

MIGRANTS' STORIES

ALEKSANDAR ZOGRAF.

ONE OF THE TRAILS TRAVELED BY ASIAN AND AFRICAN MIGRANTS TO WESTERN EUROPE, LEADS THROUGH THE BALKANS. ABOUT 600 000 REFUGEES PASSED THROUGH SERBIA IN 2015 ALONE. A FRIEND, WHO FOR YEARS HAS WORKED WITH GROUPS DISTRIBUTING AID TO MIGRANTS, DESCRIBED TO ME ENCOUNTERS AND CONVERSATIONS WHICH TOLD HIM, IF ONLY VAGUELY, WHAT THEY WERE EXPERIENCING...



ALI, WITH HIS WIFE AND THEIR SIX CHILDREN, HAD BEEN ON A 1-1/2 YEAR LONG ODYSSEY BEFORE THEY REACHED THE MIGRANT CENTER IN SERBIA. WHEN THEY LEFT KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN, THE HUMAN TRAFFICKERS ORDERED THEM NOT TO BRING ANYTHING FROM THEIR HOME, BECAUSE IT WOULD ONLY MAKE THE ALREADY HARSH JOURNEY MORE DIFFICULT, BUT STILL, THEY RISKED BRINGING THEIR TALKING MAGPIE WITH THEM...

THIS BIRD IS LIKE A HUMAN MEMBER OF OUR FAMILY; WE'VE HAD IT SINCE IT WAS A TINY CHICK IN THE NEST...

SALAM ALAIKUM



WE CROSSED THE IRANIAN BORDER ON FOOT, AND THEN FOR 3 DAYS AND 3 NIGHTS WE CONTINUED THROUGH HIGH MOUNTAINS AND DEEP SNOW BEFORE WE REACHED TURKEY... MANY REFUGEES FELL OR GET STUCK SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE; SOME DIED THERE... WE HAD OUR SIXTH BABY, A GIRL, BORN ON THE WAY, AND I KEPT HER WARM UNDER MY COAT; THE CHILDREN KEPT THE BIRD CLOSE TO THEIR BODIES, TO KEEP OUR POOR CREATURE FROM FREEZING...

"WHEN WE WERE IN THE BOAT FLOATING FROM TURKEY TO GREECE, IT WAS STORMY AND RAINING; WE NEARLY FELL INTO THE SEA, AND THE MAGPIE WAS VERY FRIGHTENED; BUT STILL, WHEN WE WERE CROSSING THE BORDERS, IT NEVER MADE A SOUND: IT'S AN INTELLIGENT ANIMAL, AND SENSES DANGER "...

WE LEFT HOME FOR THE SAKE OF OUR CHILDREN. MY WIFE AND I ARE BOTH ILLITERATE: WE DIDN'T EVEN DARE TO GO TO SCHOOL. OF OUR FAMILIES, HALF WERE SHOT, AND THEN, LIKE US, ALL OUR CHILDREN WERE BORN INTO WAR... I DON'T WISH THEM TO LIVE THE LIFE I LIVED, AND MY TIME IS ALMOST OVER...

CHETOR!?!*



*'HOW ARE YOU,' IN FARSI LANGUAGE

"WE TRIED TO CROSS THE GREEK BORDER INTO MACEDONIA, BUT WERE SENT BACK FIVE TIMES. EACH TIME WE RESTED IN FORESTS. FINALLY, WE SUCCEEDED IN CROSSING THE BORDER, AND CONTINUED ON THROUGH MACEDONIA, FOLLOWING RAILROAD TRACKS. NOW WE ARE DETERMINED TO CONTINUE ON TO WESTERN EUROPE, AT ANY COST!"

THE BIRD ENTERED ITS CAGE. THE NEXT DAY, THE ROOM WHERE ALI'S FAMILY STAYED WAS WIPED DOWN BY THE CLEANING LADY. ALL THAT WAS LEFT BEHIND WERE TORN FRAGMENTS OF CLOTHES, A FEW DIRTY SOCKS, AND ONE SHOE MISSING ITS SOLE... I WONDER, DID THE MAGPIE FIND ITS WAY TO THE WEST?



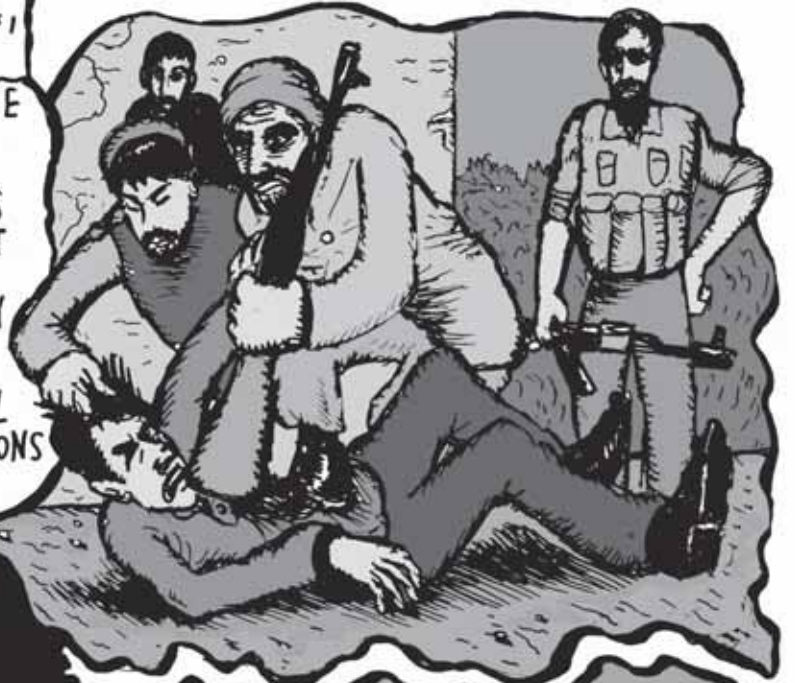
KHODA HAFEZ*



* GOODBYE!

IN THE REFUGEE CAMP IN SERBIA,
WE MEET A YOUNG MAN FROM
AFGHANISTAN...

I LIVED IN THE
VILLAGE WHICH
WAS CHANGING HANDS BETWEEN
TALIBAN AND GOVERNMENT TROOPS
...AT ONE MOMENT, GOVERNMENT
TROOPS HAD TO WITHDRAW, SO
THEY'D HIDDEN THEIR WEAPONRY
NEAR MY HOUSE. WHEN THE
TALIBAN CAME, THEY WERE
BEATING ME VERY HARD UNTIL
I TOLD THEM WHERE THE WEAPONS
WERE
PLACED
...



BUT SOON THE GOVERNMENT TROOPS
REGAINED THEIR POSITIONS, AND THEY
CAME TO ME AND STARTED TO
BEAT ME BECAUSE I GAVE AWAY
THE WEAPONS' HIDING PLACE... THEY
THREATENED TO KILL ME, BUT I
MANAGED SOMEHOW TO RUN AWAY
FROM THE PRISON...



I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE, I WENT
TO A NO MAN'S LAND BETWEEN
AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN,
CONTROLLED BY TALIBAN... ANYWAY,
THEY'VE PUT ME ON TRAINING TO
BE A SUICIDE BOMBER... YOU HAD
TO GO THROUGH RELIGIOUS
INDOCTRINATION, AND YOU LEARNED
ABOUT
WEAPONS...



AFTER ABOUT ONE YEAR, THEY CAME TO ME AND SAID—YOUR TIME IS UP. YOU WILL GO TO THE CHECK POINT CONTROLLED BY AMERICANS, AND BLOW YOURSELF UP IN A CAR. I SNEAKED OUT AND RAN AWAY, AND I WON'T BE BACK EVER...



IN SEPTEMBER 2015, WE MET AN ANGRY SYRIAN REFUGEE, AFTER HE'D BEEN RETURNED FROM THE HUNGARIAN BORDER...

IN HUNGARY WE WERE PUT INTO A CAMP RESEMBLING A CATTLE PEN. THEY DIDN'T ALLOW US TO CONTINUE TO WESTERN EUROPE, AND MALTREATED US BEFORE SENDING US BACK TO SERBIA... WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES US DIFFERENT FROM YOU PEOPLE? CAN'T YOU SEE THAT WE HAVE TWO EYES, TWO HANDS, TWO LEGS, JUST LIKE YOU!?!...



IN DAMASCUS, I WAS A DIRECTOR AND ACTOR... I HAD A NORMAL LIFE, PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT ME... I WOULD NEVER HAVE LEFT IF I DIDN'T REALLY HAVE TO...

AFTER LEAVING HOME, I KNEW THAT I MIGHT LIVE OR I MIGHT DIE ON THIS ROAD... AND THEY SHOULD KNOW THAT—EVEN IF THEY RETURN US 100 TIMES FROM THE BORDER—WE WILL JUMP OVER THE FENCE AGAIN, BECAUSE WE DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE TO RETURN TO, ANYMORE!!!



AT THE REFUGEE CAMP IN BANJA KOVILJAČA, SERBIA, WE ARE SPEAKING TO A 19-YEAR-OLD AFGHANI WHO, INSTEAD OF FARSI, INSISTED THAT WE SHOULD CONVERSE IN SERBIAN...

WHERE DID YOU LEARN SERBIAN?

WELL, I LIVED IN ENGLAND FOR A YEAR WHILE SEEKING ASYLUM. I SPEAK ENGLISH, AND SINCE HERE IN SERBIA THE MOVIES ARE NOT DUBBED BUT SUBTITLED, I HAVE BEEN LEARNING THE LANGUAGE BY LISTENING TO THE ENGLISH CONVERSATION AND READING THE TITLES ON SERBIAN TV...

BUT YOU HAVE BEEN HERE ONLY 3 MONTHS?

YES...



WHAT OTHER LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK?

MY NATIVE LANGUAGE IS PASHTO, AND I SPEAK URDU, HINDI AND FARSI, BUT SINCE I SPENT TIME IN REFUGEE CAMPS IN TURKEY AND GREECE I LEARNED THEIR LANGUAGES TOO, AND NOW I'M LEARNING GERMAN...



I AM LUCKY TO BE FROM A WEALTHIER FAMILY. I LEFT AFGHANISTAN WHEN I WAS 15, WITH A GROUP OF FRIENDS WHO WERE DREAMING OF EUROPE AS A PLACE WHERE EVERYTHING WAS JUST FABULOUS... IT DIDN'T TURN OUT THAT WAY, I WAS DEPORTED FROM THE UK, AFTER MY ASYLUM APPLICATION WAS RETURNED... THE PAST 5 YEARS OF MY LIFE WERE WASTED, I REALIZED THAT EUROPE WAS NOT AS I IMAGINED. THERE ARE SOME GOOD THINGS, BUT IT'S REALLY HARD TO FIT IN. JUST LOOK AT MY POOR COUNTRYMEN - THEY SUFFER A LOT TO JUST GET TO EUROPE, WHERE EVENTUALLY THEY'LL GET ONLY THE WORST JOBS...



AND WHAT IS MY PRESENT LIFE ALL ABOUT? I MOVE FROM ONE REFUGEE CAMP TO ANOTHER, JUMP OVER THE BARBED WIRE TO CROSS BORDERS ILLEGALLY, SLEEP IN BUSHES, GO TO JAIL, GET DEPORTED...



I DON'T BELONG ANYWHERE ANY MORE - I KNOW EUROPE, AND I WENT BACK TO AFGHANISTAN JUST TO LEAVE IT AGAIN RECENTLY. NOW I WANT TO TRY TO MAKE IT TO SWITZERLAND, WHERE MY FRIEND LIVES... I COLORED MY HAIR BLONDE, AND WILL GET A FAKE EUROPEAN PASSPORT...



MAYBE I COULD HAVE STAYED IN SERBIA, BUT I CAN SEE THAT THINGS ARE NOT QUITE PROSPEROUS HERE; THEY WOULD GIVE ME A PLACE TO STAY AND FOOD TO EAT, AND I'M THANKFUL, BUT I HAVE THAT IN AFGHANISTAN ALREADY, WHERE I ALSO HAVE MY FAMILY, MY NATIVE TOWN, AND ALL THE FAMILIAR FLAVORS AND TASTES... I DON'T KNOW IF MOVING TO WESTERN EUROPE WILL BRING ME FULFILLMENT, BUT I WILL TRY ONE MORE TIME...





„Migrants' Stories“ von Aleksandar Zograf.

Aleksandar Zograf ist ein serbischer Cartoonzeichner und Schriftsteller. Bekannte Werke von ihm sind „Life Under Sanctions“, „Psychonaut“, „Dream Watcher“ und „Bulletins from Serbia“. Zograf ist seit den frühen 90ern in der Comicszene aktiv, viele seiner Werke wurden in den USA, in Frankreich, Italien, Spanien und Deutschland veröffentlicht.



STADT ODER LAND? GESCHWINDIGKEIT

- *Gestern musste ich nachsitzen, weil ich schon wieder zu spät in die Schule gekommen bin ...*
- *Warum denn das?*
- *Viele Ausfälle bei den Öffentlichen.*
- *Das kann mir nicht passieren. Bei uns gehe ich jeden morgen zu Fuß, ist ja nicht weit.*

