seriously affects children. Parents often cannot afford to send children to school and thus secure for them a life better than they themselves have, as one father put it. Many are distressed when they cannot find an answer to the child's question: "Why am I not allowed to go to school?" or "Why do I have to be hungry?" Parents similarly cannot explain to their children why now, once they have left their homes, they still had to live in terrible circumstances or why they are again trapped in the maze of some institution.

I met a father of three young children from Kosovo. The circumstances at home were unbearable, and possibilities for the children's education limited. "I would like to secure for my children a future that will be worthy of a human being," explained this kind man. The journey to Slovenia seriously distressed the whole family and now he wanted to be allowed to return home as a free man. "Slovenia made good economic and political progress, but you lost the sense of humanity." He cannot understand why he was locked up as if he were the worst criminal. He is told when he may have a meal, and even worse, when his children may eat. "It is hard. We can have three meals a day, which is not enough for a small child. The children are often hungry and it's hard when they ask me why I don't feed them."

I only had some candy in my bag, which I gave to the youngest son who had an appealing smile always on his face. "It is really hard when I cannot answer my son's question: 'Why are we closed?' 'Why can't we go out?' 'Why do you let us be hungry?' 'When do we go home?'" I could see sadness in the father's eyes. He said that he suffered because he was rendered powerless, because his and his family's fate were in the hands of others, and because he did not know when he would be able to return home.

Our conversation then veered towards politics and the world order in general. "The duplicity of those that see themselves as developed is unbelievable. On the one hand, they open borders and talk of equality, but on the other they quite obviously set apart higher and lower valued people. I cannot understand that. I do not understand why I should be inferior if I want to secure a better future for my children, better than I had. Is that why they treat me like a criminal? They thrust me into a situation in which I have to explain to my children why they are not allowed to play in the courtyard. Indeed we do not need such democracy. You obviously do not lack anything in Slovenia, but there is no room for us here."

The clock was striking six and it was time for supper. The children gathered around their father even before the policeman appeared on the other side of the door. I was standing with them on the doorstep when the policeman cried out from behind the bars: "What did I tell you? Form a queue, one behind the other, otherwise you won't be getting anything!" I felt I did not want to cross the doorstep and go to the other side of the iron door. Is it possible? There were around twenty of us next to

the door and we had a pleasant conversation. Why would anybody want to shout at us so coarsely? What did we do to him? The father and I stared silently at the enraged policemen. Then we looked at each other. I squeezed his hand and patted him on the shoulder. We understood each other instantly without uttering a word. When the policeman unlocked the door, we said our farewells. "Good luck." I spent just a few hours behind the bars and then walked freely to the exit, while the father and his children remained inside.

The immigrants had not experienced segregation solely in their home countries but in the "developed world" as well. Here they were assigned a social label once more, not reading "exploited" this time but denoting someone who must be "shaken off" as soon as possible, or rather, "removed." The comparison of the assessments of inequality by groups of countries showed that the highest ratings of inequalities in all areas were by the immigrants from Europe. This may be explained by the global capitalist system – the explanation is most plausible because these immigrants mostly come from countries in transition which are characterized by a deepening of differentiation. The countries in transition go through both economic and political crises, some are at war, so these high percentages relating to differentiation were not surprising. The political and economic crisis is reflected in the standard of living, which on average has been decreasing for most people. Many families live on the edge of poverty or can hardly make both ends meet, but they hope that their material conditions will improve over time.

In the opinion of 87% of immigrants from European countries, their present financial state was not satisfactory, compared to 80% of respondents from Africa, and 67% from Asia who expressed dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, immigrants from Asia did not complain about the current material conditions of their families – approximately one third of them were very or moderately satisfied in this respect. We could conclude<sup>40</sup> that the differences in assessing the existing material conditions between the Asian and European group were statistically significant if compared to forecasts of their future financial state. It turned out that the immigrants from Asia and Africa were more strongly convinced than were the immigrants from Europe that their financial position would improve. This result

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<sup>40</sup>The statistical method used here was variance analysis.



was expected, and a possible reason could be that immigrants from Europe are better acquainted with the job opportunities and social aid in Europe. As many as 60% of Asian immigrants thought that their financial situation would significantly improve compared to the current situation, and the immigrants from Africa held similar opinions, as 53% of them predicted a significant improvement and 33% a moderate one. One third of the respondents from Europe answered that five years from now their financial situation will be similar to the current one, while 43% said that it might improve to a certain extent.<sup>41</sup>

I was most impressed by a guitar player called Benjamin. He sat in the corridor and immediately informed me that he had already filled in the questionnaire. We talked about life in general, about jazz and flamenco. He borrowed a guitar from the Bosnians and invited me to his room in which he had spent the last four months together with his aunt and two cousins. He tuned the guitar and then started to play - impressively, quickly and with feeling, as if he were a professional jazz player. Benjamin graduated from a vocational school of electronics and had two years of university education at the faculty of electronics. His cousin graduated from the faculty of electronics and specialized in programming in Visual Basic. They asked me about the possibilities of getting Slovene citizenship. A man from Postojna had asked for the hand of his cousin and the family wanted to know if they could get Slovene citizenship.

Why did they leave Iran? Because of Benjamin's love of music. He was labeled an enemy and revolutionary because he played flamenco, and a photo of him in handcuffs with policemen taking him to prison was featured on the front page of some Iranian newspaper. He was tortured in prison and had both hands mutilated. On top of that the sinews on his right hand were cut to stop him from ever playing guitar again. I wondered how he was still able to play so well and he explained that his playing was not as good as it used to be, because he could not feel the forefinger and the middle finger on the left hand, so he had to press strings relying on memory. He showed me a wide scar under his left wrist and many smaller scars on the fingers and palms. His "dissident" behavior cast a negative light on the entire family. His father lost his job and the same happened to the aunt who had been a nurse for 25

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<sup>41</sup> The respondents from Europe were better satisfied with the financial state of their family in the past than at the moment, which constitutes a characteristic difference that distinguishes them from Asian respondents. One fourth of immigrants from Europe assessed their financial state of five years ago as much better than the current one, while one third said that it was somewhat better than now. By contrast, 27% immigrants from Asia thought that their financial state in the past was considerably worse than at present, and one tenth said that it was somewhat worse. The immigrants from Africa mostly evaluated the financial state in the past as similar or somewhat better than at present.

years. She was ousted because a strand of hair escaped from under her veil. Later, the whole family was put in prison for a period of time, then they escaped. Their documents were taken away by the mafia.

They traveled in vans and did not know where they were heading or how long they were on the road. Eventually they ended up in Šiška. Benjamin told me that the policemen in Šiška vented anger at them, they did not want to listen to them and their various pleas were answered by "Zgin gor, pička ti materina" and "Spizdi, mater ti jebem." Only later did they learn from the immigrants from Bosnia, whom they met in Postojna, that these were curses. He also told me that an immigrant in Šiška was beaten, and he was chased by a dog because he walked along the corridor after 10 P.M.

Separations in other areas were assessed similarly – the respondents assessed as high the differentiation between the educated and the uneducated, between law-abiding citizens and those who disobeyed laws, people living in the countryside and urban dwellers, government supporters and opponents. The median answers ranged from 3.7 to 3.8, while the percentage of those who thought that these differences completely set people apart ranged from 38% to 42%. The median value of answers stating that the differences between those who obeyed religious codes and those who did not set people apart was 3.4, with the percentage being 37%.

High degree of correlation was observed for all areas of separation. The correlation table revealed that the separation between country people and city dwellers positively correlated, as expected, with the separation between the old and the young. A significant separation between the rich and the poor correlated with the separation between the healthy and the sick.<sup>42</sup> The understanding of the significance of health and of the system of health protection in their home countries was correlated with the differences between the healthy and the sick. The immigrants rated highly the value of health (90% of the respondents answered that health was very important or important). When we asked them about the current state of their health, somewhat less than one half of the respondents said

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<sup>42</sup>The unsuitability of health protection and bad living conditions come to light also through the data about life expectancy. Sierra Leone has the lowest life expectancy – barely 37.9 years. In Sudan it is 55.4 years and in Bangladesh 58.8. Asian countries have higher life expectancies, for example, Iraq 63.8, Pakistan 64.4, Iran 69.5, Turkey 69.3, China 70.1, and European countries still higher, for example, Slovakia 73.1, Macedonia 73.2. For comparison purposes, let us add that the countries with the highest life expectancies are Japan (80 years), Canada (79.1), Iceland (79.1), Norway (78.3) and other Scandinavian countries in general (HDR 2000).

that they had been feeling neither good nor bad recently; one fourth said that their health was rather poor, and they also gave a high rank to the value of health. Most of the immigrants put their health at risk when setting off on the journey, occasionally even their lives; and they were often completely exhausted.

Owing to the stricter measures and lack of information, an immigrant from China jumped through the window on the fourth floor during the protests organized by the civil initiative in Šiška. He was convinced that he would be returned to China or "removed" in some other way. He broke his spine and both legs. At the time of our survey he was hospitalized in the Ljubljana medical center.

An older Romany woman, whose husband had been killed in Yugoslavia and the rest of whose family fled from the country, caught cold during the journey after she spent several nights in the open. She later fell ill and when she was brought to the center she asked for a medical check. They told her that regardless of how she felt she had to wait for the doctor's work day to start.

#### TRUST – BETTING ON THE FUTURE

The immigrants' experience in their home countries influenced their trust in political institutions. The ruling powers that seek to satisfy the interests of the ruling class only and neglect the interests of those ruled over undoubtedly contribute to the low level of trust in politics. On the other hand we also sought to find out how much trust was present within their interpersonal relations as the foundation that makes them last. These questions enabled us to explore trust understood as a psychological and societal need, which implies speculations about the future.

Sztompka (1999, 20) argues that trust is related to uncertainty about the future. Our actions and decisions are based on convictions, memories and interpretations of past events, with trust referring to future recognitions that will enable a redefinition of experience. According to Giddens, trust would not be needed if we could completely control our actions. Yet in reality people usually do not have complete control over their actions, so trust plays the central role when deliberating various acts. This is the situation in which, regardless of uncertainty and risks, we take a decision and with it step into the field of trust. Trust then becomes an important "strategy" which enables us to perform actions oriented towards the future. We therefore understand trust as a strategy enabling the individual to adapt to a complex social environment.

Acting in an uncertain environment involves risks, so individuals “bet” on certain developments and on the behavior of other individuals. Trust is therefore a bet on potential future actions that will be taken by others. Conviction and surrender are two essential elements of trust, with certain expectations also being included.

We have already mentioned “surrender,” which prevents trust from being solely a contemplative deliberation about the future, but a certain commitment is involved as well. The idea here is that an individual has to commit him/herself actively to the future, which involves, as we already mentioned, a certain “bet.” Here “bet” is understood metaphorically. Distrust is manifested as a “negative image” of trust. Distrust is also a bet, but a negative one. It relies on negative expectations about others’ actions; therefore it implies harmful or malicious motives on the part of others and also negative commitment on the part of the subject, like avoidance, fleeing, or keeping distance.

One hypothesis underlying our study of trust in institutions is that trust reflects the extent of the democratic nature of the system. The higher the legitimacy of the system, support and participation, the higher the degree of trust in the central institutions of the system. These institutions are those that “significantly determine behavior patterns and relations between people” (Toš 1999, 35). In this study we measured the immigrants’ trust in referential groups and through this we related our study to the starting point which stresses not only the meaning of trust in institutions but also trust in other individuals and people who are important for the individual.<sup>43</sup>

We analyzed various types of trust: self-trust, mutual trust between individuals, and trust in institutions. The immigrants assessed their trust in institutions of their native countries based on a comparison between their past experience of these institutions and the experience they have gained in other countries and in different systems.

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<sup>43</sup>We measured trust in political socializers, by which we established the degree of political education which in turn, influences other kinds of education, for example cultural education. The factors that are at work in the process of political socialization are “social factors and institutions,” which mediate a political content, to which people become harmonized or to which they adapt. Moreover, they mediate or even impose on individuals the definition of a political position, which is understood to be the workings of the “ideological state apparatus.”

We further measured their self-trust and trust in family and friends, both being important referential groups. In addition, we measured their trust in the educational, legal and social system, in political parties, the president, police, army and the media, meaning that we studied trust as a part of political culture which reveals the degree of political socialization of an individual. We also measured their trust in religious institutions and in God, and finally in western countries.<sup>44</sup>

The study showed that the immigrants most trusted<sup>45</sup> their families (the median value was 4.6). Such a high level of trust in family was expressed by 88% of the respondents (out of the total percentage, 80% answered that they fully trusted their families, while 8% said that they trusted them somewhat). Just three respondents said that they did not trust their families at all. Other public opinion surveys also showed that people have a high degree of trust in their families,<sup>46</sup> so the result was expected, particularly owing to the special circumstances of immigrants. Kolinsky (1998, 15) says that in a period of social changes the significance of the family increases. During such a period the family becomes the key institute, if not the only one that offers support, and by way of support brings stability to society as a whole. The family is also in other contexts the most frequently selected basic institution of private life, within which the majority of relations important for an individual are shaped. Therefore it is logical that the discussion about the family as a “primary group” (Ule 1993, 172) whose members are related through kinship, emotional and solidarity bonds, is extended to encompass the family as a “social institution.” On the one hand, the family is a place of “intimate solidarity” where its members can satisfy their needs, while on

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<sup>44</sup>We defined the areas using factor analysis. The first factor, which explains 21.3% of the variance, combines variables which, taken together, express trust in institutions, namely the police, the president of the state, political parties, legal system and the media. The second factor combines trust in religious institutions, God, armed forces, and the educational system. The third factor relates self-trust, trust in referential groups, family, friends and western countries. All three factors explain 46.6% of variance.

<sup>45</sup>Trust was measured using a 1-to-5 point scale where 1 means “do not trust at all” and 5 means “fully trust.”

<sup>46</sup>The authors of the global study of values, Inglehart et al. (1998), arrived at similar conclusions. According to this study the family is most highly valued in Nigeria and Northern Ireland, while friends are most highly valued in Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands.

the other, and within historical and social circumstances, it is recognized as a “social institution.”

In cases in which whole families were fleeing, men often fled first followed by women and children. The vast majority (88%) answered that understanding within the family was a very important factor in their lives. This was confirmed through conversations in which many of them stated that they were striving to achieve a better life, and in particular to secure a better life for their children.

Bek, a 17-year-old Muslim came to Great Britain from Kosovska Mitrovica. He was threatened because he was helping Albanian soldiers. When the Serbs came for him he had already escaped, together with his friend. His family, who now lives in Bosnia, helped him flee because they knew that he would be in danger if he remained in Kosovo. He went to Macedonia by train. There they paid 4,5000 German marks to be taken to Switzerland, but by an odd coincidence they ended up in Britain. They were on the road for three days and traveled hidden in lorries. The driver of the third lorry discovered them when he stopped at a gas station and somebody called the police. The police took them to the city center, appointed a solicitor and provided social services. Bek lived in a place with three other asylum seekers. While he was away somebody attacked the house, smashed windows and doors and hurt one of his friends so he had to be taken to hospital. Bek had to move. He now learns English and saves money for the next summer when he would like to go back to Kosovo, if it will be safe to go back.<sup>47</sup>

We started to talk about the situation in Sudan. The man was a medical worker and he complained about the situation in the country which he left hoping to find better luck elsewhere. This forty-two year old man talked modestly and in a low voice. He looked disappointed. “I left Sudan because I hoped that somewhere else I could perhaps be happy. I am not young, I have no wife or children. It is not right.” He sighed and added that he was sad because he had not managed to start a family – he is convinced that the family is most important. “I have a few years before me to find luck, but after that I will be too old and without energy. My experience during the journey to Slovenia and things that happen to me now are not encouraging.” He added that he has begun to doubt that luck can be found. He was filled with both sadness and hope that luck might be waiting for him somewhere in the west.

The immigrants most often embarked on the journey with their families or friends (referential groups). Our survey showed that trust in friends was lower than trust in the family – 40% said that they fully trusted their friends, while 20% said that they did not trust them at all or trusted them little. Compared to the significance attached

<sup>47</sup> A summary of the article entitled Bek, 17 Year Old Asylum Seeker from Mitrovica, Kosovo. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk>, June 2001.

to the mutual understanding between family members, friendship too was rated lower (3.7). The answers revealed a high degree of self-trust and trust in God (4.6), where more than three thirds of the respondents chose to answer “completely.” Just two respondents said that they completely lacked self-trust which, compared to other “have no trust at all” answers, is the lowest rating regarding other indicators of trust. The lowest values were recorded for trust in political parties, social security, the president of the country and the police. More than one half of respondents did not trust political parties at all (40%) or trusted them little (16%), and the mean value for these answers was the lowest of all (2.5). Somewhat less than one fifth of immigrants completely trusted political parties, which represents the lowest percentage of answers stating “completely.” Approximately one third did not trust the police, the president of the country, the armed forces and the social system.

If we proceed from the above-mentioned starting points we could say that the immigrants expressed distrust in the institutions of political power in the first place. The survey results show a moderate or average degree of distrust, with trust in political parties being an exception as it was rated conspicuously lower. This could be related to the nature of politics itself, which leaves an impression of dishonesty and deception. Or, as Močnik said, to trust politics is the same as to behave anti-politically. People do not trust politicians for political reasons and they look for the basis of trust elsewhere, outside politics (1995, 41,42). Dissatisfaction with politics is also one of the important reasons why immigrants decide to leave their native countries.

Trust in various political institutions was interrelated.<sup>48</sup> We identified a positive correlation between trust in the president of the country and in political parties, and this was also related to trust in the educational system. This data show that trust in the political and legal state apparatus is correlated with trust in the educational system (mean value 3.7), which weakly correlates with trust in western countries; 37% of the respondents answered that they completely trusted the educational system, while 13% said that they did not trust

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<sup>48</sup>We sought to establish weak and strong correlations for 0.05 and 0.01 significance, meaning that we studied correlation at 95% and 99% interval of trust.

it at all. The correlations between the factors that could be collectively called “ideological state apparatus,” after Althusser (2000), were strong. The immigrants’ trust in individual state institutions was conspicuously lower than trust in family or God, or their self-trust. 53% of them had complete trust in western countries, and 31% in the media. The percentages of those who expressed distrust were as high as of those who expressed trust.

Italy is believed to be a perfidious country. A group of Roma from Kosovo settled in a squat near the border after they crossed to Italy – they were waiting to continue their journey towards Germany. They were discovered by the Italian police and put in the center but they were allowed to move around the country. The Roma found it very important that they could go to church and pray. The Red Cross gave them new clothes and they were promised to be allowed to continue their journey. They were issued special documents authorizing a fifteen-day stay in Italy, and after that they were supposed to cross the border (to the East or the West). Even though the Italian police is legally bound to return immigrants to Slovenia within three days, they handed the Roma over to the Slovene police more than three days later, disregarding legal provisions and despite the promises given to them. Ever since then they had been confined to the Slovene centers for aliens across the country. During their stay in Italy they felt safe for the first time since they started on their journey, but they lost their trust. Their trust evaporated, but their confidence in a life worthy of humans did not.

The high percentage of those who trust in God (89%) was not surprising (82% said that they completely trusted in God). Trust in religious institutions was somewhat lower (67%). Judging by similar degrees of trust in religious institutions and in God, we could say that the immigrants mostly do not make a distinction between religious institutions and religion itself.

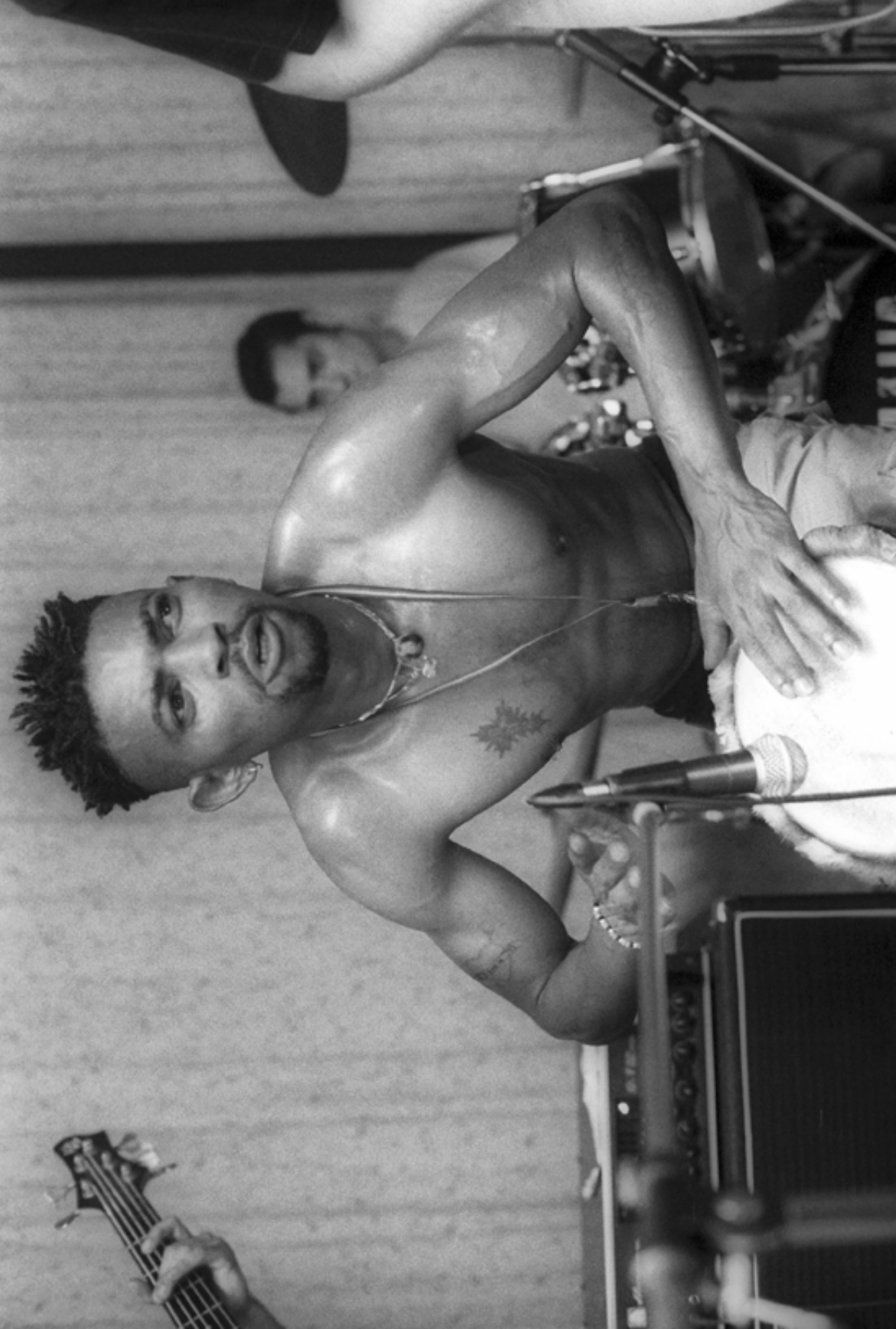
The immigrants showed very little trust in the armed forces and the police; they often discussed the aggressiveness of the police, while they understood the armed forces as peace-makers. When talking to questioners they pointed out that their negative experience was related to the representatives of the mentioned institutions, because they were often the victims of repression, aggressiveness or verbal violence. Negative experience with the police in their own countries was only augmented for the majority while on the journey. They crossed several borders and were interrogated by the police several times. Often it was precisely the police that “seized”



them within Slovenia and locked them up in various centers where they lived under police supervision. The policemen supervise their meals, their departures from the center and their returns.

An Iranian was telling us that a Slovene policemen treated him incorrectly. He was beaten and thus afraid of them. His experience convinced him that he had no chance to complain about their conduct. He said that the Slovenes were intolerant racists. When we asked him whether he thought that race determined success in life, he interpreted it as if race were significant for the Slovenes who did not acknowledge other races as equal. He added that he did not trust anybody because he too often had bad experience with people.











## NEW WORLD – THE WEST

### OPEN DOOR

A number of immigrants who asked for asylum and had been in Slovenia for a longer time made contacts with the locals, mainly students and people from the field of culture. They were engaged in arts and culture (film directing, music), while others worked now and then. Information on educational possibilities was particularly interesting for those with high school or university education, and they were looking for information about Slovene language and other courses. The immigrants who did not ask for asylum and were living in the centers for aliens and were not allowed to go out, could only meet people who came into the center, while those who applied for asylum could make contacts with anybody who showed an interest in them.

We asked them how they would make contact with local people in the country in which they wanted to live. We wanted to find out to what an extent they were ready to establish links.<sup>49</sup> Most of them (85%) would like to strike friendly relations, 65% of them would establish contacts through work, 61% through neighbor relations, and 51% would marry a local. Just two immigrants were not ready to make any contact. The immigrants from Europe expressed readiness to make work-related contacts, while immigrants from the Near East prevalingly chose friendship.

As many as 88% would take up the local customs of a “new” country and learn the language, 11% would preserve their own language and habits, but they would be ready to adapt; one immigrant said that he would preserve his own language and live in isolation. Notwithstanding the high degree of religiousness (89%) and specific

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<sup>49</sup>To find out how ready they were to establish links we asked the following question: “Countries are composed of people belonging to various nations, nationalities and ethnic groups. In which way would you be willing to establish links with members of different ethnic communities?” They could choose one of the following answers: 1. through friendly relations; 2. through work relations; 3. through neighbor relations; 4. through the closest contacts, marriage; 5. I am not willing.

traits of their cultures, they would not perceive cultural integration in a new environment as a “loss” of the mother tongue, native culture or religion, but as a challenge leading to a better life and better opportunities for development, education, equal rights etc.

The immigrant from Africa arrived in Slovenia two days before we started our survey. He is a graduate in sociology so we did not have difficulties finding a topic to discuss. He said that he was a BBC correspondent in his native country where he was imprisoned for criticizing the circumstances there. He escaped and found himself in Slovenia by accident. When I asked him whether he expected to find freedom of speech, equality, equal opportunities and rights in the EU countries, he smiled and said: “You tell me!” Then he added: “By no means do I expect miracles. No doubt violations are committed there as well, but I hope, and I pray, that the situation will be at least somewhat better than in my country!” Hope, at least hope persists.

Our analysis of the immigrants’ identification with various concepts revealed their broad openness. We used a scale that ranged from “identification with the native place” at the one end to “identification with the world” at the other.<sup>50</sup> The majority of immigrants (30%) identified with the native place or town, while 20% identified with the world as a whole; 12% identified with the West (there were no Asians in this group), and 9% with their region. European and African immigrants predominantly identified with nationality, immigrants from the Near and Middle East with the native place and the world, while immigrants from Asia mostly identified with the region and the world. The type of identification was not related to their readiness to integrate into a new environment, as it was primarily those who identified with their own place or country who stated that they would be ready to take over the host country’s language and habits. Among those who identified with the world in general were more asylum seekers than other immigrants.

Another question aimed at assessing their openness looked into their readiness to help fellow humans in need. As many as 80% would help without hesitation, 19% would help partly. The openness of immigrants is not influenced solely by their experiences and decisions but their knowledge as well. Their knowledge of foreign languages was very good. As many as 84% of respondents spoke at least one for-

<sup>50</sup>This is a long established question in public opinion polls: “What do you most identify with?” 1. the place I lived in; 2. the region I lived in; 3. the country I lived in; 4. western countries; 5. the world in general.



eign language, 42% spoke at least two, while 22% spoke three languages or more. Most of them spoke English (44%), followed by Serbian and Croatian (29%), and German (22%). Among the respondents who said that they could speak at least one foreign language, 74% could both understand and speak it, 61% could understand but not speak it, and 43% had good command of the language.

Their assertion that they were ready to help their fellow humans was confirmed in practice by their self-initiated offers to help us when we could not overcome the language barrier. When we offered to pay for their work their answer was “We didn’t help you for money!” They translated voluntarily and did not ask for payment. We had to press Lia<sup>51</sup> to accept the phone card. A woman from Macedonia who could speak Romanian and Albanian also volunteered to translate. When we later offered to pay she asked us to buy fruit or juice for the Romany children and said that it would be the best payment for her work.

I established friendly relations with an immigrant from Sudan who helped us translate the questionnaire for a larger group of Iranians. With his help we managed to establish contacts with several Iranians and immigrants from Pakistan within just two days. The translator, who is otherwise a student, kindly offered his help so when we were finished I wanted to pay for his work, although he neither expected nor wanted the money. He modestly asked for a chocolate. A larger group of immigrants gathered in the room where we held conversations – our questioning was the only event on that day and the only contact with the outside world.

#### THE FORTRESS OF SUCCESS

Our study clearly proved that the immigrants were no less creative, talented, educated, open, or ready to establish contacts than the westerners. Yet their skills are most often overlooked. They do not have any opportunity to realize their goals and even when they arrive in a “democratic” country they cannot (are not allowed to) put their knowledge and talents to use, because they live in isolation, are denied freedom of movement and are thus deprived (the same as in their native country) of autonomy.

Modern society has witnessed an increase in individualism under the influence of the capitalist way of thinking. Solidarity and the mythology of equality belong to the past. In everyday life modern

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<sup>51</sup> See the section entitled Asylum Seekers’ Home and the Center for Aliens in Šiška, Ljubljana.

individuals are faced with new “tasks” which should make their lives meaningful. The assumption that has prevailed is that an individual life acquires “real value” only when the person achieves something. These “achievements,” whatever the meaning we attach to them, are closely related to success. On the one hand success is what society expects an individual to attain, and on the other, it is a value an individual strives to achieve because it is socially determined as being desirable and acceptable. The understanding of success is thus both an individual and collective value, which is a paradox. It is individual primarily because today it is no longer possible to overlook individualism. Through endeavoring to become accomplished, the individual develops a wish for success which, on the other hand, is a commonly shared value recognized and defined by the power centers. Therefore, we were taught that success is important for humans and we accept such a definition. Our understanding of modern identity implies what is commonly called multiplicity. The individual’s identity is hence no longer one or constant, but has become multiple and flexible. Everybody assumes several identities, all of which are constantly undergoing the processes of change and transition, meaning that they are constantly complemented. Success can be understood in the same way. It is no longer understood as an integral whole but divided into particular identities. Opportunities for success depend on certain things. Success can be viewed from two perspectives – individual, which can determine the chances of success, and general, which is a social dimension. The individual has no influence on either, or his/her influence is limited.

In our study the immigrants were asked to assess the importance of particular areas for success in life.<sup>52</sup> They were first asked to assess how important for success was being born into a wealthy family, having educated parents, being ambitious, being creative, talented, working hard and being well-connected. Then we asked them how important they thought was belonging to a specific race or religion. Finally we were interested in their assessment of the importance of global peace and freedom of action and thought.

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<sup>52</sup>To evaluate the answers we used a 1-to-5 rating scale where 1 means “not important at all,” 2 “not important,” 3 “neither important nor unimportant,” 4 “is important” and 5 “very important.”

Ninety percent of respondents thought that the most important condition for success in life was peace in the world and freedom of action and thought<sup>53</sup> – the median value on the five-point scale for answers stating “peace” was 4.7. Such a high rating is related to their personal experience of the native country which they fled precisely because of wars or violations of human rights.

In the opinion of immigrants, race and religion should not influence an individual's options for success. At least three fourths of the respondents thought that race should not be important at all (64%) or not important (9%), while somewhat more than one third said that religion should not be important. The answer to this question appeared self-evident to them, since they did not understand either race or religion as an important factor in a set of questions about success. On more than one occasion they were bewildered and asked us if that was important in western societies. The respondents came from racially or religiously more or less homogeneous societies in which success was more strongly dependent on rights, peace and freedom of action and thought, than on race or religion. Similarly, individual success should not be pre-determined by the wealth of a family into which one was born (45% thought that it was not important at all whether or not you originated from a wealthy family). In their opinion it was precisely the differences between the rich and the poor that set apart people in their native countries. On the other hand, they assessed that more than by material wealth, success was predicated on the education of one's parents. In addition to social status, educated parents could more easily afford to pay for children's education, secure them inclusion in society and a better life in general; 63% of the respondents thought that school success and success at work were very important.

In their opinion success was to a large extent determined by the individual's ambition and creativity (83% thought these factors were important or very important), talents (80%), hard work (80%), and well-connectedness (75%).

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<sup>53</sup>The factor analysis yielded three groups of factors: the first includes the answers pertaining to the importance of ambitiousness, creativity, talent, hard work and education of parents. The second includes belonging to a specific religion or race, being born into a wealthy family, and well-connectedness. The third includes peace in the world and freedom of action and thought. These three factors explain 54% of variance.

Our conversations led us to conclude that the unfortunate experiences of many immigrants when endeavoring to achieve success were related to objective circumstances over which they had no influence. In the group of factors making up objective circumstances they included political and social circumstances rather than factors that could be related to individual abilities or relations between social classes. Accordingly, it turned out that they had more trust in western countries than we could possibly have expected. In these countries they hoped to be given opportunities that would not be related to individuality but would enable them to realize their individualities.

The fact that they did not have an opportunity to realize their goals gave rise to their wish to create opportunities for their children. In order to be able to establish the immigrants' attitude towards western countries, we asked them to assess four statements.<sup>54</sup> All of them were highly rated (the median value was more than 4), which confirms that the majority of respondents expected to have better opportunities in western countries. The majority of the respondents (74%) agreed that children in western countries had better chances for development. Somewhat more than one half (57%) completely agreed with the assertion that in western countries everybody had equal opportunities for development, while 53% thought that these countries provided good living conditions for all people; 62% of them assessed highly opportunities to get a job.

The assessments of opportunities for development in the western countries were strongly correlated with self-trust of the respondents ( $r = 0.99$ ). The immigrants who expressed a high degree of self-trust<sup>55</sup> and gave high ratings to equal rights in the western countries, stressed freedom of action and thought as one of the most important factors in success ( $r = 0.70$ ). Similarly highly rated was

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<sup>54</sup>"For each of the assertions below state to what a degree it is true according to your opinion" (1 "not true at all," 5 "completely true"). The immigrants were asked to assess four statements: 1. The western countries provide good living conditions. 2. In western countries everybody can find a job he/she wants. 3. In western countries children have good opportunities for development. 4. Everybody has equal opportunities for development in western countries.

<sup>55</sup>To assess trust we asked the question "How much do you trust?" We used a 1-to-5 point Likert scale where 1 meant "do not trust" and 5 meant "fully trust." The immigrants were asked to assess their self-trust, trust in religious institutions, family, educational system and the like.

ambition ( $r = 0.99$ ), the education of one's parents ( $r = 0.68$ ) and hard work ( $r = 0.57$ ). A high negative correlation was observed between success and assessments of the situation in the native country – job opportunities, educational opportunities, peacefulness of politics, international reputation of their country, the development of science and technology and relations between religious institutions and the state were all assessed negatively.

There are several facts that could be used to disprove one of the most widespread lines of reasoning, namely that immigrants want to penetrate the fortress of Europe primarily because of economic benefits. First, the analysis showed that only 10% of the immigrants were unemployed in their own country. Second, the immigrants assessed that political and not economic factors were important for success. Among the influential factors they stressed social contacts, social interaction, and cooperation, all of which represent social capital.<sup>56</sup> Most of them had many relatives and friends in their country. They highly rated the importance of integration into the new environment (relations at work, relations with friends, readiness to accept culture, habits and language), which made us conclude, given their rich social capital at home and their readiness to integrate, that in a new environment they would rather rely on people, seek new friendships, and put their talents to use when looking for jobs than turn to the state or state institutions for financial aid. Even though for the time being they were without jobs in European countries, the immigrants hoped to find jobs that would suit them.

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<sup>56</sup>Some sociologists argue that it is precisely the social capital that enables individuals (a family or a group) to "get by" or "get ahead" (Woolcock 1998). The social capital includes institutions, kinship ties and norms which shape the quality and quantity of social interactions (WB 1999); in the social structures of society there are norms and social relations which enable people to achieve the set goals through cooperation. Social capital is the first effect of trust and cooperation of individuals (groups), as well as their transfer – they transfer the social capital they themselves produced. Social capital is a special form of social relations which enables a certain society to cooperate and achieve its goals (Putnam 1993). It is characterized by interpersonal relationships, interactions and networks that are established between social groups, and by a degree of trust inside social groups. The benefits of social capital are reflected in certain areas such as education, social mobility, economic development, political prominence, the activities of the community (Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998).













## EXCUSE US!

### VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Excuse us,<sup>57</sup> but the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the government should not be allowed to degrade people to the level of goods (cargo) under any imaginable pretense (the most often given explanation is an insufficient capacity of the facilities). Although they have been talking of the construction of new facilities for several months now, the public has not been acquainted with any details. It is tragic that the buildings in which immigrants now live have turned into “a living space unworthy of human beings” only when the television cameras recorded the center for aliens in Šiška and the immigrants had to be moved elsewhere because of bugs and clogged pipes. On the other hand, the fact that these people had been locked in these centers living in unbearable conditions for years was, and apparently still is, unimportant. Obviously, the motto they used when inspecting the center was “I came, I saw nothing, I conquered.” As a matter of fact, the data furnished by the minister and others were tragicomic: they talked of computers, rooms for socializing, TV sets, toys, a playroom for children and so on, but none of this is available in these centers. We were in a position to check the veracity of their assertions when conducting our survey, and unfortunately we saw none of these. Since we were surprised that the minister gave such statements, we asked both the immigrants and the employees of the centers where these items could possibly be hidden. The employees explained that toys were “stored somewhere,” but they knew nothing about computers. They showed us an empty room with a TV set and no audience, and the children’s “playroom” (an empty room with several tables and wall-mounted shelves) that was reserved for the children

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<sup>57</sup> By saying “Excuse us,” we do not mean to apologize to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but to point to our disagreement with what they do. We use it to distance ourselves from all the public statements of the Ministry officials. They may go out of their way to “prove” that the immigrants present a threat, and to furnish arguments for their untrue statements, but they should know that they are alone in this game.

of immigrants who asked for asylum, but no children played in it. More sadly, in other centers there was neither toilet paper nor hot water. People who allow such circumstances clearly swear to human rights and simultaneously violate them.

In Europe an important instrument in the protection of human rights is supposed to be the European Convention on Human Rights, but the authors of this research could only conclude that it did not apply to immigrants.<sup>58</sup> Neither were there any conventional actions or measures taken on their behalf. Immigrants are apparently a

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<sup>58</sup> A number of rights prescribed by the law are violated in practice, as we could see. Such a difference between theory and practice is impermissible. The state violates the laws that it formulated itself, obviously just to complete formalities. We would like to draw your attention to some of the rights specified in the law.

Article 7 of the Asylum Act specifies that "An alien who upon entry in the Republic of Slovenia declares his/her intention to submit an asylum application in the Republic of Slovenia shall be treated as an asylum applicant in accordance with this Law and he/she must be allowed to enter the State." The law also prescribes that "Asylum applicants shall be given opportunities to lodge their asylum applications as soon as possible." It further states that "An asylum applicant shall be informed of the procedure for acquiring asylum status and his rights and duties in such a procedure as well as about the right to contact NGOs which are providing help to refugees, in a language he can understand." Also, "An asylum applicant shall have the right to select his legal counselor (representative) or refugee counsellor as per Article 16 of this Law to assist him during the procedure" and "Persons mentioned above selected by the asylum applicant as well as representatives of the Office of the UNHCR shall have the right to contact the asylum applicant at any time and at all stages of the procedure for asylum" (Articles 8, 9). As for the language "An asylum applicant shall be enabled to follow and participate in the procedure in a language he can understand." Furthermore "Upon their reasonable request, female asylum applicants shall be entitled to have a female person to conduct the asylum procedure, according to possibilities." The treatment of underage applicants is also prescribed. "Unaccompanied minors shall not be deported to their country of origin or to a third country willing to accept them unless adequate reception and basic living conditions are provided for them in such a country." Finally, "For providing support and legal assistance to aliens in asylum and procedural matters, the Minister of Justice shall appoint refugee counsellors." The counsellors' task is to "Inform aliens of all issues concerning laws and other regulations as well as general legal acts in the field of asylum and asylum application; provide assistance in lodging their asylum application; provide general legal assistance; represent them in the asylum procedure." According to Article 43 "Asylum applicants shall have the right to: reside in the Republic of Slovenia until the asylum procedure has been finally closed; the provision of basic living conditions; basic health care; financial assistance or an allowance; free legal assistance for implementation of rights pursuant to this Law; humanitarian aid." The rights entail duties, so the immigrants are obliged to "Conform with the laws and other regulations valid in the Republic of Slovenia, as well as with measures taken by state authorities; always be within the reach of the competent authorities; respond to the summonses of competent authorities and co-operate with them at all stages of the asylum procedure; communicate any change of address to the asylum authority within three days after the change; and comply with orders issued by competent authorities regarding the restricted movement."

special category of people who should be kept as far away from “white Europe” as possible, and more credits for this go, paradoxically, to the inhabitants of Slovenia than of Europe. Such conduct is not simply an act of discrimination that could be blamed on individuals or groups, but it is legal and institutional discrimination.

The immigrant from Sierra Leone who assumed the artistic name B.Fine came to Slovenia in December 2000. He is a musician and together with his band he intends to make a film about his life in Slovenia. Apart from the basement in Šiška, he also experienced violence at the hands of the police. He was allowed several days absence from the center, but when he returned after 10 p.m. he was beaten by the policemen. He was locked in the basement for three days. He believes that the policeman who responded by violence was not subjected to suitable measures. The following is his view.

If you want to obtain asylum in Slovenia you are appointed a representative after a talk with social workers. I have one too. You must furnish proofs that you come from a specific country, and explain why you left it. They ask questions such as: “What brought you to Slovenia? Why did you leave your own country? Why do you think Slovenia would want to give you asylum?” I don’t know why, but Slovenia does not want to give asylum to black people, to Africans. It is not important what you have to say, they are not interested in our difficulties. The police is very aggressive in their attitude towards us and I think that the only reason is the fact that we are Africans. But we are not bad people.

Since I did not have a permit to leave the center and did not come back to the center on time, the policemen beat me. I tried to contact my representative but I was locked in the basement for three days together with 50 other immigrants. There were no beds to sleep on so we slept on the floor. I tried to explain to the policemen that I had rehearsal with my band. They did not listen to me. They destroyed my CD player and beat me, they were brutal. With the help of my representative I filed a complaint and the judge ruled that they committed a violation. But they did not explain what measures were taken against the policeman.

The policemen behaved aggressively towards my friends too. They are aggressive in all countries of the world. If a dark skinned man walks the streets here with a Slovene girl, the policeman is sure to ask the Slovene girl: “What are you doing with this black?” They do not like us! But we cannot do anything about it and have to be patient. They do not want us to be free. I would like to live on my own, I would like to compose my music, I would like to walk around. In short I would like to be free. I want to live as a normal being and secure a better future for myself. But here I am increasingly more depressed.

I think that the most serious violations arise from the fact that they do not see us as people. They do not want to hear that we had problems in Africa and that’s why we fled. They do not care whether we live or die. Nothing can convince them. The only

thing they care about is that they have a job and are paid for it. Indeed freedom of speech is observed in Slovenia. You can go to a TV station, you can say anything, but human rights are not respected. It is similar in other east-European countries which would like to join the EU. Asylum is not granted in Slovenia. In some countries Africans receive asylum without any difficulties – I have friends in other countries who assure me that it is not such a big problem.

I did not choose any specific country. I just wanted to leave Africa, Sierra Leone, in which I opposed the government and its politics. They killed people there. I was beaten when the civil war started. I had to flee. I have no reason to go back. I will probably not return for another twenty or twenty-five years. I hope Slovenia will grant me asylum. If not, I will not be able to work. I would like to find a job and earn money. At the moment I make use of my talents. I have been singing since my childhood and I like to sing, but I would like to have a regular job.<sup>59</sup>

### WHERE ARE THE PLUSH BEARS?

In February 2000 the Peace Institute initiated a humanitarian action entitled “We collect toys for the children of immigrants.” The response to the action exceeded the organizer’s expectations, so from 19 February to 26 February several thousand toys were collected, plus several hundred clothing items and shoes. As agreed, the organizers handed over the collected articles to officials in the center for aliens and asylum seekers’ home in Šiška. Several children then living in the center were delighted to be able to choose toys. But today we can say that the story with an encouraging beginning took an unpromising twist.

The organizers of the action, of course, made arrangements with the authorities in charge of the centers that the collected items were to be made available to those for whom they were collected. And what do we see in the centers today? Or, better said, what didn’t we see? There was not a trace of the toys, clothes or shoes contributed by thousands of people. The employees at the asylum seekers’ home showed us a room that was supposed to be the children’s playroom. The room looked like anything but a playroom, and if we hadn’t been told so, nobody would have guessed it was a playroom. There were two tables next to the wall on the left side; there were several chairs around them and some wooden shelves on the wall. The only other things that “adorned” the room were several miniature figurines on the shelves that were out of reach of the small children at any rate.

<sup>59</sup>Source: B.Fine. 2001. An interview by Marta Gregorčič and Mojca Pajnik, a recording, 4 July 2001, Štepanjsko naselje, Ljubljana.

With so many toys collected in the mentioned action, several rooms of this size could have been filled to the ceiling. On the fourth and fifth floors of the center there was not even any such playroom, and accordingly no toys either. We asked the employees about the toys and all they could tell us was that the collected items were stored somewhere, but nobody could say where. The adults in the center told us that they did not receive anything; the parents asserted that they never heard of any toys. It is true that people living in this center usually come and go quite quickly, but some remain there for a longer time and in accordance with the agreement everybody should have had an opportunity to choose the items he/she needed.

We came to these centers to pursue our field research. It was not our purpose to act as inspectors and to oversee goings-on inside the centers. But having seen the conditions there we could not pretend that things were fine. Especially not because none of us could ever have imagined that people living in the center were not going to receive humanitarian aid. After we concluded the field research, we wrote to the authorities in charge of the asylum seekers' home and the center for aliens and asked them for explanations. The department for asylum seekers at the Ministry of Internal Affairs replied with the letter cited below.

Dear Sirs,

We understood your letter in which you asked for an explanation about the humanitarian aid in the form of clothes and school accessories that you so kindly gathered for the children living in the asylum seekers' home and the deportation center for aliens at 166 Celovška street.

In connection with this we would like to explain that the toys and clothes that we and the deportation center for aliens received from you were suitably stored. The toys were placed in the club room situated on the first floor of the asylum seeker's home, where the playroom for children has been set up and which also includes a computer so that the children can acquire basic knowledge of computer technology?? (question marks ours). We distributed school accessories among the school-age children and gave some to the kindergarten.

The children living in the asylum seekers' home can get clothes, shoes and toys every workday of the week, and they can take them away when they leave the home. We also took toys to the children of asylum seekers who live in the centers outside Ljubljana (Kozina and Postojna).

On this occasion we would like to inform you that at the moment there are only six children in the asylum seekers' home younger than 10. But your humanitarian aid is waiting on new children that will come to live here.

With regard to your statements that you had reliable information that children in the asylum seekers' home had no toys, let us add the following. On the basis of the experience of social workers in the center we have concluded that the asylum seekers living there often stated that there were no clothes in the storage room, but this is not true. The storage room is always well stocked with clothes, which indeed are not new as some residents expect, but they are well maintained and clean. It is precisely episodes of this kind that lead to distorted and untrue statements that you yourself may have heard.<sup>60</sup>

Let us add here that we responded in writing and later received a telephone call in which they assured us that "now everything was as you wanted it to be."

### BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

While I was talking to a group of Roma and Albanians from Kosovo in the room at the end of the corridor in the center for aliens in Šiška, a social worker came in. She was nervous, as some minutes ago she had had to convince another group of immigrants that they could go out to the playground – since they spoke different languages the conversation was prolonged. She asked: "Do you want a permit?" in Serbian. She repeated the question several times without explaining to them what kind of permit she was talking about and what they needed it for. Since just before she entered we were talking about asylum one of the Roma asked if she had asylum in mind. She understood his question as a provocation, because what she was doing was making a list of the immigrants who wanted to get a permit for a furlough (a supervised leave) within the next few days. I initially sat calmly waiting to see if they were going to resolve the misunderstanding, but now I intervened. I advised the social worker to explain to them what permit she could provide for them. The misunderstanding was presently resolved. All immigrants signed the paper, hoping that within the next few days they would be able to leave the center for several hours – the first since their arrival. It would have been much more sensible if the social worker had put all the immigrants on the list, as (judging by their accounts) a free walk in nature or around the streets was the biggest wish of all. Everybody struggled to get a furlough of several hours, which was a sort of exceptional occasion because the center is a closed-type one. The inspector later selected who could go out and who could not on the basis of criteria unknown to us.

One can get an idea about the communication in the center from the film *Fortress Europe*. In this film a social worker talks with Chinese immigrants in the center for aliens in Ljubljana and the conversation goes something to this effect. "Do you speak English?" The immigrants look at each other, shrug and shake their heads. The social worker continues: "Do you speak Slovene?" (!?). The group is now even more perplexed. So the lady, despite the fact that it is obvious that they can not under-

<sup>60</sup>Source: Matjaž Dolšina, state under-secretary at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a letter to Vlasta Jalušič, director of the Peace Institute, 1 June 2001.



stand her (they looked around and smiled not knowing even how to respond) indifferently concludes: "OK, then I'll speak in English." It is not difficult to imagine what this monologue looked like and how much those to whom it was addressed understood.

A mother with two children was sitting on the bench on the fourth floor. We met her the morning after the night she was brought in. She was scared. She only knew that she was in Slovenia. "Do you think they are going to let me out? I'd like to go to Italy to my parents. All that I have is a document." She did not have information; she was even afraid to ask for balm for her child who had a rash on the hand."

Immigrants should be informed about their rights and options (social and health security, status and so on) at a police station near the place where they were "seized" and then again when they arrive at a center. The Ministry of Internal Affairs assured us that each immigrant received individual treatment and that they were acquainted with their rights in their mother tongue. According to the words of one police inspector working at the Ministry, there were several translators who could be called up whenever the Ministry discovered an immigrant. These translators were reportedly present at each interrogation.

But excuse us, the reality is different, so we cannot consent to Wittgenstein's conclusion that we should be silent about the things we cannot speak about (or rather, we should not speak about in this example).

One: the vast majority of the immigrants (79%) were not acquainted with their rights either when they were captured or later.

Two: the immigrants did not know to whom they could turn when needing medical assistance. Given the opinion of the policeman who stated that the immigrants had exotic, sexually transmitted and other diseases, we would have expected stricter medical control.

Three: it was more than obvious that among the 21% of the immigrants who said that they were acquainted with their rights when they were captured by the police, none could tell us anything about these rights. They were not acquainted with these rights or the rights were not presented to them in an appropriate way. Only rare immigrants from the ex-Yugoslav republics were acquainted with their options and rights, but they found themselves in the center several times in a row.

Four: Darja Peharc, the head of the center for aliens, who was the guest in the broadcast Radio Jury<sup>61</sup> in which the topic was “Immigrants in Slovenia,” stated that there existed a leaflet from which the immigrants could learn how to ask for asylum. This leaflet turned out to be a kind of a phantom document. People at the

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<sup>61</sup>Radio Jury would be equally interesting as a subject for content analysis and analysis of the discourse of the participants, but here we would just like to draw the reader's attention to the intolerant discourse of Slovenes regarding immigrants. Before the broadcast, Radio Slovenia invited listeners to answer the following question: “If there were two rallies in Slovenia, one with the motto “foreigners out” and the other with the motto “for tolerant attitude,” which rally would you go to?” This survey of 24 April 2001, which included 140 people, 48% women and 52% men (including the calls to Radio Slovenia between 5 A.M. and 17 P.M.) led us to conclude that the degree of intolerance and xenophobia in Slovenia is quite high. Two thirds of the listeners said that they would attend the rally with the motto “foreigners out.” Among the many reasons they stated for such a decision, for our purpose here we chose several that were characterized by racism (included are the statements that were broadcast as well as those that were not).

The reasons for intolerance are mostly related to the economic situation of the country. The respondents were of the opinion that the foreigners put additional strain on the already bad economic situation of the Slovene nationals. Such were, for example, the following statements: “I support the view that aliens should immediately leave the country. We have enough poor people, salaries are low, many young people can hardly support themselves. We should also calculate how much we have to pay for these foreigners. The sums are so high that they make you dizzy. I think that we should first provide for our own people, but it seems that we are more concerned about foreigners than about our own people.” “Ask our unemployed whether anybody in Slovenia could afford twenty to thirty thousand German marks to leave the country.” “Since young people are without jobs, have no place to live, and no future, we cannot accept any bigger number of immigrants. Because, if we open the borders there will be a million, ten millions of them tomorrow.” Certain other statements that inhumanely stigmatize and stereotype immigrants are even more intolerant. “The aliens currently living in Ljubljana are all criminals, so they should leave the country.” Furthermore, “The aliens bring with them a rather strange culture and religion, filth and infectious diseases, so we should send them back.” Some expressed doubts about the financial situation of the immigrants who presumably have a lot of money. “Where do these immigrants get the money for illegal flights and for nice clothes and mobile phones? Many Slovenes cannot afford daily bread.”

Women's statements prevail among the rare tolerant ones. In their opinion, immigrants should be helped because we do not know what the future has in store for us, and because we should help our fellow humans in need. One lady thought that it was shameful that we have become “non-understanding, intolerant and egotistic.” Another man pointed out how much more closed Slovenia is compared to other countries. “Just imagine what it would have looked like if in the sixties and the seventies, when our people went abroad, Germany behaved in the way we do now.” We could say that even the tolerant statements do not stem from altruism but rather from some egotistic reasoning about a potentially similar destiny that perhaps awaits us. Slovenes imagined themselves in the situation of the immigrants and related this to the possibility that they might find themselves in a similar situation in which they would expect tolerance from others. (Source: the recording of the Radio Jury in Studio 14, Archives of the Informative Program of Radio Slovenia.)

Ministry of Internal Affairs asserted that the leaflet was printed in several languages. Unfortunately, those for whom it was intended never had an opportunity even to see it, let alone to read it. Nobody knew anything about the leaflet; nobody could show it to us and nobody knew what was written in it! "When talking to the immigrants we had a feeling that the majority had no information about their position or procedures that affect them, or about other circumstances they were interested in."<sup>62</sup>

Five: The Ministry of Internal Affairs maintained that immigrants are returned in accordance with the Geneva Convention, which prevents the repatriation of those whose lives could be threatened in the countries of their origin. In the course of the past ten years asylum was granted to eighteen immigrants. We cannot but ask whether the lives of the remaining several thousand immigrants are not in jeopardy in their native countries, among them Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Israel etc. Some of them are most afraid of being "removed" from Slovenia (for example, Kurds assured us that they would be "removed" by officials in their native country if they returned).

Jurij, an engineer of electronics from Belarus with a family of four, has been waiting on asylum for more than two and a half years. After the second year he received a document explaining that his application was rejected on the grounds that "Belarus was a safe country." Jurij explained that he submitted a pile of documents to the authorities including certificates of education and proofs that he left the country because of political persecution and not for economic reasons, as both he and his wife, also a university graduate in technical sciences, had exemplary jobs. The court ordered a renewal of procedure, and Jurij now asks whether he will have to wait another two years for a new ruling. "It is quite clear that in the course of the two years the commission did not so much as translate these documents, let alone study them carefully, otherwise the answer would not be so illogical." He added that he could not understand the attitude of the Slovene state administration which complained that the immigrants were a heavy burden on the national budget while at the same time it delayed the procedures for years and thus prevented asylum seekers from becoming materially independent.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Butala, Aleš. 2001. Poročilo o obisku centra za tujce v Velikem Otoku pri Postojni (The Report on the Visit to the Center for Aliens in Veliki Otok near Postojna), 16 May 2001.

<sup>63</sup>Taken from the article entitled *Stavba ne poka več po šivih* (The Building no longer Bursts at the Seams). *Delo*, 20 March 2001.

Among those eighteen who were “lucky enough” to be granted asylum, is a man from Iraq. “I can thank to my knowledge, my own inventiveness and the understanding of the employees that I got asylum. Had they not needed my language skills, the fact that I am a Kurd and that I escaped directly from the frontline would not be of any help. I am lucky to be a doctor and that, in addition to Slovene and Serbian, I can speak four other languages quite widespread around here – Kurdish, Arabian, Turkish and Persian.” Obtaining asylum is only the beginning of the road. The real journey along the bureaucratic roads starts when immigrants are required to arrange all the necessary documents: obtain evaluation for certificates of education, acquire identity cards, passports, residence permits, right to social protection etc. It seems as if the labyrinth of bureaucratic corridors does not have an end.<sup>64</sup>

Six: black students in Slovenia may study at the university and take an MA degree, but not a PhD.

Idris Abdal Fadl from Sudan came to Slovenia at the end of 1985. He graduated from the High School for Social Workers, received his MA from the Faculty of Economics and then enrolled at the Graduate School for the Humanities (ISH). He is just about to start the second year of the graduate course and he participates in two scientific research projects. He submitted the certificate confirming his education, as well as the certificate about financial means, the balance on his foreign currency account, receipts confirming that he paid insurance, the confirmation that he was not being sued for an offense and possibly some other papers, on May 30 when he applied for the permit for temporary residence in Slovenia on the grounds of his enrollment at the ISH. However, the authorities in Ljubljana obviously did not think that studying at ISH was a sufficient reason to grant him a permit for temporary residence. Idris was issued a document stating that he had to leave Slovenia within 15 days. If he did not, he would be expelled. It is likely that it will happen, as this document does not give any details about expulsion. But it does clearly state that Idris could file a complaint which, however, does not prevent the execution of the order. In order to expose distorted views underlying this story, let me mention that in 1999 Idris applied for permanent residence in Slovenia. He never received a reply. Shrewd, isn't it? How easy it is to get rid of bothersome niggers in Slovenia!<sup>65</sup>

Judging by our experience, we suppose that, even if we submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs a series of proofs, acquainted them with our reflections on the reality we witnessed, and furnished proofs of the violations in the centers, they would not even take notice, let alone take them into consideration. At the round table dis-

<sup>64</sup>Taken from the article entitled *V labirintu predpisov in birokratskih zapletov* (In a Labyrinth of Regulations and Bureaucratic Complications. *Delo*, 30 April 2001.

<sup>65</sup>Taken from the article by Žagar, Igor Ž. 2001. Črno in belo (Black and White). *Dnevnik*, 19 July 2001.

cussion dedicated to racism and xenophobia in Slovenia<sup>66</sup> we have already presented some findings of this research. Our presentation was understood as an “attack on the inefficiency of the police,” and it appeared that they wanted to diminish the value of the findings. At the same time we unofficially learned from the employees at the Ministry that the Ministry itself, or rather the Minister, determined how many people “could ask for asylum in Slovenia.” Therefore, they determine the number of asylum seekers. In other western European countries the authorities only prescribe the number of asylum grants that may be issued, while not denying anybody the right to apply for asylum. If this is true, the Slovene authorities violate the constitutional right of foreign nationals in Slovenia who are persecuted because they strive for human rights and freedoms (The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, Article 48). This information was immediately forwarded to the human rights ombudsman in Slovenia, who initiated an investigation. He later informed us that the Ministry denies that it had any instruction to prevent immigrants from applying for asylum. According to the Interior Minister Rado Bohinc, any immigrant who expresses a wish to apply for asylum is given an opportunity to do that. “The Ministry is ready to study applications on a case by case basis,” was the information he gave to the ombudsman.

#### DISTRIBUTION – A HUMAN BEING AS A CATEGORY

This section is dedicated to the meaning of terms that have gained currency in current political and media coverage of migrations. We would like to call attention particularly to those terms that are used to “label” people. Through various connotations they mark these people as marginal. We start from a supposition that the naming and consequently the division of people according to pre-set criteria reveal our attitude towards a specific group of people, one that we have shaped over time or uncritically taken over from others. It is particularly in relation to immigrants that the national and political

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<sup>66</sup>Dnevi varstvoslovja (The Days of Security), a session held in Bled 7–9 June 2001, organized by the Higher School of Security for the Police, the round table discussion “Lekcija ksenofobije ob ‘imigrantski krizi’ v Sloveniji: kaj se lahko iz nje naučimo?” (“The Lesson in Xenophobia on the Occasion of ‘Immigration Crisis’ in Slovenia: what can we learn from it?”).

structures have come under the influence of the media discourse and begun to use inappropriate terms. The media, on the other hand, took over political denotations and created their own. Without going more deeply into the contents of the political and media discourses, we would like to stress that, on the one hand, the meanings of the terms used (rather than simply the specific placement of a term in a context), have contributed to the stigmatization of immigrants by way of negative connotations. On the other hand we would also like to draw your attention to a series of names that are more or less unsuitable in our opinion, particularly if considered in the light of the legal definitions and meanings they otherwise have.

Even though the language as a system of signs is neutral and objective, when seen as a social construct it creates meanings of its own. In addition to linguistic codes found in a specific culture, which serve to enable communication between people, the meaning of a term depends on an individual that shapes and/or receives it. It would be possible to speak of the interrelatedness of individual and cultural meanings – the individuals within a particular culture accept socially agreed or predicated meanings through communication, but in doing so they are not passive receivers but co-creators of meaning. During the public debates on migrations several terms gained currency. Even though they were derived from social and legal theories, through everyday usage they radically exceeded the denotative meanings they have within these theories. The naming originated either in the legal or state administration discourses<sup>67</sup> and includes the terms alien, asylum seeker, refugee, temporary asylum holder, or in the media discourse and related everyday use of the language including the terms *prebežnik*, *pribežnik*, illegal immigrant, illegal, *azilant*, transgressor (see Picture 1 on page 132).

Let us first concentrate on the public diction and interpret the meanings in accordance with the Slovene legislation. In the Asylum Act and Aliens Act<sup>68</sup> the meanings are defined only in terms of con-

<sup>67</sup>The legal discourse is understood as a language of legal argumentation, while the discourse of the state administration had been defined by Aristotle as an extension of a political discourse used for setting operative norms and implementation of already adopted political decisions.

<sup>68</sup>See Rakočević (1999); Asylum Act (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 61–2911/99); Aliens Act (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 61–2912/99).

sequences affecting individuals belonging to a specific category. But in a wider social context they acquire new and additional connotations. Whatever approach we chose in an attempt to decode the names applied to the immigrants, we ended up trapped in the framework of legislative and political categorization which, on the most general level, defines people who do not have Slovene citizenship as “aliens” (in Slovene, *tujci*). “Aliens” is hence the widest category covering immigrants as well. The meaning of the word “alien” becomes legally applicable only when an individual enters the territory of some foreign country which recognizes him/her as an alien and accepts or rejects him/her. The legal definition of aliens is hence related solely to citizenship, so in this case the nationality or origins of the individual are not important. The Aliens Act also prescribes rules for entering and leaving the national territory of the country. These rules are decisive in determining whether the entry was legitimate, or to put it differently, whether a foreigner arrived with a valid passport or without it. In fact the legislation defines aliens by relying on a negative definition, that is to say, on the basis of what an alien is not and what he/she has not. This sort of understanding reduces people to the citizens of a state; it draws distinction lines between the “domestic” and the “foreign,” the legitimate and the illegitimate (entry), and in everyday usage between the known and the unknown. The Dictionary of the Slovene Literary Language under the entry *tujec* gives the following meanings: 1. one coming from a foreign country, or a member of a foreign language community, 2. a foreigner, unknown man, who is not familiar with the environment, and finally, 3. a foreigner not understood. Therefore, the definitions found in the Dictionary refer to the properties of others who in social and organizational terms belong to some other, who do not belong to the country in which they stay, and whom others cannot comprehend or do not want to comprehend. The last of the mentioned meanings often prevails in public discourse as a negative connotation.

When covering immigration issues, the media and political discourses never use the word “aliens” even though the immigrants legally belong to the category of aliens. Immigrants are treated exclusively as illegal immigrants who unjustifiably look for benefits within our country. They are a priori pushed to the social margins

and seen as people who should be gotten rid of as quickly as possible, which sets them apart from other foreigners who arrived here as guests with valid passports. So the media laud the political recognizability of Slovenia and assert the country's supposedly important role in international relations whenever a high foreign official or renowned foreign guests visit Slovenia, particularly some foreign political or economic delegation. In this way the polysemy of the term "alien" comes to light through different treatments of aliens – the connotative meanings shift from positive to negative and back depending on the "type of alien." However, in contrast to foreigners possessing a valid non-Slovene passport, the most the immigrants can hope for is to be sent to a center for aliens. But "it never occurred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to establish some center for the removal of aliens when aliens in question were other than immigrants."<sup>69</sup>

The aliens are assigned further labels once they arrive in the centers for aliens or asylum seekers' homes. The state bodies formally define them as applicants for asylum who officially have the possibility of acquiring the refugee status, or as "ordinary" aliens waiting to be "removed" for whom there has not been invented a special legal term. The chain of names thus starts to unfold in a different direction than in everyday usage, because a refugee, thanks to his/her socially recognized situation, becomes "superior" to an alien (which is in fact a term wider than refugee). Other aliens (who have not applied for asylum), are not a legally defined category, which additionally obscures the meanings of more or less inappropriate terms applied to the immigrants. The most that these other aliens are entitled to is a temporary refuge (asylum). According to the law,<sup>70</sup> the temporary refuge is provided to people who arrive from countries that are at war or from countries in which human rights are massively violated. However, as specified in this law, the country which decides whether to grant a temporary refuge is under no statutory obligations and it independently decides how many temporary refuges to provide. As Horvat et al. concluded (1998, 31), the wider rhetoric defines aliens who were provided temporary

<sup>69</sup>See Žagar, Igor Ž. 2001. Ljudska retorika. *Dnevnik*, 22 March 2001.

<sup>70</sup>The Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 20–1139/97.



refugee<sup>71</sup> “as being really “temporary,” because they are expected to leave as quickly as possible.”

The meaning of the term refugee is in legal terms related to the status that a person acquires only after he/she has been granted asylum. According to the Asylum Act, a refugee is a person who has been granted asylum, or the protection available to aliens. This protection includes the right to live in Slovenia, then other rights in accordance with the Geneva Convention, as well as rights specified in the Asylum Act. But such a naming is not appropriate given the meaning of the term “refugee.” As UNCHR pointed out, a person is a refugee even before he/she is granted refugee status by some country. According to the Geneva Convention, the term refugee stands for a person who “Due to the justified fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, belonging to a specific group or because of a religious convictions stays outside of the country of which he/she is a citizen and cannot, or because of fear does not want to, accept protection of the country of which he/she is a citizen; or a person without citizenship who is outside the country of which he/she previously was a citizen but does not want to return to that country because of such events or out of fear” (Rakočević 1999, 195). A refugee, who therefore is not recognized as a refugee, may apply for asylum in a foreign country which means that he/she tries to exercise his/her right to be granted asylum, through which he/she (paradoxically) obtains the right to become a refugee. The right to asylum is defined as a human right founded in international law, which may be rejected by a country on the basis of valid legislation, but not to people coming from a country in which their lives or freedom were threatened. In the Slovene legislation an asylum seeker is an alien who filed an application for asylum, and this definition applies from the moment he/she applies for asylum to the moment the legal decision is taken.

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<sup>71</sup> Horvat, Verscheueren and Žagar (1998, 2, 5) concluded that at the time of their analysis of public discourse (in 1992 and 1993) the term “temporary refugee” was used as if having a clearly defined status in international laws, while in fact it is quite marginal and does not appear in these laws. Even according to the currently valid law on temporary refuge, the term “temporary refugee” is not a legal term: according to this law, a “temporary refugee” is a person with temporary asylum who does not have refugee status.

As stipulated by the law, as long as they are not legally recognized, refugees cannot be other than asylum seekers. Such a definition places them in the inferior position of someone who pleads, is powerless, and dependent on the good will of others who have the reins in their hands and have the power to reject or accept the application. The term “seeker” is additionally marked by the imperfective aspect of the verb from which it is derived, as the very aspect of the verb connotes the duration of the procedure following the submission of an application. We could similarly interpret the meaning of the word refugee (in Slovene, *begunec*) by exposing its negative connotations in the Slovene language: the root of the word *begunec* is *beg*, meaning flight, so the negative connotation calling to mind further flights, uncertainty and danger are preserved, even though the term should, in accordance with the law, cover newly acquired human rights. According to the Dictionary of the Slovene Literary Language the word *beg*, from which are derived the verbs *bežati* (to flee), *pribežati*, *prebežati* (to arrive somewhere by fleeing) and the noun *prebežnik*, means “a quick withdrawal out of fear, fleeing away from danger, a rescue out of unfavorable circumstances.” In this sense the term *begunec* denotes one who flees from danger, from an unpleasant situation, or one who departs to live abroad for political reasons (political emigrants), and not one who managed to obtain refugee status in some country.

In everyday use of the terms *begunec*, *prebežnik*, and *pribežnik*<sup>72</sup> – if connected with the prevalent intolerant attitude towards immigrants – the fear, danger and unpleasant situation as reasons for flight are pushed to the background. Through the stereotypes, *prebežniki*, *pribežniki* and *begunci* are thus turned into terms whose meaning is related exclusively to the “foreign people,” “intruders,” those who enter the arena that belongs to “us,” which is “domestic,” and “our country” in which they are unwanted and are perceived as a “threat.” The immigrants are hence unjustifiably treated as “good-for-nothing” or “illegals” who illegitimately entered our country. Similarly the original meaning of the term asylum, which stems from Greek (*asilos*) meaning “one that may not be seized,” has been

<sup>72</sup>See Jalušič, Vlasta. 2001. Ksenofobija ali samozaščita? (Xenophobia or Self-Protection?). Quoted in: Poročilo skupine za spremljanje nestrpnosti št. 1. (Intolerance Monitoring Group Report, no. 1). Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut (Peace Institute).

disappearing. The possible connotations of the Greek word, however, could be connected with rights, freedoms and human dignity which should be recognized for every individual.

The meaning of the term (im)migrant which indeed is a more complex social category, gained ground in connection with illegal crossings of the border. (Im)migrants are not understood as new settlers in the positive sense of the word, but as people who attempt to take away jobs from the locals, domestic people, and the unemployed, who attempt to obtain rights on insufficient grounds, even settle down in “our” country. Moreover, in the media immigrants are labeled as *prestopniki*. The literal translation would be transgressors (of the border rules), and this is the main connotation of the term, even though it also alludes to another meaning of the verb *prestopiti* (from which it is derived), which is “to cross” (e.g. the border), although the noun *prestopnik* without an additional designation is not used in Slovene in the sense of “one who crosses.” Seen as transgressors, that is to say, as “criminal offenders” these people deserve punishment since they have dared to violate our laws. The terms *prestopnik* and *ilegalec* (illegals) which originated in media discourse, as did the terms *prebežnik* and *pribežnik*, have negative connotation in their origins, while other categories – foreigner or alien (*tujec*), asylum seeker (*prosilec za azil*), refugee (*begunec*) are explicitly discriminatory or at least illogically conceptualized given the hypothesis that these definitions were needed in the first place to satisfy legal requirements. In our opinion the most suitable terms are *prebežnik* or *pribežnik*, although even the term *prebežniki*, as Žagar concluded, turned into a label attached to people “who found themselves within the Slovene territory almost accidentally, by mistake one could say, and in doing so they violated Slovene laws because they crossed the border illegally.” However, Žagar also points out that the term *prebežniki* retains at least minimal reference to the destiny and situation of these people who mostly flee from a politically or economically uncertain future in their home country.

It is precisely this flight and the already mentioned fear of danger and uncertainty, which constitute the key connotations of the term *prebežniki*, and which influenced our decision to use this term in the Slovene version of this book. We also adhere to this term when

interpreting the results of the survey, even though we occasionally need to make a distinction between asylum seekers and aliens who did not apply for asylum, for reasons grounded in legislation and correspondingly different treatment. The expression *prebežniki* thus enables us to avoid legal and political categorization. We initially attempted to find another suitable term that would enable us to surpass the existing categorization, but we later decided that a neologism would not be a better solution. By inventing new names we also risk unintentional drawing of a new distinction line or categorization, even stereotypization. We therefore suggest that the choice of the word in Slovene should be understood by taking into account the original meaning of the word flight (*beg*), which we hope might contribute to the establishing of an attitude towards immigrants that will be different from the prevailing one.

#### LEGISLATIVE LOTTERY

The Lukaševič family from Belarus is the only family who was granted asylum in Slovenia in the first half of 2001. The parents and two small children waited for asylum for almost three years in a small room of the asylum seekers' home in Ljubljana. They had an opportunity to encounter convoluted bureaucratic procedures and the reckless attitude of Slovene officials within a few days of obtaining asylum. Neither the husband Jurij, an electrical engineer, nor his wife Jana, a graduate in computer technology, could obtain the basic identification documents. Since the family did not have a permanent address they could not have ID cards or passports, neither could they arrange health insurance cards. As Jurij explained, these documents are a prerequisite to apply for endorsement of the university certificates, so neither of them can get a regular job. They turned to the office for immigrants, from where the puzzled officials redirected them to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who in turn referred them back to the mentioned office. "So we are sent back and forth. It is not that we are asking to get something for free, we just need help of somebody who could tell us what to do in order to obtain the required documents. I hear time and again that Slovenia is a young country and it has not had enough time yet to organize its attitude towards immigrants. But I know that some other, equally young east-European countries, have had these issues arranged for several years now," says Jurij. He added that the very manner in which he was told while still in the asylum seekers' home that he was granted asylum was illustrative enough. Rather than handing in the papers personally, they sent it by registered mail. Jana and Jurij want to find an apartment as soon as possible, mostly because of their children, a one-year-and-a-half old son and a daughter who has finished the third class of elementary school

with excellent marks. They were offered temporary residence in the asylum seekers' home. Slovene philanthropy (an NGO) offered them to contribute money for rent once they found a new home.<sup>73</sup>

The migration politics and legislation in this field in Slovenia follow the generally accepted goals of the EU member states which try to control immigration and to prevent migrations that are defined as illegal. In this sense the Slovene national interest is similar to that of Europe. The authorities therefore want to "have the upper hand" over immigration and through it to reduce budgetary expenses. It is obvious that in implementing this legislation the primary interests are those of the ruling power. It seems that observance of international agreements and documents on human rights is more or less subject to "national interests."

The government's explanations of the proposed Asylum Act and amendments to the Act, which in addition to the Aliens Act regulates asylum policy in Slovenia, point to the fact that the government justifies legislative amendments with the necessity for controlling people, harness budgetary expenses and align domestic legislation with that of Europe, with the protection of human rights being pushed aside.<sup>74</sup> The Asylum Act that came into effect in 1995,<sup>75</sup> with the second

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<sup>73</sup>Taken from the article by Kocmur, Helena. 2001. Prvo leto življenja družine Lukašević v azilu: azilant sem postal po pošti, priporočeno (The first Asylum Year of the Lukašević Family: I Became an Asylum Holder through Registered Post), *Delo*, 20 June 2001, 3.

<sup>74</sup>In The Proposal for Changes and Amendments to the Asylum Act, which the government submitted to the National Assembly on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2001, it is stated: "The government of the Republic of Slovenia sends the proposal for the changes in and amendments to the Asylum Act which should be adopted in a quick procedure because the issues at point represent extraordinary needs of the state. The Proposal is a necessary reaction to the changed circumstances, in which 10,000 people applied for asylum in Slovenia. The changes in the law will enable more efficient and faster procedures, which would undoubtedly reduce costs that represent a burden for the state budget." Furthermore, the government, or more precisely, the Ministry of Internal Affairs states that the changes are essential also because of the accommodation of the asylum applicants and alignments with the European legislation, as well as because of the decision of the Constitutional Court which introduced third instance in the asylum procedure (source: <http://www2.gov.si>).

<sup>75</sup>Before that the issues pertaining to refugees and asylum were regulated, with many deficiencies, by the 1991 Aliens Act (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 1/91-I), which was in force until August 1999. It included also a provision that an alien in Slovenia should apply for refugee status within three days of his/her arrival in Slovenia. The majority of applications were rejected because the applicants failed to meet the terms of procedure, so until 1999 Slovenia had granted asylum to three person only (Longo and Zagorac 2001, 40).

amendments dating from July 2001, takes into account, at least by definition, a number of international documents on human rights. The fundamental international document that has been introduced into Slovene legislation is the Geneva Convention signed in 1951, and the Protocol on Refugee Status<sup>76</sup> signed in New York in 1967. The key provision in this convention is that “No contracting state shall expel or return (refouler) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”<sup>77</sup> Excluded from this provision are refugees who were sentenced for criminal offences. The Convention also prohibits sending people to a country in which they could face torture or inhuman or humiliating treatment. In this sense the Convention therefore sets rights as an ideal framework which is often not respected in practice.<sup>78</sup>

The rights and duties of refugees in Slovenia are therefore regulated by the Asylum Act. The right to asylum is also guaranteed by the Slovene constitution, in which it is stated that “Within the limits of the law, the right of asylum shall be recognised for foreign nationals and stateless persons who are subject to persecution for their commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms.”<sup>79</sup> The Asylum Act specifies in detail the principles, terms and procedure of obtaining asylum, as well as the status, rights and duties of refugees. As Rakočević (1999, 187–188) explained in his comments on this act, in contrast to economic and social migrations, asylum refers to the universal human right of a person who fled from his/her own country because of political, racial, religious, national or similar persecution.

In accordance with this law, Slovenia grants asylum to aliens who ask for protection on the grounds of reasons specified in the Convention and the Protocol on the Status of Refugees. Asylum is also granted to aliens whose safety and physical integrity, in accord-

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<sup>76</sup>The Geneva Convention and the Protocol were signed by 110 UN countries.

<sup>77</sup>Item 1. of Article 33. of the Protocol on the status of refugees.

<sup>78</sup>This applies also to other international documents referred to in a country's legislation. The most important international documents on human rights referred to in the Slovene legislation are: The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, The European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>79</sup>Article 48 of the Slovene Constitution.

ance with the Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, is threatened in their native country, or asylum is granted on the grounds of “humanitarian reasons.” This automatically defines reasons for denying asylum. In addition, an application may also be rejected if it is based on “fraudulence or abuse of the procedure,”<sup>80</sup> if the asylum seeker came to Slovenia for “purely economic reasons and is not threatened by persecution in his/her own country,” and if entry to Slovenia has been prohibited to the immigrant in question in the past and the reasons still exist. The law distinguishes between asylum and temporary refuge, with the latter being granted to people who come in large numbers from countries that are at war and countries which massively violate human rights. It is interesting to compare the number of granted asylums and temporary refuges. According to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, at the end of 1999, 3114 citizens of Bosnia–Herzegovina were granted temporary refuge, while 81 applications were still being processed. At the same time, 1255 people from Kosovo had temporary refuge. In 1999 the Ministry received 744 application for asylum, plus another 286 unresolved application were carried forward from the previous year. None of the applicants was given the status of refugee; 87 applications were turned down, 237 application were terminated while still in procedure; 117 applications were dropped. Among those who applied for asylum there were 320 Yugoslavs, 90 Iraqis, 58 Turks, 38 Armenians, 25 citizens of Pakistan and 24 citizens of Ghana.<sup>81</sup>

The chances of getting asylum in Slovenia are nil.<sup>82</sup> The procedure lasts more than two years,<sup>83</sup> while the so called “fraudulence and

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<sup>80</sup>The fraudulence or abuse of the procedure is held to be: giving false identity or using forged documents, a false presentation of reasons referred to by the asylum applicant, a deliberate destruction of a passport or other official document, and concealment on the part of the immigrant that he/she already applied for asylum in another country.

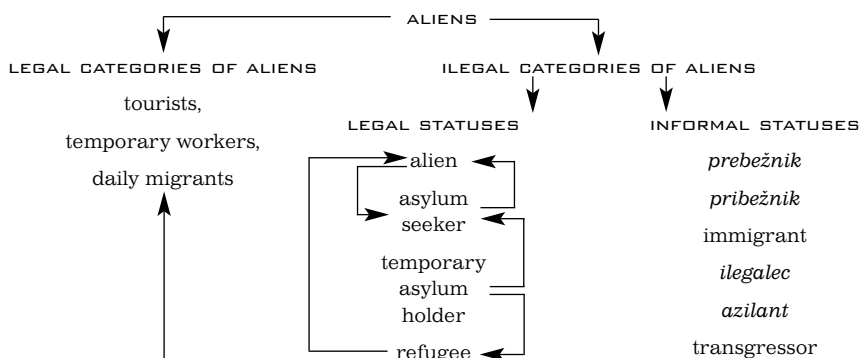
<sup>81</sup> [http://www.sigov.si/uunz/porocilo99/odd\\_za\\_azil.html](http://www.sigov.si/uunz/porocilo99/odd_za_azil.html)

<sup>82</sup>Longo and Zagorac (2001, 40–41) point to the decision by the Constitutional Court which invalidates a part of Article 40 of the Asylum Act. Asylum applicants are now allowed to file complaint with the Supreme Court, but it does not suspend the execution of the decision so it does not represent an efficient legal instrument. This means that the consequences may be fateful for the asylum applicant, because in practice it is possible that the Supreme Court rules that the application for asylum was justified, but applicant has already been removed from the country.

<sup>83</sup>In his comments on the law Rakočević (1999, 190) gives the example of Scandinavian countries in which the average time needed to process an asylum application is six months, then France, with eight months and Germany, where efforts have been made to shorten the procedure to two months.

abuse of procedure” is a handy provision in the law that facilitates turning down an application. NGOs<sup>84</sup> have been pointing out many inadequate legal provisions and deficiencies in the Asylum Act. They have concluded that the principle of not returning the immigrants has not been observed in the law itself, and when the law was amended the principle became related to the restrictions on the movement of the asylum seekers.<sup>85</sup> They further pointed out numerous violations of the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, a conclusion which has been confirmed by our study and through many stories of the immigrants. With the latest amendments to the law, the scope of rights that were incorporated in the previous version, has been narrowed. As Longo and Zagorac concluded (2001, 40), several provisions are disputable. Some articles that specified the rights of refugees have been omitted in the new law. The provision that an alien holds asylum seeker status only until the day the court issues a ruling, but not also in the course of the complaint procedure at the Supreme Court, is also disputable. Furthermore, the scope of rights pertaining to the translation of documents that are important for the immigrant has been reduced as well. And finally, the amendments prevent the immigrant from disputing the assumption that the “third country” to which the asylum seeker is sent is safe, which gives rise to concerns, since Slovenia classified Croatia among safe third countries, but Croatia has not yet defined an asylum procedure.

PICTURE 1: EXPRESSIONS USED IN PUBLIC AND LEGAL DISCOURSES TO DENOTE PEOPLE WHO CROSS BORDERS ILLEGALLY



<sup>84</sup>Peace Institute, Amnesty International Slovenija, KUD France Prešeren, Slovene Philanthropy, Legal and Information Center for NGOs, GEA Foundation 2000, Vox Association.

<sup>85</sup>According to Article 33 of the Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees “No contracting state shall expel or return (refouler) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”



## SCHENGEN – AN IMAGINED AREA WITHOUT BORDERS

The Schengen Agreement<sup>86</sup> enables people to cross borders more easily and quickly.<sup>87</sup> This apparently general and “harmless” assertion, however, gives rise to doubt as soon as we remember what needs and intentions led the EU political elite to sign this agreement. When we talk of this agreement that “brings (presumable) advantages,” we must immediately add that advantages can be enjoyed only by members of the elite (the EU). They are allowed to freely travel from country to country without being checked. However, while internal borders within the Schengen area were removed, border control on the external frontiers was tightened. The symbolic significance of the control was doubled, even tripled. So when we now speak about the Slovene-Austrian border we can say that this is not only the border between Slovenia and Austria but between Slovenia and the EU, which must be protected not only from Slovene citizens, but from all citizens of the globe that might never be able to cross it without a passport and other certificates confirming that they are “good enough” to join a selected company.<sup>88</sup> It is an unprecedented hypocrisy to speak about equal opportunities and simultaneously to grant benefits only to the chosen. Even worse is the fact that some receive benefits so that others cannot.

<sup>86</sup>The agreement was signed by five EU members in 1985 (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and The Netherlands). One can read on the official EU pages that this agreement was the most important achievement in the process of establishing the internal market without borders. We talk of the free crossing of the internal EU borders because this is closely related to economic interests. In 1990 the signatories agreed on the method of implementing the agreement. The provisions began to be implemented five years later and included Spain and Portugal. The provisions of this agreement were included in the European legal system with the Amsterdam treaty. Until 1997 the agreement was signed by 13 member states except Ireland and Great Britain.

<sup>87</sup>Source: Schengenski sporazum – območje brez meja (Schengen Agreement – the Region without Borders). Information and Documentation Center of the European Commission in Slovenia, 2001.

<sup>88</sup>According to the surveys of the Cati center (4 to 5 February 2001) commissioned by RTV Slovenia (data are available at [www.tvodliv.cati.si](http://www.tvodliv.cati.si)), 31% of the respondents did not object to the settlement of immigrants in the vicinity of their home (46% of students, 61% of respondents with high or university education, 61% of respondents who stated that they were not religious). A similar correlation is evident as regards other assertions (The government should increase border control, so that illegal immigrants cannot enter Slovenia; the police should immediately return illegal immigrants to the neighboring country from the border (e.g. Hungary, Croatia). The majority of the respondents did not have a positive attitude towards immigrants, among those prevailed older and religious people and those with lower education.

What are these presumable benefits that are mentioned in many documents signed by the EU countries? The most obvious benefit is the above-mentioned free crossing of borders. In relation to this we cannot sufficiently stress the pitfall contained in the generalization stating that the agreement enables free movement of people. When we say people, we mean all people, but the agreement by no means implies all. In reality, some people no longer have to queue to cross the border, while others are denied entry. The first of the provisions taken into account when signing this agreement, namely that the removal of internal borders would be substituted with the control set up on the external borders of the EU, also made obvious the hypocrisy of eulogies for big opportunities and Europe without borders. Similarly the second provision speaks for itself and does not require a comment – at EU airports, EU citizens are distinguished from others by way of separate gates. EU citizens carry red passports and queue in a separate line from those carrying passports of different colors. Schengen rules have become a “game of colors” in which the outcome is invariably known in advance. It was not long before the agreement was turned into an efficient tool for the campaign against all who are not EU citizens. It is also a paradox that only few of the basic provisions in this agreement regulate the rules of the free flow of EU citizens, while all others, under the pretense of

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A turn in the pattern of reasoning evident from these answers came to light through the assessment of the assertion: “The illegal immigrants should be allowed to continue their journey towards the EU countries which they targeted.” A lower degree of agreement with this assertion was expressed mostly by young people (39%) and those with higher levels of education (among them 9% of students, others with higher or university education). The survey showed that generally younger people and people with higher education are more tolerant towards immigrants, while at the same time they are pro-European and display such a highly “protective” attitude that they would rather “hide” immigrants in Slovenia than impose the burden of immigration on the shoulders of the EU! It is precisely young and educated people who more than others redirect responsibility to Slovenia and Schengen borders: the countries that are crossed or countries that are “fled.” The latter will probably not improve the living conditions or basic rights in the short run (the end of war and violation of human rights, improvement or stabilization of the political and economic situation). Slovenia itself (as has been evident for several years now) is not capable of controlling the flow of people on its own, especially not if the number of immigrants increases rapidly (in a few months). Therefore, the EU should take on itself the greater part of the responsibility and stop shutting its eyes as it has been doing for the whole decade now (as has Slovenia). The implementation of the procedures in Slovenia undoubtedly calls for changes in the legal rules, personnel and elementary structural changes, both within the centers and within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

protecting the interests of EU citizens, create barriers for all other people. The barriers are very clearly defined. The top EU politicians are creating them all the time. Each rule that is intended to protect the interests of the EU is accompanied by a number of apparently mass produced sub-clauses which in some way or other impose limits affecting all those who do not belong to the company.

The rules and borders are fetishes that conceal facts or reasonable arguments or, in other words, are the criteria of politics.

“Schengen Agreement provides higher security to the citizens of the signatories.” Security in the face of threat coming from whom? From millions of criminals and idlers from the “strange” parts of the world? The EU additionally protected its own prejudices – it has been erecting the Schengen wall along its external frontiers and establishing the Schengen Information System to be a kind of “heart” of the agreement. Candidate countries receive millions of euros from various EU programs and add millions from their national budgets to improve infrastructure and educate police forces.<sup>89</sup> They need them to defend new iron curtain from all imaginable good-for-nothings. Once the candidate countries fulfill their tasks satisfactorily and prove that they are sufficiently democratic (!?), the EU will accept them. If Slovenia succeeds in this, the wall it maintains for the EU at present will be shifted further. Today Slovenia defends the EU from its own (Slovene) citizens, tomorrow our neighbors will do the same. Given all these facts, it is questionable how anybody can speak of the EU as a democratic and non-discriminatory society.

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<sup>89</sup>Setting up of computer networks for police stations, digital radio networks, technical equipment for border control, equipment for the protection of borders, vehicles, radars, cameras etc.



## CONCLUSION

*And the son of Hippolochus answered, son of Tydeus, why ask me of my lineage? Men come and go as leaves year by year upon the trees. Those of autumn the wind sheds upon the ground, but when spring returns the forest buds forth with fresh vines. Even so is it with the generations of mankind, the new spring up as the old are passing away.*  
Homer, Illiad, Book VI

One of the important reasons behind our decision to write this book was our wish to present people who live in fear and uncertainty and who are repeatedly stabbed in the back by those to whom they turn for help. The book presents small big stories of the immigrants who on their way to Fortress Europe become stranded in Slovenia where they have a chance to meet with the “democracy” and “cosmopolitanism” of its people who, trumpeting their respect for human rights, violate these same rights flagrantly in the same breath.

In this book immigrants talk of their lives in their native countries and at the doorstep of the EU – in Slovenia. Rather than concentrating on the political, social and economic situation in the countries from which immigrants come, and where their survival became impossible because of massive violations of human rights, we focused on their experience, values and viewpoints. They are put in prisons, marginalized and marked by imposed identities fabricated by means of “democratic” laws. Many of them narrowly escaped death in their home countries only to find themselves in a new “jail of peoples” behind the Schengen door full of hypocrisy and constraints of (non)democracy. Before that they faced slow death in oceans, in tunnels, forests, or in the basements of various holding centers. “I did not imagine life could become so wretched,” said Lia from Pakistan resignedly. “Only in prison did I realize how important freedom is,” was a sad reflection by Jurij from Russia. And the inquisitiveness of children from Kosovo is nothing like the usual children’s curiosity to which we are used. “It is really hard not being able

to answer my son's questions like: 'Why are we closed?' 'Why can't we go out?' 'Why do you let us be hungry?' 'When will we be going home?'" a father from Kosovo recounted the usual questions put by his children. These children, who could never enjoy their right to childhood and had no other choice but to accept the game of life, share with the adults the harsh reality of the Slovene centers for aliens.

The Schengen periphery and Fortress Europe attempt to construct the identities of people who "do not belong there," but these people do not identify with their own countries either – they are the inhabitants of inter-spaces, the prisoners of their passage and of their own departure. Even though identities are only constructs, an effort is made to find a collective identity for immigrants in Slovenia. It is like a global stamp of migration that immigrants have to carry eternally, a stamp formalized through laws governed by the European migration policies. Various terms that determine the immigrants' identity are used when referring to them. In this book we discuss the terms found in the Slovene legislation that are used to set them apart and thus facilitate control over them. We point out how absurd it is to classify people into categories that serve to sort them and define their legal and formal status. We also stress the differences between identities - the identity of citizens on the one hand, which is flexible and can be changed like the emperor's new clothes, and the identity of "non-citizens" and "aliens" on the other, which is like an innate feature that determines their lives and marks them wherever they go outside their native country.

Our attempt to clarify identities by analyzing terms such as "(im)migrant," "asylum seeker," "temporary refugee," "refugee" points to the terminological conundrum which is a result of political attempts to "accurately" classify people. By drawing attention to the absurdity of terms we do not attempt to initiate new debates about their suitability but rather to stimulate correct political actions and concrete measures. Our intention is to stir up those political circles that are most responsible for the situation of immigrants in Slovenia but which have been excusing their conduct by referring to their presumed lack of power. They could learn something from Sardou who said that a work is done in vain if it is not rewarded and not acceptable, because without assessing the value of the work in

advance, the worker wastes both time and efforts even if the work is well done. For people closed in a cage who look for an exit like Rilke's panther, the impotence of political circles is not only an excuse born of ignorance but also one that is completely unfounded, as it is used to justify the violation of human rights, dehumanization and discrimination. All three are taking place on two levels: on the individual level, at which people become categorized and differences are sought, and on the institutional, where laws and other state institutions formally prescribe various categories and even legally create inequalities. Violations of human rights, dehumanization and discrimination in Slovenia are mostly open and public, and nobody feels the need to whitewash them. The EU harbors similar, though somewhat subtler laws that are wrapped in priority programs, for example those aimed at ensuring non-discrimination, equality of races and similar clichés.

Our book points to the dominant discourses that follow the example of the media, political or everyday public discourses in treating marginalized groups as "others." Our wish is to encourage a turn away from these discourses. In our book the immigrants are given the platform to speak for themselves. Their truths are suspended between countries that cannot be their own. They are travelers par excellence, prisoners of the passage who are not given a chance to speak publicly about themselves as the opportunity to decide or at least co-decide about their lives is a priori denied them. The discriminatory politics exclude them, decide and determine the future for them and on their behalf. Politicians are not interested in the consequences, nor do they see individuals when taking decisions. "I received a ruling that I must go home. I cannot return to Lebanon, because I will be killed there. Look at this scar on my face - I earned it in Lebanon. So you tell me, how can I return there?" These were the desperate words of one immigrant. Many more addressed us similarly still clinging to the hope that they will be granted asylum. A forced return to the native country, which is the most frequent ruling, seals their fate for ever. Their references to human rights and asylum rights falls on deaf ears. The immigrants are simply the prisoners of their own departure.

The immigrants stranded on the doorstep of the EU are not only a symbolic image but an actual situation. They are forced out to wait

on the doorstep to be “removed.” They are a “controversial topic” that should be resolved because they pose a threat to the majority of “our” citizens. The distance maintained by the majority, attacks on their humanity and acts of discrediting could be even more painful than institutional discrimination. The paradox of all assumptions pertaining to immigrants is that immigrants do not complain nearly as much as, or not in the way the public is made to believe or wants to believe. Each among them does his/her best to survive behind the iron doors in overcrowded airless rooms. They have preserved an unbelievable measure of patience despite the fact that instead of hoped-for democracy they encountered verbal violence expressed through terms such as “food processors,” “carriers of exotic diseases,” “criminals and liars,” “idlers,” “hypocrites,” “exploiters,” ones who “have sex non-stop.” Despite these coarse comments directed at them, their response is calm: “They do not like us. We cannot do anything about it. We have to be patient. They do not want us to be free. They are not interested why we fled Africa. They do not care whether we live or die. Nothing can convince them.” Thus speaks B.Fine who comes from the war-torn region of Sierra Leone. Other immigrants who fled violent wars are similarly content simply because they no longer have to run for a shelter from grenades and bullets. Some still hope that they will start lives anew somewhere in Europe, in the west, where they will be able to secure a better future for their children. In contrast to those who persistently reject them, they are open and ready to accept others. The immigrants looking for better options are not chasing economic gains and even less do they want to take away jobs from anybody. By presenting their life stories our book also attempts to dispel stereotypes about their being prevaillingly economic immigrants, because their reality is quite different from the one “recognized” and maintained by the majority. It is usually reduced to “scarce 3-d jobs in developed countries” meaning dirty, dangerous, and degrading jobs.<sup>90</sup> Neither do immigrants ask for financial aid; they just want to cross our country trying to enter Fortress Europe where they want to take care of themselves and their families through their own work. According to

<sup>90</sup>Verlič-Christenses, Barbara. 2001. Migranti so živeli tudi boljše čase (Migrants Saw Better Times). *Delo* (Saturday Supplement), 1 September 2001, 14–15.



various studies, three to seven million people managed to settle in the west, and they successfully support themselves without any social aid. They are not starving nor do they live in inhumane conditions as do those who are closed in the centers and camps and given aid. "I do not need state aid. I only want to be given a chance to sustain myself. Closed behind the bars like this, I feel impotent, I feel like a victim who is in the hands of others."

Those who happen to enter a center for aliens or asylum seekers' home have a chance to observe a reality that is much darker than could be imagined on the basis of political discourse. The supervising society functions perfectly – the immigrants, who are mostly not even informed about their formally guaranteed rights, are completely dependent on the good will of their supervisors. They are aware of the Sisyphean task they have taken upon themselves, but they nevertheless insist that the Slovene authorities should decide how much their politics are dependent on the successful removal of as many people as possible. It seems that for Slovenia waiting at the doorstep of the fortress of Europe is a privilege that must also be earned at the expense of the "prisoners of passage." But when following common political will, Slovene and European top political circles should remember that it would be at least creative, perhaps even advantageous, if they let the immigrants speak out and contribute to the development of migration policies through their own experience.

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