

*Everyone staying at the refugee reception center has two stories--the real one and the one for the record. The stories for the record are the ones the new refugees tell to obtain the right to humanitarian asylum, written down in the immigration department and preserved in their private files. The real stories remain locked in the hearts of the refugees, for them to mull over in complete secrecy. That's not to say it's easy to tell the two stories apart. They merge and it becomes impossible to distinguish between them. Two days ago a new Iraqi refugee arrived in Malmo in southern Sweden. He was in his late thirties. They took him to the reception center and did some medical tests on him. Then they gave him a room, a bed, a towel, a bedsheet, a bar of soap, a knife, fork and spoon and a cooking pot. Today the man is sitting in front of the immigration officer telling his stories at amazing speed, while the immigration officer asks him to slow down as much as possible.*

--Hassan Blasim, *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*

### **Declaration of Seyedeh Gelare Khoshgozaran Haghghi**

- 1.** My legal name is 32 letters with two Roman letters for each consonant in my last name. I have two names, two last names, and two birthdays falling on the other sides of the Persian year, but both in March 1986. I was born in Tehran, Iran in the middle of a deadly war, Reagan's presidency and the AIDS Pandemic. I file this declaration in support of my application for asylum in the United States.
- 2.** There is a rejection stamp on an expired passport never shredded. There is a photo of my mother holding me as she and my brother look at the lense from inside the passport. France rejected my seven year old brother's visa. We stayed.
- 3.** I am enraged at my parents for laughing at the sound of sirens for air raid. We hide under the stairs in the dark. I'm already bored at this game of hide and seek. Death is so close its face is almost pixelated.

- 4.** I sneak out of the house to buy bread. Mother thinks I got kidnapped and calls the police. An hour later I am found at the bakery by a gang of neighborhood kids. I return home with half a bread I had neither paid for, nor stolen.
- 5.** The war is over. I can hear it on the radio. I make up stories about the past, when I used to be a mother, and an elementary school boy. I tell these stories to my mother and my brother who goes to elementary school.
- 6.** My extended family travels to Istanbul to reunite with cousins who had fled the war and lived in Norway as refugees. Watching MTV for the first time, I kept thinking about the woman whose name I recently learned: Tatiana Thumbtzen and *the way you make me feel* in America's dark alley... "But I told you homeboy: you can't touch this!"
- 7.** The boys and I play soccer on the street after school. I convince two of my schoolmates to cross a busy street in Tehran without a traffic light or a crosswalk in the middle of the day, four times.
- 8.** Gallbladder attack. Pale green walls and fluorescent light, in the basement of a hospital... and blackout.
- 9.** In the West, time is linearized on a betamax tape with two nameless creatures--later Boy George and Cindy Lauper: play pause, rewind, play pause rewind, play pause, rewind. Until I arrive home in Prince, before English and before queer.
- 10.** I can no longer pretend I'm a boy.
- 11.** America at home: a few, pale adolescent boys singing stupid songs together, at school: a chant and a flag on fire.
- 12.** There's a photo of me and my cousin wearing the same baseball hats that say Muhammad Ali on the front and "I am the greatest" on the back".
- 13.** Reading *Catcher in the Rye* in Farsi... with ellipses throughout the book and gender-neutral, third person pronouns: who touched who in whose sleep when who was crashing on the couch at whose house? he/she/oo: shoe is my preferred gender pronoun.
- 14.** Back on the street, playing basketball with the boys, rocking the Muhammad Ali cap on my hijab.
- 15.** Smoke is coming out from the top of a miniature building in the sky on TV. It feels like it is the end-times until the airplane hits the second tower.

- 16.** A cloud of sadness is constantly above my head, like something is ending and needs a restart. I speak fluent English.
- 17.** The “good president” wins again. I start smoking cigarettes and hang out with heavy metal dudes in Tehran.
- 18.** In art school: the art history instructor is the boys’ sex ed teacher is the school’s censor of art books marking over any too much flesh with a sharpie.
- 19.** I’m more libidinal with a lover and more intellectual alone. Apparently I believe in, at least, one dichotomy.
- 20.** Disillusioned with everything already. I live in despair but in the prospect of “leaving.”
- 21.** Present is the temporality of migration. I start packing in my head.
- 22.** In the prospect of another four years of tyranny, we turn to the streets and march: one million asking “where is my vote?”. I take my last pictures of Tehran on a disposable camera I carry in my pocket during the protests.
- 23.** I throw away the camera and bring a roll of 35 mm color film to the U.S. Everything fits in my two bags of 23 kg, I get on a plane to Frankfurt and puke in the bathroom all night long.
- 24.** choosing words, distastefully, one at a time: poetry, prose or cons  
admittedly shy of the shortcomings of the self.
- 25.** the only place I wish I was right now is an old family photograph
- 26.** immigration, has ration and imagination has nation. ima imagine: too much “i”  
in immigrantomagination.
- 27.** I drive to Anaheim and take the exit before Disneyland to appear at my asylum interview at the USCIS office. My officer: my interrogator, fixated on the details of the teargas story or the story of being beaten by the riot police. Distressed as she is, I may need to comfort her. “No, it didn’t hit me. I dodged it.”
- 28.** I escaped the world, evasive pasts and futures for a queer present. The state that

I'm in is occupied with tangential immigration stories that break out of memories of crying. The burden of time chips away at my oblivion to the disaster it has all become.

**29.** Where would one go after an asylum, sought and granted in the United States?  
Where would one go?

Stateless, yet ungovernable

**30.** I certify under the laws of the United States, that this application and the evidence submitted with it are all true and correct. Title 18, United States Code, Section 1546(a), provides in part: Whoever knowingly makes under oath, or as permitted under penalty of perjury under section 1746 of Title 28, United States Code, knowingly subscribes as true, any false statement with respect to a material fact in any application, affidavit, or other document required by the immigration laws or regulations prescribed thereunder, or knowingly presents any such application, affidavit, or other document containing any such false statement or which fails to contain any reasonable basis in law or fact - shall be fined in accordance with this title or imprisoned for up to 25 years. I authorize the release of any information from my immigration record that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) needs to determine eligibility for the benefit I am seeking.

I swear that I know the contents of this application that I am signing, including the attached documents and supplements, that they are all true to the best of my knowledge. Furthermore, I am aware that if I am determined to have knowingly made a frivolous application for asylum I will be permanently ineligible for any benefits under the Immigration and Nationality Act, and that I may not avoid a frivolous finding simply because someone advised me to provide false information in my asylum application.

Signed and Sworn

mm/dd/yyyy