

# My nails soiled with Earth

Mit ihrem Blog bringt Parwana Amiri die Stimmen Geflüchteter aus dem Lager in Ritsona in alle Welt. In Brief Nummer 23 berichtet ein 17-Jähriger von seiner täglichen Arbeit auf den Zwiebelplantagen vor dem Camp und die menschenunwürdigen Umstände, unter denen die Bewohner\*innen Ritsonas ihr wenig Geld verdienen müssen.



The sun has not risen yet. I keep one eye close, the other open to check the clock, hoping I could sleep a bit more. No, I must get up. I need to pray and quickly get ready, not to miss the dolmush (a small bus).

Walking from the house to the gate of the camp, I can see some shops opening for the day and I can smell the coffee brewing in the Kurdish mini coffee shops. As I step out of the gate onto the road with the wall of the camp behind me, I join a group of almost 20 people, some with bags on their backs.

The bus arrives, a white dolmush. Normally it should transport 12 people, but we all get in, one by one, closer and closer to each other. With all the seats taken, a number of us sit on the floor.

There is little light reaching us on the floor. More and more, we have difficulty to breath, incapable to change position or stretch our legs. We resign to tolerate it all, as it will last only for 30 minutes.

Some of the men in the car are almost the age of my father, some maybe younger. My poor father is sick. He can't even walk properly. The same is true for my mother. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here, on the floor of this car. I would be sleeping like so many youths of my age. But the story and the wave of everyone's life are different, some have no waves in their life and some face a tough sea.

A bad smell comes from some shoes. I would really enjoy making a joke out of our circumstance, but the silence around me is heavy and scary. Were I to make a joke, I might be kicked out of the car. The whole scene reminds me of old, black and white movies.

Finally, a young man, in his late 20s perhaps, changes the whole situation. I could hear with gratitude his voice coming from the corner of the car: "Please, use a spray for your feet. They smell so strongly we can feel the smell even though you wear shoes. Do something, otherwise we will get all dizzy before starting our work".

He is totally right. There is an awful stench in the car. Yet it is not shocking. Rather, it is totally predictable. The space is tight, heavy with the breaths of so many people. Most of them may have not had the time to wash their face or brush their teeth. Mercifully, it is still early in the morning and the weather is not yet awfully hot.

Finally, the door opens and we pour out. No chance to even stretch our body. Our so-called boss is tough and heartless. "You are not here for gymnastics, start your work immediately, this field should be finished today."

He yells at us, screaming out everyone's mistakes. He is one of the inhabitants in the camp, but he just knows some Greeks and, thus, he has become the manager of the workers. He must be almost 50. His name is Safi, but now everyone calls him mister Safi Jan.

Such a strange world....

Here in the onions fields, work is divided in 2 stages. I wish I could work in the second one, but I am new and for people like me, no matter how old they are, they work only in this part, harvesting the onions and picking them out of the ground. At the end of the workday, you can't see your nails any more, as if a kilo of soil has gathered under them. The second stage of the work is better because you just put the onions in boxes and then lift the filled boxes onto a truck.

As I gather the onions from the ground, I think of a chessboard. Yeah, I love this game and I am a good player. So I enjoy thinking about new techniques and tactics while picking the onions. It makes time pass faster and easier.

My very life is itself like a chessboard. Here, however, I am not the player. Neither the ones who are here working like me are players on their chessboards. We are all chess

pieces in the hands of politicians, who use our name for their benefit. It is the same in my country. It seems I have many rights, but I'm not aware of them. This is the reason why I and many others like me are exploited.

Generally, I am a calm boy and I don't interfere with anything or anyone's life, unless I have a responsibility to do so. My quiet manner may well be the main reason why my brothers, smaller or older, whip me with their words. They are much fatter than I am and more energetic. I used to think about everything too much and worry about all that happens. I feel a heavy weight on my heart and a heavy weight on my shoulders.

During the first hours of our work, with every minute that passes, I can feel the heat increasing, reaching up

to 36 degrees Celsius. The humidity is very high as well, I feel as if I stand under a hot shower, or as if someone is pouring water on me.

Getting close to mid-day, there is no eagerness to have food, only water, and my clothes are wet through.

Few hours left, I tell myself. I should persevere. I need to get those 20 euros home. We are getting close to the end of the week and we were supposed to buy my father's medicines at the beginning of each week.

Now, I am counting the moments to see when it will be 14:00 so we can stop working. Exactly as I am thinking this, Safi says, "Today's work is finished, thanks to all of you."

This is the best sentence my ears could ever hear.

Going back from here to the camp, however, I feel like a prisoner who goes from detention to work and to work from detention. In the Spongebob animation show I saw, the hero was in jail and working for a coal mine.

I do not even want to think about myself anymore, either about life, or about the things that happen around me. Who can see me? Who dares to look at me? I am just a 17 year old boy, who is burying his dreams every day, trying to accept his realities and somehow continue to live.

Still, this work of ours could be more dignified, better organized, and equitably paid. We get much less than we should rightfully get. I know that we are sold from one boss to another, from an Afghan to a Pakistani and each of them gets paid for what we do, because they collect us and bring us to work, but not in an humane way.

The prospect of integration does not rest only in having the possibility to work on onion fields, or in vineyards or olive groves. Integration should be based on the opportunities offered to use our training, our talents, our skills and abilities in any given field and for us to have a chance to live as normal citizens in the community.<



Parwana Amiri, *eine junge afghanische Frau, verbrachte Monate im völlig überfüllten Flüchtlingslager Moria, bevor sie mit ihrer Familie in das kleinere Lager Ritsona aufs Festland ziehen konnte, weil ihr Vater schwer erkrankte. Sie veröffentlicht Geschichten über Menschen, die in den Lagern in Moria und Ritsona leben müssen, unter anderem in den Büchern „Der Olivenbaum und die alte Frau“ sowie „My pen wont break, but borders“.* Weitere Texte findet ihr hier: <http://birdsofimmigrants.jogspace.net/>