

“What’s the rule?”

Interview about a young man’s path to a home

interview by Ágnes Regenhart

Mohamed recently moved to a new apartment. A vigorous, cheerful young man in his thirties who married a Hungarian girl two years ago. He tries to create a secure existence in Hungary. He has been working at the same company for several years and has managed to be employed full time and officially, with all paperwork in place. This is a big thing because usually kitchen workers are employed undeclared or only part-time or per occasion. In his home country he worked as an electrician in the family business. As he learned from his father, he does not have any official certificate and is unable to use his knowledge in Hungary. He did complete a one-year course in Budapest which is equivalent to eighth grade in elementary school. He currently has subsidiary protection status which grants him protection. Under the new rules his case is reviewed every three years and this decision may even be changed which makes long-term planning extremely uncertain and questionable so now he’s working to obtain a residence permit on another legal basis.

He speaks relatively good Hungarian, although with not the best grammar, but he expresses himself very fluently and communicatively. I’m writing down our conversation word for word, without correcting Mohamed’s mistakes because his use of the Hungarian language is very unique. Although the word order, conjugation or use of prepositions is often incorrect, or sometimes he does not use the most fitting words, but he is comprehensible and very expressive.¹

Since Mohamed participated in our housing programme, what I wanted to find out was what housing conditions he had lived in so far. We start the story by describing his current circumstances and go back in time to map up the various places he has stayed at and his experiences there. Where I thought it necessary, I clarified his words in parentheses.

How’s your new flat? How do you feel about it? Tell me about it.

It’s a very nice flat, one bedroom, not expensive. A little meanness with owner, but not so much problem because he doesn’t live here... Bathroom not good, all other good in flat.

And how do you communicate with the owner?

In Hungarian...

Do you speak over the phone?

By phone and once a month he come for money.

So he travels here and goes to see you?

Yes. He come every week, but he live in Graz and he have two or three flat here. And I think his grandmother or grandfather or someone is here. Then he come here every week. I saw last time he had mother and children with him too. But he doesn’t bother us, just once a month.

And he goes to the flat?

Yes, he go there and we give money, that’s all.

¹ Translator’s note: the English translation attempts to reflect the mistakes although it is impossible to transpose a speaker’s incorrect speech in one language into another language, especially as Hungarian has such a unique grammar structure.

And how do you pay the bills?

He'll say us how much money is and that's how much we give. It's not so much problem because hundred twenty-four thousand eight hundred.... About 125,000 altogether heating, hot and cold water, plus what it's called.....

Common costs?

Yes that's it, common costs. That's together and ...er... electricity bill comes after two months once and gas also once after two months. We just got the electricity bill, it was 6,000² Forints.

For two months? That's quite good.

Yes, for two months. He showed me by e-mail the bill.

And does he bring the bills?

No, it come by e-mail, he tell me, if I want he can send to me like that, I tell him I trust him. What will be the difference? 1,500 Forints or what? No problem, better I trust him (*he laughs*).

What kind of neighbourhood is the flat in? Which part of Budapest?

Well, Hidegkúti Nándor Stadium, you know. Two stop from Puskas.

Is it on Hungaria Avenue or in a small street?

Yes, on Hungaria Avenue.

Isn't it very noisy?

Well yeah, not problem. Only problem that no good shops close by. No Spar, not anything. Always we no find if we want buy something. The police there bother me a lot, really much. Almost every day.

The police? Where?

Yes. Even in stop.

Maybe because there's lots of trouble in that neighbourhood there by the stadiums...

Well, I don't know. I'm there two months but I don't see nothing, only there close is that police centre, I don't know how that is... Hős street is round the corner. And they bother a lot this neighbourhood from Puskas to Kőbányai street, market near. They really really bother. Police at night, police in the morning, don't know why.

Do they stop you and ask for your documents?

Not just stop me, the other day the police came, I came from work, around half 11.

At night?

Yes, night. I was standing at Puskas and waiting tram because at night tram only come in 15 minutes. I was waiting tram, I see police car come and pull up on other side. And the three policeman came. I was looking, there's nobody, just couple two Hungarians, so I think he's coming here. OK, no problem. Before I hold ID Card in hand. So he come up to me, not say hello, not say nothing. First question was, how you know we come to you. I say, look, I see I alone foreigner, nobody else, three people here so I think you come here. He holds my ID card, you have any knife, stabbing, whatever? I say what? What did you say? I no heard. He ask again, any knife, stabbing, whatever? I say, look, I come from work, still T-shirt on me, and he know from smell I was doing kebabs. Oh, I see! Where do you work? I work here, close Örs Vezér Square. Oh, OK. Then other was good man a bit, the other police, he says OK, OK, not worry, he give back my ID card. Not ask for ID after.

Yes, they were just checking.

Well, yeah. But these days it happen all days. This area. Every day. Otherwise I don't think so, is a safe area, why because here close is ... what is name .. BKK³ warehouse, all trams go there, all trolley busses, all busses go there. All night people come and go. Not much problems, I don't know why but since I come Budapest, police never bother me. In this one month they bother me a lot. Before, never happen like this, if someone stops somewhere then the police ask for their papers. But now in this month I see this. They bother to everyone.

How long have you lived at this address?

Well, two months, this the third month now. We moved in December. But not just there, it's same at Blaha Lujza square, we went there the day before yesterday, me and my wife, both, but on 28 (tram line). There at Blaha where it stops, the end stop, the police stop at the door and who gets off the tram, checking their papers. ID card. And my wife was very sick, and she told him we go see doctor, she look sick, but never mind he still check documents.

Maybe they're looking for someone...

This happen there every night, Blaha Lujza square near and where we live too and other places too. I don't know what's going on but that's how it is.

Well, who knows what's behind it, what matters is that you're OK.

Well yes, everything OK with me but you know it bother me, sometimes it's like this, over there at Puskas⁴ when a tram goes at night, you have to wait like 20 minute more. And they no care. If last tram goes, you wait half hour or more for night tram. And I should go back early morning. They no care.

Yes, that is a problem indeed. Otherwise what's the area like? What's the house like that you live in?

It's a block of flats or is it precast concrete panel? I don't know how much difference the panel. I just hear like this: panel...

Panel is made of concrete slabs, not brick.

Then I think it's panel. It's made of concrete, yes.

How's your relationship with the neighbours? Do you see the neighbours?

Well the many Chinese live in there but Hungarian people who live there very good people, everyone, yes. Unfortunately we lived here at Nyugati Station, when I went everyone say to me hello, good morning, even children. When wife go, you know she's a gypsy, nobody want to say, relation with her. Very... But there is good, everybody meet there, introduce, everybody talk. Not so much problem. The janitor is good, janitor has a kid, he's very good man too. Something wrong, we call, then they come quick, not problem.

Well that's really good.

Everywhere is cameraing. Then not so much problems.

Yes, that is reassuring. How many of you live in the flat?

Three living there.

Your wife and a friend of yours?

Yes, Ali.

3 Budapest Transport Company

4 Puskas Stadium

How do you manage to pay the rent? Does everyone pitch in?

For now, we and Ali pay half and half. For now I pay but Ali will pay, not problem. But I believe half and half we pay. Because sometimes Ali also have some girlfriend, somebody is there. I spoke, if not, then we three pay, but they always have someone.

I see, there's always a guest.

Yes.

I see. And there are two rooms, one is yours, one is Ali's?

Yes. We have that bit big one, he has little one. That's the difference. One-bedroom flat is.

What 's the kitchen like? And the bathroom?

Yes there is, kitchen very small and also the bathroom very small. Not problem if small, just not... I painted all, weren't clean, I fixed and all but not good like that, no space inside for washing machine, very small. Problem is he who made it putted in there bathtub. You can't put bathtub in bathroom like this because very small. If no bathtub would be very good.

Yes, this was built a while back, shower cabins were unknown then, they installed bathtubs everywhere.

Yes, it's very small because of bathtub. Because of washing machine ... I can't walk around there (*he speaks laughing*). But it's good place. For the money, it's good.

Please tell me how you got this flat. How did you get to have it?

Well, I look it up from Internet, then I came here to BMSZKI, I was in the housing programme, and you or they helped, Agi helped. Always called to he, talked with all them because I not know the rulings (*contract*), I can't understand that. OK, I can read and write in Hungarian, but the rulings I don't know them. When we write the paper it can be bad. Then Ági help me and talked for property and so.

And how did you arrange to move? Was there furniture here or did you have to bring it?

Well, the owner bring the furniture, there was no furniture, but property agree to owner, everything and then he get furniture and all. We buy no furniture. And then there was few furniture for Ali room and then Agi gave some.

Yes, we received the bed as a donation. Is that bed good?

Yes, yes, good. All others were there in it. What we say the owner bring it all. Is a good owner, just a bit ... he ... I feel, but he's very, you know... how you say ... in Hungarian ... little bit ... not so much want to reserve for people, you know little, a little meanness, little full of himself. When he speak, he speak like the other person is zero. Just things like that.

He doesn't show respect?

Respect just something, I don't care, whatever, he speak like that, you know. Anyway nothing with us, once a month we deal with him, I guess will be OK.

But it's good you were able to sign the contract. How many flats did you check out before this one?

We check out many and they all said, foreigners we no give (*he says laughing*).

Yes. About how many rejected you?

Well about two months, I guess well about 10 flats I go in and look personal and many flats when I say I foreigner, they no give.

Yes, and we called at least three times as many.

And the somebody they say to Agi why you are calling why they not call? (*he laughs*)

Yes and then they said, oh we won't rent out to foreigners.

Yes, yes, we won't rent to foreigners. Or some say, we give to foreigners but if gypsy, we not give. It's like that.

Where did you live before? Where did you move to this flat from?

We lived in the 6th District and BMSZKI paid that.

That's when you were in the housing program.

Yes, in the housing programme. That was good then, but bit expensive.

Yes, and you were unable to maintain it any longer.

Well, I speak to owner, I tell him, but the minimum difference is that because it third building (*floor*) and there's gas heating, very big came the gas bill. 50–60 thousand a month and we can't pay that. And rent was over 100 thousand, too much, small difficult. Now where we live the 140 includes everything, maybe even 130 something. Central heating and the like, we not have that there. Anyway it was good place, 24-hour transport and all, close to the centre.

Yes, that was a nicer neighbourhood.

Well that was very nice. I told him, just 30,000 if he deducted, I could even stay here, but he didn't want. But he was good owner, very very good owner. That was one hundred percent good.

He also got a few things for you, right?

Yes, yes, but like because of person I say very good. Like for example now also mail went there for me, I told him too, don't need nothing, not problem that bill, the mobile bill, not problem, I can pay it like that too. But still he bring there to the shop.

That is very nice.

Yes, very good person.

Were you able to get an address card?

No, it stayed there in District 6. That's good. We can get it for the new place because we have contract, with that we can but we don't want to because that's better. Because there we know doctor who is good.

Did the owner agree to this?

I speaked with owner, he not does anything. I speaked to owner, he says will stay, not problem. Then it stays as long as it stays, then we'll look at it. But I make new address, that is the permanent residence, in wife's flat..

In the flat of your wife's parents?

Yes, yes.

That's where you registered your permanent address?

Yes, and 6th District is place of residence.

I see. Where did you live before? Before joining the housing programme.

In the Kocsis shelter.

What kind of place was that? Tell me about it.

That was also very good place, really, clean, nice, the social work was good, everyone, there was not any problem there too.

You don't have to praise BMSZKI, that's not what this is about (I say laughing)

I know, really.

OK. Please tell the readers, because this interview will be read, what a shelter looks like. Many people don't even know what that's like.

But I tell you, now I said this honest, they show us other shelters too, there is one in District 10, District 11, that was not so nice and clean. Then we say no, if after one year also we get the place, we still go here to Kocsis.

Were you on a waiting list there?

Yes. Long time on waiting list and they want for us other place, I said no, until no place we will wait, but we go there.

Where did you wait? Where did you live until then?

Well here, on Dózsa György street.

Here, in this building?

Yes, here on the third floor, no second...

How long did you stay here?

Ali live about one year, and me I live the three-four month or the six month. This was not so good place (*he laughs*), but Kocsis was very good.

How long did you stay there?

Well ... about six months?

Were you in the temporary shelter?

Or for the eight month we lived and we got the allowance four more month. First month we pay nothing why if you're in waiting list six months, then they get this kind of allowance. One month no have to pay, other month half pay, third month 70 percent should pay and then from fourth month should have to pay full. But it was good, 10,000 per person and we lived two, me and Ali. Not problem there too.

Were there other foreigners at that shelter?

Yes, there were, for example we lived in thirteenth, there next to me in room was a Pakistani, an Afghan and after... down there is the hostel of some high school, then there many foreigners stayed.

And in the part where you lived how were the rooms equipped?

Inside the room there was a fridge and two closets, big closets, two beds, a nice big window, there was the phone inside, which we can call, they said, I never tried, but they say you can call to anywhere.

Could you make calls out to town?

Yes, and you can call from the outside and we can call too.... not to the mobile, to the other one. Yes, and we each had a separate key, there was closet, everything. There was a washing machine there, everyone could use.

Did that belong to the room too?

No.

Was that in a common area?

Yes, there was a washing machine in each building (*floor*), you know, that small one, with a drier and you had to pay 300 Forints in a large washing machine.

And was there a bathroom in the rooms?

No. That was common. The one downstairs where the student hostel is, there inside is the bathroom. The one above, for BMSZKI, we live in it, there not.

And the kitchen?

That was common too.

Did you use that? Did you cook there?

Yes. It was good, clean, every day comes from downstairs the person who clean everything.

How was your relationship with the other residents? Did you meet them?

Well, the one who lived at the left was not so good because there was some kind of racism but rest of others, seven or eight rooms, there everyone was very good. We always talked one or two days. Or me, when I work, when I no go or go late at night and come in morning, we meet in three or four days, then they ask me where you were, we didn't see you and so on. Others all were good, only one not good, the neighbour. That's how it is, it happen, what you can do? *(he laughs)*

Yes, unfortunately you can always run into this...

Yes, he was very racist. But I guess not only for us but for others also not so good relationship. Always argue in the room. I listen always something going on.

How did you end up there? How did you find the Kocsis shelter?

When we came here at Budapest, there from the camp, then we lived *(with the support of)* the Kalunba⁵, that was before the protestant. When he no get permanent money and like, when programme finished he say we no get more money, then we looked for apartment.

We looked everywhere, was same problem everywhere, we no give to foreigner. If someone want give, he say we no give address card, we no give contract, nothing. And it was like this, one-bedroom apartment for 200,000 forints, 220! Then we can't pay that much. We no speak Hungarian also, was difficult, like that ...

Then this guy, Sajid, he meeting a boy, at BMSZKI, talking with him and he say until we don't find apartment like this there's a place here in the 13th District. You should come here and register, then we can give you. OK, we came here in a week, we talked, he says you wait, then we went one-one for listening, he also do some kind of interview. Then he say we no can stay here this paper ours, not allowed. What rules there are, we will ask director, if director say yes, then we can help. And you have to wait for that, one week or two weeks. OK. We wait two weeks, when we come back he say yes, director say yes, same rules as for Hungarians, we can stay here. Then when is room or how long can we stay in apartment. I tell him I can stay about three month, to us owner say not problem but other boy say he can stay one month. And then he say when one month end you should come here, then we give you room. Then he come here, I come in about three-four months. And Ali too about when that other boy come, he come with him. Then to everyone he give that small-small room.

Did you get some kind of help here?

Well down here is the social and all, but I don't think I got so much help. It wasn't so much just that we should always go, when there will be the place in Kocsis. But I guess not everyone wanted that we go to Kocsis, he showed us others, I say no, we were there, we look, it is good place. We are at other too, two or three place was not good, then we say we no want go there.

⁵ Kalunba Social Support Nonprofit Ltd. organised a housing and language training programme for persons who had been granted international protection.

Would you have gotten into the other place sooner?

Well he say maybe sooner at other place, but you have to wait a lot for Kocsis but actually Kocsis is a very good shelter, then they no want send everyone there. That is problem, not should wait. Need to wait same at other places too. Just they don't want everyone go there. Because everyone want go there, that's nice good place.

Yes, of course everyone would choose the nicer place. Was there social work at Kocsis, did you get help there? Or could you ask for it if you needed it?

The social work was there and everyone who with own social work was just that he always say then you have to come here and when we go inside he just say quickly should have money for you and we look for you apartment. That's all, nothing else. But we say to him we went to apply for local government apartments. But for that nothing help we got.

It's very difficult to apply for a council flat, the conditions are such.

Now I guess so, problem is we don't know rules. If I know better rules, we look like this, that's all. When we come here to BMSZKI, he say we can't have. When we explain we explain and we explain, OK we as the director, then we reply. And after he say yes, maybe there is same rule. And was like this all places. For example when I changed for me licence, everyone say not possible. The interpreter went in with me many time like that, but nobody possible success. Then I alone wen and I got it.

Well done!

And I changed for others too.

You helped others?

Yes, I helped. And everyone tell me not possible, not possible, not possible. I say OK, not problem, rule what says? Rule says yes, possible. Then OK, then I go now, I find someone speaks English, then will be everything. I look for person who speak English, I explained with him, he say yes, possible. Then I get in one second.

You're very clever. More so than the social worker... (we laugh)

Well that's how it was, it really is. When there was another, Naser. Me and Naser go all place. Not problem not speak Hungarian, not problem at all. But we go in, we look for something. We never ask for help, where you have to change address card, someone go with us or that license or other place, the tax office, nowhere. Never. OK, we go, first we look for person speak English. I also look for work like this.

Yes, you speak good English, you can communicate well.

I look for work like this too. Anywhere I go, first I speak English, little bit Hungarian also understand, then I explain all, then I get it. This job where I work now I also look like this. There too unfortunately people not want help, just once I go in, I was luck and there was lady who really want to help. And she say you wait, wait, we find someone with same language. Don't be afraid, OK? Then she find persons and I got job, then I work there.

Have you been working there ever since?

Yes, since then. Four years already.

When you came to Budapest, was this your first job?

No, there was other job too, at an Indian restaurant, I work about three month there, but owner was very full of himself, was very little pay, you worked 13-14 hours for 3,000 forints. That was the pay, so I work there two or three month, then I say no. No days off, not like that, was very difficult.

Where did you stay before you came to Budapest?

I lived in Bicske, three-four month.

In Bicske at the camp?

Yes, at the camp.

What was that camp like? Tell me about it! How did you live there?

Well, that was open camp. When I come here Hungary, then closed camp putting us. One or two day the police take here and there, no food, no nothing, was very difficult.

Where did that happen?

Well that was Szeged. There was the police and then they us put there to Békéscsaba. Yes. And some days at Kiskunhalas too.

There too at the closed camp?

Everywhere at the closed camp. *(he speaks laughing)*

Do you know why you were in closed camps?

They say only Afghan, Syria and one or two other country can go to open camp there in Debrecen, and all other country has to go closed camp. This rule changed before the day when I come.

That's when they changed the rule? That wasn't your luck, I'm sorry. It was four years ago, right?

No it wasn't for sure. Yes, in 2013. And it was time when we were in there. When we come, in about three or four month everything become open. Well, that's how it was unluckily.

How did you come to Hungary?

Walking *(he smiles)*. 16 days I come or... 17 days.

You walked for 17 days?

Yes, we came walking. Well, half of what's it called... Makedonia? Macedonia? Half country we walked.

Wow. Those are pretty mountains, it's hard walking though...

Yes. Very pretty, so pretty is I swear, really, very very pretty is. Only for us was not so pretty because we have to walk. And very big maffias there, everything they steal from us, all money, all like that, very hard. Guns and all and there the police not helping nothing. We tell police we come with this car and like that people and they not care.

How did it happen? Did they stop there on the road?

Yes, yes. And came the people and have they guns and all money he say, he steal. All. And twice. No, wait, he steal one ..., two ..., three times!

So you didn't give him all the money?

Well, you know it was like this, some money here, some money here *(showing his shoes, pockets, sleeves)*. If I have to give something, because he also not time, he also hurry, you give some and that's it. He also hurry. They go, fast. And so they rob three times. And twice the police also got for us and we talk and he did listening and all and we say to such place and car like that, which colour, which people and which place, we also show, he take there, and we show it was here, like that and all. But he help nothing, then he send back Greece.

He sent you back to Greece?

Yes. Well send back like that, not all send back, there is border close, they throw you out.

They take you back by car and drop you off?

Yes, about how much 1 -2 km is forest. There is small mountains and small mountains on other side too. And there people say no can look back and he have gun and like that, there police, just keep going straight. And on other side you find Greek police, there is the stop too and there you can go back to

Athens or wherever you want. And we come like that. And twice he send back and third we were lucky and we came.

When you finally entered Hungary, how did you end up in the closed camp?

Well, when we come to Hungary there Serbia, from Serbia we come here to border and there we walked whole night and second day we sit down there at a place, was countryside, I don't know where, we sit and wait so if police come, he take us.

So you didn't mind getting caught?

No, no. We sat down there and the police came, two car came, one very good people, they bring us water and all, very very clean people and he say you have to sit down, from here should take to police and from there after what will be, then we know. But we sit down there, he say if water need or something, then he bring water from house there, all for us, very good person. The other car came, he very very bad racist person, and he speak ugly, we not understand but we understand he speak ugly, we also a little bit nervous, then the other police send back, now come. And with us in English he say not problem.

Was he a policeman too?

Yes, yes, they were both police. And we ask what he say and he say no, no, no care about that, but not problem. The other car will come. He put we in other car and take us there. To Szeged.

Did you know where you were then? That this is Hungary?

Yes, yes. The police say this is Hungary, not problem here, not problem, as much as he spoke English and we knew, we talked and then he take us in Szeged. To the police. Very big place is. And there two days we were there and it was cold ...

Did they lock you up there?

Yes. Yes, there at the police station they locked to us. And can't ask for water either or food, or nothing, was very hard those two days. And was an interpreter, he say, listen, if nothing, they have food in bag, all. Just give us bag. They also not want give that. Then very very hard we get it what was in bag foods and water. This interpreter say I come back after two or three hours, then if you need water, he will give. Then he bring always bottle. There was a tap, you could get from there. Only police not want, we see across tap, he not want give water from there too. And then he say here can be interview for everyone and afterwards decision what will happen to you. That's how it was, he say 85 percent you go closed camp, 20 percent you go open. But we three people were like we shouldn't go to closed camp. We waited from 6 in the morning, there where the interview was held and there was no interview until 7 in the evening. You can't sit, no food, no water. And at 6 o'clock to everyone they take back to little prison or whatever that closed place is and we three stayed. He says, is that you? We say was no interview, no nothing, we don't know. He bring a list, name was not on it. Only another interpreter, he say no, no, maybe we come back soon. He then bring us the name and all and then we three also have interview.

And we want to say what is or what will be, the lawyer wasn't there, nobody was there only that one the interpreter, one the listener or administrator, we say. Yes. And we want to say but the interpreter say, no-no, you shouldn't say nothing here, there will be other interview at camp. OK, then we say nothing. Just name and where we come from, that's all.

And when he take us to Békéscsaba, to closed camp, we stay one day in a room there too because he say coming the doctor, checking the this and that, I don't know. And in two days, when we coming down, we speak to people, there were about 20 people there, they say no way! That was the interview, that will make decision. I say then how this is, he tell us there don't say nothing, it will be at the camp.

OK, and that's really how it was, in 15 days they gave negative to everyone. There you go, you should go back to the Serbia. OK. I was little clever, and when I hear from everyone that's how it is, I write the papers to the immigration in Urdu: we come here, that's how the police tell us that this isn't interview, will be interview at camp, her you shouldn't say nothing. now I heard what there was, was interview and will make decision on that. Then that is a cheating thing, the interpreter lie, but we know nothing on

that. Then what happen there, I not care, I need another interview. And I give paper and everyone got negative, to me he say wait. And after about one month he say to me you have another interview because there is a rule, within 15 days we can write to immigration, what I say before is not good. Then there is a rule like that.

Yes, you can appeal.

Yes. You can say is no good. Then they can do again. Then that was my luck, but all others they send back to Serbia. That was interpreter's fault.

Yes, it's quite strange that the interpreter should interfere like this...

No, not interfere the interpreter, just want to... be quick ... because many many people coming then. And for him I don't know... they get hourly pay or they not get money for people or something like that. Then they don't wants long interview for someone. Everyone should have it short and that's it. And ... tells everyone, interpreter too and director too, everyone: why you coming here, should go back to Serbia, should arrange from there, should go from Croatia. Why you come here, this poor country is!

Like this and like that ... etcetera, etcetera. And unfortunately everyone say like that. And when I got the interview again, I also ask many times why director was very very good with me. And he always come to me and talking, and say to me many many times: "*Mohamed, you must learn Hungarian*". I always say you all are lying, not me. Everyone lies and I not want to learn because when I learn a little the language, then he say have to go back to Serbia.

And he always tell me like this: "*eh look Mohamed, we say to everyone, should go back. To you I not say. To you I always say should learn language. Then be clever.*" Then I say I not believe. What is my experience to the police, to the interpreter, to everyone, I not believe. I say it's like this because that's the rule, if you show where you come from exactly, then the rule says, the law, this person can't stay in closed camp. I'm still here, I'm not learn Hungarian, I don't care, and he say many times to me, many times he say you must learn language. But I little stupid, I not care.

And yet you see, you did learn Hungarian after all.

Yes, but it was just like that, there was this social. There was the "playroom", we went in there always and that social tell me once when I was there over five months, and she tell me you see, that's very interesting, you tell me always that you get paper but I not want that you have sadness after. I tell you honestly, we are here for three years, those who bring here have to go back. To Serbia. They don't get, max what happen is if six months are up, then have to go out, they give a police card and you have to go to Debrecen. Nothing else. We not see anyone who gets the papers. And we talked and all, I say not problem, I say to her you know why people not get papers? She say why? I say because of yous. You speak nicely and then you tell the immigration, this person is lying, that isn't. And she say that's not how is. I say, listen, I'm very clever like that. When you talking nicely and play here, cards and all, meantime you listen what we talk, you ask what's up, how's things, then after you speak, I see. Those who came here much, they went back quickly. She say not. Listen, here were the two boys who came to you every day and they learn language very fast too and they sent them back very fast

And those who didn't go the playroom, they didn't send them back?

Those not so quickly. Listen, that's how it is. I come here rarely, I speak with you little, only what is the game. I never speak anything other. You also ask me often but I not talk about that. OK and then I got the paper afterwards and I wrote once on Facebook, you see, I said you weren't there. Yes, yes, that was very interesting, you got it but nobody else got it.

Everyone there said when I got the papers, everyone said they never see no-one get the papers. Everyone said that.

Hm. You were the exception?

Yes. I was lucky.

Please tell me something about the closed camp, what kind of rooms were there, how many were you, help me imagine how it was.

First there was for me a room, a ... we were eight in a room and later, I not connect so much with Pakistani people, always different people with me, black people, like this and that. The Pakistanis two buildings, they live in the other building.

And then there was this story, the black guy broke all window, like this and that, there was a strike, we not did it, Pakistanis, but he take us from there to Kiskunhalas for about twenty days. Then when bring back, and then to other building, where lived all Pakistanis, he give me place there too, but then for me I get little other room, only two of us there. Later the social wanted to get back the room many times, then I say I live her few more days, when I go, then you give someone. But as long as I'm here, I stay here.

They wanted to put you in another room?

Yes, in another room, I say, I not connect well with Pakistanis, then I not go to anyone. I live here, here is a friend and that's it. No other. And then three times he wanted, he shouted a little bit, we bring the police, I don't care about those things. Either I live here or I go in the director's room (*he laughs*), but nowhere else. And then he say OK, OK, not problem.

So the two of you lived in one room and how many people stayed in the other rooms?

In the other rooms, well...10-12 people.

Wow, then you were really well off.

Yes, well it was like this, I was the interpreter for everyone. And I knew everyone. They not want give that small room just when I ask who lives there? He tell me nobody lives there yet. Then I say I live here. He say no. I say, I tell you, I live here. Then I don't care. I live here. Then little aggressive I enter there, I live here, I'm not going anywhere. Then I spoke to everyone at social and he say OK then stay here now.

They gave in...

No, we totally spoke about it, this not prison. Closed camp is, but still not rule like that. He say yes, I know this not prison. Yes, I say if it was prison we also not say we go here, we go there. But was hard a little. Not telephone, not nothing, not TV, there was nothing. We got one hour internet per week, that too not so good was. We couldn't talk the home. Max YouTube.

How many buildings were there?

Well, there were two buildings, two.

Was there a fence around?

Yes, there was a fence and inside there was a little ... place for a football and this and that. There were three buildings.

Could you enter the other building?

Yes, during the day, not at night. If they closing at 10 then not, then we can't go from one room to the other too.

Did they lock the room or did they watch that you shouldn't go out?

Well like this in all the corridor there are security people. Then you not allowed to go to other room, at 10 o'clock they close off the light, smoking not allowed, this kind of rule after 10 o'clock.

Could you go out to the bathroom?

In the other building was inside the room the toilet but where I lived, was not. But then too if someone want go toilet they ask what you want, where you go, like this and that were so stupid guards. OK, I

believe is very hard for him too, not all people respect you and then it's difficult. Like this. But difficult, very difficult.

(The phone rings, we hold a small break. He's talking with someone about his about-to-be "passport". The official name of the document is travel permit; he cannot get a passport. He has lost his own Pakistani passport or left it at home, but in any event that could not be on him as you have to hand it in at the Immigration Office when submitting the application for refugee status. The travel permit is granted for one year, if he wants to travel, he has to renew it annually. He has asked the administrator several times about the document but he keeps getting a procrastinating response.)

I told her, listen, three or four times you tell me it's ready. Why you not give? She say I don't know. I call back. She call now, she say it's ready, not any problem, tomorrow we can give.

Great, so your passport is ready.

I ask her today what will be. She say not problem. Well, she say that anyway, she say I cannot say ...

Let's continue the interview. We were talking about Debrecen. Where did you move from there?

Yes, to the camp at Bicske. At Déli Train Station I ask many-many people, I have ticket like this, I should go to Bicske. Not find anyone to help. I ask a Chinese, he say you should go up, there is train. OK. First I think "the up, how can a train be up?" But really? If someone say in first floor is train, then how can be? *(he laughs)* OK, well I go out, I look that there is train. Then I ask everyone, nobody speak English, nobody help. Almost one hour I going here and there, then come an old man, he come on his own, he ask in English, do you need help? I say yes! Maybe somebody there to help me! He say what's wrong? I told him I have ticket like this, I go to ticket office, he not speak English, then what I do? He went there, he talked, he say yes, yes, there Tatabánya.

The train to Tatabánya?

Train but he not say train, just he say I have to go there. Now how do I know what is Tatabánya? I don't know. OK, I keep asking and asking, nobody... English I not find person. I find an Arab boy, he also don't know. He say he want go there too, he got ticket too, but he don't know what train goes there.

Oh, I see...

OK. After you know there is these cleaning people, but many. I ask one person, he say he not speak, I go to other, I showed, he too not speak English, only he say come here. He look at paper and he say this train goes. You should get on that one. OK. We go in, train starts and there's Bicske and Bicske alsó⁶. And that too very-very bad. For a new person, it was night, it was snowing, it's cold, who know? Train said Bicske-alsó, we get off. OK. There is the very big uh... cemetery. I ask everyone, nobody no, no, no, no. OK. The two of us what we do? We walk, we look at people, they go from here. Well we were lucky, which side we get off train in that side is camp or let's say the town.

Yes, yes. If you go straight from the station you reach the centre of town.

We start walk, walk, walk, then I see small market is there, like this and that, but was closed, was Saturday, was closed everything. And er there too many people, about three-four people, different people we ask, nobody ... he say we don't know, I don't know, I don't know. Last was a girl and a boy and I say, listen, you don't know, not a problem. Do you know where is police? Where can I find police? Where is police? He say yes, we know where is if you go from here, on the left side then you go straight, I find there. I say OK, I go there, not problem, I got papers and all, then we go there. I started and then I also saw a black guy and he say, my friend, what is problem? I tell him, not problem, we look for camp. He say OK, not problem, come I also go there. We went with him, we walked and that's how we ended up there.

⁶ Translator's note: there are two train stations in Bicske, the stops are about 2 kms or 2 minutes from each other.

It's quite a distance from the train station (about 2.5 km if you don't get lost).

Oh it's quite far and inside you're afraid too, you know. First town, then forest, then there's market, then that Tesco, then again when you start go to the forest, I say, hey listen where you are going? He say not problem, there you can see the camp. I say OK, then good. Well because who knows, in the night a man, we don't know...

Yes, a stranger leading you somewhere...

Yes, if some mean person is or who is, who he is... so very difficult arrived.... to Bicske camp. And I go in, and there to, because Saturday, there too nobody.

And did they give you a room there? Or how was it?

No. A big room, he says sleep somewhere here, on Monday we can talk. Until then we can't help nothing. OK.

Were there beds in that room?

There were, many beds. Just beds ... and after was there someone I knew, I knew from before, he... an Afghan, but to him they also bring there to closed camp for couple days, but after, because that was rule, who is Afghan can't stay there, go to open camp to Bicske. And I look for the..., and I found in about two-three hours, then I went to him in the room. But then he say to me, until no food, no nothing, can eat and drink here too with him. If you not want, then you should go back, he give food.

Where, to the big room?

No, the guard has it, at the gate. Who new people come, until they get from there money, can get food from there.

You can get food from the security guards?

Yes, you know where is that gate, there they put the... that's how it was then. I don't know how is now, but then it was like that. Saturday, Sunday if someone come, then we can get bread, milk, this and that from there. If someone has nothing, can get from there.

I see.

But he not say like that to me first.

Who, the security guard?

Yes. Only when I go back, I was curious, I go back, I ask, he say yes, yes, I forget to tell you, but from here in the morning come, then you can get from here. OK. Not problem. *(he laughs)*

You got food there, breakfast, lunch...?

Well, they don't give three times, but in the morning they give a ... one kilo of bread and one litre of tea and this and that for the whole day. But I didn't need food like that because I had a couple thousand forints on me that I got at closed camp. 7 thousand every month, six month I live there, so then I had 30 thousand forints on me.

Because there you couldn't spend it?

Like that not. Because I not smoke, no nothing, so I don't spend it anywhere. All I bought was tea.

So you bought for yourself...

Yes, there I bought for yourself, Tesco is nearby. Tesco was open.

When could you leave the camp to go shopping?

There you can go anywhere. Bicske is good, not problem there. *(he laughs)*

I see. At the Bicske camp how many were you in a room?

Well, at the Bicske we were two, he lived alone and I went there. Two in a room.

What kind of furniture was there in your room? Was there a closet for your things?

I don't think there was a closet. Or was there? I don't remember. There was a bed, a fridge, no fridge was too not in every room. Some had, some didn't have. I don't think there was a closet, yes, there was no closet. There was a table, two beds, a table.

(His phone rings again.)

You're very busy today!

Oh, it's always like this. *(He smiles. After he hangs up the phone we speak a little more about the passport and refugee status issues.)*

Maybe you'll get it on Monday after all...

Yes. Maybe. Not sure, but maybe. She say Monday and after 10 o'clock. Then why after 10 o'clock?

I guess that's when they have customer service hours at the office. You'll see.

For sure I won't give old one. When I go I say I don't have passport. I don't have, I lost it.

But if you lost it, I think they have to file some kind of report at the police.

Then, ... I don't need. I did, I have a friend. The administrator say yes and when he go there, then not. The same. He also have Hungarian wife. Everything. They not give. They go again, Five years now. Five years! He have Hungarian wife, family, he go there, one address card, everything and they not give paper.

What paper?

Well, for him same, he had subsidiary protection. I have other friend who now wife bring back to him from deport centre.

Those who are expelled because their subsidiary protection is not extended are taken to a closed camp until it is clarified how they will leave the country. This is the deport centre. His wife went to pick him up?

Once the immigration not give him paper. For him asked totally different paper. They give back this status, he asked for all other paper, the immigration did not give, he go to the court. The court not give too, from there the police take him and want to send him back to deport centre, you know from where they send back. And when they send back, another court inside. Then they say, you five years can't come here, this and that, you know... The rules they say, there is a I don't know court person, this and that. And there he say to him, the wife and lawyer also go like this and that, he say, listen for him there is family and all, how you want to send back? Etcetera, etcetera, then lawyer bring back. Now so much news, who safety here? We work, we pay taxes, but what's the point? What's the point of family and wife? I don't understand any more. The other day I meet to black guy. He has two children! Immigration not give paper. He has two children. They want to send back for him too.

With a Hungarian wife?

Yes, Hungarian wife, two children. And year and a half not give him paper, want to send for him back. Lawyer bring him back too. There is an Afghan guy, he also have little girl, finally he also get paper, but they tell him that girl has to take exam, not believe that you. *(They don't believe that it's his daughter.)* Now this mess, who knows?

And what are your plans? What do you think you'll do?

I, I don't know. Problem is I can't ask for own passport. If I can ask own passport, I changed paper, but I can't ask own passport. Then I don't know what will happen like this or what's the rule or what?

During the implementation of the programme it was often a problem that our clients got lost in the Hungarian bureaucratic system. Often, Hungarian administrators are not familiar with the special rules applicable to refugees or the fact that rather than special rules, the same regulations apply to refugees as to Hungarian citizens. If this uncertain situation is magnified by a lack of a common language, any kind of official procedure becomes effectively impossible. In the programme a social worker provided help in official matters, including accompanying clients where needed and providing an interpreter.

However, we came across practices that did not arise from communications difficulties, which in our view caused serious legal disadvantages to our clients. We turned to the office of the Office of the Commissioner for Basic Rights with a submission requesting a review of the complications related to switching from refugee or subsidiary protection status to relative of Hungarian person status. The review was not completed until the writing of this study.

But you definitely don't want to return to your country? You can't go back?

Me? Well but there is a death sentence for me there.

Oh...

I can't go because...

Because you escaped?

Me, even on the map I don't see that country. I don't want to see it, you know?

If you're facing such danger then how could they send you back?

I not know, I really not know why he give me this five-year paper? (*Why he only got the five year subsidiary protection status and not the final refugee status.*) And I showed all, I give paper, everything there give, it's all in there ...

(*He's silent for a while, playing with some candy.*)

Actually this was for the interpreter mistake, which is now my mistake. The interpreter was mistake.

He mistranslated?

Yes. I didn't get first the ten year, because it was for the interpreter mistake. Many times I just read it was for the interpreter mistake. Then that's the interpreter mistake... I'm going court for sure when I get the paper, even then because ... now I know that, that is not for me mistake but for interpreter mistake. I would need that ten-year now the same way, from which I can ask for citizenship ...

Well, give it a go.

I try for sure. Now someone tell me I can ask residence permit. The same in immigration they say I can't ask. The same, third woman who said no, now I can ask for citizenship. And fourth say I can't ask. Then this, what rule is there? What kind? I go ask for residence permit. There were two, the one said yes, you can, the other said you can't. Then there was an old woman, she say no, I can ask for citizenship in a year. I said, OK. Then she went into other office, when she came back she said I can't ask nothing until there's this status. Then I said OK, I not ask anything, we came home.

From here, you know this... lawyer. He write, to him too she say can't ask. This administrator she say I can ask for that residence permit if I don't give back the status. I can ask even then

You can ask but you may not get it, right?

If I can ask then she can give. They say I also cannot ask! Now there is one law in a country and everyone say differently. Now who I trust, the ... truth, the truth? I don't know.

It's very difficult ...

Now this administrator she always say I can ask passport from there. And still I don't get since a month. I sent three or four weeks ago, when I went there she say no, I can't give you. Last time was like this, I say listen, not problem, here in a paper you write that you not can give me, that's all. But woman say that ... now I write this? The boss said I can't give? I say yes, you write that. Oh, that I can't write unfortunately. I said I go court, I need something show paper, you say you can't give.

Yes, often they don't issue the deportation in writing.

Yes. And what you should do at times like that?

Well yes, that's the bad thing that you're vulnerable, that there's nothing else you can do ...

Yes. At times like this you can't do anything!

And what does your wife think about this?

Well unfortunately she's not clever in Hungarian. She say she can't do anything the immigration office. Her family also say we are here, how they can do something? Well I say, listen, all I say is but they not listening. Well the other day he wanted to give him and he too both of them go there to the immigration for an interview. I say to him, listen, there's no point in your going there, they not care who are you. You not even have permission to go in there. Not understand.

You don't have children, do you?

No!

You don't want any either?

Well I also said because of the children to the woman over there, now I have experience against everything. Then I even leave child here if they say go back? What should I do? I think very very hard what I do. Because this, this isn't good.

Yes... (I nod sympathetically) Well, it's a difficult situation, I don't envy you...

Well, listen, when we got that five years, then he say they only look within five years how we can stay, what are we doing here.

How you can fit in...

Yes. If you can ... how do you say it in Hungarian... settlement?

You mean to settle?

Yes. And now I say to the myself, not to other, if possible, some have punishment, some have anything. For me, until today – I not know for tomorrow – no punishment. Not from BKK⁷, not other, not nothing. I don't have nothing.

I work, 8 hours now, I pay the tax too. I have apartment, contract, address card, everything this and that. I went school, I have eight grades. I speak Hungarian, well OK not 100%, 60% I speak, right?

Yes, 60%, I agree.

I don't say 80%, but I do have 60. I can write, I can read too. Not so good, but I can.

I understand you also have a driver's licence.

I do have a driver's licence. I work here nicely, no mess anywhere. No nothing nowhere. There's a Hungarian wife and still now they ask from me.... they not give a paper or they bother like this, then what I should think? Some people do all bad thing, he have refugee status. Who steal, cheat, do everything. What can one say then?

⁷ Translator's note: Mohamed used the English word here

⁸ Translator's note: Budapest Transport Company

One can't say anything ...

No, you can't. And I was good like this. I had an interview at the TEK⁹. They give us when TEK say not problem, you know? Afghans and others not, to us they give paper like that.

Let's hope it will be OK and you get the paper.

It will be OK. I don't think so much that this... this... protection status to give back, OK well, if I look at it this way, the passport if they not give, is problem. If they not want give. But I think those five years, or now they say the three years, is OK to get that. But still bad. Who knows, in two years they say come again.

I think if you get the three years, then they'll do your passport too. Just maybe they don't want to until the decision has been issued.

But I'm talking not about that. I stay everything good, I work, I also make a shop that I wanted now too, I closed out that shop (*opened up*), but ... I not asked for half, but I did it alone. Owner wanted to give. Well OK, all will be ready, three years I get, I make passport. In two years maybe the ... who knows I not stay for Zsuzsi (*wife*), or who knows ... in one year or two years ... Then what does the immigration? Then that is problem... the administrator told me, totally no interpreter there, nobody there, she say, listen, that's how it is now here, this is what came from above, the people must to go back. That's it. She say I telling you honestly.

Hm, hm – that's really all I can say.

She say I don't know for you what will be the decision but that's how it is. That's it.

But consider that many people were unable to fit in in Hungary like you have. They don't learn Hungarian, they don't have a fixed job or a wife. They are more likely to send those people back, but I don't think you are threatened by that danger. I really doubt that you won't get the subsidiary protection status. And then you'll be closer to getting citizenship too.

Yes, just I say for us not possible to get citizenship.

What do you mean? If you have a permanent address for five years and a Hungarian wife, you can apply for it.

I know. What I explained from lawyer, that is the law. Just inside written who have protected status, not him. Inside written.

You think the law says that the five years are not applicable to those people who have subsidiary protection status? As far as I know you just have to prove higher income.

No. Lawyer explained, we can't ask before eight years, we eight years ... can apply even today, none of their business for immigration, I go, I can ask there from Government Window¹⁰, that's where you ask. But then too finally they not give.

No, they refuse it.

And then it's no use. That's what I mean, the immigration one person say I can ask, other person say I can't ask.

Um, they aren't sure of the rules either? The subsidiary protection status does make things more difficult for sure....

Yes. These five years are like this for those who ... you know they come here some kind of businessy people or they come with a kind of visa like this. Not us. Or if have Hungarian wife, then we can ask in

⁹ Translator's note: Counter-Terrorism Centre

¹⁰ Translator's note: in Hungary, all official administrative business must be conducted before a so-called Government Window

three years. Then not need income, not need tax, not need nothing. In two years can ask for this settlement, but if you have protected status, it's written in that law that we can't ask for nothing.

Even if you have a Hungarian wife?

Even then. That is problem. We ... that is the problem – who doesn't know the decision what is really rule. Because it is written in the law, if me and wife one year have same address card, I can ask for settlement. That is law. But now I have it. Both of us working too, one address card too, one address, one place of residence, one everything. I can't ask. Now there is law and there is immigration.

Let's return to the description of the Bicske camp (I try to return our conversation to the places where Mohamed has stayed).

How many were you in the camp?

Well you were much in Bicske, just I didn't have so good experience with Bicske because I was the only Pakistani there. And Afghan people two of them different people. Some speak Pashtu, some speak Farsi. Who speak Farsi was good with me, who speak Pashtu was not good to me. Well, I don't know but there were people like who actually went to immigration and in the room said why you give paper to a Pakistani?

You don't say!

Well that's how it was. Then I didn't meet anyone, I wasn't friends with anyone. Some people live in building, say ... I say, the one I went to he too say on third day, listen, find yourself a place. Because he was Pashtu too and he says to me straight: other people they say me why a Pakistani stay with you. Then I'm sorry I can't give you place. I said OK, no problem. Was in same building, with a Farsi who speak Farsi, that was Naser, he said to him, no problem, come here in room. Then the social gave me a separate room. That was many experience like that unfortunately.

That means there weren't many of you in a room there?

No, no. I was alone. In last month there were two with me, one Bengali, one from Myanmar. Because were doing maintenance work in the camp then...

You had to move in together because of the painting?

Yes, painting, you know was like that, six or eight rooms in a building. I guess six rooms.

Plus the bathroom.

Plus bathroom and kitchen, maybe seven rooms. Then they rebuild one building at time, working, then they send to other place. Then we were the three in one room. That was couple days. 20 days? Then I come here.

And were there any conflicts between the people. You said you didn't make many friends. But were there arguments or fights?

Lots of arguments the Afghan and the black people. Police comes often too. I didn't go to anyone. Then I stayed in room or school. That's when I started school here, Than Károly. In the morning we come here and in the evening we go from here and I didn't have friends. There were at the camp, there was a school there too, then there too, every day I went there. I only in room or ... or school, or here and there. Not other friends. Or with that other person, Naser, with him I went to him to room or he come here. Or two of us go shopping.

And did you go out somewhere from the camp? Only shopping?

Well just to Tesco's, yes. Or in Budapest we came here school. Not other places.

And how long were you in Bicske?

About two and a half month or three month, I went in December ...

Why did you have to move out from there?

New rule came, you know, we got the money, housing programme came.

The integration contract?

Yes, yes. Then we can live there in the camp for max two month, after that had to move from there.

And how did you move out? Did you already have a place to stay?

I moved to that organisation, you know, he been there before, I don't know, they do a little interview for 60 or 50 people. I want actually at the camp when he come, I just looked at paper over there and wrote the e-mail there: I wasn't, which school I went and came, saw here is a paper, you been here before, but I also want a place to stay or a room or this and that, then you can help me or not, like that. I wrote to the boss English. Then he wrote back, yes, you should come to Budapest, this the place, the address, Monday such and such time. OK, 10 or 11. I went to the immigration room, you know, that's where I get ticket.

(The phone rang so we have another break. We continue the conversation with the story of leaving the camp.)

Please tell me how you first came to Budapest. How could you travel, did you get a travel permit?

Yes, they gave me a ticket.

At the office of the Immigration Office in Bicske?

There's a room in there, you know.

In the camp?

Yes, yes. There we got the ticket to Budapest. That's it, then I came here, that's where the interview was, everything like this and he (*the social worker*) asked me what I do, do I go to school there, like this, what I do here, I want to live here, I want be outside, can I pay bills or not? I told him I can't pay nothing because there isn't. Why I lie: yes, yes? No money. When I get money from there, then yes. If not, then not. He says anything else? I say there, listen, I don't want live next to Afghan man. There were the interpreter Afghan and everyone smiled, I say what's wrong and he say I'm Afghan too. I said OK, I don't care but that's how I have experience. They threw me straight out of the room because he was Afghan too and then I not want to stay, then we spoke afterwards and we live in one room with Naser for a year and a half, there was no problem. That's where I got an apartment from then. Then he bring car and all if need to take any stuff. I didn't have any stuff, just a bag, that's it. Then afterwards he bring everything. To the apartment also always bringing monthly, they bringing his mum, for a week we eat for sure. Rice, oil, fruit, vegetables, everything, lentils and stuff. Was good the programme for them, could be there every day or the ..., he had some kind of relationship with market, I know, goods that expire say tomorrow, they bring from there.

That's a good idea. Did they get it cheaper or for free?

I think they got it free. Then they call to everyone, come, this came, the joghur, or something came, can take it out home. It was good there then ... They gave a lot, clothes and stuff

And there some of you lived in your own apartment?

Yes, yes, ooh, 60 people there were I guess, and they had about 20-25 apartments. He rented them and he paid for them, because we also paid a bill, they paid for the rent. And that's how it was, you should go Hungarian lessen twice a week. Just that was important. Once have to go for sure, second some volunteer teacher, if you want. If you not want, no problem. I had a volunteer teacher who helped my Hungarian learning very very much. She came every day, every day.

You learned a lot from here? So that was useful?

Yes, it helped me very very much, it was very very useful. We went to the park, here and there, because on Saturday and Sunday that club was closed, so then we always went to park, here to Margaret Island¹¹. I learned a lot from her. A lot, a lot. Rules ... she said just about all of them.

Now let's go back a little, we go back in time a little. We already spoke about how you fled through Macedonia, I guess you slept in all kinds of wild places there or did you have a place to stay?

No, we slept in the wood. Well, the country near, or the border near or we had to stop at a place like this somewhere, woods, where nobody can watch and then we go in there and we sleep there. It was like we walked at night and we sleep during day. Then at night not problem that showing. Can't see many place, during the day everyone can see. We walk at night and we sleep after seven in the morning. In some mountains, sometimes in woods, a lot like this we sleep in the mountains.

I see. Before that you lived in Greece. Did you stay at a camp there too?

No, there maximum an hour or hour and a half. Greece is different.

And where did you stay there?

I lived in Athens. It wasn't bad there but me, where I live, I tell nobody that I'm Pakistani, I also not say now at work, if someone ask me now, I not say it.

Because you think that's a disadvantage?

I'm afraid of that. I tell everyone I'm Indian.

Because people are more accepting of that?

Looks the same, language is about same ...

But why is it better to say you're Indian?

Well you know there is once these people for me here who were looking for me, there is these people, I gave to immigration now too... I even went for police two or three times ... and these, these, the final was nobody help ... (*he laughs bitterly*) Because it happen once, they looking for me, used name with IOM. (*Somebody tried to find him, they wrote him an e-mail and called him by phone too in the name of IOM – International Organization for Migration.*) But well, the social worker came, everybody 8th district police we go, 5th district we go too.

But who tried to find you?

Well, I not know that. I talk many times, there was a call too, and e-mail too, there was everything, and so they want I go Bratislava. The number say someone calling from Polandia, Poland and say to me always want to meet me here in Bratislava. I told him I not going Bratislava, either come here or we find you elsewhere, but I not going to Bratislava. But later when he once say he need CV from me, what I did in Pakistan, that's what I want to talk about (...)

That's quite scary. And he hasn't called since?

Well that's how it was now, in every three-four months I throw away SIM card, buy new. Once, twice, three times he found the numbers, after that not. Now afterwards I have the numbers that's not in my own name, I buy for different other people's name. And I don't answer if I don't know the number and by email also I don't read if not know them. And it happen, then I tell nobody I Pakistani. Nobody. Only how many people who I know very well or work there or owner or you, who help me, can also hold ID card, not others. I tell everybody, Indian. If wants to know where Indian, I say I from Kashmir. OK, they find Kashmir, I tell nobody. Even my wife when enter married, then I tell her I Pakistani. I told her I Indian.

¹¹ Translator's note: Margaret Island is a large park on a Danube island in downtown Budapest.

She thought you were Indian?

Well it's the same language about, you know, only writing different. Because I didn't want tell nobody.

It must be difficult to live like this.

Yes, nobody helping, I tried everything. Two-three times we went to police. We are to IMO and I tried everything, but final everyone say oh we can't help. OK.

And your reckon this is because you're from Pakistan?

Who knows. Nobody knows that. Once we could catch guy for person. But the police didn't help and IOM either. When a guy say he can come here. In other country they say we can't go, OK. That's it. As the social worker told me, that's how I spoke with him. And then he say OK? Then he want come here and he say we agree time, and when we come we say which hotel should come. And he say the same, now here too the police can't catch the guy, then what to do? I don't give to him the time, come here and then I go there. I don't go!

Yes. Of course not.

And after I told everyone at work too, if somebody ask who I am, nobody say who I am, OK. I Indian and that's it. Many people even I don't say that I'm Mohamed. Even now in e-mail written other name for me. We always change other name. We always changing the name. I don't any more... I don't do that. Who knows who that was, God knows. I tried everywhere but it was no use.

Well yes, this is difficult.

Well, that's how it was. I tried everywhere but nobody wanted to help.

Let's turn back to Greece. How was your life there?

Greece was good too.

How long were you in Greece?

Well, about two or three years.

Three years. Seems like a long time.

Yes, I was there a long time.

And why did you have to leave?

Well, no paper there, no safety, at night time we can't go in street.

You didn't even try to get refugee status there?

Well, I didn't even try. Because from here when coming new, then like that I wasn't so well,.... I was afraid of everything and stuff. And they don't even give the status there. And second, it wasn't the safety in Greece when we were there, there wasn't safety. Lots of refugees invaded and we can't go alone in street at night. And there was that Golden Dawn, that's a political group. He not want refugee stay there. He find everywhere living refugee, they go in, there are 60-70 people, they open up like this, they kill people...In our own apartment happened too.

They went in?

Yes. There were two apartments in one building in the second floor and they came there, belled and the other guy went in. First it was like this, a car came, with 4-5 people, the other you know we stayed back... And when they looked, yes here is refugee, then came the 60-50 people and hurting to everyone. In our apartment too everything disappeared, the neighbours called, from across, police, the police didn't come. The police come in about an hour and a half, wrote all the papers, leaved, police say we can't do anything, they went inside and that group came back. And first they went to the neighbour.

The one who called the police?

Yes, they belled, he came, then we locked the door upstairs, we saw upstairs from the window what was happening. And he said straight, we not bothering to you, then you not calling the police and after they stayed there for long time, belled and stuff, then we didn't open nothing. It was a metal door, then he can't break. And a few days after he came there many times, but it was like this, just during the day we went inside, not at night. And we had other apartment, another, Pakistani people lived there ... they lived there, it was the same there, it was like that for many many people. It was like that for all people. The group came, 50-60 people, drunk, then this and that... That's how it was, it was not safety then.

Were you able to work or did you have any income?

No, I didn't work. First, I not speak the language so much, secondly I was afraid of everything anyway, about what will happen now. Because we couldn't walk alone on the street, this was like this, finally when we came here, we couldn't go in the street. After at night, during the day was like that too. Then we couldn't go anywhere in the street.

(The phone rings, we stop the conversation for a bit.)

That was not life in Greece. Without papers man has no life anyway. We can't go to doctor, we can't do nothing anywhere.

Who did you go to Greece with or who were you with? With friends or family?

No, not friends, I don't have. Well, it was like this, we come to camp, from there one or two hours, from there a guy I know, from there another guy I know, you know an interpreter guy I know and we went in there, the guy who was there with him, with who we come from camp and I go with him.

Was there a small group who went together?

Yes-yes. It was four people, there was us, then two went to other place, who knew them, I was just like that, there was nobody. First I went in, I waited alone for six hours. There was a friend who came here, he knew a guy.

You mean in Greece...

In Greece. And he disappeared from another group, we like that too. Then I didn't know where I was going and I sit down there and that guy who left me and I had a little mobile phone on me too, he had one too and I called him. And he asked, did someone come or did you try to find me and I said, listen, not till now, then he say OK, I come back, I speak to him, he say there's nothing wrong. You can come here to me. Then we went to him. To Pakistani people. And I lived there after six months, they knew the people. I can speak better to people or keep contact, then I went to other, then others were good, then I lived there till final. After that I come here. And he help me come here too, we not have money to come here and he helping. Anyway I didn't give it back, I don't even know where he is. He helping to come here. Train ticket and all, when I came, he give 50-60 Euros.

What did you live from in Greece? Did the others help?

Yes, unfortunately. It's I swear a bad life. When I think, for example I escaped then from Pakistan and four years, three years in Greece, I didn't drink Coke... The problem isn't that they not give, just inside I sorry, I ashamed, this or that not. What's good is that they cook, we also eat and that's it. Or I cooked, I cleaned because I'm home, they work. Inside I ashamed, nobody said nothing, they were very good people, they never say to me do this or do that, I just did it on my own.

You didn't want to work or you couldn't?

Well, not me. Actually I was a bit very afraid because a bit we come here from there, there was food and here I didn't feel so good either, what should I do, I was afraid of everything, now I'm much better, but I swear I was very afraid when I come here too. I don't know what will happen, what's happening.

Yes, of course.

And Greece the same. I never went in street at night in Greece. Never. And during the day too very rarely. Maybe I stayed home one week. I not go to shop for anything, I was also afraid, I often hear that police caught person and send back to Pakistan, I was afraid of that too then, not had papers, then what to do, I was always afraid of that, maybe I go in and police grab me. At night I was afraid of this, maybe if I go in then some group grab me.

Tell me how you got to Greece.

Well that's Pakistan, from Pakistan Iran, from Iran Turkey and from Turkey to there.

And when you left Pakistan did you want to go to Greece?

I didn't really know. I had a little problem and brother arranged, I didn't even know where I was going, only brother gave me a number and ask where I am. There was a happening and after he arranged, he find me and from there I sit in car and from there I go to border. And from there then one person give me to other, other to third and so on.

Your brother arranged this whole thing?

Brother arranged this, he paid, I don't know how much he paid.

So they brought by car?

Not by car. By car means that you are out of Pakistan by car, but afterwards it's the same, sometimes you walk, sometimes they put you on truck, sometimes you have to run. I talk with a man... you should go there and should bring from there like we came. In Iran the police is so rude, they find one or two people and they kill them. They don't care. With the car I came with, they did it three times, you know with that big gun.

They shot at the car?

Yes, we were just lucky, the driver was good or this and that.

But how's that? While the car was moving just like that? They went there and shot at it?

Yes.

Incredible. And they didn't hit anyone?

No. No just the ... wheel, not inside the other tyre, just... not that one... not quickly.... go down.

I see, the tyre didn't deflate when they shot it.

Yes. And after that they throw us to a place, for a moment car stop, they throw us and then car went on.

He dropped you off and continued on with the car?

Yes and then the police didn't watch that, he stop him or not, the police watched the car. And then after 10 km or 5 km they stop and nobody inside, police can't do nothing. If he find us, then problem have.

And you hid there?

Well, there's the...not proper, you know, we go from the not real street, the mountains or close to this forest, then you can throw people anywhere. For now not problem.

And did the car come back for you? Or another car?

It come back in 7 or 8 hours. Well, they come from there like that, it's very very bad. Maybe they throw you a place, two days nobody come. No water, no food, nobody come, they put you out there. Somewhere you have to walk, you have to walk a lot. All mountains or border near it's walking. There is very big mountains, we look, we don't even see the last one.

The top?

The top, and there's snow. There in Turkey so much snow, all the way just snow, nothing else. In winter and summer

Yes, there are very high mountains over there.

In the high mountains there's snow in winter and summer.

And you crossed those?

Yes, walking. I don't like snow so much, now for this and that reason.

You don't miss it, I believe you.

No, oh. I almost died once there in the mountains

Oh, because of the cold?

Because of the cold and you know, we don't have you know borders like this. Kind police, kind this, no problem if not have papers, OK, we leave then, no, there they kill you. And they throw you out into the snow, after hundred years maybe somebody finds it, there's nothing like that there (*he laughs bitterly*). It's very difficult anyway walking in mountains. Very very difficult, we don't even see where the top is, where we going. And if someone slips, we don't know where we go down.

Did you come with a group? Did you come together with a few people?

For them they bring new, they have lots and lots of people who come with the group.

And was there a leader who showed you the way?

There isn't a leader like that. Border coming close, everything who is around there, everybody leads. Everybody has this work.

You have to pay them there?

Yes. Everybody know who have team, everyone knows each other. And somehow from there police or soldier tell each other, you shouldn't go that way, you should go there and so on. I guess the police doesn't have so much intelligence too, the soldiers, yes they have. In a street maybe hundred cars go, 99 come for them.

For the human traffickers?

Yes.

Well that's what they make a living of over there... How long did it take till you reached Greece?

Two months.

It was a very long trip. When you arrived, did you feel safe? Weren't you afraid?

Well first when we were there, then then the soldier got us, the soldier grab us because there was no police in border and soldier said, no problem, here in Greece there are no problem, this-that, now rule, now they take you to camp, this-that. Only there, when we went inside camp we hear from many-many people that there's problem here. Maybe from here they send you back, this-that, then we hear news, then in the head are different things. For everyone not the ... who coming here, let's say 70% come just for the money. There's the 30% who have totally problem. (...) Me to ... the train station in Athens. I thought there: what's going to happen with me here? No friends, not know anybody, there's nobody, where will I go, I don't know. I have no money and there many many bad news, what will be and then man took me. I thank him very very much, now I not find him where he is. No connection now, but I thank him now also very very much for taking me. They give me everything, food, clothes, when I lived there and when I go to other, him too and then with him, thank you because he arranged for me come here. But it's very difficult like that... if they bring you ... they put 30-40 people in a small car. ... A car like this, 30-35 people.

How do they fit?

In a plain car, in a simple passenger car they put 16 people. Now think that six, behind them they throw three people.

In the trunk?

Yes. They throw three people inside.

That's terrible.

They don't have that, they bring them like dead, you know? If someone dies, he dies. They throw out, nothing wrong for them. Yesterday or the day before I saw a video, I'll show you ...

(We watch the video of some people travelling on a van on his mobile over a video sharing app. The film shows some people travelling on the plateau of a van in a rocky sandy area, on a dirt road. One of them is filming with his mobile. They are sitting all over each other, their legs hanging out from the sides of the van.)

Let me make it bigger... Look how many people in one car!

Yes, they really loaded them up there, their legs are hanging out.

Even thirty of them, on top this and that, if somebody slide off, he slide off. Never mind.

Yes, but you see they're smiling, they're hopeful.

Well yes, they are young, what should they do. Each other, you know, they hold hands like this so that not have big problem.

Are they going in a desert here?

Yes, but the car go like this in mountains too. Very hard. This must be Iran country. You see, how they packed? I didn't believe they packed thirty people, but after I figure out that yes. *(he laughs)* If someone slides, that's it. That's how they pack car.

(It's hard to get back to our original subject but I try:.) My idea was that we would talk about the places where you stayed, what they were like.

There, the Greece?

Everywhere. Where did you live in Greece?

Greece is very cheap. Very cheap. We find two room apartment for 60 thousand forints¹², in three months come the water bill, and in two months come the electricity bill. No gas there. We used those cylinders, gas cylinders.

Gas in cylinders?

Yes, we used gas cylinders. Life is cheap, everything is cheap.

How many of you lived in an apartment?

There were six of us.

In two rooms?

Yes, two rooms. But like that not, there not just me, but other people also help people life because everything is so cheap. 40 euros a month are enough for one person. Because everything is cheap.

¹² €1=HUF 300

Is food cheap too?

Yes, everything is cheaper. 40-60 euros. 60 euros is 20 thousand forints. Out of 20 thousand forints can be for one month. Then it's not expensive. 100 euros max a person can live one month.

Was the house in Athens also an apartment block, similar to the one in which you live in Budapest?

There were two different apartments, one was an apartment in a block like this and one a house. The apartment was a bit more expensive and the house a little cheaper. Rent was €170 for the house. That had two bedrooms. Well, it was a bit old but still.

I guess it must have been on the outskirts or a suburb?

No, it was totally downtown.

Was the rent so low because it was so run down?

Not so run down. But it's like that over there, not so expensive. We lived in a nice apartment, very nice. Not very old. It wasn't built so long ago, max. 10-15 years before. Rent was about 220 or 230. Not so expensive, there apartment not so expensive. And the other was good too, it was not bad, that was €170, that's about 35-40-45 thousand forints. 50 thousand max. Two bedroom apartment. In two months come electricity, in three months come water, and that wasn't so much too, max. after three months water was €40-50, 20 thousand, then that's not bad, not much. Six people living in one house.

Yes, you could pay that much.

But still that's not much, everyone shower every day, this and that, then is that much?

No, not at all.

I think here in Budapest the bill comes to 40 thousand. Expensive, that's very expensive.

Yes, it could be even more.

But I talked with other country too, but Budapest is expensive.

Yes? Which country did you talk about?

There was a guy I worked with at Pizza King, now he's in the France. And he tells me I swear life is cheaper there.

Life is cheaper in France?

Listen, I was looking at an apartment for 90 thousand forints. One room plus there's a living room and it's not old and that's not expensive.

Well yes, it's about the same here too.

OK, but about the same, but not so much the same because the salary is a big difference.

That too, probably yes.

For example now he work 8 or 10 hours and he has about 500 thousand salary. And here how much is it? 80-90 thousand? How much is my wife's now? Her official salary is 80 thousand.

Usually minimum wage ...

That's how much she gets. Or she works overtime, then 120.

Unfortunately many people actually work for such low wages.

Then that can't be (*he laughs bitterly*), we can't rent an apartment from that.

Well yes, that's true, you are right about that. Wages are low, only rent is high.

Well yes. And many the owners don't want to give, this and that.

Yes, yes, it's difficult to find rental space. Tell me about the place where you lived in Pakistan? What kind of house was it?

In Pakistan it was own house, two.

You had your own house?

The family did, yes, yes. My father had two houses. Over there its not like here. With us, what's my father's is mine. That's naturally.

Who did you live with, your parents?

Yes, I lived with my parents.

How big was your home?

Well we had a family home, both of them, we don't have these apartment blocks. The home, a home, if there is three buildings (*floors*) then all three ours. If there are four, then all four ours.

So this is more like a family house?

Yes, it's a family house. Well, not with a garden, but like this if you have in a row house, then it's not like we live here but not in the other one, if there are three buildings, all three are for us.

I see. The extended family lives here?

Yes. Maybe they rent it, but still. It's not like that. If someone they sell it, they should sell the whole. It's not like we sell this but not that.

Yes, I see.

If someone buys, they buy the whole.

If you had two houses I guess you could be considered quite a well-off family, right?

Yes very well-

I suppose poorer people don't live in houses like that.

Buut yes, well, in Pakistan poor people like here in Budapest, we don't have poor people like that.

You don't?

We don't. Well in Pakistan there are poor who not wanting to work or ... over there everyone in family, keeping family contact.

Hm.

There, if I don't work then the big family don't throw me out in the street, no.

Then your family supports you?

Yes, they support. But it's not like this. The family supports everyone, yes. If somebody not work, they not work. Other supports. What my brother have, I also have the same.

Interesting...

It's not like I ask brother if we take you or not, no. It's not like that. If one car at home, that is for everyone. It's not like that is for the big brother then we should ask him or for him, no. If I'm interested, I also go with him where I want.

Sounds good, I like this idea...

Life in Pakistan is not like that. For example here at hospital the people, I also see that if I been there. Nobody go to nobody. Or very rarely they go somebody, and just half hour.

To visit the sick?

Yes, to visit the sick nobody go. In Pakistan if one man go hospital, the whole family go hospital. And maybe from a totally different, another town family coming. Even the neighbours go.

Hm. Everybody visits.

Yes, everybody visits. And one or two people stay 24 hours. Three months, four months, one month, one week, they're there, then two people staying there.

What do the doctors have to say about that? Don't they mind?

Well that's how it is in Pakistan. One person for sure can staying, before there wasn't, now they make a card for him staying. An entry card. And one more person can be there, he can come and go, inside hospital. And also, time is too when you can go, but like that you can go all day. It's not like that. In Pakistan, doctor not. Then have argue. Can't say you can go from then to then. Can't be that aggressive. Just shouting, going, then coming back, nothing wrong. But everyone is family. And that is good (*he emphasises*).

“But everyone is family.” I sense that this large, extended family is what the majority of refugees misses the most. They face many difficulties during their flight and during the formation of their new life. But maybe it is the support of a large family, the feeling of keeping and belonging together that is the most difficult to find in a foreign country among strangers.

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