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Helga Ramsey-Kurz, Gilles Reckinger (Hg.)

Refugee Narratives – Fluchtgeschichten

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Refugee Narratives – Fluchtgeschichten

We would like to express our deep gratitude to each one of our project partners for their willingness to share their thoughts and recollections with us.
Unser ausdrücklicher Dank gilt allen unseren Projektpartner_innen für ihre Bereitschaft, ihre Gedanken und Erinnerungen mit uns zu teilen.

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Content/Inhalt

Introduction/Einleitung

Helga Ramsey-Kurz, Gilles Reckinger

The texts assembled in this volume are the result of a truly interdisciplinary pedagogical experiment conducted at the University of Innsbruck in the summer term of 2017. Students of English attending a literature seminar on life writing and refugee narratives, students of European Ethnology participating in a course on "Fluchtgeschichten" joined in a three months collaboration with refugees, who had volunteered to act as conversation partners and tell their stories. The idea for this experiment had been sparked by the so-called 2015 refugee crisis and the increasingly hackneyed portrayals of refugees and accounts of their flights disseminated by the media. From the outset its aim was to produce more detailed "refugee narratives" from a dialogue across actual and perceived social, linguistic and cultural borders sustained over a longer period of time and thus shaped by a growing sense of familiarity and trust between the interlocutors as well as by a gradual normalisation, if not even ritualization, of their encounters and the telling taking place in their wake. It was hoped that the time invested would help avoid the superficiality marking of many other inscriptions of refuge and asylum that have been forged from brief isolated interviews unsuited to yield the kind of insight needed for a fairer discussion of forced displacement than has become the dangerously polarising norm in western societies today.

Keen to embark on such a counter-discursive endeavour, neither the students nor their teachers, Gilles Reckinger and myself, expected to reach the limits of our own disciplines in the way we did as we were forced to realise the differences between how we had been trained to think about narration and narrative and how were applying corresponding concepts to our project. For the scholars of literature, working with ethnologists meant being made aware of how little importance mainstream literary criticism ascribes to the very act or event of telling, to the contingencies of human encounters from which stories ensue. It meant learning how much noting and recording these contingencies is key to and part of the mode of metadiscursive reflection we all had agreed we needed to overcome dominant ways of seeing refugees and relating their experiences. Learning from the ethnologists in the project, we may have failed to place enough weight on our own primary object of inquiry: the accomplished narratives, the end products not only of the conversations that had taken place but also of the many diverse deliberations following them in the process of putting in writing what had been said, heard, seen, and otherwise sensed.

For the literary critic, these deliberations are fundamentally telling in their own right. For the ethnologist they are not, or much less so. This emerges clearly from the following retrospective appraisal Gilles Reckinger offers in the following of the writings contained in this volume.

Als mich meine Kollegin Helga Ramsey-Kurz ansprach, zusammen ein Seminar zu Refugee Narratives zu machen, war ich gespalten. Einerseits bin ich seit Jahren damit beschäftigt, zu versuchen, Menschen, denen die Stimme oftmals entzogen wird, dazu zu verhelfen, sich selbst aus ihrer Perspektive zum Ausdruck zu bringen (etwa Reckinger 2010, Reckinger 2013, Reckinger 2018) und dementsprechend unmittelbar begeistert, diesen aus den Philologien stammenden Ansatz gemeinsam in einem interdisziplinären Seminar auszuprobieren. Andererseits jedoch war ich ob der latenten Problematik des *othering* und der drohenden Essentialisierungen skeptisch. Die Menschen als Experten und Expertinnen ihrer eigenen Biographie, als handlungsmächtige Akteure und Akteurinnen anzuerkennen, die ihrem Leben über ihr Sprechen und über ihr Handeln Sinn verleihen, ist eines der zentralsten Anliegen einer praxeologisch orientierten Ethnographie (Katschnig-Fasch 2003, Reckinger 2010). Aus diesem Grund sah ich im Ausloten der Potentiale einer Co-Konstruktion von Texten (Ellis 2004) durch Studierende und Geflüchtete eine methodologische und didaktische Chance. Dass das Anliegen nicht darin bestehen sollte, lediglich Fluchtgeschichten aufzunehmen, sondern eigene Texte entstehen zu lassen, die die Vielfalt der unterschiedlichen Erfahrungen der Studierenden – Europäer_innen, die entweder Anglistik oder Europäische Ethnologie studierten – auf der einen Seite, und Menschen, die einen Fluchtmigrationshintergrund hatten, in ein produktives Verhältnis zu bringen, schien mir reizvoll.

Gelungene ethnographische Arbeiten thematisieren die im Zuge des sich ausdifferenzierenden Forschungsinteresses entwickelten Fragestellungen häufig nicht direkt, sondern nähern sich den Forschungsfeldern und generieren Verstehen durch die Begleitung des Alltags der Menschen und über Schilderungen über diesen Alltag, aus dem unmittelbaren Leben der Menschen. Dabei sind es oft gerade die unbewusst stattfindenden Prozesse, die den meisten Aufschluss gewähren (Erdheim 1982, Weiss 1994). Gerade die dichte Beschreibung der gelebten Erfahrung erlaubt auch den Leser_innen, sich empathisch in die Situation von Menschen hinein zu versetzen, und ihnen vorderhand nicht vertraute Lebenswelten im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes zu erspüren, weil sie sie als in soziale, kulturelle, ökonomische und politische Zusammenhänge eingebettet verstehen können.

Die Geschichten, die in diesem Band versammelt sind, zeigen gut die Dynamiken und Effekte von Rollenerwartungen. Obwohl wir den Studierenden im Laufe des Seminars immer wieder versicherten, dass wir nicht darauf aus waren, die Geschichten der Flucht selbst – die Umstände der Flucht, die

traumatischen oder auch nicht traumatischen Erlebnisse etc. – zu thematisieren, drehten sich die Gespräche doch noch stark um genau diese Themen, aber auch um Erfahrungen kultureller Differenz zwischen einem wie auch immer gearteten „dort" und einem ebenso amorphen „hier". Dabei war auffallend, dass sowohl die Geflüchteten als auch die österreichischen Studierenden die Erwartungen an die Lebensumstände und Realitäten der jeweils anderen oft nicht überwinden konnten. Offenbar prägten medial transportierte Vorstellungen von Migration auf beiden Seiten die Vorstellungswelten stark. Die Dynamik, dass nach den Regeln der Universität in einem Seminar eine Prüfungsleistung zu erbringen ist und die von den Studierenden verfassten Texte schlussendlich als eine solche gesehen wurden, sodass sich letztlich ein Lehrer_in/Schüler_in-Verhältnis reproduzierte, das ich gerne flacher gesehen hätte, ist ebenfalls ein Effekt dieser wirkmächtigen Rollenverhältnisse.

Mit dieser Feststellung ist kein Urteil über die Qualität der Texte intendiert. Es geht nicht darum, die Texte als gescheitert zu sehen, weil sie noch nah an den Erwartungslogiken von Flucht, einheimisch-fremd und ähnlich dualistischen Kategorien angelehnt sind, sondern sich zu vergegenwärtigen, dass diese Effekte mit makrostrukturellen Bedingungen und Macht-/Ohnmachtskonstellationen zu tun haben, also damit, wer wann und in welcher Weise über was zu sprechen berechtigt ist.

Die in diesem Band versammelten Arbeiten haben einige diese Effekte auf vielfältige Weise produktiv thematisiert, bearbeitet oder abgemildert. Darüber hinaus könnte eine längerfristige Arbeitsbeziehung durch die sich daraus ergebende langzeitliche Reflexionsmöglichkeit in Verbindung mit der Entwicklung und Anwendung weiterer methodischer Mittel – wie das Anfertigen von Zeichnungen, Musik etc. zu einer „Normalisierung" ebendieser Beziehung beitragen. Dass sich so viele der Projektteilnehmer_innen einander über das Kochen angenähert haben, zeigt, dass ein „Tun" während einer Unterhaltung dazu beiträgt, diese „natürlicher" werden zu lassen. Aber auch, dass viel von Eigenverständnis/Selbstkonstruktionen und Fremdzuschreibung über das Kochen verhandelt zu werden scheint, und dass auf diese Weise das Verhältnis Forschende_r/ Beforschte_r, Lehrer_in/ Schüler_in, eine Dynamik, die der methodischen Form des qualitativen Interviews inhärent ist, abgemildert werden kann, weil eine alltägliche Praxis den Raum ergreift. Jenseits diskursiver Konventionen ist es ja in der Tat unser alltägliches habitualisiertes Handeln, in dem Diskurse zum Ausdruck kommen, zementiert und reproduziert werden. Dabei ist es elementar, die Position, von der aus gesprochen wird, zu klären.

In diesem Buch finden sich Texte von immer jeweils zwei Studierenden. Am Ende kam nur ein Text heraus, der tatsächlich das Ergebnis einer Koautor_innenschaft von einer Studentin und einem Geflüchteten ist. In allen anderen Fällen handelt es sich um die Produkte einer Kooperation zweier Studierender der

beiden Fächer, die in dem Seminar vertreten waren (Anglistik und Europäische Ethnologie). Die Bezeichnung Refugee Narratives weist auch darauf hin, dass jede Erzählung immer etwas Fiktionales hat und haben darf, und dass es in diesem Buch auch nicht primär um Faktisches gehen soll. Das schien ein Zugang zu sein, der die Europäischen Ethnologinnen eher befremdete, obwohl gerade die ethnologischen Fächer mit Claude Lévis-Strauss, Laura Bohannan, Florence Weiss, Nigel Barley und vielen anderen eine lange Tradition (quasi-)fiktionalen Schreibens haben und darüber hinaus die ethnologische Erzählforschung wichtige Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Fakt und Fiktion liefert.

It is fascinating how despite his apparent scepticism vis-à-vis the inherent truthfulness of texts *per se* as manifestations of discursive conventions, Gilles Reckinger identifies as a methodological imperative for similar projects in the future that one should explore ways of curbing the reproduction of established patterns of thought or of addressing them "productively" within the respective narratives. He is right. As a second seminar has since shown, intensive metadiscursive reflection on linguistic devices enforcing and undermining discursive exclusion and stigmatisation, critical readings of literary texts deploying such devices, and writing exercises enhancing students' ability to use them as well are eminently conducive to a mode of narration that can function as "an act of reappropriation," of reclaiming the voice of disempowered subjects and even of exposing "the continuing and evolving forms of the colonial gaze that permeates the discourse of forced migration." As such, Brant et al. submit, writing in collaboration with refugees can counteract "tendencies to characterize migrants merely by an attributed placelessness or to depict them as the opaque Other" (2017, 627). Under this perspective, questions of truthfulness or credibility, of fictitiousness and authenticity, so important in contemporary asylum granting procedures (cf. Woolley 2017, Granhag 2005, Hynes 2003, Cohen 2001) become secondary to issues of creativity and linguistic virtuosity.

Arguably, in encouraging breaks with established forms of expression truth is not jeopardized and reality not deformed. In fact the literary critic believes that an approximation to either is achieved precisely by conscious deviations from the dominant discourse, which must begin with a consciously deviant use of language. Even so, the failure to muster such a use remains of scholarly interest if only as proof of the entrapment even of critically inclined individuals in the proverbial "prison house of language" (Jameson 1972, Heller 1965). As such the texts gathered in this volume remain crucial evidence of the anxieties harboured by an important segment of European societies intensely preoccupied with the issue of forced migration but silent, for want of adequate and effective discursive tools to question contemporary immigration policies and engage in a public discourse about them.

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Life Writing Meets Creative Non-fiction in Refugee Encounter Narrations

Hannah Spielmann

The texts collected in this book tell people's stories of the past, show depictions of the present and portray dreams of the future. They are about stagnation and transformation, agency and victimization and ability and disability (Eastmond, 2007). They are representations of encounters of people with different life histories and are, therefore, testimonies of curiosity, courage, conflict and empathy.

The texts are based on conversations between at least two, sometimes three or more, interlocutors. One of the interlocutors involved in the construction of each text is a refugee who fled to Austria. The term 'refugee' in this context synonymously refers to people who were granted the legal status of 'Convention Refugees' by the Austrian authorities as well as asylum seekers who experienced forced migration and seek protection in Austria. The other interlocutor was not forced out of her or his home, is a university student and partook in the university class as part of which the encounters between the interlocutors were organised. Reading the colourful and detailed descriptions of the interlocutors in the texts, the reader will notice that 'refugee' and 'university student' are only simplified labels and that manifold stories hide behind these terms. Over the course of one semester, the interlocutors, or 'project partners', met regularly, spent significant time together and so got to know each other. Considerable attention was given to the refugees' stories and the process of learning about each other and becoming familiar with each other was then written down by the students. While in the majority of the cases, the refugee project partners did not (wish to) contribute their own writing and the texts were authored by the students, they can, nevertheless, be considered to be co-constructions: The students wrote and the refugee project partners shared their stories specifically for them to be written down. The act of writing about the encounter was, thus, preceded by the actual performance of the encounter – a fact which, at a time when digital media prompt as well as control many people's social interactions and political persuasions, is not self-evident.

There are several reasons why having written refugees' stories down within and outside academia is rewarding. As Eastmond argues, narratives of forced migration are very often the only means of "knowing something about life in times and places to which we have little other access" (Eastmond 2007, 248); life, which at the same time shapes our own social context while it is often not tangible. In other words, it is

important to write down refugees' experiences of persecution, conflict and seeking refuge for the simple sake of gathering their knowledge. For research in particular, it can, moreover, be worthwhile studying refugees' life narratives because they might reveal how refugees experience and make sense of "violence and turbulent change" (ibid.). Most importantly, however, narratives in forced migration studies can instigate a questioning of "over-generalized notions of 'the refugee experience'" (ibid.). Refugees' stories like the ones published here reject to consider refugees as a homogeneous group with the same historical and political background ignoring the individuals behind the term 'refugee' (ibid.). While the stories in this book are artificially grouped together, this book can also serve as a reminder that not only are refugees not a homogenous mass but just as little are they a group that belongs together. Very often it is the political and juridical – more so than bureaucratic – label 'refugee' that creates the imagination of one large group of refugees (Zetter 2007). A rejection of such a simplification and over-generalization of refugees is not only of great significance to society but can also be vital to refugees themselves "in order to contest over-generalized and de-individualizing images promoted in a […] camp situation" (Eastmond 2007, 254).

The significance of researching refugee narratives has also been emphasised by Woolley, who reminds us of the problems occurring with asylum seekers' having to relate their stories as part of their asylum bids (Woolley 2017). The power relations between an immigration officer and an asylum seeker at such an interrogation are clear: whether or not an asylum claim is successful depends, amongst others, on "the self-representation of the individual claimant" and "their ability to convince an immigration officer" (ibid., 380). Authorities often fail to "take into account linguistic and historical nuance, the memorial revisions of trauma, or its own structural performative aspects" (ibid., 381) and asylum seekers often find themselves in a disadvantaged situation.

It must be acknowledged here that the students in this project also represent an institution – the university – and conversation is made in English or German rather than in the refugee project partner's mother tongue. Therefore, there are differences in 'power' in this project too. However, while asylum authorities stick to strict interview situations and do not allow for, what Blommaert terms "home narratives" – that is "often long and sometimes anecdotal stories" (Blommaert 2001, 415) – this is exactly what this project was after (Wooley 2017, 179). Moreover, the conversations were casual and happened in an entirely different context to an asylum interrogation that can decide over life and death of a person (ibid.).

In order to gain legal recognition as refugees, asylum seekers must thus "provide for decision-makers a 'well-founded' narrative of persecution based on verifiable evidence" (ibid., 377). Because of this, asylum seekers often "cede narrative agency

over their stories to institutional procedures" (ibid., 382). Coming back to the problem of over-generalization, this and the demand of bureaucracy – and politics as Zetter would argue (Zetter 2007) – for a standardisation of cases can often add to stereotypical simplifications of refugees' stories (Eastmond 2007). As the reader of this book will notice, however, the narrators of the stories are just as diverse and heterogeneous in their social backgrounds, their worldviews, their access to civil rights and their political opinions as are the stories in content, style and form.

The texts in this book are carefully crafted creative representations of encounters between the project partners. They do not portray the refugees' and students' lives but are subjective representations of them. Readers of the stories have to be aware of the basic difference here between "experience and expression" (Eastmond 2007, 249). Accordingly, a distinction must be made between "*life as lived*", "*life as experienced*", "*life as told*" and "*life as text*" (ibid.). "An experience", Eastmond argues, "is never directly represented but edited at different stages of the process from life to text (ibid.)." Many simplifications, falsifications and interpretations will be made before the reader then reads and understands the text yet again in her or his personal way. In this sense, the texts are "representation rather than documentation" (ibid., 250). What also adds to this is the fact that the stories were often subject to several stages of translation: while the actual event told might have been experienced in an Arabic speaking context, it was then, in the encounter between the project partners, related in German and then written down in English or vice versa. Naturally, emotion or content can get lost or transformed in this process. However, the issue of potentially 'losing' information only corresponds to the actual subject matter of the texts which is, amongst others, loss, the difficulty for refugees of understanding and being understood and of having to change or 'translate' their identities (Bal 2007). In contrast with interrogations at asylum authorities, where translations can never be accurate enough, the depth or information missing in the stories in this book, the things we would have liked to know in more detail, perhaps tell a story for themselves (ibid.).

Thus, the students committed to writing representations of lives: their refugee project partners' lives as these were told to them but also their own lives. In literary studies, the writing about lives, often divided into autobiography, biography, memoir and other forms, is subsumed under the term life writing. With the rise of postcolonial literary studies and its interest in reading lives beyond the "Western male autobiography" (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xv), life writing studies have increasingly turned towards representing and studying non-dominant ethnicities, which is also the case in the project displayed in this book. Certainly the refugee project partners were diverse in their ethnic background and – as mentioned above – were not as such a homogeneous group. However, their often precarious

situations and their manifold experiences render them intriguing narrators in life writing. As for life writers themselves, one characteristic of contemporary life writing is an opening up of the genre to lay writers rather than limiting it to professional authors. This has allowed lay writers to write and be heard, such as the students who contributed their pieces to this book.

Life writing scholar Gillian Whitlock slightly martially terms life narratives "soft weapons", arguing that telling stories of people who face or fight social injustice can be an effective means to address human rights issues (Whitlock 2007). Considering life narratives to be "soft weapons" can be a peaceful and yet compelling method of bringing injustice to the foreground because carefully chosen words can be powerful (Whitlock 2007). While I would argue that all refugees experience social injustice, certainly in their home countries and perhaps also in their receiving societies, not every refugee is a political activist who tells her or his story with the intention to fight injustice, which might perhaps also be an indicator of injustice in itself.

The texts in this book can, thus, be considered powerful and thought-provoking wake-up calls rather than soft weapons. Their aim is not necessarily to actively fight social injustice but confront the writers and readers of the texts with their very personal expectations, stereotypes, potential fears and to question political certitudes. When looking at the texts as wake-up calls, we might, therefore, accept that they challenge our habitual thought patterns and force us to re-think ourselves and our environment; they give place to fresh thoughts and ideas about the self and the other. In this sense, the texts in this book are prime examples of contemporary life writing while each text is, in itself, a *bricolage*.

The reader of this book will recognise a great variety of genres and styles appearing in the texts. They show traces of biographies and autobiographies, diaries and ethnographic field notes as well as features of journalistic and artistic literary writing. Besides the texts' anchoring in life writing, their inherent variety of genres and their many other characteristics explored below also render them fine examples of creative non-fiction in general, a genre closely related to literary journalism. Creative non-fiction is defined by creative writing scholar Philip Gerard (Gerard 2004) by a distinction from journalism. Creative non-fiction, he argues, is cut loose from the necessity of timeliness usually expected in journalism (Gerard 2004, 8). He suggests that creative non-fiction does not only portray a "current crisis but larger trends, deeper truths" (ibid.). Gerard highlights the "ironic tension between the urgency of the event and the timelessness of its meaning" in creative non-fiction (ibid.).

This certainly holds true for the texts in this book. They are embedded within a European discourse on refugees and asylum, which, in its current scope developed after 2015, when the number of asylum bids in the European Union

was significantly higher than in the years before and the years that followed. In this sense, the texts do react to and explore "the urgency of the event" (ibid.). This event can be the war in Syria, the increase of refugee arrivals in Europe or very personal, challenging and noteworthy situations of the narrators in the stories. What also renders the stories typical of contemporary narratives of this kind, is not only their very specific historical setting or their being produced for a university course but also the impact of digital media. Digital media shapes the stories on several levels: First, it influences the refugee project partners' stories in their content. They can easily stay in touch with friends and family in their home countries, keep up to date with events there and connect with other refugees, all of which, of course, has an impact on their life in the receiving country. Second, digital media influences the interaction between the project partners. Not only are mobile phones used as online dictionaries which then influences conversations but they are also used, amongst others, by the project partners to show photos or videos to each other. Third, digital media, of course, has a great impact on preconceived ideas that the project partners may have of each other and ideas the reader may have prior to and after having read the stories.

The tension between timeliness and timelessness referred to by Gerard, however, arises when reading the texts irrespective of their current historical setting. The texts can be placed within a larger historical context of war and terrorism in the Middle East and some parts of Africa at the beginning of the 21st century, a post-colonial narrative of recurrent Western exploitation in its former colonies, the disparity between the global South and global North more generally or issues of white supremacy, racism and discrimination. Moreover, many of the themes appearing in the texts such as war, migration movements, intercultural encounters, interpersonal conflict or friendship are by no means specific to the 21st century. The texts published in this book therefore show the timelessness of the very topical issues that appear in the texts, which again is typical of creative non-fiction.

Another typical feature of creative non-fiction is its inclusion of an "apparent subject" and a "deeper subject" (ibid., 7, 8). The apparent subject of the texts can be considered to be the refugee's story. This includes anecdotes and accounts of her or his family, home country, dreams and wishes as well as her or his life as a refugee and her or his life in the receiving country in general. The apparent subject, always subjectively represented by the student, can be thought of as one narration, a read thread in the text. It also represents the process of the project partners getting to know each other because confidence, trust and familiarity always engender a disclosure of more intimate and detailed stories. The deeper subject might constitute a frame story of the narrations. It might be about the students' interest in and concern with potential otherness, their endeavour to

reject othering and their dealing with difference. This goes beyond what often is subsumed under the term 'culture' but might also involve the students' dealing with differences in gender, age, educational background, socio-economic status, humour, political persuasion or religiousness. All these issues are reflected on in the writing and show that there is more to the narrations than 'only' a refugee's story. This reflection, which may correspond to the deeper subject of the texts, is sometimes even indicated by the use of italics or different fonts.

The students, therefore, often gave very careful consideration to the construction of their texts, which again is typical of creative non-fiction. In contrast with the journalist, Gerard argues, the creative non-fiction writer exceeds the inverted pyramid style typical of journalism (ibid., 11) – a strict model on how to structure a journalistic text – and adds more to it. Indeed, most students did not simply write facts about what happened when and where. Many wrote emotional descriptions of the situations they were in, portrayed the encounters with passion for detail when describing food and tattoos as well as bombs and loss. Besides distinguishing creative non-fiction from journalism, it is, however, also important, to contrast non-fiction from fiction, which the term already suggests. This is especially important in the context of the texts published in this book because of the "culture of disbelief" (Finch 2005) many refugees face.

Creative non-fiction is narrative that employs devices borrowed from fiction, such as "character, plot and dialogue" (Gerard 2004, 9). The texts do so not because the students were taught the tools of fiction or creative non-fiction – in fact they were not given any guidelines on how and what to write. The texts employ character, plot and dialogue because the students have been exposed to reading literature – be it fictional or factual, be they language or anthropology students. They introduce characters gradually, present their stories chronologically or in an order that is well thought out and enrich their writing with flashbacks and, less frequently so, with foreshadowing. They use direct speech and indirect speech, dialogues and inner monologue and sometimes even create suspense.

Gerard warns non-fiction writers to always "rein in that impulse to lie" (ibid., 4) and the students were, of course, aware that the project was not about composing fairy tales. However, the stories are always subject to the narrator's and the writer's honesty and to the difference between experience and expression referred to earlier (Eastmond 2007). While asylum authorities are preoccupied with a search for truth and authenticity in the statements of asylum seekers and the fear of "bogus asylum seeker[s]" (Woolley 2017, 380) is prevailing, learning or defining the truth was not a primary aim in the construction of the texts of this book. The term creative non-fiction does, by definition, promise to the reader an account of the truth (or the 'not-fiction'), however, the final product will, for reasons elaborated on above, always be a subjective interpretation of a situation or

a story. In contrast with writers of fiction, non-fiction writers face the difficulty of having to write the story the way it was told to them or experienced by them – even if they did not like it and even if they had preferred a different ending to it (Gerard 2004). The actual 'ending' in refugees' stories, even if it is only a 'preliminary ending' or does not actually correspond to the end of a chapter in real life, can, however, be telling, even if the student would have preferred to write a different ending to the refugee's story or to their encounter.

Taking all these characteristics and categorisations of the texts in this book into consideration, I suggest naming them 'refugee encounter narrations'. There is a great variety of storytelling projects that include refugees and yet, this one is different to most other projects because it is not only about stories of asylum-seeking or stories of flight but also about encounters of refugees and non-refugees. The texts are as much "encounter narrations" as they are "refugee narrations" and therefore a combination of the two only seems appropriate. They are narrations rather than narratives because (1) they show the diversity in refugees' biographies and oppose a standardised "refugee narrative" and (2) because the term narration highlights the act of storytelling and thereby also creating new experiences while telling and writing the stories. The refugee encounter narrations are inherently unfinished in that they represent only a fraction of the refugees' stories (namely that of the encounter with the student). As Eastmond argues, refugees are in the midst of the story they are telling, and uncertainty and liminality, rather than progression and conclusion, are the order of the day" (Eastmond 2007, 251). Refugee encounter narrations as instances of life writing and creative non-fiction are, therefore, about representing and writing lives and are instances of texts where the writing lives.

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Farzanehs und Ramins Geschichte

Hannah Kanz, Lisa Manzl und Farzaneh R.[1]

Alltag

[Lisa:] Ich habe Farzaneh schon öfter getroffen. Einmal in der Woche besuche ich sie und wir lernen zusammen Deutsch. Auch wenn wir gelegentlich Verständigungsprobleme haben, können wir gut miteinander reden, mit Worten, mit Mimik und Gestik, durch Wiederholungen und Umschreibungen und manchmal mit Hilfe von Google-Translate. Von Anfang an war Farzaneh sehr offen mit mir. Sie sucht das Gespräch, den Austausch mit anderen und erzählt gerne aus ihrem eigenen Leben. Dadurch schien sie mir als Partnerin für dieses Projekt gut geeignet. Nun stehe ich kurz vor unserem ersten geplanten Gespräch und bin unsicher, ob sie richtig verstanden hat, was wir vorhaben und ob wir die Sprachbarrieren tatsächlich so gut gemeinsam überwinden können. Hannah ist dieses Mal noch nicht dabei, und ich denke, vielleicht ist es ganz gut so, dass zu dieser ungewohnten Situation nicht auch noch eine unbekannte Person hinzukommt. Ich frage Farzaneh, ob ich das Gespräch aufnehmen darf, und die Atmosphäre scheint an Gelassenheit zu verlieren und an Ernst zu gewinnen. Sie hat Angst Fehler zu machen und davor, dass ich die Aufnahmen anderen vorspiele, was ihr peinlich wäre. Ich versichere, dass dem nicht so ist und wir beginnen unser erstes Gespräch zögerlich. Farzaneh fängt an, mir von ihrem Alltag zu erzählen.

[Farzaneh:] Am Morgen gehe ich ins Badezimmer, dann putze ich meine Zähne und wasche das Gesicht. – Dann Frühstück essen, aufräumen, mein Zimmer putzen, dann zum Deutschkurs gehen, nach Hause, zu Mittag kochen und dann zusammen mit meiner Familie Mittag essen und dann abspülen, mein Mann trocknet ab, einkaufen, ein bisschen spazieren, ein bisschen mit meinen Kindern spielen, im Haus, Abend essen, die Kinder gehen schlafen, ein bisschen Film schauen und Hausaufgaben machen.

Farzaneh steht um sieben auf und geht um elf ins Bett – acht Stunden Schlaf bevor der nächste Tag beginnt, immer wieder und immer wieder der gleiche Rhythmus, die gleichen Aufgaben. Es gibt wenig Abwechslung und das alltägliche Leben ist auf kleinen Raum begrenzt. Die vierköpfige Familie teilt sich ein großzügiges Zimmer,

1 Alle Vornamen wurden auf Anraten der Heimleiterin geändert, da sich die Familie noch im Asylverfahren und somit unter besonderer behördlicher Beobachtung befindet.

in dem gemeinsam geschlafen, gegessen, gespielt, gelernt, geredet wird und noch vieles mehr geschieht. Bei schönem, angenehmen Wetter vergrößert sich der Raum nach außen hin und auch der Innenhof des Asylheims, die Parks und Spazierwege werden gerne zur Abwechslung genutzt.

Montag bis Donnerstag gehe ich zum Deutschkurs, manchmal am Morgen, manchmal am Nachmittag. Am Wochenende – nein – kein Deutschkurs, ich muss die Wohnung putzen. Die Küche, das Badezimmer, die Toilette.

Die Räume werden von drei Familien geteilt. Es gibt einen Putzplan, wie in einer WG – doch ausgerechnet ein junger Student, der alleine wohnt, beteiligt sich nicht. Es gibt fünf Waschmaschinen, die an drei Tagen pro Woche von Farzaneh benutzt werden können. Es ist ihr sehr wichtig, dass ihre Wohnung, ihr Zimmer und auch die Kleidung ihrer Kinder immer sauber und ordentlich sind.

Es gibt noch eine Familie, sie hat eine sehr gute Wohnung – ein Zimmer, Küche und Bad. Aber viele Personen, sechs Personen. Aber eine Person ist sehr krank.

Farzaneh erzählt mir, dass nebenan unter anderem ein dreijähriger Bub wohnt, der sehr krank ist. Sein Vater spendete ihm eine Niere, und er wurde vor kurzem operiert. Immer wieder muss er ins Krankenhaus, und es ist schwierig für ihn, mit den anderen Kindern zu spielen.

Sehr, sehr traurig. Meine Kinder sind gesund, das macht mich glücklich. Manchmal gehen wir zum Arzt zur Kontrolle. Einmal in zwei Monaten. Spritzen. Nächsten Freitag gehen wir in die Stadt. Ein Arzt kommt und schaut alle Impfpässe an. Kontrolle. Sind alle Impfungen gut, dann ist es positiv. Wichtig ist eine Impfung gegen Tuberkulose. Das ist sehr gefährlich in Afghanistan.

Ramin und die kleine Tochter kommen in den Raum. Farzaneh beginnt zu lachen.

Mein Mann ist sehr schmutzig. Ich habe drei Kinder. Ein Kind ist sehr, sehr groß.

Alle lachen und Farzaneh beginnt die kleine Tochter zu stillen.

Das mache ich auch jeden Tag, jeden Tag, zehn Mal am Tag, am Abend zwei Mal vor dem schlafen gehen. Dann ist der Bauch voll – essen, trinken. Mein Bauch ist auch voll und ihrer auch. Immer wenn sie Milch trinken kann, ist sie sehr leise. Sie liebt Milch und ich liebe es, wenn sie ruhig ist.

Farzaneh arbeitet viel zu Hause, aber sie wünscht sich auch eine andere Arbeit. Auch ohne einen positiven Asylbescheid können kleinere Arbeiten gegen ein Taschengeld verrichtet werden. Drei Euro in der Stunde würde sie verdienen. Ihre Nachbarin putzt im großen Heim nebenan und verdient etwas über 100 Euro im Monat. Wenn die kleine Tochter für ein paar Stunden in die Kinderkrippe kommt, möchte Farzaneh auch gerne arbeiten. Am liebsten hätte sie einen richtigen Beruf. Sie könnte sich vorstellen Verkäuferin zu sein, wenn sie perfekt Deutsch gelernt hat.

Ich möchte sehr gerne schnell arbeiten. Was machst du den ganzen Tag, verstehst du mich? Aber ich brauche einen Bescheid und gutes Deutsch. Ich habe Freundinnen, aber ich gehe nicht oft zu ihnen nach Hause. Manchmal, manchmal doch, dann treffen wir uns. Vielleicht einmal in zwei Wochen.

Ich frage was sie am schönsten findet, welche Zeit am Tag sie am liebsten mag. Farzaneh beginnt wieder zu lachen.

Zehn Uhr, zehn Uhr am Abend. Die Kinder schlafen und ich kann einen Film schauen. Das macht mir viel Spaß. Der Deutschkurs macht mir auch viel Spaß, es ist sehr gut. Ich liebe den Deutschkurs. Und wenn ich einmal arbeite, habe ich auch viel Spaß.

Sehr langweilig ist es, wenn meine Kinder viel weinen und wir immer zu Hause sind, sehr langweilig.

Ich frage Farzaneh, was sie sich für die Zukunft in ihrem Leben wünscht.

Einen positiven Bescheid und dann eine Wohnung, alleine, eine eigene Wohnung und Arbeit. Dann kaufe ich ein Sofa. Es gibt einen schönen Teppich. Ich koche gut. Ja, das möchte ich.

Erinnerungen an Afghanistan und Pakistan

[Hannah:] Ich steige die Treppen hinauf zur Wohnungstür im ersten Stock des kleinen Hauses. Am oberen Treppenabsatz wartet Lisa auf mich und geleitet mich ins Innere. Wir durchqueren einen kurzen Hausflur mit einem kleinen Schuhregal, das über und über mit Schuhen beladen ist. Lisa öffnet eine Türe linkerhand und wir betreten den Vorraum der Wohnung, die sich Farzanehs Familie mit weiteren Mitbewohnerinnen teilt. Farzaneh reicht mir strahlend die Hand zur Begrüßung. Ich entschuldigte mich, dass meine Hände vom Radfahren eiskalt sind und sie bedeutet mir, meine Hände an der Heizung aufzuwärmen. Ihr Mann Ramin kommt aus

der Küche, die der Wohnungstür gegenüber liegt, und begrüßt mich. Lisa und ich tragen wegen des schlechten Wetters Gummistiefel und dicke Wollsocken, während Farzanehs Füße in Flipflops stecken. Wir ziehen unsere Schuhe aus und stellen sie zu dem kleinen Schuhregal. Farzaneh überlässt uns den Vortritt, als wir ihr Zimmer betreten und streift an der Schwelle die Flipflops ab. Auf dem teppichbedeckten Boden liegen Lernutensilien verstreut, an denen Lisa und Farzaneh zuvor gearbeitet haben. In dem Stockbett an der rechten Wand des Raumes und auf der grauen, kleinen Couch schlafen die beiden Kinder. Ein wenig unschlüssig stelle ich meine Tasche neben dem Tisch ab, während Lisa sich am Boden in der Mitte des Raumes niederlässt. Sie erzählt mir, dass sie soeben den Text von letzter Woche gemeinsam gelesen und verbessert haben. Farzaneh scheint mit dem Ergebnis sehr zufrieden und bietet mir an, den Text zu lesen. Ich erwidere, dass Lisa ihn mir bereits gezeigt hat. Es scheint mir, als würde sie dies ein wenig irritieren. Auch ich lasse mich am Teppich in der Mitte des Zimmers nieder.

Gemeinsam schauen wir eine Landkarte an, auf der Afghanistan und Pakistan zu sehen sind, die aneinander grenzen. Farzaneh hat in beiden Ländern gelebt. Sie erzählt uns von einer Stadt im Norden von Pakistan – Aliabad.

Ich war fünf Jahre in Aliabad. Aber immer zu Hause. Ich habe im Haus gearbeitet, Kopftücher gemacht. Manchmal arbeite ich sechs Stunden am Tag an einem Kopftuch. Es dauert mehrere Wochen, manchmal Monate, bis es fertig ist. Meine Augen sind kaputt, weil ich so genau schauen muss. Vom Sitzen tut mein Rücken weh. Ich arbeite immer zu Hause, aber Ramin hat eine andere Arbeit. In Pakistan auf einer Baustelle. Eine sehr schwierige Arbeit, er ist nicht der Chef. Es ist sehr anstrengend und gefährlich, weil er keinen Helm hat.

Geboren und aufgewachsen ist Farzaneh in Afghanistan, in einem Dorf – Bayram Petre, einem Dorf, das so klein ist, dass ich es auf Google-Maps nicht finde. Vielleicht liegt es aber auch daran, dass ich nicht weiß, wie man es richtig buchstabiert. Jedenfalls liegen viele Autostunden zwischen den beiden Orten, mehr als zwei Tage dauert die Fahrt. Auch Ramin kommt aus Bayram Petre. Seine Familie hat dort ein kleines Geschäft, wo auch er mitarbeitete.

In Bayram Petre haben wir alle zusammen in einem Haus gewohnt, die ganze Familie. Meine Mutter ist tot, sie ist gestorben. Ich war ein Baby. Mein Vater hat aber eine neue Frau. Sie ist nicht gut. Sie sagt, ich darf nicht in die Schule gehen. Ich muss viel arbeiten und sie gibt mir nur wenig Essen.

In Afghanistan gibt es keinen Kindergarten und keine Volksschule, so wie in Österreich, erzählt uns Farzaneh. Manche Kinder gehen von 7 bis 18 Jahren in die Schule und

danach an die Universität in Kabul. Manche Kinder gehen aber auch gar nicht in die Schule, wie etwa Farzaneh selbst, ein bisschen Lesen und Schreiben hat sie zu Hause von einer Freundin gelernt.

Einmal war ich in Kabul, drei Wochen, fast ein Monat. Es ist eine schöne Stadt, aber viele, viele Leute, sehr laut, viele Autos, viele Geschäfte. Auch sehr schmutzig. Im Dorf ist es besser. Im Dorf ist es nicht schmutzig. Im Dorf haben viele Leute einen Bauernhof mit Tieren, einen kleinen Bauernhof. Meine Familie hat auch einen Bauernhof. Mit zwei Kühen, drei Schafen, drei Ziegen und Hühnern, die Eier legen. Mit Milch, Käse, Butter – alles selbstgemacht für die Familie.

Farzaneh erzählt weiter, dass die Tiere unter anderem der Fleischproduktion dienten. Geschlachtet wurde immer im Winter. Das Fleisch wurde daraufhin zum Trocknen aufgehängt, um es haltbar zu machen. Im Sommer sei das nicht möglich, da es wegen der hohen Temperaturen schnell verderben würde. Ich erinnere mich daran, wie ich einmal mit anderen Studierenden bei einer iranischen Familie in Ahwas zum Abendessen eingeladen war. Obwohl die Familie einen Tisch besaß, wurde für uns am Boden gedeckt. Ich frage Farzaneh, ob in ihrem Elternhaus am Tisch gegessen wurde. Sie erzählt uns, dass in den ländlichen Bereichen Afghanistans auf dem Teppich gegessen würde. Es gab auch keine Betten in ihrem Elternhaus, sondern die Matratzen lagen direkt am Boden.

Auch jetzt, hier in Innsbruck spielt sich der Großteil des Familienlebens am Boden ab. Wir sitzen so gut wie immer auf einem großen Teppich, wir reden, lesen und schreiben, die Kinder spielen neben uns. Wir trinken Tee und essen Kuchen.

Im Dorf gibt es nur am Abend Strom und es gibt kein fließendes Wasser. Mit Eimern wird das Wasser vom Fluss geholt, als Trinkwasser für die Menschen und auch zum Versorgen der Tiere. Die Kleidung wird ebenso im Fluss gewaschen. Das Wasser ist klar und sauber. Wenn es sehr heiß ist, spielen und baden die kleinen Buben im Fluss, erzählt Farzaneh, die Mädchen allerdings dürfen nicht mitmachen.

Wir kommen noch einmal auf den Bauernhof zu sprechen und Lisa fragt, welche Aufgaben Farzaneh dort übernommen hat. Sie erzählt uns, dass sie zum Beispiel geputzt und Brot gebacken hat, aber auch als Hirtin tätig war. In ihrem Heimatdorf sei es kein Problem gewesen alleine auf die Straße zu gehen, da sich dort alle kannten.

Zwischen Afghanistan und Pakistan gibt es einige Unterschiede. Doch größere Unterschiede scheinen zwischen dem Leben in ländlichen Gebieten und in großen Städten, wie Kabul, zu bestehen.

In Pakistan trägt man eine Hose, ein Kleid bis zum Knie und einen Schal, alles zusammen. In Kabul ist alles sehr modern. Ich mag moderne Kleidung. Fashion. In Pakistan – nein.

Hier in Österreich, erzählt Farzaneh, könne sie sich endlich wieder schön kleiden. Vor allem gefalle ihr, dass sie hier auch kürzere Kleider tragen und ihre Arme zeigen könne. Farzaneh findet die kurze Kleidung der Frauen in Österreich gut, da die Männer davon keine Notiz nehmen. In Afghanistan oder Pakistan hingegen würden Männer eine Frau sofort anstarren, wenn nur ein bisschen Haar unter dem Kopftuch hervorschaut. Farzaneh erzählt uns, dass sie sich gerne modisch anziehe, besonders zu Festen. In Afghanistan und Pakistan feiere man keine Geburtstage, aber hier in Österreich schon und das sei eine gute Gelegenheit sich hübsch anzuziehen. Sie schminke sich auch gerne, zum Beispiel wenn sie mit Ramin spazieren gehe.

Pakistan ist schön, aber es gibt nicht viele Bäume, es ist nicht sehr grün. Im Sommer ist es sehr, sehr heiß, mit wenig Regen. Die Menschen trinken viel Wasser und viel Tee. In Afghanistan meistens grünen Tee, auch schwarzen Tee. Aber ich glaube grüner Tee ist gesund.

Daraufhin steht Farzaneh auf und serviert Lisa und mir grünen Tee aus einer Thermoskanne. Aus einem der großen Schränke, in dem offenbar Lebensmittel aufbewahrt werden, holt sie Kuchen hervor, den sie auf einen Teller gestapelt vor uns auf den Teppich stellt. Sie reicht Lisa und mir je einen Teller und fordert uns auf, vom Kuchen zu nehmen. Ihr Mann und sie selbst essen den Kuchen ohne einen Teller zu verwenden.

Farzaneh erzählt weiter, dass man als Frau in Afghanistan und Pakistan oft zu Hause bleiben muss. Sie kann kaum ohne männliche Begleitung in die Stadt gehen, vor allem nicht am Abend. Besonders gefährlich ist es für junge Frauen und Mädchen.

In Kabul können Frauen hinausgehen, in die Schule gehen, aber nicht immer. Die Männer arbeiten. Aber es ist auch sehr gefährlich. Zum Beispiel, ein kleines Kind, fünf Jahre alt, kann nicht draußen spielen – zu gefährlich.

Farzaneh erzählt, dass manchmal Kinder entführt werden und deshalb nicht alleine spielen sollten. Manchmal auch Frauen. Es gibt Diebstähle und Raubüberfälle, zum Beispiel wegen Taschen und Fahrrädern. In Innsbruck werden auch viele Fahrräder gestohlen, sage ich.

Aber nicht Menschen, nicht Kinder. Ich muss auf meine Kinder aufpassen. In Pakistan müssen sie immer im Haus bleiben, es ist zu gefährlich. Auch jetzt muss ich auf meine Kinder aufpassen. Manchmal bei anderen Leuten bin ich mir nicht sicher. Ich muss immer schauen.

Wenn ihre Tochter im Hof draußen spielt, sind viele andere Kinder dabei und Erwachsene schauen zu oder Ramin passt auf sie auf. Im anderen Haus, das viel größer ist, wohnen außer Familien auch viele ledige Männer. Farzaneh macht sich manchmal Sorgen, denn einige von ihnen trinken Alkohol und sind dann sehr laut.[2] *Sie selbst und Ramin trinken nie Alkohol. Ein weiterer Unterschied zwischen Österreich und Afghanistan, der Farzaneh wichtig scheint, betrifft die Ausbildung in der Schule und zu verschiedenen Berufen.*

In Österreich: Ich möchte kochen, ich muss lernen. Ich will verkaufen, ich muss lernen. Aber in Afghanistan – nein. Du musst nicht lernen, es ist egal als Verkäuferin, auf der Baustelle, Brot backen. Du musst es nur können, nicht lernen. Die Familie sagt: Mädchen müssen nicht lernen. Ein Sohn ist sehr wichtig in Afghanistan. Er soll in die Schule gehen, er soll lernen und einen guten Beruf haben. Mädchen, nein.

In Österreich wünscht sich Farzaneh vor allem eine gute Ausbildung für ihre Töchter. Sie sollen in die Schule gehen und viel lernen, studieren und einen guten Beruf finden. Vielleicht als Ärztin oder Pilotin, sagt sie und lächelt.

Die Flucht

Lisa kommt aus der Unterführung und schiebt ihr Rad auf mich zu. Wir begrüßen uns und tauschen uns nochmal darüber aus, was wir heute besprechen wollen. Vor dem kleinen Haus treffen wir Ramin und das ältere der beiden Mädchen, das mit weiteren Kindern im Hof gespielt hatte. Am Fenster im oberen Stock steht ihre kleine Schwester und weint. Wir folgen Ramin die Stufen hinauf. Am Eingang der Wohnung begrüßt uns Farzaneh strahlend und geleitet uns in ihr Zimmer. Wir würden gerne wissen, wie Farzaneh den Weg ihrer Familie nach Österreich erlebt hat. Um das Gespräch aufzunehmen, muss ich zuerst eine App auf meinem Handy installieren, weil ich nicht daran gedacht habe mein Aufnahmegerät mitzunehmen. Ich starte eine Sprachaufnahme und Farzaneh beginnt zu erzählen.

Farzaneh und Ramin sind schon vor einigen Jahren zusammen von Afghanistan nach Pakistan gegangen. Sie hatten sich verliebt und wollten heiraten, doch die Familie hatte andere Pläne für Farzaneh. Sie sollte einen anderen Mann heiraten – ihren

2 Es gibt eine Hausordnung, die den Konsum von Alkohol verbietet und von allen Bewohnern unterschrieben wird. Bei Verstößen wird eine Verwarnung ausgesprochen (Auskunft der Heimleiterin).

eigenen Cousin, der an einer psychischen Behinderung litt. Farzaneh war 19 Jahre alt, ihr Cousin 30. Sie hatte ein schlechtes Gefühl in seiner Nähe. Manchmal war er aggressiv, er schlug immer wieder Kinder oder stieß sie in den Fluss.

Der Sohn des Bruders meines Vaters ist sehr krank. Er versteht nicht. Er ist groß, 30 Jahre alt, aber er braucht immer eine andere Person, auf der Toilette, in der Dusche… Er hat ein Problem in seinem Kopf. Seit ich ein kleines Kind war, haben alle gesagt, er heiratet Farzaneh. Ich war sehr traurig. Mein Vater möchte. Meine Familie möchte. Mein Onkel hat ein bisschen Geld und viel Boden, viele Wiesen, viel Land. Er gehört zur Familie, mein Cousin. In Afghanistan wird oft in der Familie verheiratet. Cousin und Cousine. Ein großes Problem. Ich war sehr traurig für lange Zeit.

Sie blickt mich durchdringend an und zeigt mir ihre Handgelenke, auf denen noch die Spuren von feinen, geritzten Narben sichtbar sind. Farzaneh lernt Ramin in seinem Geschäft kennen, immer wieder kauft sie bei ihm ein, Kleinigkeiten wie Salz oder Gewürze. Sie sprechen viel miteinander und allmählich verlieben sie sich.

Mein Vater und mein Onkel sagen, dass ich diese Woche heiraten muss. Ramin und ich sind sehr traurig. Als alle schlafen, um 3:00 in der Nacht gehen wir weg. Niemand darf es wissen, sonst töten sie uns. Wir fahren nach Kabul, dort bleiben wir drei Wochen in einem kleinen Zimmer. Wir gehen zur Polizei. Ich habe Angst. Die Polizei sagt, sie haben viel andere Arbeit, sie können uns nicht helfen.

In Kabul ist es nicht sicher, daher entschließen sie sich, nach Pakistan zu gehen. Sie heiraten und ihre zwei Töchter werden geboren. Sie versuchen unauffällig zu leben, benutzen neue Namen, fühlen sich aber dennoch nicht sicher. Ihre Familie sucht nach ihnen, sie möchten sie zurückholen in das kleine Dorf in Afghanistan. Ich frage, was geschehen wird, wenn sie sie finden. Farzaneh zögert kurz, zuckt mit den Schultern und erzählt uns dann von einer Steinigung, die sie als kleines Mädchen miterlebt hat. Eine Frau stand alleine in der Mitte, in einem Loch in der Erde. Das ganze Dorf warf Steine, bis sie starb, die Kinder sahen zu. Farzaneh sagt, sie war nur ein kleines Mädchen, sie hat damals nicht verstanden, was geschieht, doch sie hat es nie vergessen. Farzaneh glaubt, dass es für ihre Familie schwierig ist, sie in Pakistan zu finden und, dass ihr Onkel deswegen die Taliban bezahlt. Sie suchen sie in Aliabad. Plötzlich hängen überall Zettel mit ihren alten Namen – auf der Straße, in der Bäckerei, in der Moschee. Als Mahnaz nur wenige Monate alt ist, machen sie sich auf den Weg in Richtung Europa. Farzaneh will vor allem auch ein besseres Leben für Manoush und Mahnaz. Ein Leben in Sicherheit und Frieden, mit mehr Möglichkeiten und Chancen.

Wir fahren, von einem Tag auf den anderen. In Pakistan habe ich schöne Kleider, schönes Geschirr, eine gute Wohnung, aber ich kann nichts mitnehmen, nur ein bisschen warme Kleidung für die Kinder. Alles geht sehr schnell. Mit dem Auto sind wir von Pakistan in den Iran gefahren. Ich habe keinen Pass, aber Ramin hat etwas Ähnliches. Im Iran war es sehr schwierig und in der Türkei. Auch wegen der Polizei. Wir müssen sehr aufpassen, in der Türkei helfen sie uns nicht. Einen Tag und eine Nacht müssen wir im Wald bleiben und uns mit anderen verstecken. Es war sehr kalt, es hat geregnet und wir haben ein Feuer gemacht. Die Leute, die uns helfen, wollen Geld. Es ist sehr teuer. Aber wir sind nur drei Personen, ich, Ramin und meine Kinder sind zusammen eine Person, weil sie noch klein sind. Auf einem Boot geht es weiter über viele Wasser nach Yunân (*Griechenland*).

Wenn Farzaneh vom Meer spricht, nennt sie es nur viele Wasser. Sie nimmt meine Hand und ihre Stimme wird sehr leise.

Das Boot ist klein für 40 Personen. Sie haben gesagt alles weg, es ist kein Platz. Wir können einen Rucksack nicht mitnehmen. Ramin verliert seinen Ausweis. Sehr schwierig, so viel Angst. Ich habe geweint. Mahnaz war noch so klein, zwei Monate alt. Ich habe gebetet. Ich habe mich entschuldigt bei Gott für alles.

Ich merke, dass es Farzaneh schwer fällt darüber zu sprechen und frage sie, ob ich mir noch ein Stück Kuchen nehmen darf.

In Griechenland ist es nicht mehr schwierig. Wir haben eine Jause bekommen. Pampers, Schuhe, eine Jacke, weil es sehr kalt war und unsere Kleidung nass. Alle helfen mir. Wir sind in den Zug gestiegen. Ich habe geglaubt nach Deutschland. Alle haben gesagt Deutschland, Deutschland. Dann haben wir auf Farsi gehört, wir sind in Otriš (Österreich) und Ramin war sehr, sehr müde. Meine Kinder haben geweint, auch sie waren müde. Mahnaz war krank. Ihnen war sehr kalt. Wir mussten sie immer tragen, es war sehr anstrengend und dann haben wir gesagt, wir bleiben. Wir sind aus dem Zug ausgestiegen und es war gut.

Mittlerweile ist Farzanehs Familie ins Zimmer gekommen. Ramin beginnt den Rucksack auszupacken und räumt die Lebensmittel in einen der großen Schränke. Das ältere Mädchen holt eine Schachtel Pralinen. Farzaneh erklärt, dass sie jeden Tag eine davon essen dürfe. Sie beginnt das kleinere Mädchen zu stillen. Die ältere Tochter setzt sich zu uns, öffnet die Pralinenschachtel und sucht sich eine aus. Farzaneh fordert auch Lisa und mich auf, uns eine zu nehmen. Als die Kleine fertig getrunken hat, steht Farzaneh auf und bringt uns einen Teller mit Moosbeeren und Erdbeeren. Es ist nun schon fast vier Uhr und Farzaneh sagt, dass ihr Deutschkurs jetzt immer Freitag

nachmittags im Stadtzentrum stattfinde. Lisa schlägt ihr vor sie dorthin zu begleiten. Farzaneh bietet uns wieder Mittagessen an, zuerst wollen wir ablehnen, aber Lisa fragt, ob sie selbst denn noch etwas essen wolle, bevor wir gehen. Sie sei hungrig antwortet Farzaneh und bringt einen großen Teller mit Reis und gebratenem Hühnerfleisch herein. Während sie Lisa und mich auffordert zu essen, hilft sie ihrer älteren Tochter dabei, ein weißes Kleid anzuziehen. Schlussendlich holt sie noch eine große Schüssel Salat und setzt sich zum Tisch. Wir sprechen Ramin unsere Komplimente für das gute Essen aus. Auf unsere Frage hin, ob wir mit dem Aufräumen oder Abwasch helfen könnten, antwortet Farzaneh, dass Ramin das erledigen würde, während sie und die Kinder beim Deutschkurs sind. Sie bittet uns mit den Kindern schon vor dem Haus zu warten, da sie sich noch umziehen wolle. Wir verlassen das Haus und treten in den sonnendurchfluteten Innenhof. Ramin hat das jüngere Mädchen bereits in einen Kinderwagen gesetzt. Wenig später kommt Farzaneh, die nun sehr modisch gekleidet ist und ihre neue schwarze Lederjacke trägt, die sie uns letzte Woche gezeigt hat.

Dinge von Bedeutung

Als Lisa und ich den geschotterten Hof betreten, kommt Ramin uns entgegen. Er hatte sich vor dem Haus gegenüber mit ein paar Männern unterhalten. Wir begrüßen einander und steigen zusammen die Treppe hinauf. Farzaneh empfängt uns an der Haustür und geleitet uns in ihr Zimmer. Ihre jüngste Tochter sitzt bereits auf dem Teppich, und wir lassen uns neben ihr nieder. Das Mädchen beginnt auf Lisa und mir herumzutollen, weshalb Ramin sie mit in die Küche nimmt.

Farzaneh und ihre Familie haben Pakistan mit nur zwei Rucksäcken verlassen. Zwei Rucksäcke gefüllt mit Kleidung, Windeln für Mahnaz, nützlichen Sachen wie zum Beispiel einem Handtuch, aber auch mit einigen Gegenständen von besonderer Bedeutung. Farzaneh steht auf und holt ein seidiges, weißes Tuch hervor. Es ist sehr zart und beinahe durchsichtig, und von filigraner Spitze umrahmt. Farzaneh trägt es zu besonderen Anlässen. Das Tuch scheint sehr wertvoll für sie zu sein und eine wichtige Erinnerung an Pakistan.

Frauen tragen schöne Kleidung und so ein Kopftuch. Ich habe alles selber gemacht (*die Spitze*) und sie zahlen. Es ist eine sehr, sehr schwierige Arbeit, aber das Kopftuch ist trotzdem nicht teuer.

Farzaneh zeigt uns, wie man das Kopftuch richtig aufsetzt. Ein paar Haare schauen hervor. In Österreich ist das nicht so streng, sagt sie. Oft legt sich Farzaneh ihren Schal

nur sehr locker über Kopf und Schultern. Wenn nur andere Frauen anwesend sind oder die eigene Familie, nimmt sie es oft auch ganz ab.

Wenn wir Farzaneh treffen, trägt sie immer ein Kopftuch, das lose auf ihrem Haar liegt. Während des Gesprächs rutscht ihr der schmale Schal manchmal vom Kopf und bleibt auf ihren Schultern liegen.

Zuhause mit der Familie habe ich kein Kopftuch. Dieses Kopftuch (jetzt) ist sehr, sehr klein. Ich habe viele verschiedene Tücher, aber hier ist es nicht so streng. Ich kann selber entscheiden. Vor anderen Frauen ist es egal. Aber manchmal in Afghanistan sagen alte Frauen: „Nein, nein, nein du musst immer ein Kopftuch tragen!" Sie schimpfen. Alle sagen, ich muss eine *Chadori* anziehen. Immer. Ich muss. Aber ich möchte sein wie ein Vogel – frei.

Farzaneh beschreibt mir eine Burka, die den Großteil des Gesichts verdeckt. Als ich ihr erzähle, dass es in Österreich seit Neuestem ein Verbot gibt, das Gesicht in der Öffentlichkeit zu verhüllen, lacht sie laut auf.

Ich muss. – Ich darf nicht*, sagt sie und lacht.*

Farzaneh hat auch Schmuck aus Pakistan mitgenommen. Heute trägt sie goldene Ohrringe. Auch zwei goldene Ringe hat sie mitgenommen. Ramin hat sie zu ihrer Hochzeit für sie gekauft.

In Österreich haben wir kein Geld. Wir treffen einen Mann und verkaufen ihm die Ringe. Wir haben ein bisschen Geld bekommen, 300 € ungefähr. Die Ohrringe verkaufe ich nicht, ich mag sie sehr. Ich habe nur dieses Paar, nicht viele.

Ich frage Farzaneh ob sie traurig ist, weil sie die Ringe verkaufen musste.

Ja, ich bin traurig, manchmal. Aber es ist egal. Mit meinen Töchtern ist alles gut, mit Ramin ist alles gut, mir geht es gut. Ich glaube das ist das Wichtigste. Dass wir alle gesund und sicher sind. Alles andere ist egal. Viel Geld, aber alle sind krank, das ist nicht gut.

Auf die Frage nach Kleidung, die sie aus Afghanistan mitgebracht hat, steigt Farzaneh auf einen Stuhl und holt einen Koffer vom Kasten herunter. Sie stellt den Koffer auf den Tisch und holt einen weißen Plastiksack heraus, in dem sich ein fein säuberlich zusammengelegtes blaues Kleid befindet. Sie breitet die weiße Hose, den paillettenbesetzten blauen Rock und das Oberteil vor uns auf dem Teppich aus. Wir

bestaunen das schöne Gewand und erkundigen uns, wann es getragen wird. Farzaneh erzählt, dass sie es von Ramin bekommen hat und es sehr teuer war, sie würde es nur zu sehr speziellen Anlässen tragen, zum Beispiel zu einer Hochzeit.

Sehr, sehr schöne Kleidung. Sie ist sehr teuer und auch wichtig für mich. In Afghanistan gibt es keine Partys, manchmal eine Hochzeit. Hier kann ich sie an einem besonderen Tag tragen, wenn Ramadan fertig ist, auf einem Geburtstag oder zum Beispiel, wenn du heiratest.

Wir lachen, denn ich glaube das wird noch eine Weile dauern. In Österreich hat Farzaneh die schöne Kleidung in den letzten eineinhalb Jahren noch nie getragen. Sie packt sie vorsichtig wieder in Seidenpapier ein und legt sie in den Koffer, der wieder ganz oben auf den Schrank kommt.

Der Anruf

Unser geplantes Treffen an diesem Tag mussten wir verschieben. Ich telefoniere mit Farzaneh und sie klingt, als hätte sie geweint. Ich frage sie, wie es ihr geht, ob etwas passiert sei.

Nicht gut, gar nicht gut. Ich bin sehr krank. Ich glaube ich bin schwanger. Ich weiß nicht, was ich tun soll.

Ihre Stimme zittert.

Glaube

Ich begrüße Lisa und wir gehen im Nieselregen auf die Treppe zu. Im Hinaufsteigen besprechen wir noch einmal, auf welche Themen wir uns heute konzentrieren wollen. Wir treffen Ramin wie so oft in der Küche an und begrüßen ihn. Er hat das Essen für seine Töchter zubereitet. Weil Ramadan ist, nimmt er selbst nichts zu sich. Er hat zum letzten Mal um zwei Uhr nachts getrunken und gegessen, wie er uns – nicht ohne Stolz – erzählt. Wir gehen weiter in ihr Zimmer, wo uns Farzaneh freundlich begrüßt und uns bedeutet auf dem Teppich Platz zu nehmen.

Farzaneh zeigt uns den "Muhr" (Gebetsstein). Es handelt sich dabei um ein Stück gepresste Erde. Beim Beten wird die Stirn daraufgelegt, denn die Erde ist heilig und

rein. Farzaneh bewahrt den Muhr zusammen mit einem kleinen Teppich in ihrem Regal auf. Zuerst dachten wir beides wäre aus Afghanistan.

In Österreich gibt es kleine Moscheen. Manchmal nur ein Zimmer oder zwei. Ramin hat den Muhr und den Teppich in der Moschee bekommen, nicht gekauft. Wir beten hier in diesem Zimmer. Nur manchmal zum Beispiel zu Ramadan gehen wir in die Moschee. Wir beten drei Mal am Tag – am Morgen vor Sonnenaufgang, einmal am Nachmittag zwischen ein und sechs Uhr, und einmal am Abend, nach Sonnenuntergang. Ein Gebet dauert ungefähr fünfzehn Minuten.

Farzaneh verlässt kurz den Raum und kommt mit einem Teller voller Kuchenstücken zurück, den sie vor uns auf den Teppich stellt. In einer Thermoskanne gießt sie grünen Tee auf und reicht uns Tassen. Ihre Tochter setzt sich zu ihr auf den Schoß und Farzaneh gießt auch sich Tee ein. Da auch sie selbst trinkt, spreche ich sie darauf an, ob nur Ramin faste. Lisa hat mir kurz vor unserem Gespräch erzählt, dass Farzaneh wieder schwanger ist, sie aber nicht weiß, ob sie das Kind behalten möchte. Mit meiner Frage möchte ich Farzaneh indirekt die Gelegenheit geben, dieses Thema anzusprechen. Sie erklärt uns, dass sie fasten sollte, es aber heuer nicht kann, da sie krank sei und der Verzicht auf Essen und Trinken die Gesundheit zusätzlich belaste. Dabei lächelt sie Lisa an, wie um ihr zu verstehen zu geben, dass sie eigentlich von ihrer Schwangerschaft spricht.

Schwangere, Kinder, kranke oder alte Menschen sind vom Fasten ausgenommen, da es ihre Gesundheit beeinträchtigen könnte. Interessant finde ich, dass das Fasten im Ramadan nicht nur ein körperlicher Verzicht ist, sondern auch die strikte Vermeidung von beispielsweise übler Nachrede, Verleumdung, Lügen und Beleidigungen miteinschließt.

Über das Thema des Fastens kommen wir auch allgemein auf Religion zu sprechen. Da Farzaneh daran glaubt, dass ihr Verhalten auf der Erde darüber entscheidet, ob sie nach dem Tod in den Himmel oder die Hölle – im Islam Dschanna oder Dschahannam – kommt, ist Religion ein bestimmendes Element ihres Lebens. Lisa stellt darauf die Frage, ob wir beide, da wir nicht muslimisch sind, denn auch in den Himmel kommen könnten. Darauf antwortet Farzaneh, dass jede Religion, jedes Land seine eigenen Regeln habe, aber dass das Wichtigste sei, dass man versuche ein guter Mensch zu sein. Das sei überall gleich. Wir würden zum Beispiel Gutes tun, weil wir ihr helfen. Im Gegensatz dazu sind beispielsweise Abtreibungen für Muslime haram, also ein schlechtes Verhalten, das sie näher zu Dschahannam bringt.

Ich frage Farzaneh, wie sie sich vorstellt, dass ihre Kinder Religion praktizieren sollen, zum Beispiel, ob sie ein Kopftuch tragen sollen.

Manchmal frage ich Manoush, ob sie ein Kopftuch tragen will. Aber sie sagt nein. Nein, Mama, sagt sie. Das ist nicht normal. Meine Freundinnen lachen. Sie sagt zuhause ok, aber nicht draußen.

Farzaneh lacht. Die Haltung ihrer Tochter scheint kein großes Problem für sie zu sein.

Es ist mir nicht so wichtig. Wichtig ist, dass meine Kinder gute Menschen sind, dass sie fleißig sind und in die Schule gehen. Später sollen sie selbst entscheiden, was sie möchten.

Die Schwangerschaft

Seit Tagen ist es schwül und heiß. Das Gewitter von letzter Nacht ist gerade abgeklungen. Ich treffe Lisa am Holzzaun, an dem wir immer unsere Fahrräder absperren. Wir durchqueren den geschotterten Innenhof und betreten das Häuschen über die rostige Metalltreppe. Im Gang streifen wir unsere Schuhe ab, und Ramin kommt uns aus der Küche entgegen, um uns zu begrüßen. Er bittet uns in ihr Zimmer zu gehen. Da die Tür geschlossen ist, stehe ich etwas unschlüssig davor und klopfe. Als Ramin uns erneut auffordert hineinzugehen öffne ich die Türe ohne auf ein Zeichen von drinnen abzuwarten. Mir fällt auf, dass wir nie anklopfen, bevor wir durch Ramin's und Farzaneh's Wohnungstür treten. Wir begrüßen Farzaneh und nehmen auf dem Teppich Platz. Heute liegt eine blaue Fleecedecke auf dem roten Teppich. Ramin und das kleine Mädchen setzten sich an den Tisch. Während wir uns mit Farzaneh unterhalten, bereitet Ramin seiner Tochter das Frühstück zu. Auch Farzaneh lässt sich neben uns auf dem Boden nieder. Wir sprechen über die Hitze und sie beklagt sich, dass sie keinen Ventilator in ihrem Zimmer habe. Sie habe immer das Fenster offen, weil es so heiß sei, aber die Zimmer in dem großen Haus gegenüber hätten Ventilatoren.[3] Ich schaue zu den Fenstern und wundere mich warum sie vollflächig mit matter Folie beklebt sind. Lisa holt einen Schnellhefter aus ihrer Tasche. Sie hat einen Text mitgebracht, den wir mit Farzaneh lesen und besprechen wollen. Diesmal hat sie über Schwangerschaft geschrieben. Es ist ein sehr wichtiges und gleichzeitig sehr schwieriges Thema für Farzaneh und ich habe den Eindruck, dass sie vor mir nicht gerne darüber spricht. Da zwischen Lisa und ihr mehr Vertrauen besteht, kann auch

3 Die Ventilatoren wurden nicht von der Heimleitung zur Verfügung gestellt, sie wurden entweder gespendet oder privat gekauft (Auskunft der Heimleiterin).

nur sie das Thema aufbringen. Gemeinsam lesen wir den Text, den Lisa geschrieben hat:

Die Entscheidung, ein Kind zu bekommen oder nicht, kann nie leichtfertig getroffen werden, doch besonders für Farzaneh ist es eine schwierige. Farzaneh hat bereits zwei kleine Töchter und so sehr sie sie auch liebt, sehnt sie sich gleichzeitig wieder nach etwas mehr persönlicher Freiheit. Schon öfter hat sie mir erzählt, dass sie sich sehr auf den Zeitpunkt freut, wenn beide Töchter regelmäßig in den Kindergarten gehen und sie selbst etwas unabhängiger ist und vielleicht sogar ein paar Stunden arbeiten kann. Zudem ist ihre Zukunft noch unsicher. Farzaneh weiß nicht, ob sie in Österreich bleiben kann, ob sie einen positiven Bescheid bekommt und mit ihrer Familie in eine eigene Wohnung ziehen kann. Beinahe zwei Jahre ist die Familie bereits hier und wohnt zu viert in einem Zimmer. Ein Baby in diese Ungewissheit zu bringen ist eine zusätzliche Herausforderung, macht alles noch komplizierter. Die Vorstellung, mit einem Säugling auf engstem Raum relativ mittellos zusammenzuleben, wird zusätzlich überschattet von der Vorstellung mit einem Neugeborenen in ein Land zurückzukehren zu müssen, das von Krieg und Terror gezeichnet ist und wo zudem noch Angst vor der eigenen Familie besteht. Vor allem bei Ramin kommt darüber hinaus der Gedanke auf, dass dieses Baby auch ein Sohn sein könnte. Söhne sorgen in der afghanischen Gesellschaft für die Absicherung der Eltern im hohen Alter und haben unter anderem darum in der Familie besonderen Stellenwert. Sobald, das Baby da ist, sagt Farzaneh, ist das Geschlecht aber eigentlich egal. Man hält es in den Armen und liebt es, egal ob Sohn oder Tochter.

Der Text enthält einige schwierige Worte und thematisiert Farzanehs prekäre Situation sowie die Möglichkeit einer Abtreibung. Sie weiß, dass in Österreich im Gegensatz zu Afghanistan Abtreibungen möglich und legal sind, trotzdem kann sie es nicht wirklich in Betracht ziehen.

Im Islam ist eine Abtreibung „haram", verboten, vor allem wenn das Kind gesund ist. „Ich glaube es ist sehr arm" *sagt Farzaneh. Sie legt eine Hand auf ihren Brustkorb und imitiert das Schlagen eines Herzens.*

Sie erzählt uns, dass es ihren Töchtern viel leichter fiele ihre Vorstellungen gegen österreichisches Denken einzutauschen. Ihr selbst falle dies manchmal noch schwer, weil sie schon erwachsen sei. Aber ihre Töchter werden Österreicherinnen sein, wenn sie größer sind, sagt Farzaneh. Es beeindruckt mich, wie sie dies reflektiert und gleichzeitig ärgere ich mich sehr über unsere Gesellschaft, die ihr vermittelt, erfolgreiche Integration bedeute, sich „österreichisch" zu verhalten und zu denken und alles abzulegen, was sie bisher als richtig empfunden hat. Es gefällt Farzaneh, dass in Österreich Männer bei

der Geburt dabei sein dürfen. In Afghanistan haben Männer nur wenig Ahnung davon, wie schwer und anstrengend eine Geburt ist. Sie erzählt uns, dass die Frauen oft am Tag nach der Niederkunft von ihren Ehemännern aufgefordert werden, an die Hausarbeit zu gehen. Meist werden die Kinder zu Hause geboren. Alte Frauen, die schon viele Geburten miterlebt haben, helfen so gut sie können. Farzaneh fragt, ob wir eine Pause machen wollen und zieht Übungsblätter aus einer Mappe, auf denen sie ihre Hausaufgabe für den Deutschkurs gemacht hat. Sie bittet Lisa die Antworten mit ihr durchzugehen. Erst da fällt mir wieder ein, dass Lisa ursprünglich wöchentlich mit Farzaneh Deutsch gelernt hat. Diese Übungsstunden, die von unseren Treffen in der letzten Zeit zurückgedrängt wurden, fordert Farzaneh damit wieder ein. Das kleine Mädchen tanzt indes durch das Zimmer zu arabischen Musikvideos auf YouTube.

Die Bombe

Lisa erkundigt sich nach dem Fahrrad-Unterricht. Wir treffen uns heute wieder um acht Uhr morgens, weil Farzaneh an einem Fahrrad-Kurs teilnimmt, der um zehn Uhr beginnt. Sie erzählt, dass sie bereits einmal dort war und es sehr schwierig ist. Es ist ihr wichtig zu betonen, dass Frauen in Afghanistan weder Auto, noch Fahrrad oder Motorrad fahren, sie das jetzt aber lernen möchte und auch ihre Tochter schon sehr gut Fahrradfahren kann. Farzaneh erzählt uns von einer Autobombe, die in Kabul in Luft gegangen ist. Sie hält ein Smartphone in der Hand und zeigt uns Bilder von Verletzten auf Facebook. Das Thema scheint sie sehr zu beschäftigen, denn sowohl sie als auch ihr Mann kommen während unseres Gespräches immer wieder darauf zurück.

Farzaneh seufzt und schüttelt den Kopf.
Afghanistan, nicht gut, nicht gut. Gestern in Kabul – BUMM – eine Bombe. Überall auf Facebook, schau.

Mit ihren Händen imitiert sie eine Explosion. Farzaneh holt ihr Handy und beginnt uns Bilder zu zeigen, von Rauchschwaden und Trümmerhaufen, von Panik und Chaos, von schwer Verletzten und Toten. Bilder, wie diese sind keine Seltenheit, sagt sie.

Immer, immer. Mindestens einmal im Monat. Immer. Es ist normal.

Die Bombe war in einem Auto. Viele Menschen sind tot. Männer, Frauen, Kinder auch. Es passiert oft, aber gestern sind sehr viele Menschen gestorben. Ramin hat Facebook, wir schauen immer die Fotos an. Auf Facebook ist immer alles sehr schnell. News.

Ich frage nach, ob Farzaneh einen Facebook-Account besitzt. Sie erzählt uns, dass das für Frauen in Afghanistan nicht üblich ist und sie kein Foto von sich auf ihrem Profil haben möchte. Dafür hat Ramin mehrere Accounts, die sie gemeinsam nutzen. Farzaneh erzählt, dass ihre Familie zuhause in Afghanistan sehr konservativ und altmodisch sei. Farzaneh selbst habe daher auch manchmal das Gefühl eher altmodisch zu sein, möchte aber gern modern sein – modern denken, modern leben, sich modern kleiden. Lisa fällt auf, dass Farzaneh auch auf den Familienbildern, die an der Wand über der grauen Couch hängen, nicht zu sehen ist. Farzaneh wird grundsätzlich nicht gerne fotografiert. Wir bieten ihr an, dass nächste Mal ein Familienfoto von ihnen allen zusammen zu machen. Farzaneh kommt wieder auf die Bombe zu sprechen.

Es ist gut, dass meine Familie im Dorf ist, nicht in Kabul. Aber ich weiß nicht, wie es ihnen geht. Wir haben keinen Kontakt mehr.

Große Bombenanschläge passieren in der Stadt, wo viele Menschen auf engem Raum zusammenkommen. Es erhöht die Anzahl der Opfer – auf belebten Straßen, auf öffentlichen Plätzen, bei Geschäften oder Moscheen oder eben im Diplomatenviertel. Trotzdem ist es im Dorf nicht immer sicher. Manchmal kommen die Taliban oder der Daesh in die Dörfer. Daesh, wie ich herausfinde, ist eine andere Bezeichnung für den IS (Islamischen Staat), entstanden aus einem arabischen Akronym. Die Bezeichnung Daesh jedoch, ist weniger neutral als IS und hat eine abwertende, negative Bedeutung.

Taliban gibt es schon lange, aber jetzt Daesh. Der Daesh kommt in Dörfer, die Menschen müssen gehen oder sie töten sie. Sie schießen.

Farzaneh scheint wenig Unterschied zwischen den Taliban und den Daesh zu machen, warum auch. Im Endeffekt handeln beide terroristischen Organisationen sehr ähnlich.

Farzaneh steht auf und hilft ihrer kleinen Tochter sich an den Tisch zu setzen, um zu frühstücken. Ramin setzt sich zu ihr und auch er kommt auf den Anschlag in Kabul zu sprechen, aber wir verstehen nicht recht, was er uns sagen will. Erst später erfahren wir, dass die Bombe vor der deutschen Botschaft gezündet wurde. Ramin erzählt, dass Pakistan die Daesh unterstützt, indem es die Terroristen ausbildet, die dann in Kabul die Bomben zünden. Es handelt sich dabei meist um Autobomben oder Selbstmordattentäter. Auch er zeigt uns Videos und Bilder auf Facebook. Betroffen zeigt er uns ein Bild, auf dem das Kind zu sehen ist, das neben der blutüberströmten Leiche der Mutter kauert und weint. Es erschüttert mich, die Bilder der Verletzten und Toten zu sehen, aber gleichzeitig scheint mir alles so unwirklich, dass ich das Gefühl nicht richtig an mich heranlassen kann. Farzaneh, die kurz das Zimmer verlassen hatte, kommt zurück und bringt einen Teller mit Kuchenstücken herein,

den sie vor uns auf den Teppich stellt. In einer Thermoskanne gießt sie grünen Tee auf und reicht uns Tassen.

Wir sprechen kurz über den Anschlag in Manchester und über verschiedene Anschläge in Europa. Farzaneh hat bereits davon gehört. Sie fragt nach dem Namen des Landes. Sie schüttelt den Kopf, als könnte sie die Gedanken abschütteln.

Schwierig, auch in Europa. In anderen Ländern, nicht in Österreich, aber es ist sehr in der Nähe. Es kann überall sein. In Deutschland wollten sie 50 Personen mit dem Flugzeug zurückbringen nach Kabul. Aber sie haben es gestoppt. Sie haben die Bombe gesehen und Stopp. Jede Woche werden Personen zurück nach Afghanistan gebracht. Sie haben einen negativen Bescheid. Eine Freundin, in einem anderen Heim, ist seit 21 Monaten hier in Österreich. Nach 21 Monaten bekommt sie einen Termin, sie muss noch ein Monat warten. Ich bin 19 Monate hier. Ich glaube nach zwei Jahren bekomme ich auch einen Termin. Ich weiß nicht, aber ich hoffe, ich bekomme einen Brief mit einem Datum für mein Interview.

Da es schon fast halb zehn und für uns bald Zeit zu gehen ist, versuche ich den heißen Tee in großen Schlucken zu trinken. Ich möchte nicht unhöflich sein und die volle Tasse stehen lassen. Während Farzaneh sich mit Ramin auf Farsi austauscht, verlässt Lisa, die die Aufnahme auf ihrem Tablet bereits gestoppt hatte, kurz den Raum. Ich versuche weiter die Tasse zu leeren, aber der Tee ist so heiß, dass ich nur kleine Schlucke machen kann.

Die Anzahl der Todesopfer des Anschlages hat sich inzwischen (eine Woche später) auf 150 erhöht, über 300 Menschen sind schwer verletzt worden. Während ich die Berichte in verschiedenen Zeitungen lese, steigen mir die Tränen in die Augen, bei so viel unnötigem Leid und Ungerechtigkeit. Und es erschreckt mich, dass ich von dem Anschlag nichts mitbekommen hatte, bevor mir Farzaneh davon erzählt hat, während ich nach vergleichsweise kleinen Terroranschlägen in Europa nur wenige Stunden später überall Mitleidsbekundungen lese.

So beschreibt übrigens das Außenministerium in Österreich, die momentane Situation in Afghanistan für ÖsterreicherInnen und spricht höchste Reisewarnungen aus, während laufend afghanische Familien in ein anscheinend „sicheres" Land zurückgeschickt werden. (https://www.bmeia.gv.at/reise-aufenthalt/reiseinformation/land/afghanistan/)

Was seitdem geschah…

Im März 2017 haben Farzaneh, Hannah und ich die Arbeit an diesem Text begonnen. Seitdem ist über ein Jahr vergangen, in dem sich viel verändert hat. Farzanehs Sohn Mahan ist im Dezember gesund zur Welt gekommen.

Wir haben das Interview gemacht. Sie haben gefragt: Warum kommst du nach Österreich? Was machst du in Österreich? Wir haben ihnen alles erzählt, alle Fragen beantwortet. Und jetzt müssen wir warten bis mein Bescheid kommt.[4]

Wir sprechen auch über Anonymisierung und Lisa hat sich ein paar Namen aufgeschrieben, die wir vorschlagen. Die Namen amüsieren Farzaneh; einige davon findet sie sehr schön, andere hingegen kennt sie nicht. Die ganze Situation hat eine gewisse Komik. Ich stelle mir vor, wie mir jemand Namen mit demselben Anfangsbuchstaben vorschlägt und ich mich dann zum Beispiel zwischen Helga, Herta und Henriette entscheiden muss. Ich bitte Farzaneh die Namen die sie gut findet für uns in Farsi aufzuschreiben. Das Schriftbild sieht sehr schön aus und sie schreibt auch Hannah und Lisa für uns auf.

Letztendlich entscheiden wir uns für fünf persische Namen, die wir in unserem Text verwenden, die Bedeutungen stammen teilweise von Farzaneh und teilweise aus dem Internet.

Farzaneh – jemand ist sehr hübsch und klug – *die Weise*
Ramin – viele reiche Menschen heißen Ramin, der Name bringt Glück; *bekannt auch als Name eines persischen Prinzens*
Manoush – *liebe Sonne*
Mahnaz – *kleiner Mond*
Mahan – *Gabe des Mondes*

Vielen Dank für deine Offenheit und dein Vertrauen!
Vielen Dank, dass du deine Geschichte mit uns geteilt hast!
Vielen Dank, dass wir dich und deine Familie kennenlernen durften!

4 Seitdem sind Monate ohne Antwort, ohne Bescheid vergangen.

A Restless Story

Axel Mölg

What did I know about Abdul so far, except for his name? Not very much. I was told that he was Syrian, about 30 years of age and that he spoke some German. That's it. I admit that I was anxious. Who is this guy? What will it be like to work with him? Will we get along with each other? What was his story and why was he here in Austria? So many things I didn't know. But then again, to answer these questions was what I was supposed to do: to shed light upon the unknown, to give this stranger a face, to tell his story. It seemed to be an easy and overwhelming task at the same time. But first, let's see what put me into that position. The revolution in Syria started in 2011 and, against all expectations, the fights are still raging and the regime is still in charge. The political situation is more complex and the humanitarian catastrophe worse than ever before. I use the term *revolution* because for Abdul it's important to point out that it had started as exactly this and not as a civil war, as he would tell me later on. In Austria the migration flows reached their peak in 2015 and at that time many refugees arrived daily via the so called *Balkan Route*. Since then I have wanted to *help* and to contribute my share, but I could never motivate myself enough to actually take that step. I have always been concerned mainly with my own things and so it has been the easier way not to get involved. Within the scope of a university project I could finally get in touch with somebody of that anonymous, grey mass we call *the refugees*.

The first time we met at the *Treibhaus*, which is some kind of liberal, pseudo-intellectual bar in Innsbruck. It's a nice place and I'm glad Abdul suggested it. When you meet with somebody unknown, you somehow always recognise each other intuitively. Therefore, we had no problems to find each other. Abdul is a middle-sized guy with a serious looking face and short black hair, naturally, and he was smoking a cigarette. We sat inside since it was relatively cold outside for April. This first meeting was just about getting to know each other, so no recordings yet. The beginning of our conversation was a bit awkward. It was that kind of introductory small talk nobody cares about but everybody does. But every conversation has to have its beginning, I guess. Then Abdul asked about the project's procedure and its intended outcome. Now that was a good question, as I had no precise idea myself and nor did our professors. I told him that there would be meetings with recorded interviews and that I would write some sort of text afterwards. He was confused and I could tell that he was definitely not satisfied with that answer. So I promised him to ask my professors for clarification at our

next course meeting, though I knew I wouldn't gain much new information. Then a fellow project member, who joined me for this first meeting, asked him straight away about the current political situation in Syria. I wouldn't have dared to touch such a hot topic at this point, but Abdul was quite pleased and we talked about that for almost an hour until we went home. I didn't really know what to make of this meeting. I don't even know if I liked Abdul, though I'm sure I didn't *dislike* him. There was a certain distance between us, but that was exciting. Above all, he made one thing clear: he wanted to talk and he meant business. That made me look forward to our next meeting.

The next time we met at the *Treibhaus* again. It was a warm, beautiful day and we were sitting in the outdoor area of the bar. Cheerful chattering surrounded us. I had decided to start talking about Abdul's early life, maybe about topics like childhood, parents or education. This approach seemed logical and rather subtle at the same time. So I learned about Abdul's early life.

Abdul was born and raised in Syria. He grew up amongst seven siblings, though it's less common to have that many kids in Syria nowadays. The family belonged to the middle class and lived in its own house. Interestingly, every child had its own little flat, while the parent's flat functioned as the family's meeting point where they used to eat, talk and do all other social activities. Abdul's father owned a business, while his mother did the housekeeping and cared for the kids.

Abdul attended school for twelve years and after that he started a Bachelor's degree at a University. While he was studying, he learned how to work with computers. He developed skills in web designing and networking, but also in the technical fields of computers. A positive side effect of that occupation was the improvement of his English skills, as this is the dominant language in this field. Especially this fact turned out to be of invaluable importance in his later life as a refugee. Abdul used to work during his study. He didn't have to work since his parents supported him and he could live in their house, but he wanted to be as independent as possible. This desire for independence and self-determination is one of Abdul's strongest and noticeable traits, as I would learn later. Therefore he took different side jobs.

What Abdul had told me so far sounded like a common life as it could have happened anywhere: he had a happy childhood, was well educated and ambitiously working for his future. He was talking about all that willingly, almost without any hesitation. Our conversation was pleasant, though still somewhat distant, and we came across a variety of topics. We talked about the vegetation and water supply of the city he had lived in, relationships in families or the housing situation while studying. When we talked about female professions, it was important for Abdul to point out that women were allowed to work in Syria, contrary to popular opinion in Austria. Women would also hold public positions in ministries and

in the parliament, but there were typical and rather untypical female professions. Bus driver was an example for an uncommon female job and Abdul told me that there had been only one female bus driver within the last five years in his city. I answered that the situation in Innsbruck probably wasn't any different. Thereupon he looked at me in disbelief and answered: "In Innsbruck? There are more than ten!" He said it in a way like knowing the number of female bus drivers in a city was something natural, and that still makes me smile.

The Syrian Revolution started while Abdul was doing his Bachelor's degree. Military service was compulsory in Syria and when he would have finished his degree he should have served. At this point the conflict hadn't reached its climax yet, but it was the time of big demonstrations and people uprising against the regime. Soldiers were ordered to fight and even shoot protestors and if they didn't obey, chances were high that they were shot themselves by their superiors. That was the reason why so many soldiers deserted from the regular army and formed various rebel groups. Abdul never could have killed anybody, especially no protestors he sympathised with. Luckily, he had the option to start a Master's degree and so postpone the military service. He was one of the last who could take this opportunity, as the government soon after closed this loophole in need of soldiers. In the following period he studied for his degree and worked for a big company. This was a tough time for everyone in Syria. But for Abdul it was a happy one at once, since he married and together they moved into an apartment into the outskirts of the city he lived in. Shortly after their marriage, his wife gave birth to a girl. This should have been the happiest time in their lives, but the unstable and dangerous situation surrounding them soon abandoned this illusion.

When Abdul finally left his country two years later, this was due to several reasons. Firstly, he would soon have finished his Master's degree and then have to join the army, and this time there would be no further possibility for postponement. Secondly, he had posted a comment critical of the government and its policies on a social media platform, for which he got reported to the police. This critique was not of high importance or impact for the public opinion, but it was enough for the police to visit Abdul and threaten him and his family with death. Thirdly, he was a member in an activist group which helped refugees from other cities by providing them with the most basic means like food, clothes or medicine. These refugees were often assumed to be family members of rebels who died fighting the government. Therefore, helping them was forbidden and punished severely by the authorities. When one day a member of this activist group got arrested, the others were extremely scared of getting denunciated, since torture was already a common practise to gather information at this time. These three reasons led to the decision that fleeing the country was the safest option for Abdul and, consequently, also for his family. This decision seemed to be the right

one, as a few months later Abdul discovered his name on a leaked list of wanted persons by the ministry of interior.

When I take a look at the reasons why Abdul had to leave Syria, I recognise that his crimes consisted of not serving an army and consequently killing, peacefully fighting injustice and helping people in need. Every humanistic and democratically thinking person would consider these points rather as social duties than misdeeds. This criminalisation of humanity and freedom of speech is basically a fierce violation of human rights itself and it reminds me inevitably of one of the darkest chapters in Austrian history. When I consequently observe and analyse my own environment, the direction we are moving towards makes me feel uncomfortable. I notice prohibitions of begging, bans of demonstrations, surveillance of citizens, restrictions of freedom and expression in public newspapers and TV, preventive detention of refugees in neighbouring countries and the strengthening of nationalistic movements all over Europe. Naturally, all these developments happen in the name of peace and security. If we can't remember our own history and act accordingly, why don't we take a look at the people who arrive nowadays in our country and who flee from a war that has been provoked by a strong manifestation of the above mentioned developments? Probably one has to lose his freedom in order to be able to appreciate it. Thoughts like these keep occupying me now, but since complacency never helps much, one shouldn't stop here for too long.

Another point that concerned me at this time was my unwillingness to dig deeper into highly private matters. Even though I knew that this digging was expected of me and that Abdul agreed to it more or less by participating in this project, I felt restraint. Who am I to ask about one's deepest emotions, about war and death and about being lonely? I told Abdul about my feelings and concerns towards that matter. He said to me, "I used to think that I knew about war. People told me stories and there were also refugees from other countries like Iraq, Lebanon or Sudan in Syria. I thought war was terrible, yes, but at the same time I thought it must be something bearable, as so many people have already endured it. Then I experienced it myself and it was much worse than I could ever have imagined. It's the same with racism. I thought I knew what racism meant. I had read about Martin Luther King and others who had covered this topic, but I only got to know what racism really meant when I experienced it myself. So, I understand your situation and you can ask." While we talked, children were running around and people were sipping coffee and chatting vividly in the sun. The contrast between our discussion topic and our surroundings couldn't have been clearer. After directly addressing this matter, it was easier for me to accept my own knowledge and experience as a starting point, no matter where this may be. That's something you can't change in the short run anyway.

After deciding to leave Syria, the next question for Abdul was where to go. The options were very limited, since most of the neighbouring countries required a visa, which was virtually impossible to obtain for Syrian citizens, the borders were closed for them. In other states, like in Lebanon, the situation for Syrian refugees was horrible as they were exploited and practically used as slaves. After a while also the Lebanon closed its borders for Syrians. Abdul finally organised a ticket for a flight from Lebanon to Khartoum, which is the capital of Sudan, and he was only permitted to enter Lebanon because he had a valid ticket which proved his departure from the country the following day. In Sudan he was permitted to stay for six months.

I find this part of Abdul's story particularly interesting. If we had to establish a connection between flight and Africa, everybody would suggest Africans fleeing the continent. We wouldn't even consider the other way round. Our middle European concept just doesn't correspond to the idea of fleeing to Africa for reasons of safety. I asked Abdul why he didn't go to Europe. He simply said that he didn't want to go to Europe. It was only afterwards that I noticed the immense ignorance implied in my simple question. My train of thought was that all refugees come to Europe, because that is what our media suggests. I didn't realise that we only see and hear mainly about happenings that directly concern ourselves. We don't get to see things we don't care about, and we definitely don't care about refugees *not* coming to Europe. So my Eurocentric thinking first collided with Abdul's simple answer, but after reflecting upon it, I was able to broaden my mind in this context.

It was hot in Khartoum. Abdul was a stranger in this country and so he felt. He already knew poverty from Syria, but here it was different. Here in Sudan people died of starvation. It was also the first time for him to be separated from his family and he longed to see his wife and his little daughter. It would be a long time until they saw each other again. First, Abdul tried to find a job, but the working situation was tough and the unemployment rate high. Therefore, it was impossible to find a job as a foreigner and he soon had to abandon his working ambitions again. Abdul lived on the money he had saved in Syria and on the financial support of his family. Instead, he tried to focus on his education. Since Abdul had absolved all courses at his university , all he needed in order to finish his Master's degree was his thesis. He had already had a concept for his master's thesis, but this was not applicable anymore in Khartoum due to several reasons. So the first thing he needed to do was to find a company that provided him with data he could work on. That was a difficult undertaking and he was beginning to feel desperate about his lack of success. Finally, he contacted an international company that was willing to cooperate with him and share information he needed. This company operated in a field he had worked in before while still in Syria, which was to

Abdul's advantage. Next, he needed to contact his professor at his university and discuss his new thesis idea. It was not easy to communicate via internet, as there was no stable connection in his city in Syria. So Abdul could only talk to his supervisor for several minutes, but she basically agreed on his new master thesis. The whole project was very uncertain and Abdul was doubtful about his chances of success. But as he didn't have any other alternatives, he started to work on his thesis. Progress was slow and working conditions unfavourable. The heat troubled Abdul and he didn't have access to institutions like the university or its library. So he could only work with his computer and the internet, which worked rather poorly and temporarily. After months of tiring effort he finished his thesis. Now the only thing left to do was the defence of his thesis. He contacted his supervisor and the jury and asked them if it was possible to do that procedure via internet, but they refused. For Abdul it was like a slap in the face when he suddenly realised that he had to return to Syria if he wanted to finish his Master's degree. It didn't take him long to decide to return and to take the immense risks associated with that decision. He could have extended his stay in Sudan for another six months, but that would have meant rather postponement than a lasting decision. Abdul's initial attention was to stay in Sudan for a few months and then return to Syria after the revolution had ended. Nobody expected that conflict to last so long. Instead the situation in Syria was more complex and dangerous than ever before and it didn't seem likely that this would change within the following months. Therefore, Abdul decided to turn over a new leaf and to leave Sudan in order to defend his thesis at his university. He informed his family and together they started to make preparations. The arrival in Syria worked out only due to luck and bribery. Two days later he successfully defended his master thesis.

First, this story sounded too extraordinary to be true and some points didn't appear clear to me. I didn't have the feeling that Abdul was dishonest to me, but that he might have withheld certain information. When we discussed these events in our next meetings I discovered my feeling to be confirmed. I understood him well, as his accounts contained sensitive information, which could be interpreted to his disadvantage. Additionally, I still was a stranger to him, though our relationship became closer with each meeting. I was deeply impressed by Abdul's attitude of not giving up, however hopeless and desperate the situation might seem. He seems to have an ever present source of motivation, which keeps him fighting for his future. The question that inevitably arises when I think about such extraordinary stories is 'What would I act like?' Such thought experiments are more speculation, as nobody can exactly predict his actions and reactions in exceptional situations. We tend to have a romanticised and biased image of ourselves and our behaviour in mind, where we act self-confidently and bravely. These imaginations, though, often don't match with reality. But maybe such

mind games are the essential part of texts like this one, as they require a certain degree of empathy to *understand*. When I asked Abdul if the decision to return to Syria had been easy for him, he thought about it for a moment and replied: "It was the most difficult decision in my life. I was aware of the risks, but if I had died, it would have been for a good reason." There's little compromise in these words and it's quite clear what he wanted and what was at stake. A few seconds later he asked me: "What would you have done?"

Abdul was in Syria for only three days. The reunion with his family was short, but the risk of staying longer was too high. Nevertheless, it was an incredible relief to see his parents, wife and little daughter again after such a long and desperate time. They came to the conclusion that the only option left for a safe life and a possible future lies in Europe. So Abdul left Syria again and stayed in exile for another two months, where he organised his flight and waited. It took him another two months to set foot on this middle European country named Austria. He crossed the border and was arrested at a little train station, where he wanted to buy a ticket to Vienna. This detention lasted for two days and in this time he was registered, interviewed and applied for asylum. Then he was brought to the asylum centre in Traiskirchen and after another five days was relocated to Tyrol. There Abdul dwelled in a refugee accommodation with 70 other people and the atmosphere was rather unpleasant. He was perplexed when he learned that he wasn't allowed to work. The idea of being deprived of the possibility to care for himself troubled him. He was used to live and make decisions independently and he didn't want to live on charity. At the same time there was the constant fear for his family, as parts of his city in Syria were being bombed randomly and anybody was being in permanent danger. This feelings of responsibility for his family and own powerlessness were unbearable. An additional burden was the uncertainty. Would he be permitted to stay in Austria? When would they tell him? What would happen if the decision was negative? All these questions and circumstances kept occupying him and as an effect he lost ten kilos of his bodyweight within the first few months. He knew that he needed an occupation, or he would soon live in mental agony like so many others. Abdul was the only one in the refugee accommodation who spoke English. So he started to accompany his housemates to appointments with doctors or authorities. Thus he familiarised himself with the local customs of conversations, appointments and everyday situations in general. As a refugee Abdul was not allowed to take a normal job, so he started to work voluntarily. He learned German quite fast, first only by listening and then by talking with persons he knew. Having contact with Austrians was very helpful for Abdul to improve his German skills. He also participated in a German language course at the BFI, but he quit after one month because progress was little and his language level was clearly higher than that of the other course members.

After living in the first refugee accommodation, another relocation brought Abdul to Innsbruck. There he lived in a refugee accommodation with 240 others and with even less private sphere than before. Abdul's decision for asylum was finally approved after 13 months and this changed his life drastically. He was now allowed to work and so took a part-time job. He also moved out of the refugee accommodation and rented a flat. But most importantly, Abdul could now apply for his family to join him. This turned out to be a complicated and bureaucratic process, but in the end it worked out and Abdul's wife and daughter came to Innsbruck. It took a while until they got accustomed to each other again after almost two years of separation. Especially the relationship with his daughter was difficult at the beginning, since she never really understood why Abdul had left them and she had blamed him for not returning. Only now she is beginning to open up again. One year after their reunion his wife gave birth to a boy.

In order to pursue his career ambitions Abdul applied for a PhD degree at the University of Innsbruck. This application was rejected due to the fact that his Master's degree didn't fulfil the requirements. Instead, he decided to apply for a master course similar to the one he had already completed. So he asked the person in charge at the university via e-mail if he would receive credit for certain courses. She denied any credits without taking into consideration what he had actually done. Further, she refused to meet with Abdul and discuss the matter personally. This *encounter* troubled him and he never started the course. Then he started a master degree but abandoned it after a few months because he discovered that he wasn't very interested in it and that the workload was too heavy. So he postponed his university plans, but is currently thinking about an extra occupational study. He took another part-time job. For more than a year he did the two part-time jobs and then started to work full-time.

For the time being, this is the end of Abdul's journey, though the future remains uncertain. The family received an unlimited permission to stay. Abdul told me that he doesn't know if he has the strength for another new beginning somewhere else. Although this seems hard to believe when I think about his fighting character, I can only guess how much energy he must have invested in the previous years. How could such experiences not have an immense effect on body and mind? At our last meeting I told Abdul a little bit puzzled that I didn't even know his exact age, only that he was in his mid-thirties. He responded: "I got much older within the last few years and I feel much older now than I am. And if you saw a picture of me four years ago you wouldn't believe it was me." Despite the extraordinary story I got told, I am most fascinated by the way Abdul deals with problems and difficult situations. Against the odds he made his way mostly by the means of strong willpower, hard work and willingness to sacrifice. Admittedly, also his impatience and penchant for perfectionism might

have proved useful in that context. He has rarely chosen the easy way and it's no coincidence that he speaks German almost fluently, has a caring family, a degree, a good job and, most important, a future. Additionally, all the activities and projects Abdul is involved in generally aim at helping people who are in similar situations he was in. Besides his work he is involved in other projects for integration and acts as a speaker at events and discussions. The last time we met he told me how difficult it is to understand the locals in Tyrol even if you speak German. Then he handed me a pad which included a kind of Tyrolian-German dictionary written by him and which contained the most important and frequent words for conversation. It was quite extensive and structured and he said that he has absolutely no time for this. A few moments later he told me that he's thinking about presenting these translations via video messages, but doesn't yet know how.

I'm very glad I got to know this restless man. With certainty I could gain very valuable experience and insights through this project and our conversations, and I hope Abdul feels similarly. This text doesn't intend to beautify or glorify anything. It's just a story supplemented by my own perceptions and thoughts. But it's a story as individual as the story of anybody who came to Austria in the last years. And I think that we as a society on the whole only can benefit and succeed if we perceive stories of people individually and not as one collective story.

Different Different But Same

Janine Fingerlos, Saiid

Saiid is a 21-year old young man, who was born in Syria and grew up in the ancient city of Aleppo together with his two younger brothers. He arrived in Achenkirch/Tyrol in September 2015 after he had spent some weeks in a refugee hostel somewhere in the eastern part of Austria. In February this year (2017) he had his first interview with a judge who told him that they were investigating his case. Currently he is still waiting for a response form. Saiid himself explains that he has volunteered to participate in this project about refugee narratives as part of a seminar that is held at the University of Innsbruck because *"[he] wants to help a friend of his and he also wants to express himself. Talking about what has happened in the past and is currently happening to him now in Austria helps him to deal with the situation and makes him more comfortable with it."*

I am a 27-year old English and Biology student who was born and brought up in a tiny Tyrolean village called Achenkirch together with my two younger sisters. I love to travel, am particularly interested in talking to people of different cultural backgrounds and enjoy learning new languages. I enrolled for the class because of its topicality and because of the explosive nature of the subject. I expected to improve my theoretical understanding of life writing, learn about how to construct a refugee narrative and gain more insights about the social importance of corresponding texts in the European context.

We titled our product "*Different different but same",* which refers to the expression "*Same same but different"* commonly used in South East Asia and especially encountered in Thailand among taxi, tuk tuk, bus, motorbike-taxi drivers and those that deal directly with foreigners. It is often to be thought a mistranslation from the Thai expression "*klai klai dtae mai meuan*" which literally translates as "*similar similar but not the same*".

The following pages aim to show our personal, creative writing attempt to co-construct a refugee narrative without complying to the conventions of any traditional literary genre. We met regularly, often more than once a week and usually spent two to three hours together. Our narrative has been compiled from earlier private documents which we carefully revised together. It includes a short-story, an introduction, commented journal excerpts, a text passage which resulted from visual prompts and transcripts of a dialogue about the topic of flirting. "*With our story I want to trigger people to look beyond the plate*" (Saiid, 23 May 2017).

While the final product, a short story, shows a very precise version of material gathered throughout the term, we decided to also include a selection of notes for the story as told on 10 and 23 May 2017 to emphasize the lengthy, yet important process of its making. The following paragraphs reflect jumps from topics during our conversations that were often triggered by certain emotions, connotations or current happenings in Saiid's life. These links between seemingly incoherent pieces of narration are marked in bold.

Notes for story (as told on 10 May 2017)

1. **ISIS story**: A Syrian man not overly devout was caught by ISIS and put in jail because he could not cite the Koran. He was told to learn the Koran by heart. It is not known what happened to the man but Saiid assumes that he was killed.
2. Saiid met this man when he went to a restaurant in Turkey. He exchanged Syrian Lira to every currency they needed for their **travels to Europe**.
3. Saiid's **family** once had a palace in Morocco. They had a factory for making cloth from wool and dying it. The factory belonged to his great-grandfather and employed thousands of people. It was situated in the countryside because it needed lots of space. Unfortunately, when the Syrian and Egyptian president became one and the same person, the factory was shut down and the land was given to farmers in the vicinity. His grandmother told him that it was common for his granddad to bring home jars of gold instead of money. When the factory was shut down, the value of the factory was divided between Saiid's grandfather and his two siblings. They had two big houses in the middle of Aleppo but sold the one which belonged to his grandfather's brother when he died. In their house in Aleppo there are still four apartments and his family is still living there. Saiid's dad owned a factory producing plastic bags. Just recently he went to see if the factory building was still there and discovered that, although all machines had been stolen, the building is still in one piece, which made them very happy. They had a little mall in Aleppo too, but Saiid doesn't know if it still exists or not.
4. A story told to Saiid by his **grandmother**: When Saiid's dad was young, he went to Belgium to do some studies. He never finished them and avoided talking about them to his wife, Saiid's mother. He used to make jokes about his time in Belgium every time Saiid asked about it. He said that he got back to Syria because he had met his wife and they just did not want to be apart anymore. However, one day his grandmother told Saiid that the Belgium government wanted to hire his dad as a spy on his own country and therefore he quit his

studies and came back home. While Saiid seems to believe his grandmother's story, I tell him that I tend to think it may be true in essence but not entirely.

"The Commandos" – 21 days in Turkey

5. When Janine asks me I estimate that the time it takes to **travel** from Izmir on the Turkish coast to the Greece is about 11 hours. "*You have to go back*, " they shout at us, wearing their black masks, standing high above on their huge battleship. Saiid was the one best capable of speaking English; he stood up and shouted: "*We have no food, nothing to drink, we are short on gas and cannot go back*." Silence, nothing but silence after he'd screamed with all the force he could muster. Then this guy turned, looked at him and repeated in very low voice: "*You have to go back*."
6. The **Commandos** destroyed their motor: they had a 2 cylinder motor for 50 people, one of them was destroyed by a member of the *Commando*. They connected a rope to their boat and tried to pull them back into international waters. As they were quite heavy and they went straight against the waves, the rope broke twice. They were told to hold on tight when the Commandos tried a third time. Then, they realized that they had no chance and just dropped the rope and drove away. When they were finally in Greek waters, everyone switched their GPS signal on and called the Greek police for help. They agreed to send their location to the Greek police.
7. "*You see, the island and your **boat** is moving with the island. You never get close*."
8. When the **new boat** arrived I hoped it was not the Commandos again and I was happy to see normal people. "*What do you want*?" I caused some laughter because we just were not in the position to ask what they wanted from us.
9. Got the **boat** from the Turkish Mafia. This was the 3rd time.
   1st time: ended up in jail for 1-2 days because they got caught by the Turkish police.
   2nd time: police came to meeting point, fled to the mountains to hide. It is risky to send police there because people could be hiding anywhere. Saiid fell asleep with his rucksack on his back while hiding in the mountains. When he woke up, only his friend was next to him. All the other people had gone higher up. Meeting point = tourist spot. Next day weekend tourists would come, they met a lady from Aleppo who had some Turkish friends. She gave them food and convinced her friends to take her back to a bus stop.
   2 days Greece, 1 day Serbia, 1 day Macedonia, 1 day Hungary: getting from Serbia to Hungary was the hardest part. The Hungarian government had told their people to tell them where the refugees were coming from and which

route they were taking. If they did so, locals would not have to pay any taxes. "*And suddenly a whole country is looking at you.*"

Notes for story (as told on 23 May 2017)

1. no **religion**, don't want to belong to any country
2. **D. Trump and the king of Saudi Arabia** met recently and signed a 400 billion weapons contract
3. *"I am a person that gets shit on by everyone. I wish I could live all alone, with a cat or a dog. I don't need people. I am tired of people."*
4. **dignity** is important for people
5. *"They [the Austrian **government**] want[s] me to be that way, so I just am. I just sit in the house and take their money. I am not allowed to take any more German courses; they just give in exchange for nothing. I don't care about the papers anymore."*
6. "*Sometimes I think **they** don't want me to make any progress as long as I don't have my papers.*"
7. Halil: "*I can't give you the house but I have work for you. You are disgusting when you just want the house but are not interested in the work."* Halil has worked on a farm and also at the local skiing area throughout the last 15 months. "*All **they** want us to do is work.*"
8. "*With our story I want to **provoke people into looking beyond their plate.***"[1]
9. "*The **journals made me feel a lot closer to you**. It was an intimate experience and I wouldn't want to share it with the public, but I do strongly believe that it changed something between us. I think our relationship changed a lot in the process of writing our daily journals."*
10. We talked about **Kuwait** and the people who still live there. Saiid shows me a video. In this video one can see people being forced to go war. They are not adults. They are kids, teenagers, at the age of 16 to 17. They get caught because they cheated in exams or committed some other minor offences at school. While he was in Aleppo and still studying at university, Saiid always hoped they wouldn't come to recruit him. He said: *"The best that can happen to you is if they don't come to you. It's all you can hope for.*" I ask him if nobody would stand up against them. He smiled at me. I felt like he derided my attempt to understand the situation he had been in. It made me feel bad.
11. He talks about the **Syrian identity cards** that will be invalid soon. *"The govern-*

1 To "look beyond the rim of one's plate" is a translation of the German phrase "über seinen Tellerrand schauen".

ment plans on printing new ones for all the Syrians who stayed in the country. All those who fled, won't have the right to get a Syrian identity card anymore," Saiid explains. "Then *I won't belong to the Syrian country anymore. And I don't belong here either. They make me wait for the papers and I have no information about what is going on behind closed door*s."

12. The Burj Kahlifa was lit in the colours of the French Tricolore when the Bataclan terror attack happened. "*They never lit it in the* ***Syrian colours*** *and thousands of people are dying because of terror attacks each day.*"
13. "*The big problem about this war is that people are in denial of the war. They just want to hear the "pinky dreams". I don't want people to become depressed but I also don't want to hide from the truth.*"

"Different different but same"

"*I never thought about writing down my story. Why would I? It makes me feel funny and special at the same time that we're trying to share bits and pieces of my life with the public. Popstars write autobiographies, soccer players do and also politicians. I wonder if anyone really wants to read about my story. Probably not."*

I shake my head in disbelief. He does it again. He always does it. He always plays personal things down, makes them appear less important than they are. Today, he seems more introverted than usual. He is sitting on what we began to call the *King's chair* some weeks ago. It is the biggest of all rattan furniture on the balcony of my parents' house. It is the largest and covered with cosy cushions. He is facing down, seems to be sad, disappointed and deep in thought. His posture has changed over those last 21 months since we were introduced to each other. He lights a cigarette. Ever since I first met him, he has been smoking but I do realize that lately his smoking has increased considerably.

"*Neither do I need a religion, nor do I want to belong to a country anymore."* I wonder what that could mean? He takes a few more puffs, then Saiid looks up at me. With a sigh he starts to clarify that he was referring to US President Donald Trump, who had just closed a nearly 110 billion dollar arms deal with Saudi Arabia a few hours before we met. He is worried that this will affect Syria and his beloved family who are still living in Aleppo. He always tries to acquaint me with Syrian politics and I honestly don't understand most of it, which I think he secretly also knows. It does not mean that I am not interested in what he has to say. On the contrary, I am astonished about his command of the English language and how he manages to make his points so clear, especially since he learnt English mostly through playing online video games back in Syria.

My mum and our dog *Bacio* join us on the balcony. She usually offers us coffee before she sits down next to us for some minutes to listen to our weekly talks. She thinks it is refreshing to get some new perspective on different political matters. Her presence gives us a break. More, I think it gives me a break. Saiid always seems to be calm and collected. I admire his ability to challenge people to look beyond what they are told by the media. He manages to make people smile or even laugh by telling a few anecdotes about his family, his life in Aleppo or the prejudices he has had to face as a Muslim. This time, however, he talks about something more serious when I come back after I had quickly left them to fetch a cardigan because the sun had set. They are speaking about the terror attack in the Bataclan theatre in Paris a year ago. In November, on Friday 13, three heavily armed gunmen climbed out of a black Volkswagen in front of the theatre while a concert was happening inside. Less than three hours later they were dead, having killed 90 people at the venue and critically injured many others. The UAE reacted and lit the Burj Khalifa in the colours of the French Tricolore. He asks provocatively why they had never thought of lighting the monument in the colours of Syria, a country that is much closer to the UAE; after all, thousands of people die there every day. I can tell my mum is reflecting on what he has just said. He must have realized it too and almost immediately changes to a different topic. Some minutes later we sit outside, still sipping our coffees and bursting out in hearty laughter. We are laughing because Saiid has just made a hilarious comment. He was describing his uncle and aunt's marriage and saying that Saiid's uncle, a devout Muslim, was from Aleppo but had moved to Munich some decades ago, where he also met and married his German, Christian wife. "*Guess what,"* he closes his story, *"he is not exploding all the time."* Once we have recovered from our fits of laughter, my mum gets up and leaves us. I am glad I see him smile again, even though I know it will only be for a short time. Today we will continue to talk a bit more about his flight.

The first time I told her that I don't think that anyone would care about my story I just thought about the readership and how depressing it would be to read about my current thoughts. But then, on the next day, she saw that I was also depressed. I had realized that it was time for people to see what I thought because there are so many stupid things happening in the world. So, I began to think of making readers not depressed but more aware. To be honest is better than just putting on a fake smile and make people read what they want to read. I told Janine. She took a moment and thought about it and agreed, "*That's right.*" She eagerly took out pencil and paper and started to take notes. When I saw her doing so, I wondered if I had said anything important enough for her to write down.

I see no hope for humans. Especially not today. I cannot get out of my mind what has just happened between those two countries. It triggered something in me

when I heard that Saudi Arabia and the US made a weapons deal of 400 billion US-Dollars while I was still asleep. Janine is the first person to whom I speak about this today. I want to explain to her exactly what that weapons deal means to me. It means to me that the bloodshed will never stop and all those problems that KSA and Iran are fighting about are ancient matter originating with one man killing another man and dividing a people into two religions, namely that of the Sunnis and that of the Shia. She looks at me and nods. I see her shaking her head but I doubt that she is really getting my point. Because I was so immersed in what I was saying I just could not stop and explain it further to her. I never think about what I want to say before I meet up with Janine, I never plan anything. It is just that my ideas come naturally when I talk to her. I also do not want to be a hippie who smokes weed and believes he can spread peace because I cannot. All I can do is share a little bit of my own experience. That does not mean that I am right. What I mean with right is the only true story. The point of me sharing all these thoughts with others is that I want to make clear that we Syrians are not people who live in the desert and look after camels.

We were sitting on the balcony and I was smoking a cigarette. Then her mum came and I can't remember what we were talking about but we ended up discussing how Dubai had reacted to the Bataclan theatre terror attack. She explained what I had said to her mother in German. I actually did not mind because it is normal for her to speak in German to her mother. This way you can get to the point faster and make yourself clearer. We are both comfortable with this. Sometimes I also tell my friends something in Arabic while Janine is present. I wondered why they did not put up the flags of other countries like Syria or Iraq where thousands of people die each day. For me all people are equal. It will hurt me the same when a person dies in Syria or in France but it does not seem so for the politicians around the world. I even raised this question in our discussion, because I feel that Janine's mother is a person able to discuss things and she completely agreed with me when I mentioned the constant delays in the processing of my papers and said that I suspected some of the judges were creating delays on purpose to make people want to go back. Sometimes, the delay in the processing of my own papers makes me embarrassed because people close to me keep asking me about the progress I am making in German. Although I don't have my papers yet I have already completed my first German course, which was organized by the local council. I passed the exam with 97%. I hope the problem about my papers will get solved soon so that I can show people what I am capable of. So far, I feel like my hands are bound and I cannot do anything. My days are more boring than anyone can imagine. […]

A feeling of **uselessness** keeps following me. While people seem to perceive me as fully relaxed, I feel at odds with myself. Yesterday, for example I got up at eleven because I had an appointment with Janine for our project at twelve. I brushed my

teeth, washed my face, and made the bed. Just as every morning, I made breakfast and was enjoying it a lot. I usually drink sweet tea before I turn on my PC. I thought about the day before. That was a refreshingly different day. I had to get up early because they had asked me to do some translations. However, I slept too long. I don't know how I could have done so but my friend came and told me that the people I was expected to help were already in the other room and that I should come and see them. So it was funny because they saw that I had just woken up and I was surprised by how many people there were in the kitchen and I was just looking at their faces and they where laughing but, yeah, it's okay to make people laugh, J. I had to be the translator. It took till 4pm and then I asked one of them, a woman, if she give me a lift to the bank and she said she could. So I went to the bank, took some money and then she offered to drive me back to the house and this was really nice from a person that u see for the first time. Afterwards I waited for my friend because he was gonna make some food for us and it's one of my favourite meals. We ate and we spoke a little bit about how things were in Syria and to share some memories. I was taken out of my daydreams when I received a text message saying that Janine was running late.

I feel my days went to **normal** again – **not that much going on** and **just the same things every day**. I don't know if this was because I'm writing about it or it was just coincidence. To be honest I think my days are the same, maybe I get one or two things that I can do in the week and maybe not, but this week everything came at the same time. Well I'm not sad. At least I did something that was not like everyday and that I can write about, so win-win. Actually this writing thing got me to think more about what is happening during my days.

I was very curious what and how much Saiid had written in his journals. He seemed to be annoyed at how his weeks were passing without much happening. At least, as he told me afterwards, this is the impression that he had during the week when we were both writing journals every day . He constantly justifies his daily routine within those records. *"I start to play on my PC till 4am. I know that sounds crazy but I have got nothing to do the next day anyway."* Sometimes, it is obvious that he would like to change his days but he is just missing a task. "*I woke up at 3pm. I hate this. I don't like to wake up that late. I should have got to do something. I should start to go to bed a lot earlier."* […]

Saiid is currently waiting for his papers to be processed. He had his interview with an Austrian judge in February this year and is now, five months later, still waiting for an answer. He told me that, as the days are passing, the outcome of the whole process is becoming more and more irrelevant to him. "*They [the Austrian government] want me to do nothing, so I don't do anything. I sit in my house and let the days go by."* I remember when we compiled our first little booklet to get us

started with our writing, I asked him to organize ten pictures according to the importance which the everyday objects on them had in his life in Austria. Having ranked time above everying else, Saiid explained:

As a refugee I feel that time is really important for me, even if it doesn't look like it, because I don't like to show what time means to me. I have to put more effort into studying so I can catch up with the others and do not have to go to class full with young people and look like their father. In other words, time is really critical for me because in my traditions and all my family they are already finished at 24 or something close of this age. I already wasted too much time with waiting for my papers to come. I am already here in Austria since 18 August 2015, till now I haven't got them. So we get to the point that I have to do so many things in a short time. Therefore time is something really important for me.

He worries about things that bother me too. I am 27 and still studying. He makes me think that maybe I should be finished with my studies by now too. I open my computer and want to check my mails. Before I can even log in, a website with current newsfeed pops up. I begin to read how president Trump and head of state, dictator Kim Jong-un, verbally attack and threaten each other. It makes me worried. I wonder if Saiid has seen those headlines already but then I remember, he is not interested in the news. He never reads any newspapers.

We have a saying in Arabic (that rhymes): "You cannot step in heaven with no people." That means that one's social life is a big thing in my culture, no matter if it concerns friends or family. Back in Syria there was not one day when I didn't meet a friend or see someone. But it is actually quite different here because I feel the meaning of friendship is quite different. I am not saying this about all the people here but because I have seen that friends here are just together when there is fun. There are times when I don't feel so good and could not find a friend to stand next to me. I don't have so much connection with the other refugees (in my house). However, when a friend of mine has got problems I always stand next to them and try to support them as much as I can.

Family is a totally different thing for me. Even in my religion we have got two times a year where all relatives spend three to four days visiting each other. One family part invites the others to come to their place. It works like a circle so that every family member gets to visit all the others. It is about strengthening the family relationship. The older people are sitting together, speaking about random topics and the children play together. The food is usually prepared beforehand and depending on the time of the day it is either a full meal or just dessert. I usually sit next to the older people and listen to what they say. I don't contribute much. I do not usually speak a lot about myself. Sometimes I even avoid it on purpose because there's been many times when I got misunderstood, and not just in Austria. […]

Actually, I am a person that is always like… you know I am a person who don't like to speak about myself but I am always when I am normal, I mean in my normal behaviour. I am a person that people think bad thoughts about because I am too … like a baby, who doesn't have bad thoughts when I say things. Like I say in a pure, honest – what is the word? – let me check it – oh it's innocent, in an innocent way. … The people don't expect this. They are trying to do something bad because they don't expect an innocent person, or like we are in a time that always the innocent person get misunderstanding or misunderstood. So, when I was in the camp, those let's say worker, or employees, when I speak with them normal, they think I want to do something bad because maybe they get the wrong idea. They were working in camps before and met some assholes probably. […] *Well, I get the impression that all of the refugees that I met here in Achenkirch are nice. Maybe I am wrong, but that's how I perceived it so far!* Actually, you got lucky with the people. Like the people here got good refugees. The refugees that are here are nice. I got the first impression here in Austria people understand me better. When I tell you for example, "You are beautiful," I say it because I mean it. But other people think when I say, "You are beautiful," I mean something different. "Does he want something from me?" Like this is an example. This is what I mean with the honest and the misunderstanding. *And you had some problems with that here in Austria? Do you feel that is "typically" Austrian?* No, it's with all the humans. *But you expected Austrians to be different, more open-minded, more understanding?* Yes, a little bit. Like it is also with my girlfriend. Let's say: Some time I joke with her. Sometimes I tell her, "Schatzi, don't eat that much." What I think of is that I don't want her to have a problem with her stomach. But she thinks, "Oh, he is telling me this because he thinks I am fat." But I don't mean that. Sometimes she is telling me the opposite of what I wanted to say. And I ask myself how does she come up with this idea? *Do you think that is an issue that is mainly addressed between women and men or would you argue that these misunderstandings are a Syrian vs. Austrian problem?* No, it is my personal problem with other people. It is not a cultural or a sexual problem. *Ok, so it is your personal experience.* I tell you, in Syria I got it harder because the situation is so much different. *In what way?* Because the people would never think you are honest. They will always think that what we mean is what we say, namely, "Eat your food!" *Ok, yeah, I get what you mean.* […] But I feel that the people are nicer here than in Syria. *Yeah?* Ja. *I would say that Austrians and especially Tyroleans are known to be quite straight-forward.* But for me it is not always like the straight-forward way. *No? You always want to be diplomatic?* Let's say when we are doing something and I notice that you are doing it wrong or bad. I don't tell you straight away because I am afraid that it will hurt you. So I always try to find a way that I tell you. I don't tell you you're doing it bad. I maybe show you again how to do it or tell you. Maybe in the end I tell you,

"No, it's wrong. You should do it differently." But I would never tell you, you're doing it bad. *And do you think most Austrians are different?* Yes! *[Both laugh.] Yeah, I'd say we [Austrians] are probably.* Another thing that I noticed is that we [Syrians] think in our heart not in our mind. You [Austrians] are the opposite. *So, you make decisions based on your feelings?* Mhm. *I like to think and think and probably overthink many things. Do you mean that whenever you feel that something is right, you just do it?* Exactly. *Do you think that Austrians tend to be perceived as "colder" people because of that?* Somehow, yes. Even in the sexual way, like you are so much colder. I don't mean that you are bad. *[Smiles.]* Yeah. It's just different. The other thing is that the way I speak with my girlfriend will be different. If me and my girlfriend are out somewhere in Syria and she is Syrian and I'd tell her: "It's such a beautiful day with you. Your eyes are so beautiful." Always I'd have these romantic thoughts. It is like that. If I don't speak with my Syrian girlfriend like this she'd ask me, "What's wrong?" She would also speak with me like this. The nice words we always share. *I heard that Arabic poetry is a lot more exaggerating than Western poetry. If an Austrian would say, "I care for you." You'd probably go three lines of saying how much you like her.* Yes, because the Arabic language is so different. The high Arabic contains so much words that I don't even understand. *Yeah, and there's a lot of different ways to express your feelings verbally, right? Where we just have one or two words to describe something you have a variety of different ways to tell the same thing.* Like let's say, you tell me, "You look beautiful today." I would answer: "It's your eyes that are beautiful today." *Oh, I see. So you'd directly give back a compliment.* We have this compliment thing. If you tell me, "You look beautiful today," I'd refer it back to you. *Is it similar when you flirt? Or are you more subtle then? When you first meet a girl, how does that usually go?* It depends. Look, I am not that kind of person. When I am the first time with you and we have our first date, they would say, "Omg, earth, you should keep what is on you. Because it is like you are on this." I don't know it is so hard to translate these words. It basically means that guys who try to flirt with a girl want to immediately tell her how precious she seems to them. Or: "I hope I die if I leave you!" *[Surprised.] On your first date?* Yeah, like there are some people that are like that. But they are usually like that. It just is that way. *Oh, it [the flirting] must be very subtle for you here now? Like, I'd say totally different altogether?* Yeah, this is so much better. Because I am not good at it. *So, you like the way we [in Austria] flirt?* I have the mix. Like, the attention that Syrians give to the girl is so much more than guys do here. How do I get closer to a girl? By giving her attention, asking her personal things. I don't know if there's a boy here that would ask: "What kind of books do you read? I have read xxx. What is your opinion about this?" You know, I always try to show some interest. And it worked, 'cause in the end she got my number from a friend because of this. Then we started to go out more often. On her birthday I finally told her that I was

interested in her and that I'd like to get to know her better. I felt she was interested too. So, this is how we started to manage to talk. ... It will take time but this is my time. *But that's just you, right?* With what I saw from my Austrian friends, I'd say, yes. They are a lot more straight-forward. *[We both smile.]*

Bilal's Story

Bilal J., Lizzy W., Sonja H.

We, Lizzy and Sonja, are standing in front of Café Central, which is one of Innsbruck's oldest coffee-houses and presents itself in the style of a typical Viennese coffee-house. In its quiet and relaxed atmosphere, you can enjoy long conversations without anyone expecting you to keep placing orders – the perfect place for a blind date.

"Do you know what Bilal looks like?"
"No, I don't, how about you?"
"No, so how shall we find him in the café?"

We realise that we don't have any idea what will happen next. We are expected to meet a man, called Bilal, and talk to him, write down what he tells us about his life, eventually make a text out of our notes. But who is he? What does he really look like? And how shall we find him? As we try to figure out his physical appearance, stereotypes are rushing through our minds. Black hair, fairly dark skin, does he wear glasses or not? We realise that our guessing will lead to nothing and decide to just go insider. We enter the warmth and welcoming atmosphere of the coffeehouse, stop right behind the enormous glass door through which we have come, look around nervously and try to figure out who of all the customers could be Bilal.

A guy is looking at us, sitting behind a Laptop, an untouched Cappuccino beside him. Obviously, he recognizes us and waves at us, smiling.

"Why did you know it was us?," we will ask later.
"Oh, I looked for you on Facebook, you know, to know what you look like! What do you drink? Coffee?"

This is how easy it can be to meet someone totally unknown to oneself in the 21st century.

Numerous books with thrilling stories about travellers and their adventures are filling bookshelves around the world. They describe how their protagonists survived life-threatening situations, re-built their lives on desert islands or went to exotic places.

However, there are other kinds of travellers too, those whose stories haven't been and maybe never will be written down. Their travels are not reducible to adventures and dangers they might or might not go through. They have come to be described in

numbers andrinscribed as arrows on maps, printed in newspapers telling us that people come across the so called "Balkan Route" or that they are crossing over from Africa via the Mediterranean Sea. There are calls for their routes across water to be closed. How can a sea be closed? The refugee crisis has been used by many different parties to gain political influence. In so doing they play with the fate of millions of people who have had to flee from the war. Millions of individuals, with different lives, stories, habits, and ideas about their future are are reduced to a single arrow, pointing in one direction.

What about Bilal's arrow?

I wanted to go as far as possible. I wanted to see like the polar bears. As far as I can. I just wanted to make sure I don't have to change my homeland again. So at least there is nobody who tells me to go out, go back, or something like that.

First thing that comes to my mind about Syria is love. Syria is about love. I mean there is nothing fancy inside it, but there is the most important part of happiness, which is, you would never feel yourself as a stranger. People are extremely friendly. You might suggest, this is highly subjective, but actually I'm reporting something I heard from a lot of tourists too. I talked to many tourists, and this was one way to improve my English by the way. I met them in the biggest mosque in Damaskus, the Umayyad Mosque, which is like a piece of art because it's very old and has a long history. In Syria there is a unique way in which everything organises. You feel it's chaos, but actually it's like the kind of chaos which has outstanding results, which leads people in a certain direction where they have to cooperate, where they have to help and support each other, where they have to show solidarity to each other.

If you look up the Umayyad Mosque on the Internet, you find it is not only one of the oldest mosques, but also that it was built in the so-called "Basilica-Style". In its basic design it is quite similar to Christian churches, the idea underlying its floorplan originating from roman market buildings. What distinguishes buildings around the world? What do they have in common? In the case of the Umayyad Mosque it is one of its three minarets, called "Jesus-Minaret," which is an assertion of Syrian culture's closeness to Christianity. The Mosque might look different to a house of God as we know it in Austria, but if you take a closer look, you can notice many similarities.

The main principle that structures life in Syria, we learn from Bilal, is the family. The members not only of the nuclear but also of the extended family support each other. Males and females go to work nowadays. And then he tells us about his family. He has five sisters – all of them have a job. One is studying architecture at a private university in Damascus . She is the only younger sister he has. His father, too, is still working. He is in the real estate business, and one of Bilal's brothers is working for him, another is in merchandising. He is the only one of his brothers who does not work with his father.

Do you remember the beginning of the war?

At this time, around 2002, I had just graduated. Everything started as a rumour: Somebody is striking against the government. It was unreal, somebody is saying "No!" to the government. Striking, demonstrating, was unimaginable. In Syria you had the freedom to do everything – aside from politics. You just did not talk about politics.

I did not feel the crisis then; I was enjoying my time as a post-graduate. I was an A-Student, being really good at IT, and had a really nice business at this time, developing websites, doing assignments for my friends, like the really complicated ones. Gaining a lot of money, spending it, enjoying life, it was really a fun-part of my life. I lived alone, sort of, like not really living alone, but I was at my own office, desk, three laptops with three different operating-systems on them. My friends visited me in office, where I had everything I needed, a bed and things like this. I almost lived in my office. Having the perfect life. Everything went fine, I was good at University, I was finding solutions for all my problems within seconds, because I was an A-Student.

One day I visited a refugee-centre, receiving people from other parts of Syria, with a friend, who was working for red crescent. There were lots of people inside and I saw how painful it was to wait for food. I saw children standing in the sun, waiting for food, crying. Three weeks later, my friend who took me there called me and told me he was going to leave the country. If I would work at his job at the red crescent, I would be highly welcomed. I joined. Next to working on programming and IT-projects I also undertook training in first-aid. I got involved more and more, day by day, more and more.

Because the situation in Syria was escalating, there was an increasing number of people who needed help. The hot areas in and around Damascus were getting more and more, a lot of people were dead, thrown in the streets. Nobody had the courage to come close to them, take them and bury them. Why didn't people go there? Most of those people who were dead were lying in areas between those the regime or the rebels controlled. If you got in the middle between the front, you wouldn't survive from the regime nor from the rebels.

I can tell one story about this. I was going to those areas as a red crescent, taking the bodies. It was necessary because of the risk of diseases. If we haven't done it, nobody would have done it – it was a must to protect the people I love. It was just about doing something. Rebels here, regime there, the bodies were in the middle. The red cross had an agreement with both parties, we were just going there, pick up those bodies and put them away. That was all. I was part of the team, which was just doing what had to be done. So we went to the area. One of the rebels thought that one of us belongs to regime. He shot at us. With the first bullet out, the second came from the regime. We were all lying on the floor,

having a rain of bullet over us. We waited like this for five hours or even longer, between bodies, until one of the rebels helped us to get out. We were even afraid to go home, because our home was in an area controlled by the regime and we came from the part controlled by the rebels.

While Bilal is telling us all of this, we are sitting in a public park, with children and tourists going by. Sometimes it starts to rain lightly, which we do not notice. We find Bilal's story unbelievable – for us, it is beyond imagination.

If you think about it negatively, you would never survive. Just another story: I was staying at an IDP-quarter. IDP means Internally Dislocated Persons, also people from different areas from Damascus. A sniper-shot went like really close to me. It hit a column behind me. I was like "What the hell happened?" You don't feel gratefully at a moment like this, you just feel dizzy. The reaction was that everybody laughed "Oh my god, we nearly would have eaten … because of your soul." When somebody in Syria dies, the family members distribute food and the most famous is … which is a kind of rice with beans and yoghurt. With this way, this kind of humour, we could survive. You have to be like this.

Before I left for Turkey in 2014, I did not want to say goodbye to my mother or my sister, because it would be the hardest thing for me and for them. I believe, my mother would not have survived it, because she has heart problems. I did not want to bring them bad feelings either. I am one of the youngest, and I was always the trouble-maker, I never got my mom or my sisters relaxed, and this is something they like. They missed it the most when I was away. My mother knew something. The way she looked at me was different, it wasn't easy. It is painful. The first hug I got from my father as an adult I got the day I was leaving. I don't know why he hugged me, he also knew maybe. I just wanted to lie, the first time ever I wanted to lie, because I really couldn't take this moment. I really would have liked to live in Syria, but I just do not have the luxury to die there.

Why would you not fight for your country? This is your country, something that belongs to you, your soul, your culture. How can you stand leaving it? Why do you think would I choose to be a refugee? I have seen brothers killing each other just because they have different opinions. I have seen a father killing his son, a son killing his father, I have seen the brutality of money and power. I did not want to kill even my friends. I had very close friends, and some were not only friends, but also somehow family, and they were all reported dead 2015 inside the jail. In a really horrible way, because one of their relatives reported them and they were deported, so he could have their home.

Mothers want to see their children in front of them. My father is always happy and sad when he talks to me. Happy because he can hear my voice, sad because he cannot touch me. We cannot have those long conversations we used to have in the early morning when he was just about to leave for the office and I was just going to sleep. We started talking and he started giving me advise and I said: "Come on, stop playing father, you are a friend of mine" and we started laughing and so on. It is so, I mean, it is a choice of your destiny, what is written for you to happen.

The following is a fairy-tale written by Bilal:

Reality

Once upon a time, at the King's castle, there lived a guard, who fell deeply in love with the fair and beautiful princess. His love to her could be described as the love of the God to his slaves, said an angel who kept an eye on what was happening. As the guard finally overcame his fear of the King, he was allowed to spend some time alone with her and started to explain to her his strong feelings of affection.

The princess, surprised by his intense feelings, required evidence for his love. She told him to stay in front of her window for a 100 days, and at the end of the last day he would have won her heart and love.

As the princess requested, the young man stayed in front of her window and he sat there, enduring rain, hail, snow, tornados, being without food and water, without sleep, or rest. He stayed until each and every part of his body showed signs of his extreme fatigue.

Suddenly, on the 99th day, although he must have only endured one last day, the guard decided to leave and give up his fight for the princess. 'Why, by God's sake? Because of the weakness of humankind? Or maybe it was God's will?' the angel asked with great surprise.

A sad voice, like the voice of the autumn wind, came to answer the confused angel's questions. God would never separate two hearts that love each other, because he is the love, he creates the love and he would keep it in the hearts of the beloved. Neither can it be the weakness of humankind, as a weak man could not have stayed for 99 days. However, the hearts of the faithful lovers are too weak to live in an excruciating reality.

He knew, that she is not made for him. Therefore, he preferred living on with the memories of 99 days with his princess, in order to gain the strength to keep going. And so, decided against the reality of the 100th day.

Turkey. Wake up. Go to work. High salary. Good standard of living. Being threatened. Again! Having to leave. Getting in contact with human trafficker. Make an appointment. Fear. Be there. Departure postponed. Waiting. Night. Day. Night. Day. Travel miles to another boat. Arrival. Departure Postponed. Waiting. Night.

Day. Night. Day. Night. Day. Again. Travel miles to another boat. Departure. Finally. Fear. Horror.

A boat. Tiny. Filled with people. Far too many. Men. Women. Children. Babies. Not enough life vests. Crying. Waves. Turbulences. Exhaustion. Prayers. Screams. Crying. Reversed boat. Icy Cold water. Trying to save one's life. Exhaustion. Trying to save as many others as possible. See people dying. Fight for survival. Arrive at the beach. Total exhaustion. Powerless. Break-down. Lie on the beach. Silence. Darkness. Still silence.

How did I arrive in Austria? I have been in a small lorry – one of those vehicles used for refrigerated transport in which 71 people died in 2016 because they didn't get enough air inside – with other people, and someone stopped the car and told us: "Go out, go out, go out!" And we went out. – We had no choice. We did not know where we are, actually. When we went out, there were just a flat, green area, with a few trees, it could have been anywhere. We just hid behind those trees, and I remember sitting there for like three or five minutes, when the police arrived. Police, you know, they have a gun, they told us to come out, they lined us up. I was standing in the first row and begging for water – "Water, please!" I had been inside the car for hours without water. But they refused to give me some. I had to wait for a long time to get water – basically until I arrived jail. There I could get some tap-water. I didn't know that people could drink tap-water. I drank like more than one litre – I was SOO thirsty.

So we were in jail and we could have guessed that we were in Austria. I was disappointed. Not because I was in Austria, but because I was really near from where I came from.

The police acted strangely, in some way. Because at one point I was nearly falling down, like collapsing, and they did not get me water. I got my water, we had to wait until there was this execution how we arrived here – so we did not even know that we arrived already! In jail they got me a translator. I tried to speak English to them, but they brought me a translator anyway when I told them I just wanted to continue my way. And he told me literally: "Either you stay here or we send you back." For me, Austria was a better option. What really made us terrified were the videos we had seen on social media – telling us what could happen in other countries.

What does staying in a country mean to you? What are your reasons for remaining in another country?

Staying, for me, meant I will have to survive here. I will have to face a lot of things: the possibility to be sent back, the possibility to be humiliated, and the possibility that I have to do jobs that do not fit my qualification. But I just had

to stay. After doing this fingerprint, I was in Austria. You know the concept of the fingerprint? As you leave your fingerprint in one country, you do not have the right to seek for asylum in another European country.

At the refugee-camp. Being in a room with 50 to 60 persons. Lining up for food. Not being allowed to go out. Being allowed outside for limited periods. Being dependent on people giving you things like clothes. Not being treated like an equal. Being treated differently. Not knowing, how the system works:

I had been at the refugee camps, and I needed a t-shirt. It was summer. Therefore, I went to the department where you could get stuff like that. They told me, that I could not get one. Others got some with a smile.

A friend of mine got his asylum decision after a week. He is an English-teacher. The other guy, who is unbelievably … He is still a human, but he is an old, around 40 to 45, junkie. I knew him from the road, he was like swearing all the time. His body is full of scars, his belly and his arms are full of small cuts. This man had no education. This man as well got his positive asylum decision after a week or two. They started to get support. I, on the other hand, was sent to the other side of Austria after two or three weeks and had to wait for around a year to get my positive asylum decision.

Feeling:
In shock
Encouraging oneself
Trying not to lose one self's dignity

The next station. Five to six people in a room. A square shape with a table in a middle. The owners of this establishment are two old ladies and a man. There was not much privacy there. The owner entering our room without knocking. Being treated like children. Being dependent on them cooking food for you. Having to accept their food even when it was makes you sick. Distribution of necessaries depending on who is liked and who is not. One of the ladies trying to talk people into having sex with her for giving them better stuff, walking around in sexy clothes and having wine.

I refused 'luxury goods' and a better situation in the house to keep my dignity.

After complaining about the situation I was sent to an area between two little villages. 30 minutes to the supermarket with bikes. Completely isolated, as a stranger. There was nothing. We were engaging in conversations which were going in circles. I tried to learn German with a book and volunteers. In the

German course there was always a new person, who did not know German, so we were always starting anew, never going on.

What stays with me are the good moments. When I was waiting for my asylum decision, I met one of the most wonderful persons in my life, who then was my German teacher. An old lady, who saw the difference in me and gave me chances. In the darkest moments, you see a light of hope – and she was my hope.

There was another man who was an amazing person. A teacher. He gave me a chance. He practiced German with me. We talked, we went out. It was him who got me the chance to go to MCI and continue with my masters. For the application-exam I studied in a room with four other persons inside. I wanted to go on.

In my first semester, I did not have my positive asylum decision. So I did not have the chance to work and was living with low money. I could not buy myself coffee at university and had to struggle for all the small things I needed, like train tickets. When I finally got the positive asylum decision, I started to work at the red cross in different projects. I wanted to build myself a life – studying and working.

It is the situation. We learn how to take it, because we must take it. We must survive. I am not saying that people here are in heaven – nor that in Syria people are in hell. It is about the situation and what the situation brings you. There are a lot of stories I have not told you, because I do not want to get to emotional, I just want to keep it on the surface.

Sometimes it feels as if everyone leaves a trace behind them, showing where life has led them to. Those traces go around the globe, crossing each other, running side by side, moving apart. They are more real than the arrows on the maps, ending somewhere en route or going on – maybe to a point where there are polar bears.

Bilal, now 28-years old, is currently finishing his master's degree in Management, Communication and IT at the MCI. What he has experienced since his flight in 2014 cannot be rcorded in detail.

Navid's Story

Sarah Heiß

"An illegal person? What is this supposed to be? An immigrant who doesn't have any ridiculous documents? Every human is legal in their existence." (Henning Mankell)

What it really means to be a refugee and how much suffering behind this term lies, what it means to be without your beloved family, to be doing nothing all day long, to be afraid of an uncertain future, to be wasting time by doing nothing because the authorities won't allow you to work, what it means when your desire to die is stronger than your desire to live. – All this I learned when I met Navid from Pakistan almost two years ago when the University of Innsbruck was looking for some volunteers who would give German lessons to refugees.

After a number of such lessons I noticed that Navid was not only looking for someone to teach him our language but for someone who would listen to him, comfort him and help him, someone who would be there for him whenever he needed it. Someone you would call a friend. I started spending more time with him, more time than I actually had. I helped him by translating for him at the doctor's, at the police station and at the asylum authorities. I invited him for dinner and we watched movies together. After some time I noticed that I could or did not want to be this friend he was looking for. He wanted me to be there for him 24 hours a day. He started calling me also in the night when he couldn't sleep or when he had frightening dreams. I felt like the mother of a sick child. There was so much responsibility on my shoulders, I couldn't deal with this situation anymore and with his emotional pain, which he shared only with me. All the stories of his suffering he told me every time we were seeing each other and his constant suicide threats were at one point too much for me. The more I distanced myself from him the more he called and wrote me, blaming me for not being here for him enough. That was the point when I broke off all contact with him. I felt very bad and selfish for doing so but I had to for the sake of my own emotional stability.

Eight months ago at two a.m. I received an e-mail in which Navid told me amongst other things that he was thankful for everything I had done for him and that he wished me a good life. Everyone else would have considered the message a farewell letter. I did not, because he had told me so many times before that he would soon commit suicide. Reading his mail I thought he only wanted to provoke me again and gain my full attention. His suicide threats were another reason why

I had distanced myself from him. It was unbearable for me to constantly think: "Now he must have done it!", just because he hadn't been online for more than two days or because he had not reacted to my ringing his doorbell. I started suffering too and I reached a point where I didn't see the light at the end of the tunnel anymore. I had turned from a German teacher into a psychotherapist, which however was not my role. When he started telling me about his wish to commit suicide I contacted a real psychotherapist and a psychiatrist, who, however, also seemed unable to help him.

Two days after his e-mail I received a message from one of his friends telling me that Navid had tried to kill himself by taking 70 sleeping pills but that he had survived because someone had found him in time and that now he was on a psychiatric ward.

I was not shocked when I read the message since I had known that this would happen sooner or later and that I would not be able to prevent it. I had tried everything that was in my power. I was relieved that he had survived but I did not contact him anymore. Now, I thought, it's the doctors' turn to help him. It was only this university course that made me contact Navid again, after more than half a year and some hesitating. Judging by his facebook account I assumed that he was better. We agreed to meet somewhere in the city.

The following account, sometimes funny but most of the time unbearably sad, distressing and full of suffering, consists of conversations and experiences we have had lately but also covers other events that took place in the past two years.

I have changed the names of all persons mentioned in the text.

Navid from Pakistan

Navid is 30 years old, grew up in the Swad Valley with four brothers and three sisters in a huge house his father built for their family. Navid and his family are Pashtuns. The Pashtuns constitute the second biggest ethnic group in Pakistan. The majority of the Pashtuns are Sunnites. His mother never attended school, she can neither read nor write. For Navid's father it was important that all his children should receive a good education, no matter if they were male or female. After attending school Navid studied economics near his home town. However, he has never worked in this field because right after finishing university his father wanted him to join the police to fight against the Taliban. Soon Navid became a police commander and ordered his squad to arrest one of the Taliban leaders, who lived somewhere in the mountains in the Swad Valley. After some weeks of searching for him Navid's squad managed to arrest him. In prison the Taliban leader suffered a heart attack and died. His sons blamed Navid for his death and his

followers wanted only one thing: revenge. Their aim was to kill as many members of the squad as possible. On top of their list was Navid. The only chance for him to survive was to leave his country. Some days after the death of the Taliban leader Navid fled to South Korea. All his brothers who were older than 18 also decided to leave Pakistan because the risk was too high that the Taliban would take revenge on them as well. In South Korea Navid worked as a construction worker for two years and fell in love with a Korean woman. He learned the Korean language and tried to adapt as much as possible to the Korean culture, but all proved pointless because after two years he was denied asylum and was again forced to leave a country where he had made plans for his future. He didn't know where else to go and was completely desperate. He only saw one solution left. He tried to kill himself. Few days before his deportation he took loads of sleeping pills. "I slept for a whole week, but unfortunately I didn't die. I wish I had because I would not have had to go through all this." After his stay in the hospital he decided to go Canada but unintentionally ended up here in Austria.

New land

Navid: After South Korea, I was hiding in a hotel in Pakistan for some weeks. Then I travelled to Iran, from there to Turkey. I lived there for one month. First, I wanted to stay in Turkey but the longer I was there the less I liked that country. After one month in Istanbul a smuggler took me and several other people in a truck container from Turkey through some countries to Austria. I don't know how many borders we crossed, the journey took three months. In the middle of nowhere the smuggler kicked us all out of the truck, leaving us behind on a field. I had no idea where I was, not even in which country. But I knew that this was not Canada where the smuggler actually had promised to take me. Together with some other refugees I started walking. We all had no idea where we were heading. After some time we saw houses and a BILLA shop. There I bought something to drink when I suddenly saw the police entering the shop. I tried to hide but they caught me and two other refugees. They asked us for our documents but I didn't have any with me so they brought me to the police station. There I heard for the first time that I was in Burgenland, in Austria. I had no idea where this was since I had never heard of Austria before. From there I was taken to Traiskirchen where I stayed only for some days. There were so many other refugees and this was probably why I was brought to Innsbruck to the Tennishalle (indoor tennis court). I stayed there with around 300 other refugees. It was quite crowded there, no privacy at all. There was always something going on: Babies crying at night,

men fighting, people arguing. I spent six weeks at the Tennishalle before I could move into the refugee home where I have been living for the last two years.
I: How much did you have to pay for the smuggler?
Navid: 5000 US dollars. My dad paid him. He did not only pay for me but also for my other brothers who had to flee because the Taliban tried to take revenge on them. He had to sell some fields to pay the smuggler. But I actually paid to go to Canada and not to Austria.

Navid has been living together with a Nigerian refugee in a room which is approximately 18 square meters large, and contains one bunk bed, a small kitchen unit and a tiny bathroom.

I: How you do like your room here?
Navid: There is barely room to move. I don't like it very much. In Pakistan I lived with my entire family, my parents and my seven brothers and sisters in a huge house about 300 square meters large. My parents have two gardens. One belongs to my mother and one to my father. My mother grows flowers and my father vegetables. He is not allowed to go into her garden and she is not allowed to set foot in his garden. Here I only have around 18 square meters. That's not much space. I miss my house, the garden and of course very much my family, especially my mother.

Insights into a completely alien culture

I: Your oldest sister studies English literature. Has she finished her studies?
Navid: Yes she has.
I: Is she going to work now?
Navid: Work? NO! She is getting married next month.
I: But being married does not preclude going to work, does it?
Navid: Women in Pakistan don't work.
I: But what did your sister study for if she is not allowed to work?
Navid: Just for herself.
I: No woman in Pakistan works?
Navid: Among the Pashtuns not. Maybe some women in the city.
I: But what do women do all day long if they don't go to work?
Navid: They look after the children, cook, clean and so on.
I: But once the children are old enough, and the cooking and the laundry is done what do they do then? You've told me that your mum can neither read nor write so reading the newspaper or a book isn't an option, and probably for many other illiterate women neither. Do they go outside a lot?
Navid: Women are not allowed to leave their house without their husband.

I: Why not? What would happen if you walked in the street with a woman you are not married to, let's say with a woman you like?
Navid: We would get killed.
I: Not seriously? By whom? The police?
Navid: No, not by the police, by our own family.
I: You can't be serious.
Navid: I am very serious.
I: You father spent 5000 dollars for you so that you can live in freedom but on the other hand he would kill you if he saw you with a girl or woman in the street?
Navid: That's called honor killing. Honor is the highest principle in Pakistan before hospitality. It's a shame for the whole family if one of your children is seen with someone you are not married to.
I: I have heard so many cruel things from you. Things I don't even dream of. I remember you telling me that you saw people playing football with the heads of dead people and people hung upside down from a light pole and slit open in front of an audience, even children. I've never watched a horror movie but I can imagine that such unbelievably cruel scenes aren't even part of a horror movie. When I told my mum about this, she began to cry and I had problems falling asleep that night having those pictures in my mind of things I only heard about. You saw them with your own eyes. How can you deal with that?
Navid: This is normal.
I: What do you mean by normal? Such scenes can't be normal for anyone.
Navid: Even little children see massacres and dead people. This is part of the daily life in Pakistan.
I: But you still want to go back to Pakistan despite all the things you've told me. Why is this?
Navid: Because of my family.

Family torn apart

I: When was the last time you talked to your parents?
Navid: I don't know. It was some weeks ago.
I: I think you should call them. They must be worried if they haven't heard from you for so long.
Navid: I hate to call them because as soon as my mum sees me on skype she bursts into tears and isn't able to say anything.
I: I can't begin to imagine how hard it must be for your mother. Do you never have to cry when you talk to your mother? I wouldn't be able to say one single word.

Navid: Men in Pakistan are not allowed to cry or to show any feelings. Not even in front of your own family. It would be extremely shameful. But last time I had to cry as well. It is terrible to see my mother always crying, she won't stop until the end of our conversation.
I: You shouldn't think that crying is shameful. It's not. Suppressing one's feelings can be dangerous for your mental health. I sometimes really hate the rules of your culture. There are only bans, especially for women. Nothing is allowed that makes fun. Some women are even denied reading books and education. You once told me that playing an instrument for women is also prohibited. You cannot marry who you want, you are not allowed to work as a woman, not allowed to go outside alone, not allowed to have fun, you cannot pursue your own interests and talents. I know that I might not fully understand what you are telling me because I grew up in a completely different way but I can imagine that every woman no matter where she grew up needs or wants more of life than having to take care of her children and doing the household. Don't get me wrong, I very much love children and sometimes I even enjoy cleaning the windows and ironing. But besides that I need other things like playing music, studying, going wherever I want with whoever I want etc. Do you think Pashtun women are happy women?
N: Of course.

Keeping up the lies

I: Have you finally contacted your parents?
Navid: No, because I always have to lie to them and because my mother always cries so badly when she sees or hears me on skype. I can't stand that.
I: Why do you lie to them? What do you tell them?
Navid: I tell them that I am a student here, that I have a lot of friends, that I have a job and that I am really happy here. But nothing of that is true as you know.
I: So why don't you tell them the truth?
Navid: Because I don't want to disappoint them. My father sold a lot of fields to enable me and my brothers to flee. My parents want us to become happy, to work, to get married, to have a family. I feel terrible and so sorry for them that I don't fulfil even one of their wishes. Not being married at my age (30) is a disgrace in Pakistan.
I: Well, you are here now and in Austria not being married at the age of 30 is not at all a disgrace. Don't think so much about what your mum wants from you. You should follow your own dreams and aims. I am sure they want you to be happy. What do *you* want?
Navid: I want a job, a house, a car and earn money.

I: I remember you telling me that you do not really appreciate living here in Austria. Have you changed your mind? Is there anything positive about being here?
Navid: No, nothing.
I: Really nothing? What about the people, the scenery, food, freedom, no Taliban, mountains?
Navid: All people are so racist, it's terrible and the food tastes very contaminated.
I: The food tastes contaminated? What do you mean?
Navid: So artificial.
I: You once mentioned that in Pakistan you need 50 kilos of sugar a month for the whole family. What do you do with 50 kilos of sugar?
Navid: We put sugar into everything, we drink a lot of tea with a lot of sugar and eat many sweet dishes.

The fate of "ugly" women

I: Are all marriages among the Pashtuns arranged by the parents?
Navid: Yes, it's mainly the mothers who make proposals to their children.
I: What about love marriage?
Navid: It does not exist. How should we fall in love with a woman when we never see one uncovered? I've never had contact with women outside my family. Even at school and university we are separated, there are even separate buildings.
I: You left Pakistan when you were 27. How come you were not married off?
Navid: I always rejected my mum's proposals of women. I always said not now, not now. I felt too young. But now I sometimes really regret having rejected my mum's proposal of a woman who is a doctor now. I should have said yes to her. She is extremely beautiful and intelligent. But I felt too young and she was only 15 or 16 then. I would be married now and have children. My mum would be happy.
I: Your mum maybe. But what about you?
Navid: I don't know, maybe not. But my mum.
I: What are the criteria for a woman to be chosen by her future parents-in-law?
Navid: First of all she has to be very beautiful and intelligent.
I: Beauty is what counts most?
Navid: More or less yes.
I: What does your society consider beautiful?
Navid: The woman has to be tall, slim, nice face, small nose…
I: You are kidding me?
Navid: No, why?
I: I thought we Westerners are superficial but obviously not as superficial as you are. What happens to women who are not beautiful enough?

Navid: They will not be married off and stay alone forever.
I: Well, to be honest, if I lived in Pakistan I'd prefer staying single to being married off at the age of fourteen.
Navid: But as an unmarried woman you are an outsider and disrespected by society. We have a scale for judging women. It goes from one to ten. One is extremely beautiful and ten quite ugly.
I: How high or low would I be rated in Pakistan?
Navid: You would probably be a six.
I: A six? I have obviously overrated myself. That means that I would not be married off to no one?
Navid: Probably not, but that's not what I think. That's what our society thinks. I don't agree with everything.

Blank space

I: What are you doing all day long? How does your day pass? I can imagine that it is not easy to have no job or other duties that somehow distract you. If I am on holiday after the third day I get so bored and I start feeling nervous.
Navid: Most of the time I don't do anything. I sit here in my room, surf in the internet, look outside the window and watch cars pass by, sometimes I only look at the white wall and wait for the day to be over. I try to sleep a lot because that makes the day shorter and it relieves the suffering. When I wake up the next morning the boredom starts anew. I think a lot about my future, which makes me very scared. Can I stay here in Austria or do I have to leave? Will I get a job here, will I see me family again? Sometimes I lose hope, on other days I am a bit more optimistic.
I: What will you do if the asylum authorities decide that you cannot stay here?
Navid: I will lodge an appeal against the decision and try again with a lawyer. If it doesn't work I see one last solution.
I: What do you mean?
Navid: I will tell you another time.

Heidi Klum and the "no" that is actually a "yes"

Navid: I like the mountains, they remind me of Pakistan.
I: Did you do some hiking?
Navid: Yes, but I have become really weak and hiking has become too exhausting. I can't even walk up to my room on the fourth floor without breathing like an old person suffering from a heart condition.

I: Do you know why you have been feeling so weak lately? Are you eating and drinking enough?

No response from Navid.

I: What did you have for breakfast today?
Navid: Tea.
I: I actually meant "eat". What did you eat for breakfast?
Navid: Tea.
I: What did you have for lunch?
Navid: A cookie.
I: A cookie? Nothing else? When was the last time you ate a proper meal?
Navid: I don't remember.
I: That sounds like a long time ago. Are you on a hunger strike?
Navid: No, I just prefer not to eat. I want to challenge myself.
I: To challenge yourself by not eating? I know that you don't like the food here but we also have rice and chicken.
Navid: I am just not hungry anymore.

I decided to invite him to my flat and cook something. One week later, it was a Thursday, he came to my place. My 14-year-old twin cousins were also there for a visit. I prepared a Tyrolian dish called Gröstl (roast potatoes with egg). Navid arrived half an hour earlier than arranged. I showed him my apartment and introduced him to my cousins. I asked the three of them to take a seat around the table in my room.

I: Do you want something to drink?
Navid: No, thank you.
I: Are you sure? Don't hesitate to ask me if you want something later!

I took his "no" seriously since I didn't want to force anything on him. Therefore I filled only three glasses with water, two for my cousins, Anna and Marie, and one for myself. While I was roasting the potatoes in the kitchen the three of them were starting a hesitant conversation in English, which was a challenge for my cousins. After a few minutes, the girls became interested in Navid's story and started to ask him more and more questions about Pakistan and his life here and back there. However, Germany's Next Topmodel *seemed to be more interesting. When I entered the room to ask if everything was fine, Heidi Klum and 16 skinny, half-naked young women and girls were shimmering on my TV screen.* GNTM *is one of the TV shows I really dislike, however, watching it together with Navid turned out to be quite funny. There was no need for him to understand German, the pictures said it all: 16 half-naked girls and women strutting down a catwalk in the desert.*

Navid: Why are they wearing such strange clothes?

My cousins and I had to laugh and we didn't really have a sensible answer to his question so we tried to explain to him the principal of the show.

Navid: What is this good for?

I again didn't know what so say, so I just shrugged my shoulders.

I: It's just entertainment, extremely stupid entertainment.

I had the feeling that so much naked skin was getting too much for Navid and I asked him whether we should turn the TV off, but he said that he was fine and that he wanted to watch the show since he had never seen anything like it before. I brought Navid a glass of water although he had not asked for it. To my astonishment he drank it all at once.

I: I thought you weren't thirsty?

Navid: I just said no. That does not mean that I am not thirsty.

I looked at him in astonishment wrinkling my forehead.

Navid: Well, 'no' can mean 'yes'.

I: So 'no' means 'yes' and 'yes' means 'no'?

Navid: No, it's just that you should not ask me if I want something to drink, you should offer me something to drink without asking because when you ask someone we are not allowed to respond with yes in our culture. That would be very impolite.

I: So when do I know that a no is really a no, a yes is really a yes and a no is actually a yes?

Navid: I think you cannot know because you are European.

I: Ok then, since you are here in Austria now can we agree that a no is a no and a yes is a yes whenever I ask you something?

Navid: I will try to remember.

While the potatoes were still roasting in the pan all of our eyes were focusing on the screen.

I: I could swear she's got fake boobs (I was talking about one of the models from GNTM).

Navid: You talk about boobs in front of your cousins???

Navid slowly turned to me and looked at me almost in shock, as if he couldn't believe his ears.

Navid: You shouldn't talk about boobs when they are present.

My cousins burst into laughter. I tried not to laugh and had to take a deep breath. Navid obviously didn't understand what they were laughing about.

I: Well, they are 14 years old, they have boobs themselves. We not only talk about boobs we sometimes compare them or go and buy bras together. You've never talked about boobs with your sister or your mother?

Now Navid couldn't stop laughing. He didn't expect this question.

Navid: NEVER EVER!! NEVER! We never talk about such things. That's so embarrassing.

I: Why is that embarrassing? So you've never seen your sister or your mother in a bra?
Navid: NOOO!! Oh my god. NEVER. We even have two bathrooms. One for the men of our family and one for the women.
I: Oh my goodness, and we sometimes run naked through our flat.
Navid: That's so embarrassing and strange.
I: The women are also covered when they are inside the house? I thought inside the house they don't wear their long clothes.
Navid: They free their face but the rest is covered.
I: But as soon as they leave the house they wear a burqa or a niqab, right?
Navid: Yes, the women from my culture, the Pashtu women. Women in cities sometimes wear only a headscarf and no burqas.

Dinner was finally ready. We all sat around the table in my room. Navid didn't eat much. He said that whenever he eats something he feels like vomiting.

Malala

I: Last week I saw a documentary about Malala, the girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban. It was a very interesting documentary, which gave a lot of insight into her current and her previous life in Pakistan and portrays very impressively how she feels about living in England as a female Pakistani. Do you know Malala?
Navid: Yes, she went to school with my sister and she's from the same town.
I: You are kidding me? With "do you know her" I meant actually "have you heard about her"? I can't believe it.

I was completely stunned. Almost 200,000 million people live in Pakistan and Navid knows Malala, the girl who won the Nobel Prize for fighting for the girls' rights for education although she knew that she could get killed for that.

I: I would love to meet her. Have you already met her?
Navid: I have seen her but we've never talked to each other. My sister told me about her. About one year ago there was this documentary about her at the Leokino (a cinema in Innbruck), where I was invited to talk about her after the film.
I: Is she also a Pashtun?
Navid: Yes, only Pashtuns live where I am from.

When I talked about Malala I was very excited since I couldn't believe that his sister went to school with her and that he had actually seen her. I noticed that he didn't share the same excitement. Instead, he seemed irritated ta have to talk about her. He spoke in a very neutral manner which didn't show any fascination for her. Watching the documentary I learned that there are men from her town that are

not at all enthusiastic about her, since they oppose the idea of women receiving an education. Since Navid did not seem to be interested in sharing his experience with Malala I stopped asking him about her.

A new beginning?

After two years of waiting, desperation, fear, anger and hope Navid has finally had the last interview in the asylum process. It took three days and 19 hours. The decision will take weeks or even months. Navid knows that he has only a 1% chance to get permission to stay in Austria. According to the Austrian government, Pakistan is a safe country and there is no reason for Pakistanis to flee from their country. Navid's stories tell something different.

All this suffering should finally come to an end. I wish him nothing but happiness and satisfaction for his future here in Austria.

Safa's Story

Andrea Bichler, Simone Praxmarer

Los geht…..

Als wir unsere Heimat verlassen mussten, haben meine Eltern zu uns gesagt, dass wir nur ein paar wichtige Sachen einpacken sollen. Nur ein paar wichtige Sachen haben keine Platz in meinem kleineren Koffer. Ich möchtete mehr als nur Kleidung mitnehmen: (Mein Hause, meine FreundenInnen, meine lieblings Baum in unserem Garten, dem Duft von unseres Dorf auch dem Duft von Damaskus,……)

Es war eine überraschende Entscheidung, wir haben vorher nicht geplant. Obwohl wir nur für einen Monat bleiben werden gedacht haben, möchtete ich alles mitnehmen. *Safa*

Special thanks to Safa who, through her accounts, has made it possible for us to write down her story. *Andrea Bichler and Simone Praxmarer*

"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success." (Henry Ford)

This was our motto when we started our project three months ago. First, our group focused solely on how we could make ourselves feel comfortable together, as we needed a basis of trust on which personal stories could be told without embarrassment. Our coming together was most important. It was not a big step though, since we all had the same goal and pursuing it together caused our group to grow together. Staying a group did not feel difficult at all. We knew that we could reach our goal, the publication of Safa's story, only if we worked hard as a team. We spent quite some time together, hours which were always very productive, but, more importantly, let us become friends.

Our source of inspiration was Safa's journey through life, partly as a refugee, a journey of a young woman, who stands with both her feet on the ground, and has already gathered many extraordinary experiences. In retelling these, we did not want to restrict ourselves to Safa's life as a refugee, since, in our opinion, this would have meant framing her as a person different from us. Therefore we devoted quite some time to Safa's life at the time of our meetings, and to such occasions as Ramadan. Safa has given us a deep insight into her life as both an

"ordinary" person and as a refugee. This dichotomy has allowed us to touch on a plurality of themes and consider them from different perspectives.

Since this project is supposed to show how human relationships develop, and how fast they do so, I am confident it will also show that strangeness is not something one needs to be afraid of. Safa, Andrea and I were complete strangers several months ago, now we text each other on a regular basis, approximately once a week. We are honest to each other and try to be as authentic as possible. The topics we discuss have become more profound. We now exchange personal information, chat about Ramadan, and even about her reasons for fleeing. I think, this project has shown that strangeness is something wonderful when it shows its ability to create closeness. We therefore would like to encourage our readers not to see only danger in the strange and unknown, but rather view it as something that can blossom and become beautiful and valuable. Moreover we would like to see our text as an invitation to try and understand strangers. To do so, we describe our meetings in detail for the reader to picture the situations in the sense expressed by Marie Curie, who wrote, "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

Feeling that, in writing about another person one runs the risk of distorting that person's perception, we have chosen to use first person narrative. This should give readers a sense of what we thought while writing. There will, however, also be transcriptions of parts of our conversations (*in italics*) meant to lend authenticity to our meetings and give a special voice to Safa. Furthermore, we (Andrea and I) want our text to form a unity, but still allow our readers to identify our different voices by indicating at the end of each text segment by whom it was written.

Simone

Getting to know each other (27. April 2017)

Wir treffen uns an einem sehr föhnigen Tag im Hofgarten. Safa hat am Vortag spontan auf eine WhatsApp und SMS Nachricht von mir reagiert, da wir eigentlich vereinbart hatten, uns erst am Donnerstag zu treffen, wir aber bis dahin schon einen Bericht über unser erstes Gespräch mit ihr abgeben sollten. Ich begrüße Safas Bereitschaft, unseren Termin kurzfristig zu ändern. Sie hatte mir recht rasch auf meine Nachricht geantwortet und dabei sehr freundlich und gesprächsbereit gewirkt. Ein Indikator dafür war für mich in jedem Fall auch die rasche Verwendung von Emoticons im Chatverlauf.

Ich sehe Safa gleich am Eingang des Hofgartens im Schatten stehen, zumindest denke ich, dass sie es ist, da sie in einer wartenden Haltung dasteht (das Gewicht

auf ein Bein verlagert und die Arme verschränkt, ein Handy in der Hand) und ein weißes Kopftuch trägt. Ich hadere etwas mit mir, da ich sie rein an Äußerlichkeiten, vor allem dem Kopftuch, festgemacht habe und hoffe, dass das unser Kennenlernen nicht zu sehr beeinträchtigen wird.

Wir begrüßen uns mit einem Händeschütteln und ich entschuldige mich für meine Verspätung. Ich stelle mich vor und wir gehen ein Stück Richtung Hofgarten. Ich erkläre ihr, was ich über das Forschungsprojekt weiß (viel ist es nicht, da der Kurs recht offen gestaltet ist) und wie ich mir unsere Gespräche ungefähr vorstelle, frage, ob ich sie währenddessen aufnehmen darf und betone, dass sie jederzeit Fragen an Simone und mich stellen kann und auch keine beantworten muss, die sie nicht beantworten will.

Wir setzen uns auf eine Bank in der Nähe des Pavillons und beobachten ältere Männer beim Schach. Es fällt schwer, nicht zu ihnen hinzusehen, da sie lautstark diskutieren. Ich will mit dem eigentlichen Gespräch auf Simone warten, die etwas später kommt, aber irgendwann fangen wir doch an, da mir das Schweigen zu unangenehm wird. Safa ist 24 Jahre alt und seit 1,5 Jahren hier. Ihr hellblauer Mantel und ihr weißes Kopftuch sind mir schon vorhin aufgefallen, sie wirkt modisch und gepflegt, was so gar nicht der medialen Darstellung und ein Stück weit auch nicht meiner Vorstellung von Flüchtlingen entspricht. Wieder eine Fassette des Alltags, über die es sich nachzudenken lohnt. Was mir an Safas Gesicht auffällt, sind ihre sehr dunklen Augenbrauen, die perfekt in Form gebracht sind, besser als ich es bei mir könnte. Make-Up trägt sie keines. Ich bin erstaunt, dass ich mich so über ihr gepflegtes Aussehen wundere, ich hätte nicht gedacht, dass der mediale Diskurs die Vorstellung von der Armut und Verwahrlosung von Flüchtlingen so stark in mir verankert hat. Ich bekomme ein schlechtes Gewissen.

Safa spricht sehr gut Deutsch, auch wenn sie kleine Fehler macht, die sie dann auch selber bemerkt. Sie hat Deutschkurse besucht und sich selbst B2 Niveau beigebracht und die Prüfung bestanden. Sie ist mit ihrer Familie (Eltern und zwei Schwestern) nach Innsbruck gekommen. Ihre ältere Schwester studiert in Wien Kunst, Safa hat im Sommer in Innsbruck Pharmazie angefangen, kann aber nicht so viele Kurse belegen, wie sie möchte, da das Curriculum einen Studienstart im Wintersemester vorsieht und aufbauend verläuft. Das Studium fällt ihr nicht leicht, da sie mit deutschen Fachbegriffen noch ihre Schwierigkeiten hat, aber sie meint, sie lerne einfach mehr als andere. (Wie aus ihren Bemerkungen darüber, wie sie die deutsche Sprache erlernt hat, kann ich auch hier ein Streben nach Perfektion bzw. möglichst guten Resultaten erkennen.) Ich erzähle ihr auch ein bisschen von meinem Studium der Europäischen Ethnologie. In Syrien war Safa ebenfalls an der Universität und hat in Damaskus Kunst studiert. Die Kunst ist ihr geblieben. Sie malt in ihrer Freizeit Bilder und hat demnächst zusammen mit ihrer älteren Schwester eine Ausstellung in Pettnau. Simone ist inzwischen da

und wir fragen Safa gleich, ob sie eines ihrer Bilder für das Projekt zur Verfügung stellen könnte, oder etwas dazu schreiben will. Ein Bild, meint sie, dürfte gehen, schreiben will sie eigentlich nicht wirklich. Was während des Gesprächs deutlich wird, ist, dass sie und ihre Familie keinen Asylbescheid haben und daher auch nicht arbeiten dürfen. Das beschäftigt sie anscheinend sehr, da sie es mehrmals erwähnt. Sie erwähnt auch, dass sie hoffentlich nicht aus Innsbruck weg müssen. Momentan leben sie in Arzl bei einer österreichischen Familie, die ihnen eine Wohnung zur Verfügung gestellt hat. Eine wirklich prekäre Lebenssituation also und alles ist von einem Bescheid abhängig, obwohl Safa und ihre ältere Schwester in Österreich studieren und ihre jüngere Schwester in Innsbruck zur Schule geht. Mich würde das extrem belasten.

Ihre Freizeit verbringt Safa gerne mit ihrer Familie, und an Innsbruck gefallen ihr die Alpen am besten. Sonst zeichnet sie gerne. Simone, Safa und ich richten eine WhatsApp Gruppe ein, um uns gut und schnell verständigen zu können. Der Gruppenname sind alle Blumen, die als Emoticons auf WhatsApp zu finden sind. Mir etwas zu stereotyp weiblich, aber ich behalte meine Meinung für mich, um die beginnende Beziehung zwischen uns dreien nicht unnötig zu stören.

Safas Alltag in Syrien: Sie kommt aus einem kleinen Dorf in einem Tal, das dreißig Autominuten von Damaskus entfernt ist. Dort hat sie die Universität besucht und für das Kunststudium einen Aufnahmetest absolviert. Was sie am meisten vermisst, sind die Familientreffen in ihrer Heimat. Safa erzählt, dass sie sich früher alle jeden Freitagnachmittag bei ihrer Großmutter getroffen und gegessen hätten. Freunde vermisst sie auch. Hier sagt sie, hat sie viele syrische Männer kennengelernt (dabei lacht sie und wird leicht rot).

Ihre Flucht findet in unserem ersten Gespräch kurz Erwähnung. Wahrscheinlich ist das auch dem Namen der Lehrveranstaltung „Fluchtgeschichten" geschuldet. 2012, also schon eher zu Beginn des Konflikts in Syrien, ist Safa mit ihrer Familie zuerst nach Jordanien, dann in die Türkei geflohen. Dabei haben sie alle erdenklichen Fahrzeuge, von Auto, Bus, Flugzeug, Zug bis Boot verwendet. Nahe der Grenze zur Türkei sind sie auch ein Stück zu Fuß gegangen. Vertreter der UNICEF (ich denke, sie meint die UNHCR, habe aber nicht genauer nachgefragt) seien an der Grenze gewesen und hätten gute Hilfe geleistet. In ihrer Erzählung wird nicht ganz klar, welche Grenze sie jetzt meint. Nach diesem kurzen Einstieg in ihre Geschichte (wir wollten mit einer detailreicheren Erzählung noch warten, bis sich unsere Beziehung etwas etabliert hat), fragt Safa Simone und mich noch, woher wir kommen, was wir ihr auch beantworten, allerdings eher kurz. Während unseres Gesprächs hat der Wind mir kleine Äste und Blütenblätter ins Haar geweht, und ich sage zu Safa: *„So*

ein Kopftuch wäre schon praktisch." Ich denke, dass ich so meine Zustimmung zur ihrer Art sich zu kleiden signalisieren wollte, wobei die Kopftuchdebatte für mich eine heikle ist, was ich auch deutlich an meinem Unbehagen zu Beginn unseres Treffens bemerkt habe. Das Kopftuch ist ein stark aufgeladenes Symbol, dessen Werte ich nur ein Stück weit begreifen und werten kann. So finde ich es zum Beispiel verständlich, dass man Religiosität durch Symbole zum Ausdruck bringt. Allerdings kann ich patriarchalische Strukturen, die für mich mit Vollverschleierung einhergehen, nicht gutheißen. Während unseres Gesprächs bin ich aber so mit dem Inhalt von Safas Geschichte beschäftigt, dass mir ihr Kopftuch gar nicht mehr auffällt.

Die in der Europäischen Ethnologie übliche Art der Interviewführung, bei der idealerweise nur Impulse gegeben werden sollen, um einen Redefluss zu initiieren, funktioniert in diesem Gespräch nicht wirklich. Oft müssen Simone und ich Fragen stellen. Das könnte einerseits mit der Sprachbarriere zu tun haben (obwohl Safa sehr gut Deutsch spricht, ist es doch nicht ihre Muttersprache), oder daran, dass das Thema auch belastende und heikle Facetten aufweist.

Andrea

Relationship work (4. Mai 2017)

Ich komme zu spät zum Treffen und ärgere mich über mich selbst. Ich bin von meiner Geburtstagsfeier mit meiner Familie erst so spät wie möglich aufgebrochen und habe unterwegs noch einen Gratulationsanruf bekommen. Ich bin noch ganz auf mich fixiert und versuche mich auf Safa zu fokussieren. Wir sitzen im Ubichat, ich habe das Café als neutralen Raum an der Universität vorgeschlagen (Safa studiert ja auch, so ist es für sie nicht ungewöhnlich hier zu sein), da das Wetter zu unsicher für ein weiteres Gespräch im Hofgarten ist und der Wind letztes Mal sehr gestört hat. Als ich komme, haben Simone und Safa bereits Getränke, ich bin noch so gesättigt von Kuchen und Kaffee, dass ich nichts bestelle. Insgeheim habe ich gehofft, dass mir die beiden zum Geburtstag gratulieren, da ich ihn in unserem Chatverlauf auf WhatsApp erwähnt habe. Sie tun es nicht, was mich kurz etwas kränkt. Mein Vorhaben, mich auf Safa und ihre Geschichte zu konzentrieren schlägt fehl, denn ich erzähle sehr viel von meiner letzten Woche. Generell reden Simone und ich viel mehr als Safa, was prinzipiell eher zu vermeiden wäre, da wir ja ihre Geschichte hören wollen.

Simone schlägt vor gemeinsam etwas Syrisches zu kochen und bietet ihre Wohnung dazu an. Safa meint daraufhin, dass sie natürlich (sie betont das Wort) syrisch kochen kann und es auch gern für uns macht.

Essen scheint ein sehr verbindender Faktor zu sein, Safa taut uns gegenüber auf. Ich erinnere mich an meine Erasmuszeit, als ich an mehreren „international food events" teilgenommen habe. Die Idee war, dass man ein Gericht aus dem Heimatland kocht oder bäckt und andere probieren lässt. Wir planen das Kochen in zwei Wochen, vor dem Ramadan. Ich bin sehr überrascht, dass es schon wieder Zeit für den Ramadan ist. Mir fehlt hinsichtlich dieses Fastenmonats jegliches Zeitgefühl. Ich frage Safa, wie denn der Ramadan zeitlich festgelegt wird, sie weiß es allerdings auch nicht. Was mich sehr am Ramadan überrascht, ist, dass Frauen während ihrer Periode das Fasten nicht einhalten müssen. Mein vor allem medial geprägtes Bild von muslimischen Ländern, in dem patriarchale Strukturen vorherrschen, wird so aufgelockert. Ich weiß, Generalisierungen treffen meist nicht oder nur sehr ungenau zu, finde mich aber, gerade was den Nahen Osten betrifft, immer wieder dabei, gerade diese aufzustellen. Ich hoffe sehr, dass die Gespräche mit Safa mich immer wieder darauf hinweisen. Ich bin positiv überrascht, dass Safa überhaupt mit uns über die Periode spricht, wenn auch nicht direkt: *„… wisst ihr, eine Frau so einmal im Monat…"*

Ich erzähle auch von meinem eigenen Fasten, und dass ich mir aussuche, was ich faste. Safa meint daraufhin, dass Ramadan in Syrien auch leichter war, da dort die Tage kürzer sind als in Österreich (an Alltagsauswirkungen habe ich in diesem Zusammenhang noch nie gedacht) und die Universität geschlossen war, wenn der Ramadan auf einen Sommermonat fiel.

Simone bringt das Gespräch vom Ramadan auf Hochzeiten.

Wir beide haben eine Vorstellung von türkischen Hochzeiten, die wir als Vergleich zu Safas Erzählungen von einer syrischen Hochzeit heranziehen können. (Safa schlägt diesen Vergleich vor.) Safa findet große Hochzeiten normal. Sie kommt aus einem Dorf, in dem alle eingeladen werden, wenn eine Hochzeit stattfindet (ca. 1500 Personen). Für mich stellt sich die Frage, wo alle Gäste unterkommen sollen. Die Antwort ist schnell gefunden, Frauen und Männer feiern nämlich getrennt. Finde ich anfangs zwar befremdlich, macht aber Sinn, nachdem Safa erklärt, dass Frauen so ihre eigene Party bekommen, bei der sie auch ihr Kopftuch ablegen können.

Andrea

Acceptance and tolerance „gehen durch den Magen" – an evening with Syrian food and stories (18 May 2017)

As Simone suggested last week, we did not only talk this time, but also cooked a Syrian dish – Hurraa Beasbaao, a lentil soup with pieces of yeast bread and a lot

of garlic in it, and garnered with fried onions and coriander. I was pleased that we were doing something together, instead of just asking and answering questions.

I have the feeling that a friendship is developing between us and that I don't want to exploit Safa for a grade. By cooking together my fear that I might be using her is not that strong. I am not sure what to think of our situation because it is the first time in my studies that I have to meet someone I have not known before and collaborate with her for a longer period of time.

To go and buy the ingredients we needed, Simone and I meet Safa in front of the Grand Europa Hotel. I hug Safa for the first time. Previously we greeted each other only with a handshake. We want to do our shopping at an *oriental* market nearby. (I don't like the term *oriental*, but that's what the market is called.) We walk a few meters unsure where the market is. Safa calls her Dad, because he usually goes there after his visit to the nearby mosque. What I immediately notice is, that when she talks Arabic on the phone her voice is much lower than when she speaks with us in German. I wonder why this is so. For I myself tend to talk louder when on the phone. But then I remember that German isn't Safa's mother tongue and conclude that this is probably why she speaks more loudly to us. The market is very small and narrow, but we get all the stuff we need relatively quickly. I pay for everything and we settle the bill later because earlier Safa said, *"Wir kochen miteinander, also zahle ich auch."*[1] She stresses the word *miteinander*.

After we have done our shopping we go to Simone's apartment and start preparing the yeast dough. The topics we have planned to talk about today are Safa's family and her journey to Austria. I don't want to use the word "Flucht" and try to use "Reise" instead, but realise that on occasion I still speak of "Flucht".

Safa starts her story by talking about her family. She is here in Austria with her parents and two sisters. She is the middle child. Her older sister studies and lives in Vienna, which puzzles me, because I thought families with refugee status have to stay together. Her little sister is fifteen and goes to school in Innsbruck. Her parents are still waiting for their "Bescheid" and go to German classes twice a week.

Safa and her family started their journey in 2012 and went to Lebanon first. Then they moved on to Jordan where an uncle of Safa's was already living. Luckily, Safa says, they never had to go to a refugee camp, because they had saved money by renting out some real estate. In Jordan, Safa's uncle, who is a doctor, had opened a small clinic to attend to Syrian refugees. Safa says it was very bad seeing wounded people coming in. Her dad tried to help her uncle, but the city where they were staying was overcrowded and it was almost impossible to get work. Safa says that they had to pay to get work – something I cannot understand.

1 We cook together, so I pay as well.

In the end her uncle had to close the clinic, because more and more people were arriving and the Jordan government could not give any more money. With the clinic closed, Safa, her family and her uncle went to Turkey. They stayed in the town of Gaziantep for a year and eight months. Her uncle had work there, but it was impossible for her father to find a job. People there did not speak English and, in Safa's opinion, were not very friendly to foreigners. Most of her contacts there were with other Syrians. Safa had planned to go to university, but her Syrian A levels were not recognized in Turkey, so she had to sit an SAT test, which she passed, but was also very stressful for her to do. While she was applying for a place to study her father decided to go somewhere else, thinking that it was better for them to move on before Europe stopped taking in refugees. They went to Antalya where they paid a smuggler to take them to a nearby Greek island. They waited for 20 days and the smuggler still was not taking them. So they decided to buy a boat with some of their savings. Asked if her mother had had a job back in Syria, Safa explained that she had been a housewife and from time to time tutored children at primary school age. At 35 she began to study archeology, but, because of their departure, never obtained her certificate.

Simone asks how they travelled on from the Greek Island. They boarded a regular boat, and it took them about 24 hours to make it to the mainland. This must have been a scary venture. For Safa's father was the only one in the family who could swim and he had never steered a boat before. From there onwards Safa and her family took busses and trains. She also mentions NGOs who helped many of the people on the move. Their journey entailed a lot of waiting, about which Safa seems still annoyed.

Austria became the place to stay because it was the first country in central Europe they reached. They were in Vienna. After two days without food or sleep, they were looking for a hotel to finally get some rest, but because of a medical congress taking place at the time, everything was booked out. Thus they accepted the accommodation a friend in Innsbruck had offered them. They took the train and arrived in Innsbruck in the late evening around 21:00.

Simone asks if the police and people at the borders were nice to her, and Safa recalls that all in all people were very kind and helpful. (Her mother has diabetes and always received the help she needed.) The officers in Hungary were an exception. I ask Safa if they ever had to go to a refugee camp, but fortunately (Safa says: *"Zum Gück nicht."*) they had enough resources to come to Austria without having to stay at a camp. In Hungary officials wanted them to go to a camp for the night, but it was horrible and wet and no one of them could sleep there. So they took a bus to the Hungarian-Austrian border.

Andrea

Stories and Syrian food (18 May 2017)

Meeting Safa now for the third time, I am able to feel comfortable with our encounters. In fact, I enjoy them quite a lot. Nevertheless, at the beginning I went through an inner conflict, because I did not want Safa to feel exploited. Soon I recognized that she probably likes being asked questions, and likes that someone is interested in her story.

Believing that you get to know a person when you cook with them, I invited Safa to my place and the three of us (Andrea, Safa and I) prepared Syrian food together. It was a fine introduction into Syrian traditional cuisine, and with Safa's help we managed to bring little Damascus, her hometown, into our kitchen. For me the evening was very interesting, and I also had the impression that Safa enjoyed it a lot. She showed us many ingredients I hadn't known before and explained how her favorite Syrian dish is cooked. We also went grocery shopping together, and Safa introduced us to a little oriental-market, which is close to the main station in Innsbruck. We bought all the ingredients we needed and headed home to start our cooking evening.

Since everything we did that evening is still vividly present in my mind, I will shift to the present tense:

Safa first asks me whether there are any males in my flat. Since two of my flat mates are men, she cannot take off her headscarf. She tells us that it is quite hot under it, even more so if you are standing beside the stove. For me this is a starting point for a conversation about a topic I want to address today.

After three hours of cooking we have amazingly delicious food on the table. The main dish is called وعبصاب ءارح in Arabic. As a side dish we have eggplant, put in the oven for 30 minutes and then smashed to the consistency of mush, before garlic, tomatoes and some olive oil are added.

While we are cooking, we talk with Safa about her flight from Syria to Austria. She tells us precisely where she and her family stopped and lived on the way and she seems to be quite grateful that she did not have to sleep in a refugee camp. She saw one refugee camp on her way to Austria, and she mentions that the living conditions were terrible there. People had to sleep on the floor in the mud; even pregnant women had to do so, as well as little babies. Her report on her journey from Syria to Austria takes about an hour, but this should not be my focus today.

Sitting and eating at the table with Safa makes me very curious. I am aware that she has experienced things that must be heard by other people. Safa, and all the other people who had to flee from their home need listeners. They need somebody who gives them the opportunity to talk and be heard.

I: What does the headscarf mean to you? Why do you wear it?
Safa: Yes, the headscarf is for me like a sister, because all women wear it to protect themselves. Yes, it is a protection in Islam, because her hair makes a woman more attractive, and it is not only the headscarf, but I also have to wear something like this this. [She points at her clothes.] But usually I do not wear short sleeves, as I am doing right now. It is not good like this, but since I am cooking I am wearing short sleeves right now. Normally I wear loose clothes which do not define my body as much. But I am not as strict with the headscarf, because I always wear normal trousers and jeans. Still, I try to select a blouse which is longer and not a short one. But it is a very normal thing in Islam to wear loose clothes so that nobody can see your body. Because of men and so on. It is a way of protecting ourselves.
I: That means you would not feel comfortable without a headscarf and never go outside street without it?
Safa: Yes I would not feel comfortable.

…Now, after we have washed the dishes together and have cleaned up my kitchen, Safa and Andrea are leaving my flat. It's 22:10. Safa hugs me, and thanks me for a nice evening, and I thank her as well. We arrange a meeting for the following week and both of us are looking forward to it.

Simone

All we need is safety and protection (29 May 2017)

This time I meet Safa alone, because Andrea does not have time. We start talking about her headscarf again – simply because there is one thing I do not want to leave unspoken now that I have gained some new insight into her family's flight and know the reason for it:

I: I was already interested in this last time we met. I wanted to show you a newspaper article, because I am very interested in the matter of the headscarf – you have already read this in my last text – and there has been a debate about whether to forbid the wearing of the headscarf in public spaces in Austria, or not. Have you heard about this discussion?
Safa: Yes, I have, but it was only that they wanted to abolish the headscarf at universities and at work.
I: Yes this is what they wanted, right.
Safa: You know… it was in Syria that Assad's father forbade women to wear a headscarf at school, work, and university. And then it was extremely bad, because we

had a dictatorship at that time. We were not allowed to do what we wanted to do, and when his son came into power it got better. He allowed us to wear the headscarf again, but now when we come to Austria and we hear that here we are not allowed to wear our headscarf either, we don't feel free. Then we don't have any freedom.

Since Safa and her family came to Austria, they had to give up much of their personal freedom in order to be safe. Unlike five years ago, Safa cannot try to re-enter Syria any longer. She says that as soon as she does so she will be detained.

Safa: Our apartment – nobody is living there and nobody is allowed to live there. The government says that nobody is allowed to live there.
I: Why not?
Safa: Because we are against the government and I don't know
I: Why does the government know that you are against them?
Safa: They know because my father is an air traffic controller at the airport, at the civil airport, but then they said to my father that he has to work with the military. There are not many air traffic controllers at the military airbase, and he said: "No, I won't do this!," because these airplanes will bombard poor people. And then they detained him three times and often asked him why he did not want to do it.
I: For how long did they detain him?
Safa: 24 hours. Three times, hence three days. Every time he left for work they would arrest him. And then he also wanted some days off, but they told him that he was not allowed to take a holiday. Then the government said that we have to leave our apartment and we got bombed.
I: So you were in danger of life?
Safa: Yes. We then packed our stuff and fled within one day. But we said that it would only be for a month and then we'd return, but, in fact, it was not like that.
I: Yes, but still if you went back to Syria now, they would know who you are, wouldn't they? Isn't it very dangerous?
Safa: Sure, now it is dangerous. Yes, a few days later they bombed our house. They detonated two bombs in the ground floor where my grandmother normally lives, but we took her with us when we fled.
I: This means your grandmother doesn't live there anymore?
Safa: No, no. My grandmother currently is in Turkey.
I: Your father is very courageous. It is very brave of him what he did!

Simone

Nur zu zweit/Only the two of us (4. Juni 2017)

Safa kommt zu mir in die Wohnung. Ich war letzte Woche nicht da, da ich von der Universität aus auf Exkursion war, und Simone und Safa haben sich in dieser Zeit alleine getroffen. Da ich mich ebenfalls mit ihr treffen will, sehen wir uns an diesem Sonntag. Simone kann nicht kommen, sie ist über das lange Wochenende nach Hause gefahren.

Safa klingelt und ich drücke den Türöffner, sie klingelt erneut, wahrscheinlich hat sie das sehr leise Brummen des Öffners nicht gehört. Sie geht die zwei Stockwerke zu meiner Wohnung herauf und wir umarmen uns. Danach zieht sie die Schuhe aus und kommt herein, ich frage mich auch, ob sie heute ihre Kopftuch abnimmt, da wir beide ja allein in meiner Wohnung sind, aber sie lässt es an. Ich frage mich kurz, ob es an mir oder der kurzen Zeit liegt, die wir miteinander verbringen, ich werde sie das nächste Mal diesbezüglich fragen. Wir sprechen über Safas Bilder. Für mich zeigt sie hier eine andere Seite. Safa beschreibt das erste Bild, das sie mir zeigt: Das ist eine Sonnenuhr und das andere ein Stellarium. Auf die Frage, ob wir vielleicht ein oder zwei Bilder in unserem Journal verwenden können, meint sie in Bezug auf das Bild mit den Uhren: Es ist ein bisschen schwierig, denn ich habe dieses Bild in einer Ausstellung in eine andere Land[...] wie heißt das[...] äh, Niederlande, und ich habe eine Unterschrift und darf es nicht mehr benutzen. Das Original hat sie zwar noch, aber ein Druck des Bildes ist verkauft. Ich bin verwundert und freue mich gleichzeitig für sie, ich hätte nicht gedacht, dass sie mit ihren Bildern so erfolgreich ist. Safa meint, sie gibt uns gerne ein anderes Bild für unser Projekt.

Das nächste Bild, das sie mir zeigt, finde ich besonders schön. Es zeigt Gebäude in Damaskus, die Safa kennt und die auf dem Bild immer kleiner und kleiner werden, bis sie in einen Koffer gepackt werden können. Sie erklärt mir: *„Das ist die Moschee, eine sehr berühmte Moschee in Syrien, das eine sehr berühmte Kirche, das ein neues berühmtes Hotel, weil es ist in Damaskus nicht üblich hohe Häuser und dann war das ein bisschen hoch."* Ich sage nochmals, dass ich zu ihrer Ausstellung gehen will, und wir beide lachen.

Auf die Frage, was sie zum Malen inspiriert, antwortet sie: *„Situationen, die ich meisten gehabt oder gefühlt [sie zeigt mir ein eher dunkleres Bild] schau, das hab ich in Jordanien gemalt und da war ich in keinem guten Mut, ich habe das Bild dann in Jordanien gelassen."*

Safa wechselt das Thema, sie will mit mir über eine Fernsehsendung sprechen. Ihr fällt aber zuerst nur der englische Ausdruck „series" ein, den ich nicht sofort zuordnen kann, sodass ich ein paar Minuten brauche, bis ich weiß, was sie meint. Sie sagt, dass im Ramadan besonders viele Serien in Syrien gedreht werden und eine Dokumentation, die unlängst in Syrien gedreht wurde (Safa weiß den Titel

leider nicht mehr), nicht die Realität widerspiegelt. Ich halte dem entgegen, dass Außenstehende vielleicht eine andere Perspektive haben, aber Safa konkretisiert, dass sie (und ihre Familie) nicht mit der Herangehensweise der TV-Sender einverstanden ist, die viel Geld zahlen, dass bestimmte Situationen nachgestellt werden.

Safa erzählt mir von einer Dokumentation über Syrien, die sie sehr gut findet, die es aber nur auf Arabisch gibt. Sie will sie vielleicht übersetzen und fragt mich, ob ich ihr eventuell mit dem Deutsch helfen könnte. Ich willige ein, denn ich habe in Österreich Ausländerfeindlichkeit erlebt, der man durch gute Aufklärung entgegenwirken könnte. Safa macht aus dem gleichen Grund auch bei diesem Projekt mit. Sie hofft, dass sie und ihre Familie bald einen positiven Asylbescheid erhalten werden. Außerdem erwähnt sie, dass die Wohnung, in der sie untergebracht sind, ab Herbst von den Besitzern selbst benötigt wird und sie dann umziehen müssen. Für 350 € bekommt man in Innsbruck allerdings keine Unterkunft, geschweige denn eine für eine vierköpfige Familie.

Safa wechselt das Thema. *„Ich habe Radkurs gemacht"*, sagt sie stolz (bei unserer ersten Begegnung hat sie den Wunsch geäußert, Fahrradfahren zu lernen). *„Ich kann geradeaus fahren, aber die Kurve ist noch schwer."* Ich sage darauf, dass jetzt nur noch der Schwimmkurs fehlt. (Schwimmen zu lernen war, wie ich wusste, ebenfalls ein Wunsch von Safa.)

Am Ende unseres Gesprächs sagt mir Safa noch, dass sie die erste Prüfung, die sie in Pharmazie geschrieben hat, nicht bestanden hat. Sie scheint etwas zerknirscht und meint: *„Ich habe viel gelernt, aber da waren Fragen, die waren nicht in Skript."* Ich versichere ihr darauf, dass das durchaus öfters vorkommt und sie ja die Prüfung wiederholen kann.

Andrea

Syria, Austria, and being in between (8. Juni 2017)

Diese Woche sind wir wieder zu dritt. Simone, Safa und ich treffen uns im Hofgarten, da es schön und die Außentemperatur angenehm ist. Wir setzen uns in der Nähe des Pavillons (wo wir uns auch das erste Mal getroffen haben) ins leicht feuchte Gras. Wir sitzen unter einem Baum und Vögel zwitschern unentwegt. Wir kommen wieder auf den Ramadan zu sprechen. Es scheint, als würden wir das Thema nicht vermeiden können. Simone erkundigt sich, wann man denn während des Ramadan essen dürfe und ob das Essen noch während des Tages vorbereitet werde. Safa meint, dass die Familie nicht so viel essen würde wie während des Ramadan in Syrien, sie sagt: *„Meine Mutter hat immer für den Abend gekocht, jetzt sie kocht für zwei Abende."* Safa sagt darauf, dass sie in Syrien dicker gewesen sei. Ein paar Kilo habe sie während ihrer Reise hierher abgenommen.

Ich frage nach ihrem Asylbescheid, ob er denn jetzt endlich gekommen sei, und Safa antwortet darauf: *„ Ja, ich war beim BFA und habe dort gefragt und auch Brief geschrieben an diese Frau, und die haben mir gesagt, dass unsere Papiere sind in Wien und warten, bis sie wieder kommt und niemand weiß wann, ja.* "Wieder ärgere ich mich für sie über die österreichische Bürokratie. Wie Safa schon in vorherigen Gesprächen erzählt hat, hat ihre ältere Schwester, die in Wien studiert, bereits einen positiven Bescheid. Ich erkläre ihr, dass wir, wenn wir einen neuen Pass beantragen, ebenfalls einige Zeit warten müssen, bis das Dokument aus Wien kommt, aber die Wartezeiten sind natürlich nicht zu vergleichen. Viel Trost zieht sie nicht daraus.

Simone berichtet von einer BBC-Dokumentation über Damaskus, in der die Stadt als quasi kriegsfreie Zone gezeigt wird und will von Safa ihre Meinung dazu wissen. Sie meint darauf: *„Im Zentrum ist es so, es schaut so aus, aber die Menschen haben Schwierigkeiten, aber es ist alles teurer geworden, sie haben keine Freiheit, es gibt Checkpoints, wo immer gefragt wird, sie haben keine Sicherheit.* " Was mich sehr wundert, ist, dass die Universität den Betrieb weiterhin aufrechterhält.

Ich frage Safa, wann sie denn ihr Kopftuch abnimmt. Dass sie es vor den Männern ihrer näherer Familie und Frauen abnehmen kann, war mir bewusst. Als wir bei unserem letzten Treffen unter uns waren, irritierte mich daher, dass sie ihr Kopftuch nicht ablegte. Sie meint, sie hätte einfach nicht das Bedürfnis dazu gehabt und wollte sich auch die Mühe sparen, es nachher wieder anzulegen. Sie findet das Kopftuch, das sie gerade trägt, sehr angenehm, da es nicht leicht verrutscht, und sie die Nadel, mit der es befestigt ist, nur zur Sicherheit verwendet. In einer windigen Stadt wie Innsbruck ist das bestimmt kein Fehler, denke ich mir. Safa erklärt, dass sie das Kopftuch vor allen Männern tragen muss, die sie heiraten könnten, also auch vor ihren Cousins. Ehen unter Verwandten seien auf dem Land in Syrien gar nicht so unüblich. Ihre Eltern sind zum Beispiel Cousins zweiten Grades und sind nebeneinander aufgewachsen. Auf Simones Frage, ob Frauen sich aussuchen können, wen sie heiraten, meint Safa, dass die Frau natürlich ihre Zustimmung zu einer Hochzeit geben muss. *„Ich kann nur Muslime heiraten",* bemerkt sie, erklärt jedoch, dass muslimische Männer durchaus auch eine Christin zur Frau nehmen können, da die Religion vom Vater an die Kinder weitergegeben wird. Ich sehe das nicht so schwarz-weiß, ich halte mich aber mit meiner Meinung zurück. Ich will nicht über Grundsätze des Korans mit Safa zu diskutieren beginnen, da ich sie nicht kränken will. Für sie ist jedenfalls klar, dass ein zukünftiger Ehepartner, egal welcher Nationalität er angehört, Moslem sein muss. Simone fragt Safa, ob sie denn religiös ist, was sie bejaht. Simone fragt dann weiter: *„Sehr religiös oder normal religiös?",* worauf Safa meint: *„Normal religiös"* und ich im gleichen Moment frage: *„Was ist denn eigentlich normal?"* Für Safa ist normal, dass ihre Kleidung nicht zu kurz ist und sie ein Kopftuch

trägt. Sie hat sich auch einige Dinge angewöhnt, seit sie hier ist, zum Beispiel das Händeschütteln. Im Islam darf sie einem Mann eigentlich nicht die Hand geben. In Österreich macht sie es aber, weil sie hier sonst mit verwunderten bzw. abschätzigen Blicken bedacht wird. Auch sieht sie Menschen anders an. In Syrien und in der Türkei gilt es als ein Ausdruck von Respekt, wenn ein Mann einer Frau nicht in die Augen schaut. Sie weiß aber, dass in Österreich Blickkontakt wichtig für jede Art von Interaktion ist. Begrüßungen laufen ebenfalls anders ab. Das Arabische verfügt über viele Begrüßungsfloskeln, die auch alle oft verwendet werden. Eine Begrüßung von Gästen zum Beispiel dauert länger und ist, wie Safa findet, herzlicher als hier in Österreich. Auf die Frage, wie sie Begegnungen in Österreich sieht, antwortet Safa*: „Wir sagen, es ist so wie das Wetter hier, sehr kalt und sehr ruhig, in Syrien ist alles sehr laut und laufend Gespräche."* Ich frage mich, ob es vielleicht in Syrien deswegen lauter ist, weil sich nicht jeder in die Augen schauen kann.

Simone will mehr über die Unterschiede zwischen Syrien und Österreich wissen, mich dagegen interessieren eher die Gemeinsamkeiten, dadurch will ich vor allem verhindern, dass wir Safa nur in ihrer Andersartigkeit wahrnehmen. Safa erzählt, dass in Damaskus alle lautstark miteinander reden, und wenn man jemanden aus größerer Entfernung auf sich aufmerksam machen will, pfeift man einfach.

Nach unserem Gespräch gehen Safa und ich noch durch die Altstadt und mir kommt der Christkindlmarkt im Winter in den Sinn, wo auch alle eher laut miteinander reden und sich ab und zu Leute zupfeifen.

Wir treffen auf eine Musikkapelle, eine Trachtentanzgruppe und einen Männerchor. Da ich selbst in einer Musikkapelle spiele und Safa öfters eingeladen habe, einmal zu einem unserer Auftritte zu kommen, frage ich, ob sie sich die Aufführung noch ein bisschen anhören will. Sie ist begeistert und fängt an mit dem Handy ein facebook-live Video zu machen. Als wir dann doch weitergehen, sagt sie mir, sie findet es gut, dass ich so traditionsreiche Hobbies mache. Das bringt mich sehr zum Denken, denn mir war das bis jetzt gar nicht wirklich bewusst.

Andrea

This time we meet Safa in the Hofgarten again. It was a good idea, since it makes me aware of the progress we have made since our very first meeting, which also took place there.

Sitting on the lawn soon makes me realize how we have grown into a team, sharing the project of recalling and recording Safa's experiences.

As Safa has said many times, she wants us to learn about her religion and her way of life because she wants to do something against the prejudices so many Austrians hold against refugees. Today this seems to be on her mind again, as we embark on another conversation on Ramadan. She seems to be very optimistic about Ramadan. I asked her once whether it wasn't unhealthy not to eat and drink on hot days, and she told me of one study that shows that fasting, as they do, is indeed so healthy that it can even prevent cancer.

Safa mentions that she misses all her friends and her house in Syria, and that she would love to go back, but they simply cannot, because it is too dangerous for them as political opponents of the government.

Safa: But yes, I miss those things, like for example the long greetings.
I: What is it like to be here in Austria?
Safa: Everything is very cold, the same as the weather here. If one is greeted here in Austria, everything is very quiet; in Syria everything is very loud. The people talk and talk and talk all the time. [She laughs.]

I can see that Safa misses her home, although she has never said so in our meetings before. Today for the first time she talks more about her emotions. I start to feel for Safa, and become quite sad when listening to her. Clearly, it is not only the people and the life in Syria that Safa misses. Her whole life was packed into one suitcase when she had to leave; there was not much time to take everything she was emotionally attached to.

Safa: We used to travel a lot in former times and always were happy when we came back home. And now we haven't returned back home, and so often I have the feeling that I want to go home. I am tired. I want to go home.
I: Do you think that this will be possible one day?
Safa: Not now, but I hope some day I can go back home.
I: Does this mean that you do not think you will ever be able to say, "Austria is my home"?
Safa: I grew up in Syria, and for this reason I will always have the feeling that Austria is not my home. And currently I am not here and not there. I am in between!

Simone

Everything comes to an end – eine kurze Reflexion am Ende (13. Juni 2017)

Ich muss sagen, dass ich mit großem Respekt in dieses Projekt hineingegangen bin. Flucht und Flüchtlinge sind medial so präsent, dass das Thema mit

großer Vorsicht und viel Selbstreflexion behandelt werden muss. In dieser Zusammenarbeit zweier Studienfächer der Universität Innsbruck, nämlich der Anglistik und der Europäischen Ethnologie, ist ein Produkt mit teilweise gleichen und teilweise verschiedenen Herangehensweisen entstanden, das umso reicher ist. Simones Texte unterscheiden sich von meinen auf den ersten Blick durch die Sprache (obwohl ich auch einen Text auf Englisch verfasst habe), aber eben auch durch den Inhalt. Ich habe meine Aufgabe hier eher in einer beschreibenden und reflektierenden Position gesehen, während Simone, zwar ebenfalls beschreibend, eher auf den Kontext der Interviews eingegangen ist. In den Texten ist ebenfalls zu sehen, dass Simone die Interviews in einer Makroebene, einem Kollektiv verortet hat, während ich Safa und ihre Geschichte eher in der Mikroebene ihres Alltags gesehen habe. Meiner Meinung nach bereichern sich die beiden Ebenen sehr.

Die Forschungsbeziehung zwischen uns hat sich ebenfalls sehr gut entwickelt, ich habe es regelrecht genossen, uns bei unseren Gesprächen dabei zu beobachten, wie wir uns immer besser kennenlernen und dementsprechend unterschiedliche Themen ansprechen können. Mit einer Person über einen längeren Zeitraum Gespräche zu führen ist in der Europäischen Ethnologie bei längeren Feldforschungen meistens der Fall, an der Universität kommt man eher selten dazu. Ich habe diese Art der Interviewführung, gerade in Bezug auf ein durchaus heikles Thema, als sehr angenehm und bereichernd empfunden.

Ich denke, es ist wichtig, Safas Geschichte zu hören, aber ebenfalls wichtig, sie aus Simones und meiner Sicht zu hören. Bei einem medial sehr geprägten Thema wie Flucht ist es wichtig Einzelgeschichten zu hören, die die große Zahl an Berichten zumindest ein Stück weit vermenschlichen können. Ebenfalls wichtig war es mir, meine Sicht, Gefühle, Unsicherheiten zu zeigen. In einem Spannungsfeld, in dem immer wieder neue Positionen auftauchen, ist es legitim ab und zu verwirrt oder unsicher zu sein. Egal, wo man geboren ist.

Andrea

Notes on the Contributors

Andrea Bichler studies European Ethnology and Romance languages at the University of Innsbruck.

Janine Fingerlos is a social worker, now training to become a teacher of English and Biology at the University of Innsbruck. She founded and runs a youth centre in the village of Achenkirch where she met her project partner Said, who after the completion of the project began an apprenticeship as a cook. Although he is still in Austria, their ways have parted.

Sonja H. studies English at the University of Innsbruck.

Sarah Heiß is a student of English and Italian who hails from a small village in the North of Tyrol, but has been living in Innsbruck for the past nine years. She was involved in a language teaching initiative at the University of Innsbruck through which she met her project partner, Navid from Pakistan. She is no longer in contact with Navid, but knows that his application for asylum was rejected and that he now is waiting for the outcome of his appeal. Navid is still living in Innsbruck, working on a voluntary basis in an old people's home.

Bilal, J. is a refugee from Syria.

Hannah Kanz studied European Ethnology and History at the University of Innsbruck and Queen's University Belfast. Since 2018 she has been pursuing a PhD project in European Ethnology at the University of Innsbruck. She was born and grew up in Tyrol.

Lisa Manzl successfully completed her studies with an MA thesis on the refugee encounter narratives produced in the summer term of 2017 in the course from which also the texts contained in this collection ensued. She now holds a teacher's degree in English and Biology which she earned at the University of Innsbruck. She grew up in Hopfgarten in Tyrol, but is currently living and working in Innsbruck. She met her project partner when doing volunteer work at a hostel for refugees. Since then many things have changed for the better. In 2018, she was granted asylum and has recently moved with her family into their own little flat. They are still in contact and see each other regularly.

Axel Mölg was born and grew up in Kirchbichl, a small village close to Kufstein. He lives and studies in Innsbruck doing a teacher's degree in the subjects English and Geography. This is how he describes his collaboration with his project partner retrospectively: "Our relationship was professional and we never developed a friendship. I have not seen Abdul since the end of the project." His project partner requested that his real name should not be given in the journal.

Simone Praxmarer is studying at the University of Innsbruck to become a teacher of English and Geography. She was born in Imst in Tyrol, but currently lives in Innsbruck. She is still in contact with her project partner who also lives in Innsbruck, but does not meet her on a regular basis.

Farzaneh R. is a refugee from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Helga Ramsey-Kurz is associate professor of English literatures at the University of Innsbruck and specialises in postcolonial writing. She is continuing the writing project at the Department of English in Innsbruck with the aim to build an Archive of Refugee Encounter Narratives (ARENA) to be set up in collaboration with the Innsbruck DokumentationsArchivMigration (DAM).

Gilles Reckinger held a professorship at the department of European Ethnology at the University of Innsbruck before accepting a position as academic director of the Institut supérieur de l'économie in Luxembourg. As a social anthropologist he has research interests in migration, precariousness, and the European border regime.

Saiid is a refugee from Syria.

Hannah Spielmann studied English at the University of Innsbruck and earned an MA in Intercultural Communication from The University of Manchester, after which she worked for the UNHCR in Vienna for a year. She is now studying law in Innsbruck.

Lizzie W. is a student of European Ethnology at the University of Innsbruck.

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