

de Niemanders

GAZETTE



"I stopped
COUNTING
the DAYS"

"All of this happened
in front of the world's eyes."
» page 23

"Many people set out with beautiful hopes."
» page 18

"The world gets better by looking
for innocence, not guilt."
» page 7

RUSTIG, RUSTIG!

We are sitting in a small room at Rozet, the library in Arnhem. A group of people come from Grave, Nijmegen, Zutphen, Balk, Leeuwarden, Assen, and Goes. That is to say: they actually come from much farther away. Yemen. Egypt. Russia, Syria, Turkey, Kurdistan, Sierra Leone... They are refugees, residents of asylum seekers' centers in the Netherlands. Refugees, asylum seekers.

The goal of this gathering is to start a new project called *de Niemanders Gazette*. An independent newspaper made by and dedicated to the unheard voices of all refugees. After months of hard work we proudly present you the result: this fantastic newspaper you are holding in your hands. Be sure to read every letter, it is surely worthwhile the time.

"We see this newspaper as our newspaper," says someone. "There is a lot of heart-pain, we have a lot to say," says yet another. Soon, personal stories follow. Stories of escape. Stories about politics, but also about daily life in the asylum centers. "What does our life look like? One word. Boring." The room laughs; the feeling is relatable. One of the participants adds, "Eat, sleep, wait. Repeat." Amid the English that everyone more or less speaks, a Dutch word suddenly surfaces that everyone seems to know: "Rustig, rustig." Be patient.

LET'S TELL OUR STORIES!

There's hesitation too. What can we say, what can't we? Will we encounter 'rules and regulations'? What if we write negatively about the COA or the IND, can we do that? Wout, the thriving force of the project: "We are independent. We can write what we want. No censorship. And we can always use real cool nicknames!" And even though the stories about the asylum centers, reception in the Netherlands, and dealing with authorities are harsh, it's quickly agreed that it shouldn't be just stories of complaint. "We must look for a mix..." someone suggests. "Not all the anger out in one go. Something positive, something negative..." And: "Let's stop complaining. We have a platform now. We can be heard; let's focus on that. Let's tell our stories!"

De Niemanders Gazette is part of De Niemanders. The goal of De Niemanders is to work together with 'nobodys' (De Niemanders), people who are overlooked due to social or economic circumstances. In 2023 the musical group consisting of Wout Kemkens and Rocco Ostermann focused on refugees in Dutch reception centers, with producer Rick Wiegerinck as the third member. De Niemanders Gazette is a continuation of their mission: making the voices of De Niemanders be heard.



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366 supporters of our crowdfunding campaign!
Fonds Cultuurparticipatie
VSBFonds
VriendenLoterijFonds
Leven Het Geven
Cultuurfonds
Gemeente Arnhem
Rozet
Mediafonds
Voordekunst

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Maike Fleuren
Rick Wiegerinck
Xavier Teerling
Jeroen Schoonderbeek
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IT'S TIME TO TURN NOBODIES INTO SOMEBODIES

When I was approached by De Niemanders to join their team, my role was initially to set up and manage the crowdfunding campaign, which would fund De Niemanders II album, the podcast series, this newspaper and the live festival De Nacht van de Niemanders. However, the position of the newspaper's editor-in-chief was yet to be filled as well. I didn't have to think twice. I sank my teeth into it and didn't let go.

In 1999, I fled with my parents, brother, and younger sister from the war in former Yugoslavia, an emotional conflict that tore apart the once-united corner of Europe. It also tore apart my own family, scattering them across different countries in Europe and even beyond. We fled to the Netherlands after a long journey that was neither simple nor safe. Looking back, however, our journey appears relatively smooth compared to the unimaginable horrors that dominate today's headlines.



My story, although it influenced and shaped my personal life path, is not unique. There are hundreds, thousands, millions like me, fleeing and continuing to flee the unfathomable realities they face. It's mind-blowing to think that after enduring unspeakable cruelty and trauma, they find themselves in a place where they are not just strangers but sometimes even objects of hate – only to endure the long, relentless, unbearable burden: waiting for an answer.

In the summer, we organized a gathering at the Rozet library, casting an open invitation to various asylum centers country-wide. The response was overwhelming. Residents of these centers undertook hours-long journeys by train or bus to reach Arnhem and tell their stories. The voices that resonated in that space were urgent, their stories a desperate plea to be heard.

After the meeting, one participant waited patiently to say goodbye. He stood there for maybe ten minutes. A small act of kindness that left a lasting impression on me. When I later read his story, I couldn't hold back my tears. How could someone who had endured so much still embody such politeness, patience, and grace?

In this issue of De Niemanders, you will read the stories of various individuals who are temporarily staying in the Netherlands or who now call this country their home. People who have had to fight for where they are now. I am honored to have worked with such an ambitious, talented and brutally honest group of people. To ensure the safety of all individuals involved, some names are fictitious or have been abbreviated, and some photos have been blurred. Despite these changes, the stories and experiences contained within these pages are real, authentic and true.

*It's time to turn nobodies into somebodies.
It's time to make our voices heard.*



*These are the stories of the Niemanders.
And here we stand.*

— Belinda Limani, editor-in-chief



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Name: Eylem Daş
Age: 23
Country of origin: Turkey
Current location: Nijmegen
Time in NL: 1.5 years
Profession: Artist

Eylem Daş is a Nijmegen-based artist. She was born in Istanbul in 1989 and studied at Artuklu University, where she discovered her passion for sculpturing. Her artistic journey started with painting murals, always working as a freelancer. After living in the Netherlands for 1.5 years, she broadened her interests to space design, graphic design, antiques, recycling, illustration and three-dimensional wall design. Eylem is currently working on her sculpture in the studio of sculptor Tajddin Özen in Nijmegen. More of her creative work and portfolio can be admired on her website: www.daskunst.nl.

The data informationstreamers are retrieved from the following sources: VluchtelingenWerk Nederland. (2019, November). Gevangenen in een vastgelopen asielsysteem. VluchtelingenWerk Nederland. (2023, July 28). Vluchtelingen en gestalten. UNHCR. (2023). Refugee statistics. Retrieved from www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. (2023). Where we work: Turkey. Retrieved from <https://tinyurl.com/Sn7j3bf> Millar, O., & Warwick, I. (2018). Music and refugees' wellbeing in contexts of protracted displacement.



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» Between 2018 and 2022, an average of 385,000 children were born as refugees per year. In 2022, more than half of the refugees are younger than 18 years old.

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A GLIMPSE INTO LIFE IN THE CAMPS

DIARY ENTRY 1: UNCERTAINLY WAITING

Another day goes by, and it feels like nothing has changed except for the date. It's a sentiment I can see reflected on almost every face here at AZC, or at least among my roommates. Here I am in Europe, what many consider a paradise. Yes, I've registered my asylum, and they've assigned me a V-number. There's a lot of waiting in a large hall, and I don't quite know what they're doing or what will happen next.

The facility is vast, with two-story buildings, each floor housing rooms for families, individuals, and others. We share bathrooms and kitchens. I join the crowd making its way to the notice board in the reception area. I'm amazed by the sheer number of people eager to see if there's any mail for them. After checking the mail and straining to spot my own number, I return to my room, ready to face another day of uncertainty and waiting.

DIARY ENTRY 2: A NEW BEGINNING

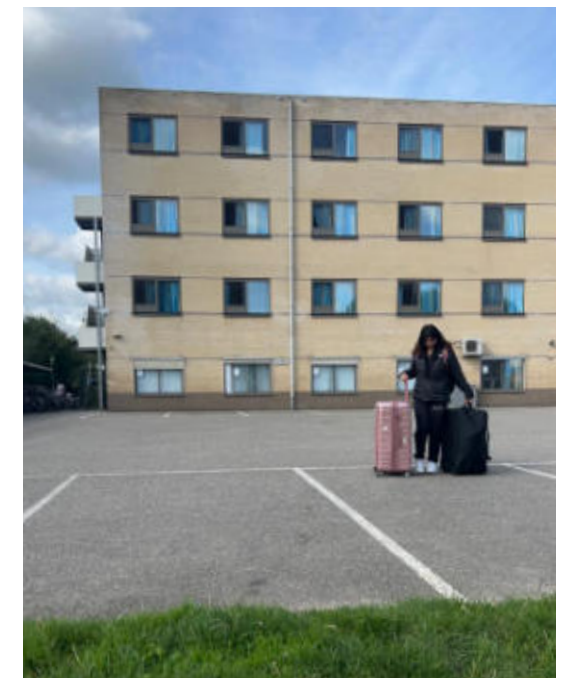
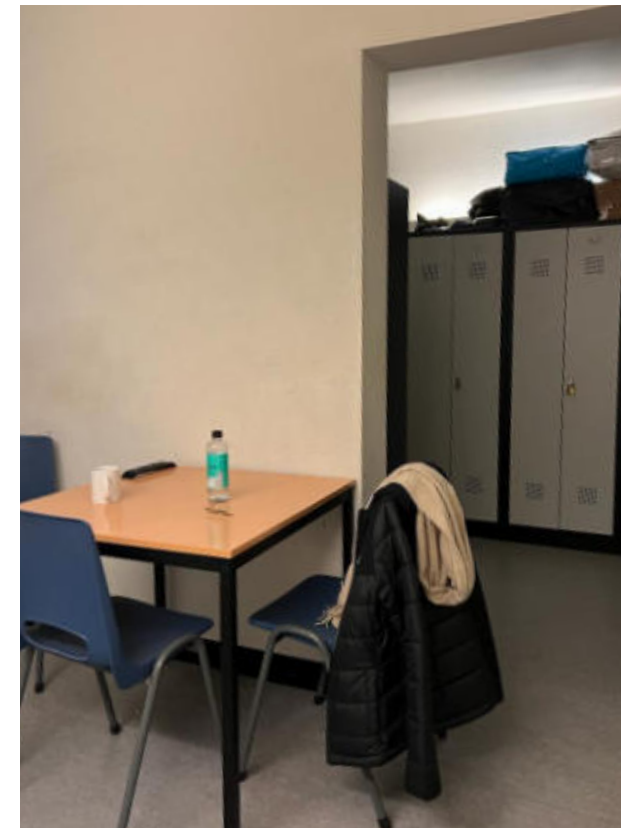
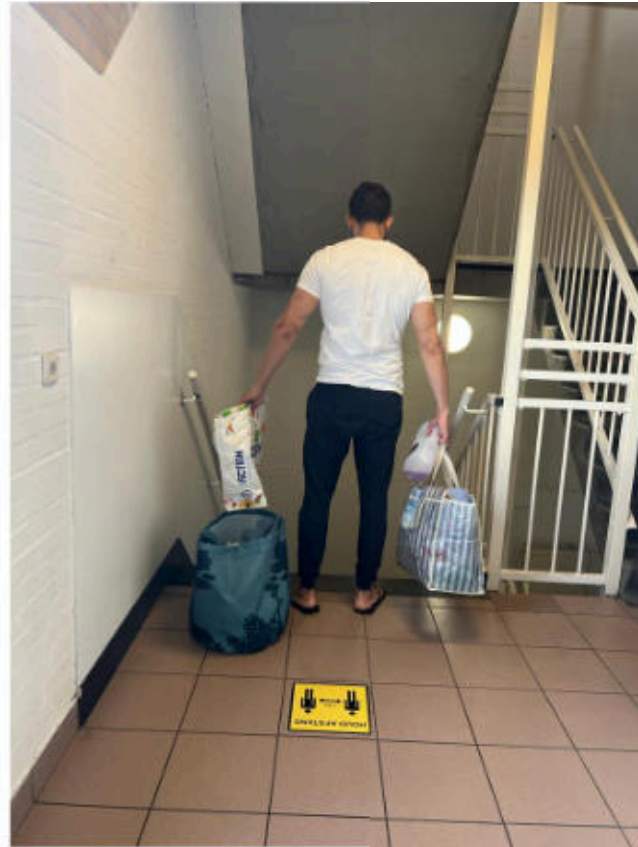
Today is a pivotal day for me. After a year and a half in the refugee camps, I had a crucial meeting. Many see us, educated and cultured individuals, fleeing life-threatening situations, yet lost in these exile camps. As usual, I attended "Fingerprint Day," scanning the job posters on the wall. Nothing matched my skills, but I decided to try, hoping to break my isolation. With some guidance, I emailed the officials, who surprisingly replied. I pedaled my bike to their location, feeling like a human among journalists, creators, and professionals. It's a dream come true, and I can't wait to contribute.

DIARY ENTRY 3: LIFE IN ARNHEM AZC CAMP

Another day in Arnhem AZC camp. I glimpsed a group of young refugees sharing laughter and alcohol, hoping their camaraderie persists. Later, chaos erupted at the camp entrance, but staff from COA managed to calm it down. I felt helpless and shed tears, realizing my own vulnerability. I encountered a fellow refugee from Pakistan, lonely and homesick. I offered words of solace, understanding the pain of longing for loved ones. I told him a few words, "After all this hardship, relief is on its way. Just keep praying to your Creator." I continued on my path, holding onto hope that something would change for the better.

DIARY ENTRY 4: TRIALS OF EXILE

Life as a refugee is challenging. We're treated like numbers, reduced to data, and seen as outsiders. My education and past achievements seem irrelevant here. I live in cramped quarters, sharing a kitchen and bathroom. Privacy is scarce, and every move is scrutinized. "What did you eat? What did you drink? Where did you go?" Loneliness is my constant companion, and 1 year for the warmth of friends and family. I've lost my sense of self and happiness. No, this is not a walk in the park.



DIARY ENTRY 5: SERENITY IN MADNESS

It's the last day before the interview with IND. Instead of the usual fluttering nerves, all I feel is a profound sense of calm. It seems that after enduring exhaustion and enduring the long wait, I am finally on the brink of receiving approval. After they grant me residency, I'll look back at these words and laugh.

For the past year and a half, I have endured a harsh solitude that has slowly chipped away at my spirit. I've felt like a ghost, unseen and unacknowledged by anyone except my husband behind the screen. I long for the presence of friends, and I struggle to find words to describe the profound loneliness that has withered my soul and weakened my body to the point where I can hardly stand or endure much.

DIARY ENTRY 6: AN UNEXPECTED TRANSFER

I was informed of my impending transfer to a new shelter after the second interview. However, the abruptness of the move caught me off guard. I hurriedly completed the formalities and left for Arnhem to receive my transfer papers. The next day, I found myself on a train, in a bags heavy with uncertainty. Arriving at Harderwijk, I struggled to find my way to the reception area. New faces, new stories, and new heartaches awaited.

DIARY ENTRY 7: SETTLING IN

In Harderwijk, questions and curiosity surround me as I enter the camp. People want to know who I am, where I come from, and what brought me here. I'm in a temporary room, sharing it with a younger, lively roommate. Our differences in preferences become apparent, but I remain adaptable. This camp resembles a home more than others I've been to, with apartment-style living and quiet surroundings. It's a welcome change, though the age of miracles seems distant.

DIARY ENTRY 8: A WORLD OF LONELINESS

Loneliness continues to be my constant companion in this new camp. Despite the company of cheerful roommates, the age gap and differing interests can be challenging. My days are spent waiting and observing, with the longing for joy and miracles seemingly out of reach. This reality may not be joyful, but it's my truth in this journey.



CHAPTER FROM XYZ:

"I Stopped Counting the Days"

I can still smell the fear that engulfed that place, smoke and fire in every angle and corner. The explosion sounds and military aircraft breaking the sound barrier, bulletproof warplanes throwing bombs on the walls. I can even imagine the rusty smell of tanks, especially when their engines vibrated with every move. The T-62, in spite of its golden years and weak war performance, was more than enough to destroy what I have ever considered precious.

On its turret, there was a serial number, and on the back. Right then, it looked like an enormous green monster, just like the tales that are told to misbehave children to help them fall asleep. Oh, how I wish it was just a story! It was real, a living nightmare that would not be forgotten once you woke up in the morning. A monster that grew bigger and more outrageous with each step.

Although I had played plenty of war games and had never been afraid of military equipment or weapons before, I found myself as immobile as a statue. My feet were rooted in the ground, and my body refused to move. **There I was, hiding behind a random tree in what once was a beautiful garden, my eyes wide open, contemplating the scene in front of me, much like a TV screen, but it was far from entertaining.**

We were all in the middle of this madness, and all we wanted was to play hide and seek, a game we had always enjoyed together. We didn't want money, power, or to flaunt our political affiliations. We didn't aspire to rule the world. We simply desired to live in peace, which was all we had ever asked for in this life.

In a matter of seconds, the street turned crimson red. A feeble, heart-wrenching sound emerged from beneath that monstrous machine—the body of a child, or what was left of it, and another child who had witnessed death before their eyes. It was a time when all values seemed to have vanished from the world.

A few days before the disaster, I had seen a news report about the (Alamal) convoy heading towards Gaza. I observed people heading in its direction, full of emotions, listening to promises made by hopeful individuals. Although that troubled land seemed distant, it suddenly became as distant as the moon from the sun. Ironically, that's what would happen to my homeland. Despite my joy at being able to help, to care and lend a hand, I became aware of starvation in Africa, civil war in Lebanon, and war in Afghanistan. For a kid like me, it all felt monotonous, living in a safe country, almost like being on another planet far removed from it all.

Then suddenly, it happened, spreading everywhere. Death roamed every corner, chaos, fear, destruction, and the list went on. No one could have foreseen it. What was once a safe place turned into scenes I saw on TV. I was just a kid, unable to grasp most of what was happening. I was sure that even the adults themselves didn't fully understand what was happening. **Still, everyone held onto hope that the war would end within a week, then a month, then a year, and two, until they stopped counting the days.** It was all over the news, the killings, the number of victims, explosions, macabre scenes, and genocide had become regular news.

When I started reading "Murder on the Orient Express" by Agatha Christie, I realized that the victim, in fact, was the train itself, representing my own country, and the genocide made victims into culprits and murderers out of innocent people. What irony, I thought, fate always has its own ways. That same train started from Aleppo, one of the states of my beloved country.

Sometimes, a solitary sentence would break the silence, causing a stir as if a foreign country was contemplating a significant move. In hard times, people are expected to be selfish, panicking and stockpiling medicines and goods upon hearing such news. The final blow that was supposed to end all the suffering turned out to be a grand folly, something that would later make them laugh at themselves whenever they recalled those pitiful days, assuming they survived. "Sarcasm, the refuge of modest people..." This quote, often attributed to Dostoevsky, holds true. Those words resonated with whoever witnessed that living nightmare called war.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: De kleine Abdulrazzak
Age: 23
Country of origin: Syria
Current location: AZC Drenthe/Assen
Time in NL: 1.5 years
Profession: Software Engineer, Writer, Violinist

"De kleine Abdulrazzak" is a remarkable young Syrian talent whose journey from war-torn Syria to Drenthe, Netherlands, is an inspiring tale of resilience and creativity. Born and raised in Syria, Abdulrazzak bore witness to the ravages of war, his hometown becoming a symbol of devastation. Despite these challenges, his determination led him to pursue a career in software engineering. Leaving Syria, he spent four years in Hungary, where he graduated as a software engineer. Abdulrazzak is also a passionate violinist and writer, with an ongoing project titled "XYZ." This novel explores the lives of two refugees, one Syrian and the other Yemeni, whose paths intersect in the AZC refugee camp. Their unique personalities and perspectives promise a compelling narrative of resilience and hope. Using the pseudonym "De kleine Abdulrazzak," he shares his story while safeguarding his family in Syria. He shares his story and talents with others, showing that even when life is hard, people can be strong and creative.



WHILE WAITING

Knocking on the door of the dervish lodge that refused to accept him, the young man put a rose petal in a glass of water and handed it to the dervish. There is probably room for a rose petal that does not overflow the water.

It's been a year since I've been here. It's going well, just slow. It feels like home. I have a lot of neighbors. I'm trying to get to know them. Actually, Bascha said 'we are a big family' in my first camp. She hugged me and then we cried together. I remember that.

The first step to being a good person is to think well. I am struggling not to lose my good will. I think this is my biggest struggle here. They are doing their best for hosting us. Everything is for us, and I think we should appreciate it. The prison was turned into a library here, for example. How nice! Everyone, regardless of their status, has come for a 'humane life'. I see that all problems are solved with compassion. **Everything gets better with love, the world gets better by looking for innocence, not guilt.**

My little daughter loves activities. So she forgets that her father and elder sister are away. When the game is over, she will remember and be afraid of being alone again. I can't even go to the restroom, because she is afraid of being alone. But I know that these beautiful people will always be good for her and one day we will reunite the whole family.

Voluntary work is organized for the continuation of life: health, cleaning, activity, language learning. I attend language classes three days a week and I love speaking 'Nederlands'. It's hard, that's true, but the more you get involved, the faster you learn. It's all like parts of a chain or steps on a ladder. Patience is a key word in our society. I don't know if the meaning of this word in Dutch is the same as 'geduld'. Language is alive: it lives with people, it can die or change over time, and it shrinks or expands. What I am most curious about, and want to research as a philologist, is whether a word here has the same meaning as in my mind.

It's good to wait if the expected day will come. You might even make a notch in the wall. Knowing that it's not forever. And while I wait, a seagull taps on the window, a child falls down the stairs, an old lady is cooking, people are laughing outside, a girl is crying in the hallway. COA, whom I meet everywhere, asks: 'Alles goed?'

'Ja', I say. Is there any other option?

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Safiye Erbey
Age: 47
Country of origin: Turkey
Current location: Emergency Shelter Leeuwarden
Time in NL: 1.5 years
Profession: Teacher of Turkish Language and Literature

Safiye Erbey, a respected teacher of Turkish Language and Literature in Turkey, found her life abruptly disrupted when she was accused of Gülen movement affiliation. Despite her eighteen years of dedicated service, she was suspended and imprisoned, along with her young daughter. Escaping unjust persecution, Safiye sought refuge in the Netherlands, where she has resided in a temporary camp in Leeuwarden for the past seventeen months. Safiye's story serves as a stark reminder of the importance of providing sanctuary to those fleeing injustice.

IF I WERE TO WORK AT COA: A VISION FOR REFUGEE SUPPORT

1. IF I WERE TO WORK WITH THE COA Refugee Affairs Organization, my main goal would be to help refugees feel happy, adapt to modern Dutch society, and live a good life in different ways.

1. HELPFUL REFUGEE WEBSITE
First, we should make a website that shows how many places are available for refugees and how many can come in each day. This website needs to be updated daily. This way, refugees can check if there's a place for them to stay, so they don't have to sleep outside in bad weather or without access to healthcare. This can prevent diseases and problems among refugees and help keep peace between families and individuals with different backgrounds. It's important to avoid disasters like these.

2. "TER APPEL FOR YOU" APPLICATION PAGE

We can create a special part of the website called "Ter Appel For You." Here, refugees can apply for asylum, give their personal information, and explain why they need asylum. We can use this information to create special plans for each refugee based on their situation. This program should match refugees who have similar habits, traditions, and experiences, like work history and education. This way, refugees can connect with others who have similar lives, which will help them fit in better in Dutch society. For example, people from Afghanistan and Iran both speak Persian and have similar cultures. Matching them can make them feel more at home.

3. USING REFUGEE SKILLS AND KEEPING AN EYE

We should also recognize the skills and talents that refugees have. Many refugees are good at different things like running businesses, organizing events, or working in healthcare. We can work with schools, hospitals, and businesses to give refugees a chance to use their skills. For example, we can organize health campaigns to teach people about diseases, and refugees with medical knowledge can help. This helps refugees and the local community.

4. FAST ASYLUM PROCESS AND KEEPING AN EYE

We need to make sure the asylum process is quick and clear. If someone's asylum is accepted, they should know right away. If their application is still being reviewed, they should get updates regularly. If their asylum request is denied under Dutch law, they should be told quickly and given options, whether they are inside or outside the country. We should also work with the police to watch the borders and airports to make sure rejected refugees don't move around freely. They should either go back home or follow the Dutch rules, especially if they have a job.

5. AVOIDING PROBLEMS AND CROWDING

By doing these things, we can prevent problems and overcrowding in refugee camps. We should organize refugees based on their needs and legal status so that everyone is safe and taken care of. This will stop situations where vulnerable people, like children and women, are mixed with others who may cause trouble. These ideas are just the start of creating a better system to help refugees. If we follow these steps, we can give refugees the support they need to build a new life in Dutch society. The COA's commitment to these efforts will create a more welcoming and integrated society for everyone.



Dissatisfaction

INTERVIEW WITH REFUGEES

In our daily lives, we encounter people with whom we have family relationships, friendships, work, love, respect, or new connections. This falls within the pattern of normal life. The size of this circle of relationships can vary depending on the circumstances each person is going through. The first circle of relationships that a refugee enters upon their arrival in this country is their daily and direct interaction with COA employees. What are the opinions of these refugees about the way COA employees treats them?

K: Initially, everything was fine because the [asylum] center was new, and the staff were new, but after a while, the good treatment and interest changed, and it was no longer the same as in the beginning.

N: According to the new law, I will stay in this [asylum] center for about a year. Since I arrived here, I have not felt comfortable. There is no privacy here.

L: They have a bad habit, which is excessive curiosity, wanting to know what you are doing, where you are going, what items you have in your room, and what you buy. If I wear something nice, they look at me with surprise, as if being a refugee means my clothes should be inappropriate, and my phone is old, and I don't understand anything. All of this makes me feel uncomfortable. It's as if I'm always being watched, and instead of alleviating the psychological pressure we are going through, they increase it.

B: They have a problem, namely that their perception of us is impoverished. They see refugees as poor people living in tents, uneducated, and persecuted in their countries. For example, when they enrolled us in swimming lessons and found me to be good at swimming, they were very surprised and started asking me where I learned it and how.

Y: They have a disturbing idea about refugees, that they are prohibited and that they steal. This certainly exists, as it does in all countries in the world, but I am against the idea of generalization. They fear for their belongings when you approach them and say to your face that we shouldn't steal stuff. They see it as normal, but I see it as an insult to me.

V: Initially, because I was here alone and had no

one in this country, and I was afraid to do business with anyone here, I considered COA as my big family. However, the organization refuses to build relationships with us. This made me feel broken, disappointed, and discriminated against, because they are something, and I am nothing.

D: I compare COA to a robot that goes to work to perform what is required of it, only at certain times, in situations and circumstances. A person needs empathy; he needs someone to ask him how he is doing, not because it's their job to ask this question, but because he needs someone who listens to him, feels him, and stands by him. Humanity lies not only in words but also in actions.

G: They are jealous of the refugees, because they live in asylum centers. From their perspective, refugees get everything, but if they were to step into our shoes, they would capture the destruction taking place within us. They would pity us.

E: Naturally, we don't show our vulnerable feelings when we are at our worst, acting arrogantly and putting on a smile on our faces. So, they think everything is always fine with us.

R: At first, I thought they were very nice; they put on an artificial smile when they saw you, and after they walked away, they would talk

about you and laugh at you, thinking we are ignorant and don't understand.

From these diverse opinions, we can conclude that the primary reason behind this gap is the lack of cultural understanding among COA staff regarding refugees. Refugees do not trust them, and ultimately, their inability to empathize and see things from the refugees' perspective has led to one of the reasons causing this significant divide.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Perla Al-Mohamad

Age: 17

Country of origin: Syria

Current Location: Winschoten

Time in NL: almost 5 years

Profession: Student (Journalism)

Perla Al-Mohamad, a 17-year-old from Syria, aspires to become a journalist, a dream born out of her passion for writing stories. She loves cooking as well. Despite studying Dutch in school, job opportunities in her chosen field are scarce. Perla has been residing in Winschoten for over a year now, and her decision to come to the Netherlands was driven by a profound desire to escape the slow death that war imposes in her country of origin, and embrace the joys of life.

"WE ARE STORYTELLERS"

"It's not that crazy," Rocco Ostermann says when I ask him how it came about that people from the music industry are suddenly making a newspaper. Because a newspaper and music, those are two very different things, right?

VERY LOGICAL FOR US

Well, no, Rocco and his fellow musician Wout Kemkens tell me. "For us, it's very logical. Even in previous projects, we have always made a little newspaper or a publication. You see, we, as creators, are interested in stories. Observations, experiences, thoughts. The story of a journey, for example. Whether it's a song, a poem, a column, an article. These are words that tell a story." And in this case – in De Niemanders Gazette – they are the stories of refugees. Residents of the asylum seekers' centers in the Netherlands. Rocco: "Because there are stories there, my friend! Unbelievable!"

SO MUCH TALENT IN THOSE AZCS!

Rocco, Wout, and their friend Rick Wiegerinck (music producer) encountered those stories earlier in their project 'De Niemanders,' when they toured prisons and detention centers in the Netherlands. The inmates they met there often turned out to be musicians or lyricists. It resulted in an album - 'De Niemanders' – with music and a podcast with stories. Featuring and by the residents of those institutions themselves.

After the experience with prisons, Rocco, Wout, and Rick ended up in the asylum centers. Also places with people who are somewhat outside of society. Wout: "In the AZCs, we encountered a lot of enthusiasm. Initially in music, during performances. But also in various areas that didn't really have anything to do with music. Journalists, writers, poets, filmmakers, photographers, advertisers, communication experts... So much talent is there! But they can't do anything, they are just waiting. That's how

we came up with the idea of a newspaper. A physical space where all those talents can be expressed. And not a newspaper about the residents of those AZCs, but a newspaper by those residents. Give them a medium; they already have the stories."

OUR OWN LITTLE MEDIA TYCOON

Rocco Ostermann points with a grin to Wout Kemkens. "He can explain it so well, right? That newspaper, that's really his thing. Rick Wiegerinck is the one among us with the plans, the energy; he's jumping in all directions... And Wout is our own little media tycoon. Practical. He ensures that ideas like De Niemanders Gazette get off the ground... And me..." Rocco spreads his arms wide: "I let the text flow like water into the floodplains! No man, if you give me space, I'll fill that whole newspaper by myself. You have to rein me in!"

LIGHTHOUSE IN A DARK LANDSCAPE

The performances in the AZCs, the encounters with refugees, it stirred something in the three of them. Rocco: "What do you really know about refugees? Not much. Yes, what the people on the streets shout. 'Why are these people here? Fortune seekers. Stay away. Go back to your own country.' Everyone has a whole squadron of those opinions. But when you talk to those people, when you inform yourself... When you hear the stories, about their home country, their escape... Persecution, war, Homesickness, uprooting. About life in the AZCs, waiting, being tossed around, uncertainty... All those images, all those experiences... What can you do as an ordinary Dutch person?"

Rocco falls silent for a moment. Then: "Hence the 'Niemanders', or nobodiers. The people who fall outside everywhere. Whom you don't normally meet in society. We, Wout and I, and Rick, we can make music with them. Give them a voice. Tell the stories. Provide a little bit of understanding. It would be wonderful if ultimately there were ten albums or so with the title 'Niemanders' on the shelf. Like a lighthouse in a dark landscape. A beacon. For people who don't have hands and feet, who don't have a voice themselves."

NICE TO READ!

Wout adds, "Yes, it's about understanding for us. We may have thought of this newspaper, but we don't determine what goes in. That's up to the Niemanders themselves. It's not a newspaper about Niemanders, but by Niemanders. Russians, Ukrainians, Syrians, Kurds, Turks... Very diverse, many opinions, many experiences. We, as the creators of the newspaper, are not there to filter things, but to make things possible. I hope it leads to more insight, more understanding, not conflict. Beautiful, unfiltered. And just nice to read!"

THIS IS A DARK TUNNEL

THE ROADSTORY OF YILMAZ

Immigrating illegally from one country to another is a difficult undertaking. Each of these journeys feels like an adventure movie, but with an important difference – it's all too real. There's a plan, but no script or director; at that moment, if you believe in anything, it's that God must be directing this movie. Here you will read a true travel story of a refugee. This journey is like entering a long, dark tunnel. Sometimes it feels like that tunnel will never end, but eventually, you emerge on the other side.

SERBIA - BELGRADE (JANUARY 10, 2022)

As we approached passport control after our plane touched down in Belgrade, we noticed about twenty people from a previous flight waiting in the hall. Their reasons for being detained varied: some lacked hotel reservations, others couldn't produce a vaccine certificate, and a few had no clear explanation. Our own passport control experience was surprisingly smooth. It was frigid outside, with temperatures at -15 degrees Celsius and snow covering Belgrade.

Opting for a cheaper hostel rather than the pre-booked hotel, we stayed for two nights. Later, we bought bus tickets to Subutika, a border town in Hungary, where we planned to cross into the EU. There, we encountered a hostel filled with about 35 individuals, most of them Kurds like us, fleeing from Turkey. Some were human smugglers, capitalizing on the desperation of those trying to cross the border. My friend and I decided not to trust the smugglers but needed a guide to help us cross safely.

FIRST ATTEMPTS

After evaluating our options, we chose Afghan 'Kako'. He agreed to lead us to the border, but once we crossed, we would be on our own. Two days later, Kako instructed us to prepare for the evening. We packed lightly and took a taxi to a location about 2 km from the border. We met an Afghan guide, and together with a group of twelve from India, Pakistan, and Syria, we ventured towards the border. Armed with four ladders, we approached the border fence, a double row of high wire mesh with a gap in between. It was nerve-wracking, and our hearts raced as we moved closer.

Our attempt to cross the border failed when the fence's sensors triggered alarms, and police lights and cameras focused on us. We retreated quickly, and the police arrived within 30 seconds. They ordered us to leave the area. Once they departed, we returned to the forest, disheartened by our first failed attempt. Over the course of that night, we made four attempts to cross the border, each ending in failure. When my friend and I looked at each other and started laughing, we suddenly realized the absurdity of the situation and the pressure we were under.

PANIC SET IN

In winter, the harsh weather conditions meant that snow and ice could persist for weeks. Luckily, our hostel provided warmth. After a day's rest, Kako instructed us to meet again that night at the same location for another attempt at crossing. Around 8 pm, we hailed a taxi and embarked on our journey. When the driver asked our destination, he was taken aback upon hearing it. "Are you crazy?" he exclaimed, pointing out the -18-degree temperature. We insisted on our destination, and he complied. Upon arriving at the

camp, we learned that Kako wouldn't arrive in another two hours. We started a fire to stave off the cold, but even a meter away, the chill was unbearable. We sipped some vodka in an attempt to warm up, but it provided little solace. We stoked the fire, turning it into a roaring blaze, our only source of warmth. The hours passed, but Kako never appeared.

As the cold grew more biting, panic set in, and we decided to return to the hotel. However, our attempts to summon a taxi failed, so we resolved to walk. Along the way, we encountered unleashed dogs in the villages, enduring numerous dog attacks and chases. We pressed on, eventually spotting what seemed to be an abandoned house where we could rest. It was bitterly cold inside, but with a small fireplace and some dry wood, we managed to warm up, spending the night there.

In the morning, we called a taxi, which agreed to pick us up. Back at the hotel, we were shocked by a grim scene. A group who had attempted to cross the Romanian border had suffered severe mistreatment at the hands of border security. Their clothes were stripped, and they endured brutal beatings in the frigid weather. Among them was a woman with two children who witnessed the horrors. It was a heart-wrenching sight, and we were grateful that our children hadn't experienced such trauma.

Following Kako's repeated failures, we changed our approach. This time, we partnered with Serhad, another Afghan. He offered to guide us to Croatia, about 120 km from Shid, and we agreed. Setting off early in the morning in a hired taxi, we bought supplies and vodka. At 23:00, we began our

A NEW APPROACH

journey, eventually following the rails of a freight train bound for Croatia. Our journey took us to the border, where we passed through into Croatian territory, even bypassing the border security booth. After a long, cold trek, we rested by a fire, feeling the effects of the vodka.

Suddenly, in the darkness, we noticed someone approaching. It was my first encounter with border security, and I followed Serhad's lead by remaining silent. The guards shouted and insulted us, and a vehicle arrived to transport us. We were dropped off at the Serbia-Croatia border with a stern warning. We began our journey again, navigating through dense bushes that cut our hands and faces. Our persistence was unshaken despite the setbacks, and Serhad's determination kept our spirits high. Eventually, we reached a flat terrain near a Croatian city, where we heard the distant sounds of vehicles. Our journey felt like a never-ending walk through a dark tunnel. But just before I was ready to give up hope, there was light at the other end.

During these journeys, thousands of refugees face injuries due to harsh weather, treacherous road conditions, and ill-treatment from border authorities on migration routes. Some even lose their lives. The purpose of sharing this story is to shed light on the challenges refugees endure, fostering empathy and understanding, especially for those with justifiable reasons for seeking refuge.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Yilmaz

Country of origin: Kurdish, from Turkey

Time in NL: 1+ year

Profession: Journalist

Yilmaz is a Kurdish journalist from Turkey who had dedicated his career to reporting the news and upholding freedom of thought and expression. However, the deteriorating state of press freedom and human rights in Turkey reached alarming levels, making it increasingly challenging for him to continue his work. The prevailing mentality in Turkey and the failure of the legal system to protect journalists led to threats and pressures that made his journalistic endeavors untenable. As a result, Yilmaz was forced to flee Turkey in May 2022. His journey and experiences reflect the challenges faced by journalists in Turkey and the sacrifices they make to uphold the principles of democracy and free speech.

ABU OMAR'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY FROM TURKEY TO THE NETHERLANDS



This is the story of Abu Omar, a 22-year-old Syrian who embarked on an extraordinary journey from Turkey to the Netherlands, facing numerous challenges and hardships along the way. Abu Omar's journey sheds light on the perilous paths and obstacles that countless asylum seekers navigate in their quest for refuge and safety.

Abu Omar is a 22-year-old young man who possesses ambition and intelligence, and is successful in his working life. At first, he had no plan to travel and leave Turkey, after establishing his own project in the Turkish city of Antalya, which is planting flowers and exporting them abroad.

FROM PROSPERITY TO HARDSHIP

Abu Omar mastered his work in growing flowers, and he opened his project in 2012, after he rented a small piece of land. After only one year, the project began producing, and Abu Omar's production of roses gained fame in the region. Until it began to be exported to a number of merchants inside and outside Turkey. But the path of Abu Omar's successful project did not last long, as he is one of the thousands of Syrians who left their jobs in Turkey after their situation became narrow as a result of the political pressures on the Syrian refugees, so they chose the path of illegal immigration to Europe.

THE EVERLASTING ROAD

Abu Omar's journey began alongside his younger brother Khaled (aged 14) in June 2020, departing from Istanbul towards the Greek lands. They were part of a group of twelve young friends, all aiming to reach the Netherlands. Their route took them to the border between Turkey and Greece, along the Evros River. They initially relied on a GPS program to guide them as they entered Greek forests. Unfortunately, they lost internet connection for two days when they reached a valley near the Flair region. This difficult stretch also coincided with a shortage of food. Originally planning to trek across Greek lands for 8 days, their journey extended to 13 days due to unforeseen challenges. After finally leaving the forests behind, they continued on their path.

TRIALS AND CAMARADERIE

Abu Omar explains, "We used to get our food from shops in the Greek villages, where most of the people were of Turkish origin. During the journey, my leg muscles got injured, causing a lot of pain. I struggled while walking, and one person in our group had knee pain. We helped him by walking alongside him or using a wooden plank to assist his movement. On the journey, we encountered another group of refugees. Among them was a strange story involving the death of a man of over 55 years old from the Syrian city of Deir Ezzor. A member of that group, Abu Raed, shared details about the man's journey. He mentioned that the man, whose last name was Abu Raed, began his journey in Turkey with his nephew and traveled with a group of 10 people."

"During the journey, the deceased man's nephew (Abu Raed) broke his leg, yet his group refused to halt their progress," Abu Omar explains. "Following a day of walking through the mountains, two members of the group decided to go to a nearby village in search of food and to charge their mobile phones. In this situation, Abu Raed, who was elderly and unable to walk well, entrusted 150 euros to the two young men, thinking they would use it to bring him food and charge his phone. Unfortunately, they didn't honor his trust. Instead, they returned after stealing both the money and the phone. At that moment, our group encountered Abu Raed on his own, in a secluded area, visibly distressed. Touched by his predicament, we felt compassion and offered him some food."

NARROW ESCAPES

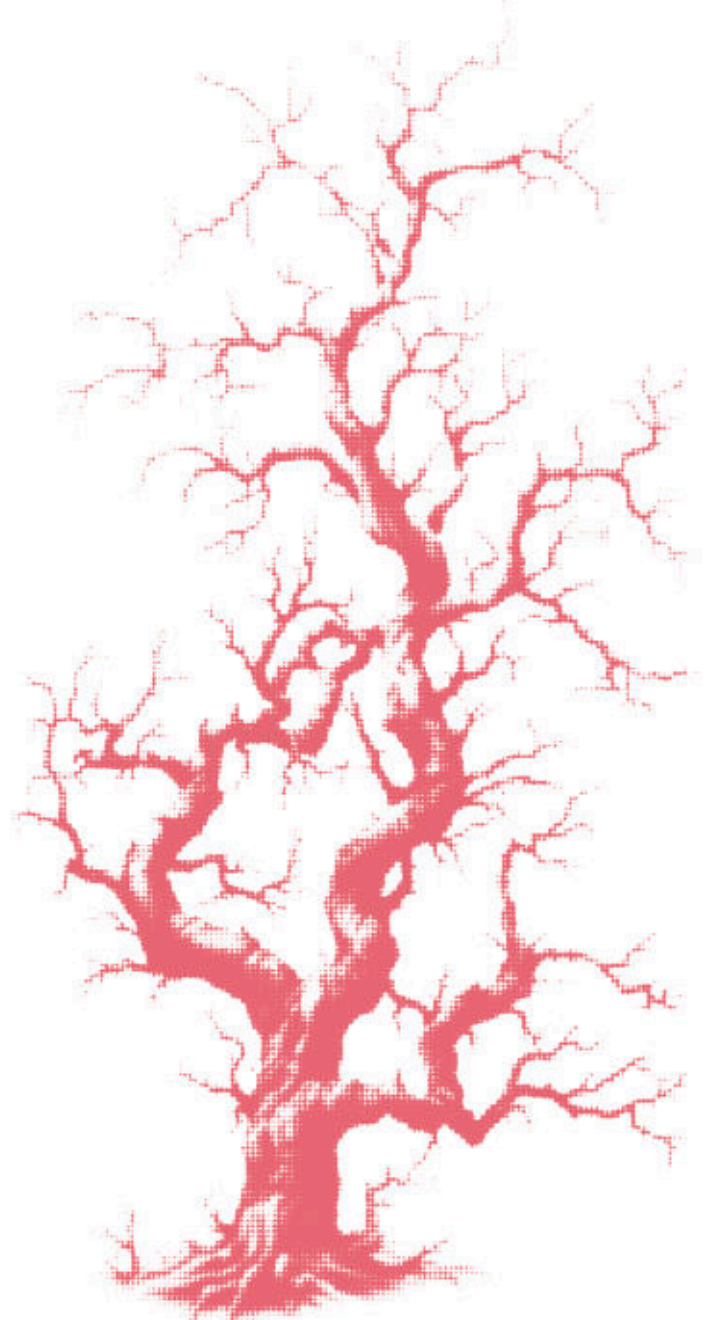
"After accompanying him for a day on our journey, as night fell, we decided to rest in a mountainous area surrounded by trees. The next morning, we were met with astonishment and shock when we discovered Abu Raed's lifeless body sitting beside a tree. It was highly likely that he had suffered a heart attack. Swiftly, we proceeded to bury him in a nearby village before resuming our journey."

Abu Omar continues recounting his experiences: "Upon reaching a loading point in Greek territory, a car arrived following an agreement with a human trader. This car was to take us to the Greek city of Thessaloniki. From there, we negotiated with another individual engaged in facilitating such journeys to guide us to Macedonia. Travelling on foot, the journey through the Macedonian lands took a day and a half. Unfortunately, the long walk caused the legs of some of the young men in our group to become strained and cracked. Upon reaching a vineyard, we rested for three hours, waiting for a taxi that had been arranged through a Russian smuggler. This taxi transported us to Serbia, where we found shelter in the United Nations' Camp (Sunbar), situated close to the border between Hungary and Serbia."

A HOPEFUL CONCLUSION

"After staying in the camp for three days, we decided to break through the wall between Serbia and Hungary. This wall was surrounded by barbed wire and had sensors to detect anyone touching it. Luckily, we managed to cross the wall safely and entered Hungary. We walked through forests for hours until we reached a loading point. A car took us from Hungary to Slovenia and then to the Czech Republic. Everything went well, and we continued to Germany by car. In Germany, we got on a train that took us to the Netherlands. Finally, on August 13, 2022, we arrived in the Netherlands. There, we gave ourselves up to the Dutch police, who sent us to the Ter Apel camp."

» In 2023, the number of people fleeing war and violence has increased for the tenth year in a row. For the first time, more than 100 million people are on the run. 5.4 million of them are still waiting for a decision on their asylum application.



ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Mohamad Eid
Age: 50
Country of origin: Syria
Current location: Leeuwarden
Time in NL: 1,5 years
Profession: Investigative Journalist

Mohamad Eid, a respected investigative journalist from Syria, now finds himself in the Netherlands, specifically Leeuwarden, due to political reasons. Despite the challenges of starting anew, his commitment to uncovering the truth remains unshakable. With a career spanning four decades, Mohamad's work continues to inspire, reminding the world of the enduring power of journalistic integrity and courage.



A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO BEING A REFUGEE: ENHANCING WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE

The forced displacement of individuals from their geographical origins due to conflict, persecution, or other crises has become a global concern. Refugees face not only physical security and basic needs challenges, but also a myriad of difficulties in terms of their psychological well-being. This article aims to explore the psychological impact of leaving their homes and the communities they once belonged to on refugees. Additionally, it will examine the coping mechanisms they develop and the role of psychological interventions in supporting their mental health. By understanding the psychological experiences of refugees, we can better meet their needs and enhance their overall well-being.

Being a refugee can have profound psychological effects on individuals. One of the most common mental health problems among refugees is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Refugees often have experienced or witnessed traumatic events such as war, violence, or persecution, which can lead to intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and hyperarousal symptoms (Steel et al., 2009). Moreover, leaving their geographical origins can result in a loss of identity and a sense of belonging. This loss can contribute to feelings of isolation, alienation, and a lack of purpose or direction in life (Siriwardhana et al., 2014). Furthermore, the emotional distress and psychological trauma experienced by refugees can give rise to a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).

Despite facing immense challenges, refugees often demonstrate remarkable resilience and develop coping mechanisms to navigate difficult circumstances. Building social support networks is a significant coping mechanism. Refugees often rely on their fellow refugees and members of the host communities for emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Additionally, refugees frequently draw upon their cultural and religious resources as sources of strength and resilience. Cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs can provide a sense of continuity and stability

in the face of chaos and uncertainty (Siriwardhana et al., 2014). Furthermore, refugees utilize adaptive coping strategies such as cognitive reframing and problem-solving to manage stress and overcome challenges. By reframing negative experiences and focusing on solutions, they can maintain a sense of control and agency in their lives (Steel et al., 2009).

Access to mental health services and psychosocial support is crucial in addressing the psychological needs of refugees. Unfortunately, such services are often limited or inaccessible in refugee settings. Efforts should be made to ensure access to culturally sensitive and trauma-informed mental health services for refugees. Trauma-focused therapies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) have been found effective in reducing PTSD symptoms among refugees (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Additionally, resilience-building and promoting psychological well-being can be achieved through education and empowerment programs.

In conclusion, taking a psychological approach to understanding the experiences of refugees is essential in supporting their mental health and well-being. By recognizing the psychological challenges they face and providing appropriate interventions and support, we can enhance their resilience, foster their coping mechanisms, and promote their overall well-being. Together, we can make a positive impact on the lives of refugees and help them navigate the complexities of forced displacement.

HEVAL'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

While I cannot find a clear definition for this situation, when I repeatedly ponder it, three keywords come to mind: inquiry, time and hope. From the time I made my first asylum application until now, six months have passed, and these three concepts have continuously revolved in my mind, sometimes changing their forms, sometimes lingering as they are. After six months of contemplation and assessment, let me convey how these three concepts have affected me and my friends I met during the asylum process.

INQUIRY

Firstly, the 'inquiry' that began from the outset of our journey and will likely continue forever represents an intricate mental state, easy for some and impossibly complex for others... In the early days, inquiry intertwines with the concepts of hope and time in our thoughts. **I don't know how to describe the emotional state that results from questioning the past, the present, and the future,** where we feel more hopeful compared to the past but less hopeful compared to the future. This is a highly unique experience, yet I still wouldn't recommend experiencing it.

TIME

Within the asylum process, we often have a lot of free time in the camps, which might seem advantageous for keeping ourselves engaged, thinking, planning, and executing those plans. However, it takes more than time to muster the necessary motivation to do so... **Because no one in the beginning would willingly choose such a path if they weren't forced.** Coming from one's own lands, loved ones, and an environment where one could express themselves better, to a completely different geography with unfamiliar language, culture, and many other factors, 'out of necessity,' to seek asylum or become a refugee involves a long and uncertain process that demands mental effort to make plans for the future, engage in activities contributing to personal development, and maintain a positive outlook.

HOPE

So, how did we manage? How are we able to persist despite these challenges and carry out meaningful work for society and ourselves? The answer is as ancient as humanity itself: communication! Through healthy, supportive, unifying, and empowering communication. Thanks to this genuine and healthy communication frequently encountered among refugees in the camps and teams consisting of some institutions and volunteers working with refugees, we still recognize our value, potential, and altruistic intentions despite all odds. It ignites us and propels us into action! Writing this article right now might be the most authentic example I can offer.

For granting us this wonderful opportunity — **an opportunity that allows us to touch people's lives while simultaneously touching the treasure within ourselves** — I extend my deepest gratitude to the 'de Niemanders' team and all the team members I've worked with. To anyone reading this, I recommend recognizing the marvelous potential within themselves and stepping out of the comfort zones formed by the triangle of 'inquiry, hope and time' as soon as possible.



ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Heval Hêja Serçik
Age: 23
Country of origin: Sirkak, Kurdistan
Current location: Rotterdam/Schiehaven
Time in NL: 8 months
Profession: Psychologist, singer-songwriter

Heval Hêja Serçik is a 23-year-old man from Sirkak, Kurdistan. His reason for fleeing his homeland was twofold: firstly, he courageously wrote a political song criticizing the government and administration in Kurdistan, risking his safety to speak out against injustice. Secondly, Heval faced intense racism due to his Kurdish identity, prompting his escape in search of a more accepting environment. Heval is a skilled psychologist and a passionate singer-songwriter, residing in a Rotterdam/Schiehaven AZC camp for the past eight months.

BEAUTY



Jelil creates beautiful, vulnerable portrait photography that he shares on his Instagram. For De Niemanders Gazette he conducted short interviews with the people he photographed about the theme of beauty.

TANYA. QUESTION #1

Jelil: Alright, it seems to be working, erm... What is "beauty" to you?
Tanya: Freedom, self-expression... that's it.
Jelil: So it's not always about appearance?
Tanya: Not at all, it's not appearance at all. It's... a sense, confidence. Yeah.

TANYA. QUESTION #2

Jelil: Umm... Do you believe that beauty can save the world?
Tanya: (Thinks) Yes (answers uncertainly).

After the second question, after the answer "yes," Tanya added "but." Sadly, that bit wasn't recorded.

SASHA. QUESTION #1

Jelil: Alright, let's go, I'm recording. Well, I need you to say, what you think "beauty" is?
Sasha: Pffff... (laughs) I don't know... it depends. Everything could be different; beauty could be different...

Jelil: I mean, in your opinion, how do you understand it? It can be anything: appearance, emotions, nature, relationship between people...
Sasha: You've got some freaking weird questions (laughs).
Jelil: It's only one question! (smile)
Sasha: (Thinks...) Visually – it's what you like, what attracts you or something that calms you down, if you're talking about nature.
Jelil: And for you?
Sasha: I don't know...
Jelil: What does "beautiful" mean for you?
Sasha: It means something that I like.
Jelil: What should it look like? Or what should you feel?
Sasha: Well, listen, I thought I'm not a fan of, how can I say it... modern art! And you know, I've always thought that it's kinda bullshit.
Jelil: Yep.
Sasha: I've gone to a modern art exhibition (inhales a cigarette)... I liked it so much! I didn't expect that, man! You don't just look, you know, you can think about an installation, or what an artist wanted to think about. There are really cool things, there are... you look at them – and it's both beautiful and it switches your brain on (sips some beer).
Jelil: So, beauty for you is something that gives you a chance to reflect?
Sasha: No, it's what you like. If you like it – it's beautiful, isn't it?
Jelil: Okay, thank you.

SASHA. QUESTION #2

Jelil: Do you think that beauty can save the world?
Sasha: No!

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Name: Idze'liil (Jelil Bekmuradov)
Age: 31
Country of origin: Turkmenistan
Current location: Zutphen
Time in NL: 6 months
Profession: Client manager

Jelil Bekmuradov faced significant challenges due to discrimination against the rights of LGBTQ+ people in his home country and later in Russia, where he lived for almost 13 years. In Turkmenistan, he lived until the age of 17 before he moved to Russia, where he worked as a client manager in a bank. After his time in Russia, Jelil moved to Georgia, where he resided for about six months. Seeking a new beginning, he arrived in the Netherlands on April 24th of 2023. Currently, he lives in the AZC in Zutphen.

Instagram: @jackkkkkkkkieeeee



"I AM THE BAD GUY!!"

CONVERSATION WITH A DEPORTATION OFFICER

I encounter him more or less by chance in the stairwell of the apartment where Wout lives, his neighbor, so to speak. He worked for many years at the COA and now works at the 'Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrek' (Service for Return and Departure), the agency that assists rejected asylum seekers in leaving the country.

It's not a beloved service, this DT&V, he says. "That's why I don't necessarily need to be identified by name in this Niemanders Gazette. **For many people, it's bad news when they have to deal with me.**" He sighs and laughs at the same time: "For many people, I am the bad guy."

CAREFUL AND HUMANE

While there's actually no reason for that, he explains. "We handle it very carefully and humanely here in the Netherlands. **Don't forget, about 80 percent of asylum applications are approved, that's a lot.** For the remaining 20 percent, the people who can't stay here, you have to let them leave in the most humane way possible. Our service takes great care of that. We support reintegration in the country of origin in every possible way, with housing, education, work... There aren't many countries in Europe where a dedicated service like DT&V has been established for the final step of migration policy."

VERY BITTER

Sometimes it can clash, says this 'bad guy': "I believe in the rule of law. In a careful and just migration policy. But occasionally, there are cases that are very bitter. Like when you see children, fully integrated, born here, going to school here, having friends here. And then they have to go back with their parents. That's, of course, a terrible story. Very bitter."

DIFFERENT SYSTEM

And now that he's speaking in a personal capacity, this bad guy, he wants to share some other things too. The asylum procedure takes far too long, he says. "Those people waiting in those reception centers... Everything mixed together. Candidates, but also people you know won't make it. Families, children... And they can't do anything, just wait. **I've been advocating for a different system for years.** A system like the one used in the United States, for example. Give people awaiting their asylum application more opportunities to work, to use their talents."

POSITIVE FORCE

Because those talents are there, the bad guy from DT&V also observes. He fully supports his neighbor Wout's Nobody's project. "Yes... Beautiful. It's also great to start with music. Music unites, it's an international language. I support the Nobody's project wherever I can. Even as an anonymous neighbor who knows some connections at the COA and the reception centers... I believe in the positive force of music, even in the world of refugees."

To live in a KINGDOM

To live in a kingdom means to be bought and sold. Step right, step left, checkmate. And after the game, queens, kings, and pawns fall into one box.

To live in a kingdom means to bow, where faith in God is absent. There is only the God of the country. Medals and awards for courage in front of the king, medals and awards for being human are not given.

To live in a kingdom means to be an actor in a larger spectacle. Everything is calculated, everything is estimated. The first act, we began. A game of life where lives are played. Buy, sell, and play.



LIFE IN THE NETHERLANDS

It was quite strange when I woke up one morning and saw that the ceiling above me looked completely different from what I was used to seeing. Also, I didn't hear my wife saying her usual "Good morning, did you sleep well?" It took a few minutes for me to realize I wasn't at home. It took even longer to figure out where I was. When I looked out the window, I saw heavy rain falling, even though it seemed like daytime. I checked the clock and it was nine o'clock in the evening!

Suddenly, I remembered I was in the lowlands, the country we learned about in geography and history lessons. **An alarm went off in my head, and I knew I wouldn't see my family for a long time,** including my wife. I went back to bed, just staring at the strange ceiling for a while before hiding it behind a pillow.

THE JOURNEY

The journey from Den Haag, passing through Zwolle and then Emmen to Ter Apel, took more than five hours. Despite the beautiful scenery, all I saw were raindrops on the train window. My mind was with my family back in my homeland.

When I entered an official office for the first time, I experienced hospitality from people I didn't know, and they didn't know where I was from until I filled out some forms. Their treatment didn't change even after that. It was the IND office.

Eating a new type of food every day was a new experience for me. We got food I'd only heard about in quizzes, like "What's Morocco's famous dish?" Once, I had spinach, and it made me feel like Popeye. I imagined going home to see my loved ones, even for a short while. I chuckled at my own thoughts. I finished the spinach, even though I didn't like it. It was the only option that day at the asylum center.

It's strange that they only offer one option each day. People here come from more than ten countries, each with its own food culture. **A cup of tea was the only common denominator between us,** and I drank it while

looking through the window glass as it drew lines of raindrops.

WELCOME ON BOARD

The transit camp, especially when it's a ship anchored on the bank, is full of strange contradictions. You have to do everything yourself, except for the cooking, which is done by the cooks and crew on the ship. It is also the thing you don't have anything to say about. Do you have an appointment? It better not be during meal times, or you'll have to buy your own meal. Did you fall asleep and miss dinner? That's alright, breakfast is in 15 hours.

You're in an open prison until your fate is decided. It's like escaping from the prison of your own country to a smaller prison with a few more privileges. Patience is the key to surviving and the reason for escaping.

YOU MUST FIGHT

Behind the genuine smiles of the COA employees and their willingness to help with your problems, there's a hidden indifference to your issues. Their initial response is usually negative, maybe to make sure your claim is true. I don't blame them entirely; they've probably dealt with many false complaints and are trying to protect their procedures. Not everyone is the same, after all.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Mahmoud Saeed
Country of origin: Sudan
Profession: Civil engineer

Mahmoud Saeed's life has been marked by courage and resilience. Hailing from Sudan, he is a dedicated civil engineer, committed to building a better future. However, circumstances compelled him to undertake a journey in search of safety and protection. Threats to his life were the driving force behind his decision to leave Sudan. These dangers forced him to leave behind his home, career, and the life he had known. Mahmoud Saeed's story is one of survival and hope.

You can buy the body; the soul is sold only to the devil. Both body and soul belong only to God. The strength of the spirit is not measured by money and does not grow from capital. You can buy convenience, but you cannot buy inner comfort. Live there, live here, move.

Climb the fences of fear. Fight for freedom just to be human. It's just the way it is. Nothing to explain to anyone, don't make excuses, no proving to anyone. Being a puppet does not mean giving up your soul. Everything that happens in the kingdom belongs to the kingdom.

I'm a joke. But at the same table with the king.



THE STORY OF MARIAM ALIYU

In the heart of Nigeria, in the small town Eika Ohizenyi in Kogi state, Mariam Aliyu's story unfolds—a tale of resilience, growth, and empowerment. Mariam emerged as the Founder and Executive Director of the Learning through Skills Acquisition Initiative (LETSAI), a beacon of hope for vulnerable communities. This is the narrative of her remarkable journey.

A CHALLENGING BEGINNING

"As an orphan and the eldest child, I faced significant responsibilities from a young age. **Despite these uncertainties, I was determined to make a difference in the world.** My passion for peacebuilding, women's empowerment, policy reform advocacy, gender equality, and justice became the driving force behind my life's work.

After graduating as a Medical Radiographer from the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria in 2017, I realized that deepening my understanding of vulnerable communities' challenges was essential for creating lasting change. Thus, I pursued a Master's degree in International Public Health from Liverpool John Moore University, honing my skills and expanding my knowledge.

Volunteering with organizations such as Christian Aid, Plan International, International Medical Corps, UNHCR, and UN Women exposed me to the harsh realities of gender-based violence and injustice. These experiences further fueled my determination to fight for the rights of the silenced. They shaped my vision for LETSAI and laid the foundation for our mission.

THE BIRTH OF LETSAI

In 2015, I founded LETSAI with the clear goal of providing healing for survivors of gender-based violence, securing legal justice for abuse victims, and empowering vulnerable women, girls, atheists, and

LGBTQIA+ individuals prone to gender-based violence. Additionally, LETSAI aims to foster community cohesion through joint peacebuilding initiatives, working towards a more inclusive future.

LETSAI's impact wouldn't have been possible without esteemed partners like the Global Center on Cooperative Security, Care Fronting Nigeria, Secular Rescue, UN Women, Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund, and UNICEF. These partnerships have enabled us to provide vital resources and support, amplifying our reach and effectiveness.

PASSIONS AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Beyond my professional endeavors, I find solace in reading and researching African history, understanding the origins of religion and humanity, and delving into feminist literature. These pursuits have broadened my perspective and deepened my commitment to creating a more equitable and just society. **I am a constant work in progress, striving for a brighter future for all.**

My journey from trauma to triumph has taught me the immeasurable value of freedom and the ability to be oneself. Through LETSAI, I am committed to empowering individuals, fighting against gender-based violence, and championing the rights of all, regardless of their religious beliefs or non-beliefs. I am grateful to the Netherlands for granting me asylum, and providing the opportunity to continue my work in a safer environment. Together, we can build a future where freedom, equality, and justice prevails."

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Mariam Aliyu
Country of origin: Nigeria
Profession: Human Rights Defender

Profession: Web Development Student & Graphic Designer

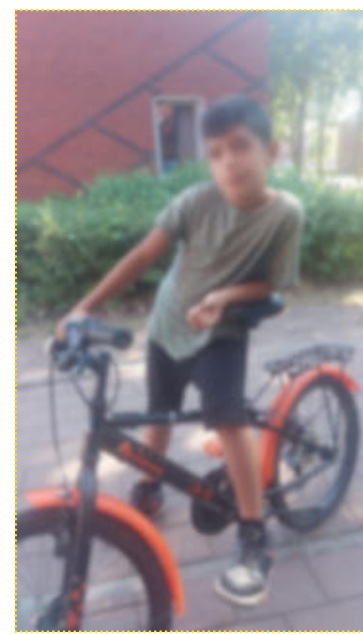
Liz Garcia Marín, a 29-year-old web development student and graphic designer, fled political persecution and dictatorship in her home country, Nicaragua. Residing in Brunssum for the past 1 year and 3 months, her story reflects resilience and determination amid distress.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Name: Liz Garcia Marín
Age: 29
Country of origin: Nicaragua
Current location: Brunssum
Time in NL: 1 year and 3 months



» Scan the code and read the interview with Mariam in The Guardian.



STORIES OF ILLEGAL CROSSING

SIMAZ AND HER LITTLE BROTHER

The wave of illegal immigration by Syrians continues, with its intensity significantly increasing in 2022 due to the worsening economic conditions in areas controlled by the Syrian regime. The economic collapse in Lebanon and increased pressure on refugees in Turkey also pushed many Syrians to migrate illegally to Europe. Here, we shed light on the stories of some Syrians fortunate enough to reach safety in Europe.

Nineteen-year-old Simaz S. dreamed of becoming a broadcaster. She enrolled in university for her first year of broadcasting, but difficult security and economic conditions in her city, Daraa, forced her family to make **the tough decision to send Simaz and her 9-year-old brother to Europe,** accompanied by 12 young men and women from their city.

Preparations for the journey began after arranging with a human trafficker through social media. Simaz's journey with her little brother started from Damascus International Airport to Libya in June of last year. Upon arrival in Libya, **the smuggler responsible for the illegal immigration route separated the women and men,** providing them with food and internet in separate houses. One crucial instruction given to the Syrian group was not to speak their native language in the Libyan city where they lived to avoid arousing suspicion.

Simaz recalls, "We waited in Libya for a month in the city of Sabratha, the starting point towards Europe. In July, we traveled after the smuggler reached a secret agreement with the Libyan Coast Guard, and weather conditions were stable. Before boarding the boat, the smuggler collected all the immigrants' phone SIM cards to prevent communication with their families. The journey began at 10 o'clock at night from the shores of Sabratha, with 32 immigrants, mostly Syrians, on board. Initially, a Libyan Coast Guard boat accompanied our journey, as one of their members had an agreement with the smuggler to escort us to the end of Libyan territorial waters. The smuggler provided us with a small amount of food and only a small bottle of water to ration our bathroom breaks."

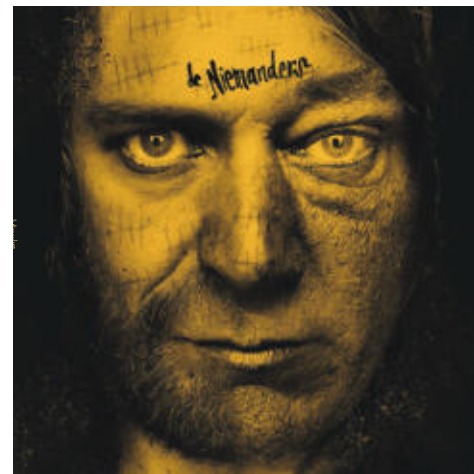
During the trip, one passenger fell into the water due to seasickness and was rescued with difficulty. **"Anxiety began to control us,** but suddenly a ship flying the Tunisian flag appeared, sailing close to us. Its crew sent food and water and contacted the Italian coast guard. Soon, an Italian barge arrived, rescuing us and docking us on the island of Lampedusa. We were fingerprinted, sent to Bari in Italy, then took the train to Milan. From there, we traveled without tickets to Switzerland and then to Germany before finally reaching Holland."

Having reached safety, Simaz hopes that her 9-year-old brother will be able to reunite with their family. She has reached the legal age and now acts as a mother to her little brother, taking care of him and hoping for a smooth asylum procedure.

A look INSIDE DE NIEMANDERS KITCHEN



[IMG. III]



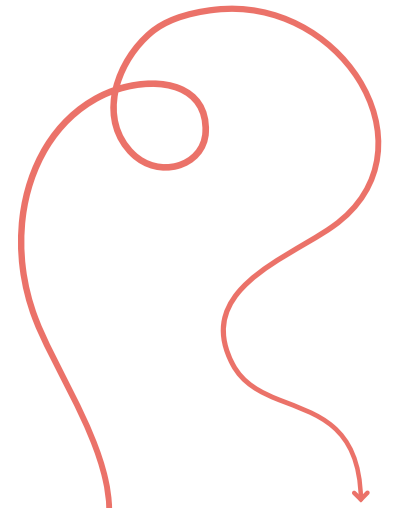
[IMG. I]



[IMG. IV]



[IMG. II]



From 2019 to 2022, songwriters and musicians Rocco Ostermann and Wout Kemkens embarked on a captivating quest: they visited Dutch prisons in search of talented musicians and tried to tell their 'behind bars' stories through songs. [IMG. I] Now, in 2023, the duo is back and hitting the road once again. This time, they are visiting asylum centers across the country, accompanied by a new steady third team member: producer/songwriter Rick Wiegerinck.

[IMG. II]

THE PROCESS OF MAKING AN ALBUM

Armed with two cars brimming with instruments and Rick's mobile studio, the trio ventured into asylum centers (AZC's). There, they encountered enthusiastic musicians, writers, and creatives from various countries currently residing in these centers. Some AZC's hosted the Niemanders team for only a couple of days, while in others they stuck around for several weeks.

The music sessions were mostly filled with pure joy, but the conversations were heavy, hopeless, hopeful, and cheerful, and everything in between. De Niemanders team connected with energetic musicians

and creative individuals who, in turn, introduced them to even more artists, writers, and storytellers. There's so much creative power in AZC's and the team feels this is only the tip of the iceberg. A reality that was both inspiring and frustrating. The team recognized that their capacity, as a small group, was limited. They struggled with the constant challenge of not being able to provide every person or idea the platform and audience it deserved. Fortunately, they found solace in the knowledge that other individuals, both inside and outside the AZC's, were also embracing music and art initiatives. Hopefully the initiatives keep popping up.

Driven by instinct, Rocco, Rick, and Wout sought to create an album that was a heartfelt collaboration between themselves and the people they met in the AZC's. Their challenge was significant: how could they combine a lot of unique musical perspectives into a coherent and exceptional album? We're going to find out the answer to this question in the upcoming months, as the first songs are about to be released into the world! The second Niemanders album will feature tracks inspired by the stories of refugees, some sung by Rocco, while others were born from spontaneous AZC jam sessions and performed by the people

residing, or having resided, in AZC's. The album promised a mesmerizing medley of singers and languages, including Somali, Swahili, Lingala, French, Arabic, Persian, English, and even Dutch! The full album will be released in September 2024, but the first single called 'Miss Information' is already scheduled for December 2023. Read about the ideas behind 'Miss Information' in Rocco's column on page 22.

ONE 'THING' LEADS TO ANOTHER

The creative process of De Niemanders II is very loose and improvised, but asylum procedures are not, which is why we choose to censor the names of the people involved in the text below.

In March 2023, De Niemanders did a fun session with rapper N. and afterwards, he sent them a video of a keyboardist from his camp. "You should invite him too, bro!" N. said to De Niemanders, and they did just that. A few days later: in walks G., a band leader, originally from a country in Central Africa. This man in his twenties simply breathes music. Within a few hours a song was born and the team spent many hours jamming, laughing and listening to music. The young keyboardist/composer introduced De Niemanders to compelling pygmy music, with Les Tambours De Brazza and other great names.

He really pushed us, as players, into musical areas we hadn't been before, and vice versa, says Wout. G. got Wout to play very specific bass parts, and Rick convinced G. that he is a great singer.

Regrettably, the harsh realities of refugee asylum procedures intruded upon this blossoming musical friendship. Due to a negative decision from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND), G. was compelled to leave the Netherlands. This is just one example of the lack of control over—and the nerve-wracking wait for—a decision that every person in an asylum procedure unfortunately has to experience, it seems. The asylum process can involve years and years of uncertainty and waiting or sudden deportation. In the meantime, G. is still writing, recording and releasing music. Hats off to the spirit and perseverance of this man! He sings and plays on two tracks on the upcoming De Niemanders album.

[IMG. III]

THE FIRST SESSIONS IN AZC GRAVE

De Niemanders team started this musical adventure in the Grave AZC. They kept coming back to Grave, simply because so many talented people participated, but also because employees of the COA (Central

Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) of this specific AZC wanted to make this happen. A shout-out to Robert, Kais and Collin, who were even musically present at the sessions! In the very first session – and luckily many more after that – the Somali rapper I. participated. He sang with a raw, deep and hypnotic voice – which he doesn't necessarily use in his solo work – and it shone a whole new light on the music of those present. His motto for these sessions was 'it's all about the vibe' and he was right. While everyone relaxed and listened to each other's playing, the music and ideas flowed naturally. Those moments can easily be seen as some of the absolute highlights of De Niemanders II. The team were also in awe of I's fan base and marketing skills, with thriving channels on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, that most musicians can only dream of. One day, he came into the session with a package he received in the mail from YouTube: his reward for 100,000 subscribers! He built this music career and fan base during his arduous journey to Europe, fleeing the conflict in his home country.

[IMG. IV]

C. was also an absolute phenomenon who traveled from another AZC to the music

sessions in Grave. She arrived, her jacket still wrapped around her shoulders, stood in front of the microphone and immediately belted out in an insanely powerful way. She really used her voice like a whip to further hype the musicians. Meanwhile, the band members smiled and tried to keep up with the energy of this Kenyan powerhouse. This was definitely the wildest session, which birthed the song 'Let's Praise' and the idea for 'I play my crazy flute', which ended up as a verse in the first Niemanders single 'Miss Information'.

STUDIO TIME

Between the AZC sessions, Rocco, Rick and Wout also spent a lot of time in the studio. Writing new parts and adding lyrics to complete song ideas and promising jams from the AZC's. G. once again proved to be a great asset and connected De Niemanders to a studio in Senegal, where percussion parts were recorded for the upcoming album. Rick, Rocco and Wout also met some musicians and singers in the studio with whom they played music in the AZC for the last album recordings. The players from the first prison project Bram Knol, Erik Harbers and Jarno van Es were also invited, as well as newcomer and old friend Matthijs Stronks. Talk about an extensive list of contributors! In between, Rick started the mixing process of the songs.

LIVE In 2024, when the album Niemanders II is ready, De Niemanders will perform at clubs and festivals with their new music. Hopefully they can bring some of the artists they encountered in the AZC's! But first: Nacht van de Niemanders! On December 30, visitors will be introduced to a wide variety of bands, DJs, spoken word artists and rappers. A number of them met De Niemanders in the AZC's. Other bands, such as Ploegendienst or Amaguk, are invited because of their like-minded mentality, energy or adventurous spirit. The band of De Niemanders plays their songs from their time in prisons, a preview of the upcoming album and a collaboration with Rudeboy from Urban Dance Squad. It promises to be a wonderful meeting of souls, as De Niemanders themselves project.



Get your tickets for the Nacht van de Niemanders. Scan the code.

LOTUS CAN SWIM IN THE WATER

DAY AND NIGHT, LIFE AND DEATH.

Every person used to look up at the sky as if there were no horizons. But then they would see the horizon, draw the line of their own infinity, and turn their backs to the sky. That's what life meant for the little water lily. While many water lilies adorned the water's surface, she felt uniquely cherished by a young child who had taken to visiting her regularly. Together, they would swim for a while, and then the child would bid a silent farewell, vanishing into the water's depths. The water lily often pondered, "Humans cannot live underwater."

The depths were infinite, the water lily couldn't see what was at the bottom, and deaths at the bottom remained there. Souls didn't rise from the depths, only unfortunate souls, people whose memories remained unfinished in the world, would strive to come up. The next morning, the water lily woke up early. The sun was blazing in the sky, ready to rise and scorch everything in the summer day. "My flowers will wither," she thought briefly.

"Do you live here?" the child who came every day asked, rubbing his eyes with his clenched fist. The water lily jumped in her place.

"Yes."

"I don't live here." The child spoke quickly.

"Why aren't you with your family then?" the water lily asked, while swaying up and down in the calm waves. Her voice had also become as rough as a hook, tearing through her throat this time.

"I can't get ashore, my legs don't work," the child said. The water lily could see the child standing strong in front of her.

"Scream for help," the water lily said again. The child shook his head from side to side and said, "It's impossible."

"It's okay; playing hide and seek is fun," the child said, and the little water lily let her leaves touch the water, as if the water had passed through the child's body.

"Even if you want it so much, can't you turn back?" she asked.

"When my parents were talking on the shore, I heard them, and then I disappeared into the water. My mother said I couldn't breathe, but even though I've been in the water for days, I can still breathe," the child said, and the water lily felt her spirit being drawn away. Those special feelings she had started to vanish.

"People can't breathe in water." the water lily said, and the child shook his head in disagreement. "But my friends can," he turned around and looked at the bodies, big and small, floating here and there. The water lily understood at that moment that they were dead souls. The sun never touched them. They didn't feel the cold or the heat. Without graves, they stayed in the shadows, and the shadows would chill them.

"How did you get lost?" the water lily asked the little child, who was laughing. "The sun was high, and the boat with many people started sinking. People panicked and fell off the boat, and I couldn't hold on to my mother and got lost in the water. I learned how to swim after falling into the water," the child said.

"My mother shouted behind me, and when my lungs started to ache, I had to close my eyes, but my senses didn't disappear. I just couldn't respond to my mother. They made it to shore," he continued. The water lily looked at the horizon again.

"She couldn't sense that he died," she thought to herself. How could one not feel death?

"Water is fun, but my parents haven't come to pick me up yet. Sometimes I feel like I hear someone calling my name," the child spoke. He spoke like a grown-up, but she didn't think he was only six years old.

"I'm waiting, they're waiting," the child said, shouting. The little water lily couldn't respond to the child; her mother and father were still asleep. When the spirits of the dead went away and all the noise disappeared, her father opened his eyes and looked at her. She approached her father and said, "Dad..."

"Today, I saw a group of dead people, none of them knew they were dead. They were just floating in the water, waiting for someone on the shore," she said, and her father looked at little lily with sadness.

"Thousands of people lost their lives in this sea while escaping from the police for various reasons, my little child," her father said. "Thousands of people left behind those who died, in agony. Some of them had no choice but to be left behind. The water took them away. Their souls are floating in this sea, unable to see their own bodies." He said. Lily's feathers stood on end, and the flowers on her face withered in pain.

"Isn't anyone doing anything for the ones who died?"

"There's nothing to be done. Sometimes life is worth less than most values. Suffering doesn't end with death," her father said. He looked at her still-sleeping mother. He felt sorry for the child; she was still waiting for her family.

"Sometimes salvation brings your demise, child. I know many people set out with beautiful hopes."

Afterward, her father fell silent, and the little water lily asked no further questions. She raised her gaze to the horizon, where true freedom lay. Thousands, driven by desperation, risked their lives attempting the treacherous journey to Greece. Boats capsized, families vanished, and death loomed ever present. Yet, despite the grim odds, countless souls embarked on this perilous journey, not for pleasure but out of sheer necessity. Forced from their homelands, they endured untold hardships, seeking a chance at life, for basic human needs remained unmet.

Freedom was the ability to glimpse one's horizon, yet for many, it remained obscured by the trials they endured. Their quest to find a better life continued, driven by the hope of a brighter tomorrow. To places where they can see their horizon.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Mesude Feyza Dinçer
Age: 20
Country of origin: Turkey
Current location: Leeuwarden
Time in NL: 7 months
Profession: Student

Mesude is from Turkey and was a student. She had to leave because of political problems and now lives in Leeuwarden, Netherlands. Her story shows how determined she is to find safety, like many others facing tough situations.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Name: Jimmie Balster
» www.jimmiebalster.com



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FACING ADVERSITY AS A JOURNALIST IN TURKEY

“Being a journalist in the southeastern region of Turkey is challenging and risky. It becomes almost impossible to do your job.”

Yilmaz is a journalist from Turkey who worked for various media outlets, including newspapers, TV channels, and news agencies. Despite facing challenges and risks as a dissident journalist in Southeast Turkey, he continued his career and covered events within and outside the country. Yilmaz had to leave Turkey in 2022 due to occupational problems, and he is now seeking asylum in the Netherlands. This is his story.

I TOUCHED THE LIFE

“My name is Yilmaz, and I was born in a Kurdish city in Turkey located on the border with Syria. My father worked as a government official, which led our family to relocate to another Kurdish city in 1990. There, I completed my primary and secondary education, ultimately graduating in 1996. Following graduation, I worked in factories until I started university. In the year 2000, I took the university entrance examination and was awarded a full scholarship to study journalism in the communication faculty at Cyprus International University.

LIFE AS A JOURNALIST ON CYPRUS

Living on an island like Cyprus was an amazing experience, with its stunning beaches, warm climate, and friendly locals. During the six years I spent there, I witnessed a lot and made some great Cypriot friends. It was also there that I began my journalism career.

In the early 2000's, while in my third year of university, I began working as a correspondent and page designer for a newspaper in Cyprus. Due to my background and personal experiences, I was drawn to social issues and their solutions. I primarily covered news

related to the problems faced by marginalized groups such as women, children, workers, the elderly, and cases of political injustice.

CHALLENGES AND GROWTH

Initially, I started my career as a page designer while simultaneously reading and attempting to write news articles. Through hard work and dedication, I was eventually able to prepare pages and write news within a few months. I continued with this routine for approximately two years while also attending school.

However, there were challenges along the way. Some of the dissenting news articles I wrote drew the attention of extremist nationalists, who retaliated with offensive and threatening pieces against me, even though I was a new journalist. I soon realized that when discussing topics that people prefer to ignore or overlook, such reactions were not uncommon. Despite these challenges, I remained committed to covering important issues that affected the community.

FROM NEWSPAPER TO TV

In 2003, I had the opportunity to complete an internship at one of Turkey's most prestigious newspapers. This experience allowed me to meet with prominent journalists who continue to shape the country's current affairs. After graduating from university in 2006, I continued to work for a year in Cyprus before returning to Turkey and settling in Istanbul. There, I worked for both a newspaper and magazine. However, due to some family issues, I had to move back to my hometown, where I started working for a TV channel as a correspondent. Working in TV journalism was a new and exciting experience for me. I spent five years working for TV before transitioning to the role of a general editor at a newspaper.

But I did.

Reporting on Syrian War and Starting a Family In 2011, the Syrian civil war began, and I reported on some of the events from both the border and within Syria. In August 2009, I got married to a kindergarten teacher. We now have three amazing children.

In 2015, however, I was fired from my job at the newspaper because my boss had an agreement with the government party, and I was deemed **undesirable due to my dissenting views**. However, I did not give up on my career and worked as a freelance journalist for various publishing and broadcasting companies, including newspapers, TV channels, and news agencies. I also provided press and public relations services for several non-governmental organizations. In 2019, due to some occupational problems, I had to move again and began working as a cameraman and correspondent for a news agency, covering social events and protests. I spent a year working at the Parliament of Turkey before being assigned to follow various social events and protests.

However, at the end when I stopped and looked at the past, I could see that **it is not possible to talk about freedom of the press in Turkey due to the unlawful arrests and trials of journalists** in Turkey in recent months. The law no longer works properly, the judiciary is not independent, and unfortunately there is no freedom of thought and opinion. **Everything works in the interests of the government. Absolutely intolerable to a different sound.**

So In January 2022, I left the agency and Turkey.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Yilmaz
Country of origin: Kurdish, from Turkey
Time in NL: 1+ year
Profession: Journalist

Yilmaz is a Kurdish journalist from Turkey who had dedicated his career to reporting the news and upholding freedom of thought and expression. However, the deteriorating state of press freedom and human rights in Turkey reached alarming levels, making it increasingly challenging for him to continue his work. The prevailing mentality in Turkey and the failure of the legal system to protect journalists led to threats and pressures that made his journalistic endeavors untenable. As a result, Yilmaz was forced to flee Turkey in May 2022. His journey and experiences reflect the challenges faced by journalists in Turkey and the sacrifices they make to uphold the principles of democracy and free speech.



NEWROZ

CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF KURDISH LIBERATION AND CELEBRATION

Newroz is a traditional holiday celebrated by many Aryan tribes to mark the arrival of spring. For the Kurds, however, Newroz has a deeper meaning as a day of freedom and liberation. Nurullah 'Thori' Akcan is a photographer who made these pictures of the festivities.

The Kurds base Newroz on the Legend of Blacksmith Kawa, who led an army to defeat a cruel king and bring spring to the land. Today, the Kurds, divided across four different countries, continue to celebrate Newroz as a symbol of their struggle for independence. They light fires, dance Kurdish dances, and wear ethnic clothes on this day. Despite bans in some countries, Kurds continue to celebrate Newroz, with the city of Amed (Diyarbakir) hosting the most splendid celebrations.

“As a Kurdish youth, I have attended many Newroz celebrations since I was a child and, like every Kurdish youth, I was excited to jump over the fire. I dreamed of participating in Amed Newroz for years and I had the opportunity to participate in Amed Newroz in 2022. That's why I was so excited. I got up early in the morning and got ready and got my new camera. And I started to photograph the exciting moments of thousands of people. And I immortalized those moments with the photographs I took. Finally, my biggest dream is to one day celebrate the arrival of spring on Newroz Day in a free and independent Kurdistan, sing songs and dance arm in arm with the people I love.”

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Name: Nurullah 'Thori' Akcan
Country of origin: Turkey
Current location: Goes, Zeeland

Nurullah Akcan, also known as Thori, is a Kurdish man who fled discrimination in Turkey, finding refuge in the Netherlands, particularly in Goes, Zeeland. A graduate of Marmara University, he has diverse professional experiences but has recently focused on photography and videography, aiming to use his creativity to inspire and connect with others. Thori's story highlights the power of compassion and empathy, emphasizing his determination to tell meaningful stories through his art. He looks forward to a future filled with creative pursuits and collaborations that promote inclusivity and diversity, such as his work with the group De Niemanders.

Celebrating EID

INTERVIEW WITH REFUGEES

What is this event they celebrate for three days, where they make the characteristic sweets known as Eid cakes, buy new clothes, and exchange expressions wishing success, goodness, health, and the fulfillment of dreams? How was the holiday atmosphere in one of the refugee centers when they were far from their families?

On the morning of the first day, they pray in the mosque in what is called the Eid prayer, wearing their finest clothes and perfume, sharing the joy of Eid with each other. Afterward, they visit a deceased family member at the cemetery, bringing them a rosary. Then the family has breakfast, and visits to relatives, neighbors, and friends begin. As for the children,

anyone who congratulates them must give them money, so they can go to amusement parks and buy toys and whatever they want. This is Eid, the festival of Muslims after the month of Ramadan. But the question was: how was the holiday atmosphere in one of the refugee centers when they were far from their families?

D: I slept until four in the afternoon. There is no Eid here.

V: I called my family and congratulated them. My mother cried a lot. This is the first Eid I'm not spending with them.

F: I didn't feel the joy of Eid, but I tried to create a nice atmosphere with my friends.

N: It's hard without my family. I miss them on this day, and the joy of Eid stopped there. There is no joy here.

Y: A very normal day, I feel nothing.

V: Eid is, in my opinion, for young children. Our hearts are too old for joy.

For some, it was painful because the beautiful memories of Eid that were etched in their minds became a past tied to family gatherings, and if there is no family, joy becomes sorrow.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Perla Al-Mohamad
Age: 17
Country of origin: Syria
Current location: Winschoten
Time in NL: almost 5 years
Profession: Student (Journalism)

Perla Al-Mohamad, a 17-year-old from Syria, aspires to become a journalist, a dream born out of her passion for writing stories. She loves cooking as well. Despite studying Dutch in school, job opportunities in her chosen field are scarce. Perla has been residing in Winschoten for over a year now, and her decision to come to the Netherlands was driven by a profound desire to escape the slow death that war imposes in her country of origin, and embrace the joys of life.

TOP 4 MUST-LISTEN SONGS

In times when clarity eludes us, music serves as a guiding light, resonating with our emotions and thoughts. Here's a curated list of soul-stirring songs that have captured the hearts of our editors:



1. "PAINT IT, BLACK" BY THE ROLLING STONES
RECOMMENDED BY YILMAZ

Yilmaz finds solace in the haunting melody of "Paint It, Black" by The Rolling Stones. It is one of his favorite songs. "Because in these days I can't see clearly what is there around me. There are many beautiful things, but I can't see them".



2. "I AM AFRICAN - I AM SUDANESE" BY THE COLLEGE OF MUSIC AND DRAMA CHOIR, SHARHABEEL AHMED, AND OTHERS
RECOMMENDED BY MAHMOUD SAEED

Mahmoud Saeed recommends a Sudanese masterpiece that combines romance and patriotism. "I am African - I am Sudanese" celebrates the richness of Sudan's history and wealth. This extraordinary collaboration features The College of Music and Drama Choir, renowned Sudanese jazz artist Sharhabeel Ahmed, Ethiopian artist Mahmoud Ahmed, Ugandan artist Shiva Musisi, Moroccan artist Asmaa Hamzawi, and the Orbab Group. "A song that combines romance and patriotism and describes some of the country's wealth and the abundance of its history."

Lyrics:
"The land of goodness, Africa is my place.
The time of light and glory is my time.
There are my grandparents.
Their foreheads are high... their foreheads are high... their foreheads are high.
The processions (of the revolution) will not retreat again.
I stand in front of it (the processions) and tell the world that I am Sudanese.
I am African, I am Sudanese."



3. "THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT US" BY MICHAEL JACKSON
RECOMMENDED BY NURULLAH AKCAN

Nurullah Akcan's pick, "They Don't Care About Us" by Michael Jackson, resonates with the unyielding spirit of resistance. In a world where words often fall short, this song speaks volumes about societal injustices and the fight against oppression. "I don't need to explain why I chose this song."



4. "BETERI YOK USLAN-MAKTAN" BY NOVA NORDA
RECOMMENDED BY OGUZ TABUR

Oguz Tabur is captivated by the rebellious spirit of "Beteri Yok Uslanmaktan" by Nova Norda. The song challenges societal norms, urging listeners not to shy away from regret. Oguz is especially captivated by its lyrics and sound. "Provocation is taught as if it is something to be suppressed. Nonsense!"

Lyrics:
"Do not rescue me from regret
Perhaps, I might enjoy being stoned
As my life rusts away with prohibitions
I've seen that there is nothing worse than being well-behaved!
I've seen there's no better way than to reform!"



THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG:

MISS INFORMATION

In December, the latest single by De Niemanders, titled 'Miss Information,' will be released. Rocco Ostermann, the lead singer of De Niemanders, wrote about the motivation behind the song.

"As a child, I despised movies where, due to misunderstandings and intrigues, a love affair fell apart or never blossomed. Where lovers missed each other, or people ended up in misery due to misinformation. It felt like a cruel trick of time, thwarted by the universe. I couldn't stand it and stopped watching. I still don't like it. I would easily leave such a film midway in the cinema. I detest lies and I can't stand the manipulation with false information.

For centuries, those in power, military forces, and their dirty games have indulged in this, and in recent decades, it has spread like an oil slick across the internet. Politicians, despots, various figures, entrench themselves in their beliefs, considering their opinions immovable furniture in their minds. Propaganda, the most infamous example, is Goebbels' bubble, poisoning the airwaves, inciting people and making them believe things they thought they had believed for years.

The Rwandan war stands as a poignant example when the Hutus and Tutsis were manipulated against each other, leading to horrifying massacres via the festering airwaves. It still happens. Recent history is rife with dark demagogues and their demonic messages.

The new single by De Niemanders, "Miss Information," delves into this. There's a subtle double entendre here. 'Misinformation' transforms into 'Miss Information,' becoming a person who captivates everyone. **People believe Miss Information because of her charm, beauty, and façade, not realizing she serves the big boys behind the scenes, spreading evil lies.**

We co-wrote parts of this song with Guy-El Mabilia, who also assisted us with his enthusiastic vibe and musicality on other tracks. He pointed out that in his home country, a former French colony, the divide-and-rule tactic of disinformation was actively used by the colonizers to disconnect people from their customs, religions, knowledge, spirituality, and languages. Tribes holding onto their traditions were demonized, a practice still present in his country's education system. For instance, the primary school history lessons there still focus on French history, not their own heritage. He shared examples, illustrating how long-lasting the effects of misinformation can be. The topic clearly struck a chord. He also helped us translate parts of the lyrics into French, explicitly representing the language of misinformation."

In early December, 'Miss Information' by De Niemanders will be available for listening on all online platforms.

About Rocco Ostermann

Rocco Ostermann is a versatile artist based in Arnhem, known as a singer, multi-instrumentalist, composer, author, and storyteller. He is an active member of De Niemanders and also performs with other bands like Donnerwetter and Shaking Godspeed. Apart from his musical talents, Rocco is also a skilled writer. He crafts stories, columns, and poetry, often in the Achterhoeks dialect.

Rocco stands out as a passionate musician deeply dedicated to those often ignored by society – from prisoners and the homeless to asylum seekers. His compassionate heart drives him to advocate for these marginalized communities, channeling his musical talent into projects that bring their voices to the forefront. It's no coincidence that, alongside Wout Kemkens and Rick Wiegerinck, he's creating an album for the second time with these communities.

"THE WEAPON AGAINST HOPE IS FEAR"

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE 2023 ELECTIONS IN TURKEY AND THE IMMENSE IMPACT OF THE OUTCOME ON TURKISH SOCIETY.



We have successfully navigated through the most important elections of the year 2023. Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been re-elected as Turkey's 13th President. But what happened during this election process that will impact the world for at least the next 10 years?

During this period of my asylum process, where I found myself with no responsibilities and no other option than to wait, I got involved in Turkish politics more than ever before, I got tainted, and my brain got fried. Additionally, as a companion to the election marathon, I spiced up my menu with World War II documentaries, Turkish history in the 90s, and the TV series *Succession*. **I started feeling like I was being beaten by the ferocious waves of narcissism, drowning in the waters of toxic masculinity and a corrupt political system,** and I began questioning why I was subjecting myself to this. Despite it not being my style, I decided to write about politics. After all, I should make lemonade out of these self-grown sour lemons, at the very least.

STRUCTURE OF TURKISH SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Before discussing the scandals, drama, games, and the obsession with power that left the witnesses astounded during this election process, let me briefly explain the structure of Turkish society and the conditions under which the election took place:

In the 1990s, the conservative segment of society in Turkey, which had been marginalized, scorned, and deprived of their rights, found happiness in 2002. The AK Party, founded by Erdogan, came to power. I will try to summarize this process that began when I was just 12 years old, now as my 33-year-old self.

In a short period of time, the economy recovered, negotiations with the European Union gained momentum, terrorist attacks, which had been relatively frequent since the 1980s, decreased significantly and were brought under control. The welfare level of the people increased, even if only for a brief period. The country and the nation were content. The Kurdish issue was discussed in parliament, and a solution process was initiated. Over time, Erdogan sidelined dissenting voices within the AK Party and assumed a one-man leadership position within the party.

THE STRATEGY

The confidence derived from the success he achieved in every general and local election, building up momentum each time, fueled his suppressed narcissistic personality. Nepotism spread across the entire peninsula like a cancerous cell. Religious-centered policies were gradually introduced, without causing too much alarm. Environmental destruction and aesthetic vandalism began to prevail... But for what purpose? For the economic interests of the government and certain allied companies.

Why was this important? The strategy of all fascist leaders throughout history was followed: use religion or divisive ideology, distance yourself from those who are not like you, control the media, reward those who support you... Why was nepotism important? If Erdogan wanted to seize control of the media, it was necessary for certain families to

constantly win and become incredibly wealthy, and for them to obey him, so that the mainstream media, as it already was, would be transferred to these biased families and subsequently to Erdogan.

So, what did the opposition do during these 10 years? They belittled their rival, relied on the immutability of the constitution, and continued to pursue the opposition policies they had followed in the past.

2013 was marked by an event that is perhaps considered the biggest milestone in Erdogan's dictatorship adventure: the Gezi Park Resistance. I was only 23 years old at the time and found myself clashing with the police in Taksim, where I had spent the most beautiful moments of my childhood and entire life. We had one simple demand: we were against the demolition of the symbolic and historic Gezi Park to build a mosque in its place. The Gezi events quickly turned into a national solidarity, but the country's politics, the government's attitude towards its citizens, and the understanding of freedom in our time shifted 180 degrees in the opposite direction of European human rights declarations. **Polarization began, hope gave way to fear, and a significant portion of the population, many of whom lacked education, were manipulated. Every institution led by opposition figures in the country was gradually emptied.** Religious schools gained prominence in education, and a project to raise a religious youth was launched.

ONE MAN RULE

Then, in 2016, the Turkish Armed Forces, which had been infiltrated by Fethullah Gulen and his organizations, whom Erdogan had nurtured since coming to power, attempted a coup against the government. Erdogan, unwilling to lose his grip on power, began following Mordor policies and

adopted a more aggressive approach, taking inspiration from Putin and previous fascist leaders whom he saw as icons. In 2017, a constitutional referendum was held, transitioning Turkey from a parliamentary system to a presidential government system. Erdogan became the sole leader, the "one-man rule."

By the year 2023, Turkey had withdrawn from orthodox economic policies and created a Turkey where the middle class was destroyed, the rich became richer, and the poor were left hungry. So, what was the reason behind this? AK Party had transformed from being just a political party into a social network. It had an unprecedented number of members, 11 million people, whereas the 100-year-old Republican People's Party had only 1.8 million members. Why did these 11 million people become members of this party? Social assistance played a significant role. The struggling state of the country's economy, with the central bank reserves in negative, and the country heading towards bankruptcy, did not greatly affect the Erdogan voters who generally had low income levels. They were living in rural areas, not in cities with inflation rates exceeding 200%. They were living a life that was not ideal but manageable with the social assistance they received. **Manipulating a hungry population was easier, wasn't it? But was it enough?**

CATASTROPHE OF THE CENTURY

On February 6, 2023, Turkey experienced the biggest disaster in the history of the Republic of Turkey, the Southeast earthquake. The loss of 60,000 lives left the whole world mourning. The Turkish people were in shock. Turks have been living in Anatolia since the 6th century. For the past 100 years, in these lands where the flag of the Republic of Turkey has been waving, there are five major fault lines. Even those who are not familiar with the subject know this in Turkish society. Earthquakes are always expected in these lands. So why did 13 million people become homeless? Why did 60,000 people lose their lives? Why were roads, airports, houses, residential areas, and hospitals built in places where they should not have been? Well, it was not the time to think about these things; it was time to help the victims of the disaster, right? Many organizations, such as AKUT and the Red Crescent, which had achieved great things during the major Istanbul earthquake of 1999, had been depleted over the years, resulting in significantly reduced performance. In some of the 10 provinces affected, they could only receive support from volunteer organizations for a full four days. Everything was inadequate. The government failed. The Turkish Armed Forces, which left the barracks late, failed. The Red Crescent, which was selling tents, was frozen. Let me explain the reason behind this with a single example: AKUT, the search and rescue organization, had a person with a theology education and background appointed as its head over the years. What's the connection?

As the election approached, the Nation Alliance and Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who united against the 20-year Erdogan regime and its absurd policies, emerged as a shining light in the eyes of the country's freedom-loving and anti-oppression voters. They used an inclusive language that resonated with the people. Yes, Erdogan was successful in implementing and executing fascist strategies in the past 20 years. But he was not only successful, he was also fortunate. »

» Turkey currently hosts the largest refugee population in the world, with close to 4 million people. Most refugees live outside camps.

Written by Sophie Conin



KIMUNTU

GUY-EL MABIALA'S NEW PROJECT IS A WAKE-UP CALL TO HUMANITY

“On the surface, our world looks beautiful, colorful, diverse; but when we look more closely, we see a world that is ill, where many have reasons to cry, many suffer from famine, cannot sleep, cannot afford clothes, nor receive an education. Our world is sick and needs to be mended.” Guy-El Mabiala, pianist, singer, composer and arranger explains the artistic inspiration and the motivation behind his new project Kimuntu.

Hailing from Brazzaville, Congo, Guy-El, 26, has always been surrounded by music and started collaborating with other artists from an early age. As a young man, he traveled through his native country, exploring its rich musical traditions and learning from his elders. But he names 2014 as the year when he turned his musical passion into a professional occupation. He has since worked with various artists from the Congo and other African countries such as Senegal. Immigrated to Europe, Guy-El remains discrete about his personal situation and prefers to invest his positive energy and creativity towards his new artistic project, which he describes as ‘political-spiritual-social-humanitarian’.

BRINGING BACK THE HUMANITY

‘Kimuntu’, he explains, has no proper translation in French or any other language he knows. It can be explained by **‘striving to live in the most human way possible, in harmony with oneself, with others, in peace between cultures and people’**. For the Kongo, Lari and Soundi people of the Congo, the word Kimuntu means “what makes the man” and covers all the qualities required in a human being such as kindness, generosity, truth, justice, respect, and solidarity, in one word: humanism. Guy-El’s artistic project uses the power of arts in general and music in particular to encourage people to take a step back, reflect and rekindle a part of their identity which they seem to have lost: their humanity. The young pianist sees this as an essential stepping stone to help the world heal.

Far from being solely a music album, Kimuntu is the fruit of collaborations between all kinds of artists, from musicians to illustrators, filmmakers and dancers. And while the influences from Guy-El native Congo are unmistakable, each participant brings their own culture, language, personal background and

influence to the project. ‘The song Death by the ocean is a cultural fusion’, Guy-El elaborates, ‘sung in three or four languages and grounded on the wide range of forced immigration experiences of people from nine different nationalities. The song pays tribute to all the people who have lost their lives because of forced immigration, to the wealth of their heritage and their resilience facing persistent chaos.’

EMBRACING THE ARTISTIC MAGIC

Collaborating with a group of geographically spread people, some of whom very restricted in their movements, requires a lot of online contacts and word of mouth recommendations. ‘This too is part of the human magic that happens’, he says, ‘By the end, I think about twenty-five different artists will have participated in this project.’

Guy-El does not stick to a particular way of working. He prefers to be spontaneous, reacting to his environment, events and encounters. Sometimes, his songs are inspired by a situation or conversation about which he writes a text or poem. Other times, it all starts with a sound or a melody that comes to him. He then records a demo, usually piano and voice, which is the fundament on which he asks others to build on. He occasionally seeks contributions from numerous artists for a single song. In such instances, the editing process transforms into the actual composition, intricately weaving together all contributions to form a harmonious whole. Guy-El: ‘I’m the source of the project, and usually the source of a song, but my Niemanders family, namely producer Rick (Wiegerinck) and Mielenandi Gilles Samaël, pianist and arranger, play crucial roles in this project.’

WAKE-UP CALL

Next to inciting the listeners to pause, re-assess their position in life while concentrating on their humanity, Guy-El also sees this project as a wake-up call to leaders in the world. To ‘step back, change their perspective and take decisions that truly improve society’ in a more wholly sense, so together we can all help the world to heal.

Source: Le Kimuntu, source de la sagesse Kongo - Olivier Bidounga, 2009

Throughout this period, he always faced opposition leaders who lagged behind the times and failed to influence the masses. Was it different this time? Could Kılıçdaroğlu turn things around by appealing to the polarized public with a message of hope and a humanistic approach?

HOPELESS HORIZONS

The economic failure, the devastating earthquake of February 6th labeled as the catastrophe of the century, the government’s helplessness in the aftermath, and the government’s cover-up of the 200 billion-dollar treasury deficit exposed by the opposition... Then, one by one, names from the underground world of the 90s emerged, using social media to expose Erdogan and several ministers, whose whereabouts were unknown due to being sought in Turkey. These individuals, who once worked for the government, began to undermine the Erdogan regime... Surveys indicated that Erdogan and the AK Party had their lowest approval ratings in the past 20 years... **Was the tide really turning? Was spring approaching?**

After a quiet March, Erdogan and his team pressed the start button in April. With their complete control over the mainstream media, they embarked on unprecedented propaganda and campaigns in Turkish political history. The Presidential Communication Directorate started mocking the opposition with tremendous performance. The decision of the Labor and Freedom Alliance not to nominate their own candidate and to support Kılıçdaroğlu from outside was declared to the voters from all sides as “Green Left Party equals PKK terrorist organization, and therefore equals the Nation Alliance propaganda.” However, terrorism has not been a major problem in the country since the early 2000s. It was a reaction to the oppression suffered by the Kurds, their lack of political representation, inability to speak their language, and in short, their inability to live in the country. **Why was the bloody terrorist organization of the 80s and 90s, which unfortunately caused many casualties, resurrected in the media? Erdogan’s weapon against hope was fear...**

IMPOSSIBLE COMPETITION

The campaigns had gained momentum, and it was definitely not a fair competition. The opposition was not competing against a political party or a presidential candidate; they were competing against the Turkish state. Popular ministers from the AKP lists were nominated as candidates. They started running their parliamentary campaigns while still holding their positions as ministers and using the power and resources of their ministries. Technically, they were supposed to resign from their ministerial positions to become parliamentary candidates. However, the autocratic regime prevented this. Projects developed by the Turkish state were presented as the achievements of the AKP political party. Incomplete projects were portrayed as completed. To keep the exchange rate of the Turkish lira under control before the elections, hot money was brought into the country from Gulf countries, and Russia postponed its debts.

The exchange rate was kept below 20... (It was only 1.78 on year of 2012) Manipulation was instilled in rural areas, suggesting that the West could divide and occupy the country at any moment. It was emphasized that national defense technologies could only be developed under the Erdogan regime, leaving a lasting impression. LGBTQ+ individuals were targeted, and this group, which was deemed immoral, was portrayed as engaging in sexual acts with animals, targeting the religious population. Moreover, these false claims were made directly by the Minister of Interior... Montage fake videos of the PKK terrorist organization and the opposition leader Kılıçdaroğlu were shown to millions of people during Erdogan’s rallies.

CHANGE IS CRUCIAL

Now, Erdogan, who legally cannot be even a candidate, is once again at the helm of the state. Marginal right-wing parties are in parliament. The lowest social democratic representation in a hundred years... The new parliament has already begun preparations for constitutional changes. I believe that very soon, the existence of the LGBTQ+ community will be banned, or rather, the existing de facto bans will be formalized. **Just like the ban on the rainbow... All of this happened in front of the world’s eyes.**

What will happen next will be done openly and blatantly. Only in 2022, 49,720 Turkish citizens sought refuge in European Union countries to be able to be free... Turkey is one of the fortunate examples in the Middle East, unfortunately. The whole world is changing. The whole world is burning... Global warming is at our doorstep. And 8 billion people are still being governed by a group of elderly fools with bureaucracy and democratic ideas from the 1950s. Nationalism is on the rise, racism is increasing. Hatred is roaming the streets. Now, without forgetting that we are all parts of a whole, without being deceived by borders and boundaries, we need to turn our heads wherever there is injustice. The Migration of Peoples that shaped Europe never truly ended. It is still ongoing...

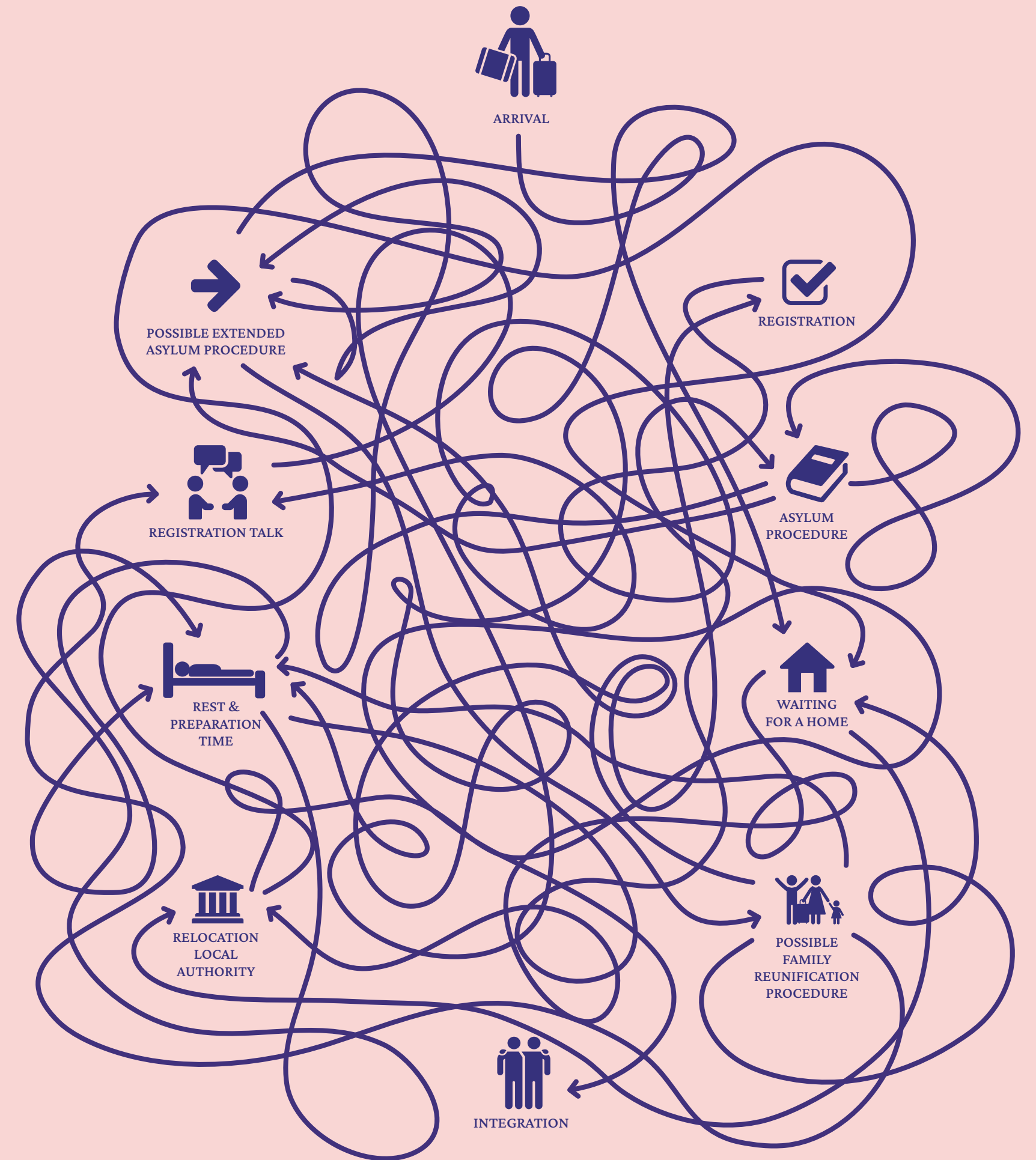
Revolution is coming...

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: **Oguz Tabur**
Age: **33**
Country of origin: **Turkey**
Current location: **Duinrell/Wassenaar**
Time in NL: **6 months**
Profession: **Retail marketing and styling professional, cinema fanatic**

Oguz Tabur, a 33-year-old from Turkey, found solace in his passion for cinema amid the challenges of intolerance. Formerly in Retail Marketing and Styling, Oguz fled his homeland due to homophobia, hate, and discrimination. Now residing in Duinrell/Wassenaar since his arrival in the Netherlands on 28 July 2022, Oguz channels his resilience into his dream of writing and directing films.

WELCOME TO THE NETHERLANDS. PLEASE FOLLOW THE LINES FOR FULL INTEGRATION.



THE DUTCH COMMITMENT TO REFUGEE RIGHTS

In 1951, many countries in the world got together in Geneva, Switzerland, and made a promise. They said they would protect people who are scared of being hurt or treated badly because of their race, religion, nationality, being part of a certain group, or their political beliefs. These people have to leave their own country because they're afraid for their safety, and they can't go back.

On May 3, 1956, the Dutch government agreed to this promise and said they would follow the rules in this promise, called the Refugee Convention. They took full responsibility for making sure people's rights in the Convention are respected.

Because of this, the Dutch legal system made some important rules:

- Everyone should be treated the same, no matter where they come from or what they believe.
- People should get a fair and honest process when it comes to their rights.
- People who come to the Netherlands should be given shelter, and their children should have access to schools and education to help them become part of the community.
- Discrimination based on race, religion, nationality, or other things like that is not allowed, especially when it comes to people who used to work for the government in their home country.
- People should have the right to go to court and have a fair and open trial, and this includes following the rules from different human rights agreements.
- People shouldn't be sent back to a country where their life and freedom might be in danger without a fair court hearing.
- These rules are meant to protect people who come to the Netherlands because they're afraid for their safety, and they are based on important international agreements and Dutch law.

THE THEORY VS. REALITY: MY EXPERIENCE AT THE COURT IN UTRECHT
In 2020, I had a court hearing in Utrecht, the Netherlands, without my lawyer because he was sick. The judge didn't explain my rights well, and there were unforeseen translation problems. The hearing lasted about 1 hour and 30 minutes. At the end of the proceedings, the judge did not allow me to check the correctness of the translation to see whether the interpreter did make no mistakes and omitted the important moments that might be crucial in the asylum case. Later, I found mistakes in the record.

My lawyer appealed to the Supreme Court, and I got the record in December 2020. It had errors like missing questions and answers and added questions. The crucial points of my given answers to the judge's questions, which affect the decision of the Immigration service IND, were noted incompletely. Is the Dutch judiciary truly independent and impartial, ensuring a fair and transparent legal process that upholds fundamental human rights? This includes:

- **The Right to Review Court Records:** Do individuals have the right to check court records to confirm that statements made by all parties, including the judge, are complete and accurate? Are court records organized properly, or is there disorder in the way they are kept?
- **The Right to Re-Translation:** In cases involving translators, is there a guarantee that translations are correct? Without re-translation, how can Dutch judges be certain of accurate translations and make unbiased decisions? Mere claims of authority may not suffice.
- **Protection of Statements: Is there assurance that statements made by parties won't be altered or manipulated by the judge or others after the proceedings are closed?** This is crucial to prevent corruption, in line with international anti-corruption laws

These questions are important to ensure fairness and protect people's rights in the Dutch legal system. Unlike the Netherlands, some other developed countries use video surveillance in court to prevent corruption and ensure fairness. Of course, there are cases where refugees had positive outcomes in Dutch courts. They say that the judges were supportive and checked the evidence. But **most refugees rely on their lawyers and don't know their rights in court.**

ABOUT THE WRITER
Name: Abdurasulov Kanatbek Abduzhabbarovich
Age: 37
Country of origin: Kyrgyzstan
Current location: AZC Soesterberg
Time in NL: almost 5 years
Profession: Police Officer

Kanatbek, a 37-year-old originally from Kyrgyzstan, has faced a challenging journey that led him to the Netherlands. He served as a police officer in Kyrgyzstan, dedicated to maintaining public order and safety. However, he encountered discrimination and mistreatment. The situation escalated as he was removed from the civil database and denied an identity card (ID-passport). He faced threats, torture, and baseless accusations related to an inter-ethnic conflict in June 2010, which were inexplicably classified as state secrets. In pursuit of justice and safety, Kanatbek's journey brought him to the Netherlands, where he sought refuge from the inhumane conditions he faced abroad. He currently resides at AZC Soesterberg in Utrecht, a place where he continues to seek asylum and protection from the injustices he endured.

Would you like to know more about your obligations and rights as a refugee or human? Scan the QR-code.



INTEGRATION THROUGH ART

A SYRIAN REFUGEE'S JOURNEY IN THE NETHERLANDS

After a long and challenging journey, Azam Al-Sha'rani arrived in the Netherlands from Syria. Right from the start, he faced a significant challenge in quickly integrating into Dutch society. We met Azam Al-Sha'rani to hear his success story in integrating into the local community.

Azam Al-Sha'rani made an effort to attend Dutch language classes regularly and also mastered the English language. Additionally, he participated in numerous volunteer activities supporting the elderly by organizing art workshops focused on drawing. Being an artist himself, he created landscapes and portraits. He spoke to us about his experience in an artistic manner, as if he were painting the letters on a beautiful canvas inspired by the vibrant nature surrounding him.

Azam Al-Sha'rani: "On this new land, all birds take their first steps. It's exhausting and tiring, but it carries with it many images and memories. On this new land, they spread their culture and share songs, flowers, and civilization tucked in their pockets. On my first day in the Netherlands, they told me to sit and rest. On the second day, they took me to a camp called 'Boudeh,' where I met new companions from the Dutch neighbors. It was on their small farm, with fresh air, trees, and rabbits. I continued to visit the farm to help my new neighbors, Leen and Leo. Because I loved the first person who taught me a Dutch word, I drew him with my pen. It was my friend Harry, whom I will never forget."

"As days passed during my stay in the Netherlands, I witnessed the moving bridges and windmills in the city of Leiden. I also met new volunteers who were teachers helping me learn Dutch. They were more like fathers than teachers, such as Faïke and Anna. After a period of staying in Leiden, I moved to a new city called Almelo, where I found a lot of love and warmth. This inspired me to start a small exhibition project in the city. Here, my companions are sitting, and there, I meet others to organize volunteer work. In the city of Almelo, I gained a teacher, a school, and a bicycle that takes me to every field, windmill, and flower."

"Yes, the air became more beautiful, and I started to breathe in a fresh breeze. All that excitement pushed me towards drawing and capturing what I saw with my own eyes. It's a small journey that is still at its beginning, but it's sketching beautiful outlines and dreams. It's the start. My small exhibition included letters, people, and pictures of the old cities that remained in my imagination. And this corner has become my favorite place with the elderly in their artistic activities."



MARYNA'S STORY

Due to a "special military operation," 43-year-old Ukrainian Maryna Sychova fled her homeland and has been living on a cruise ship in the Waal Harbor in Nijmegen since March 2022.

VLADIVOSTOK: GLOOMY AND HEAVY
Maryna was born and raised in the city of Vladivostok, a city in the far east of Russia, where her parents had moved from Ukraine. She remembers Vladivostok during the Soviet era as bleak and harsh, marked by scarcity and long queues for basic necessities. 'Everyone wore the same clothes, dark, somber colors. The winters were grim, sometimes there was up to two meters of snow and we children could not go to school.'

Maryna became a Young Pioneer, an esteemed youth organization in the Soviet Union. On the day in honor of the October Revolution of 1917, they all wore a button with the image of Lenin. 'We were very proud of that at the time,' says Maryna. If you did well at the Pioneers, you could move on to the Komsomol, the club for the slightly older, young people. Membership of the Komsomol was the stepping stone to party membership.

TO ZAPORIZHIA
When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 – Maryna was eleven years old – her parents decided to return to their native Ukraine with their two children. They moved to Zaporizhia Oblast (province), to a village near the capital of the same name. Maryna went to school in the village. She faced challenges adapting to the Ukrainian language but eventually excelled, completing her education and marrying at a young age.

It was a difficult time for the Ukrainians. Inflation is staggering, up to 1,000 percent, says Maryna. She graduated from high school at the age of seventeen and married at the age of eighteen. The young couple moves to the capital Zaporizhia, where she starts working in a clothing store. But after a few years, Maryna wants to achieve more and is starting a university course in financial administration. During her studies, her son Yehor was born.

WAR BREAKS OUT
When Maryna has been working in her field for a year after her studies – it is now 2014 – war breaks out. Putin occupies parts of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces and



Crimea. Everyone is shocked. 'We thought Russians were our friends. Many people have family living there. We just couldn't believe they were doing this to us. Because Zaporizhia is not far from Luhansk and Donetsk, it was quite scary,' says Maryna. 'Refugees from the occupied territories came to our city. Often well-educated people who had lost everything and had to start all over again. And after the Russian invasion of February '22, many had to flee again. We felt the threat of war. Our suitcases were packed and ready for grabs if we too had to flee.'

The war causes a lot of stress for Maryna. 'You can't be busy with the war all the time.' As an individual, you cannot change anything about it. So you try to put it aside, not think about it too much.' Maryna and her son are also going through a very difficult time personally during that period. Maryna and her husband divorced in 2019. A year later, he died of cancer. Maryna has now met her second husband.

SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR IN THE HALLWAY
When the Russian army invaded Ukraine on February 24th 2022, Zaporizhia also entered an anxious time. The air raid siren goes off about every hour at night, but always unexpectedly. From their apartment on the seventh floor, it is impossible to reach the shelter every time. So we end up sleeping on the floor in the hallway. Moreover, the largest nuclear power plant in Europe is located near Zaporizhia. Not a nice idea either. 'We thought the war would be over soon. But after three weeks, we realized it wasn't going to stop anytime soon. Mainly for the safety of my son, we decided to flee,' says Maryna. They leave on March 16, 2022 and her husband

remains behind in Ukraine. **TO THE NETHERLANDS**
Maryna and her son take the train to Poland. They stay there for two days. But they must continue, to make room for new refugees. Then she remembers that she heard from a truck driver what a pleasant country the Netherlands is. And so she decides to board the bus to the Netherlands. She arrives in Nijmegen with her son and finds refuge in the Waalhaven boat.

Maryna quickly finds employment and begins working at an electric heating systems company in Wychen, which is a 50 minute bike-ride. Her son, Yehor, starts attending a regular high school, mastering the Dutch language. 'We of course live in great uncertainty,' says Maryna. 'It goes without saying that we would like to return to our country, to our own environment. But we don't know if and when we can go back. That makes it very difficult to make plans for the future. If we cannot return, I would like to stay in the Netherlands. The mentality here suits me. It feels like my second home.'

RESPECT, FAIRNESS FOR ALL, OPENNESS, CLARITY, AND LOVE.

Monique is an employee in the COA department, but she's not just any employee. She has 24 years of work experience and direct communication with refugees. She can understand you without speaking. Her expertise in dealing with people is extensive; she can easily assess and connect with them. She dislikes mistakes and is provoked by ignorance. She always does her best to help everyone. She is strong on the outside, but sensitive and kind on the inside. Her love for her work has made her eager to give more year after year.

INTERVIEW WITH MONIQUE, EMPLOYEE OF COA

PERLA: Why did you choose to work at COA, and what motivated you to take on this job?

MONIQUE: Initially, after completing my studies, I worked in child psychiatry, which I found quite challenging because I couldn't understand why so many young children couldn't stay home, especially when I observed minimal behavioral issues and saw the distressing way they were treated. Then, I received a call from a temp agency asking if I wanted to work for COA. I went for an interview when I was 23 years old. They told me it would involve unaccompanied refugee children in need of shelter, food, and psychological support. I wholeheartedly accepted the job, and that's how my journey with refugees began.

PERLA: Is your passion for the job still the same as it was in the beginning?

MONIQUE: A lot has changed in 24 years. In the past, the internet wasn't as readily available, interpreters were scarce, and children were fleeing wars or human trafficking, often becoming real orphans with no one left. Nowadays, refugees still arrive, but more often, their parents are involved, and they receive better care. COA has also learned a lot over the years, enabling us to provide better support. I still go to work every day with great enthusiasm, hoping to learn something new or offer something valuable.

PERLA: Is there anyone in particular you're grateful to, someone who made a lasting impact on you?

MONIQUE: After 24 years, I'm proud of all the children who have endured difficult circumstances, and I'm proud of the dedicated colleagues I've worked with.

PERLA: What are the challenges of this job, and how have you dealt with them?

MONIQUE: One of the most difficult situations I encountered during my work was the suicide of a refugee child, as well as a girl who repeatedly took the wrong path, following things that could ruin her future and life. These are things that still affect me to this day. It's challenging for me to transition from work to home. However, I'm able to differentiate between my work life and my personal life.

PERLA: If you had the authority to make changes in the refugee system, what changes would you implement?

MONIQUE: I would provide assistance in the countries where conflicts are happening. I believe that no one can do that alone, but if I had the authority to do something for refugees here, I would involve them in the COA department because, in my opinion, they know best what refugees truly need.

PERLA: Describe your interaction with refugees in five words.

MONIQUE: My interaction with refugees is based on respect, fairness for all, openness, clarity, and love.



A JOURNEY FULL OF SUCCESS AND DESIGN

INTERVIEW WITH A REFUGEE AT CAMP UTRECHT

Mazen Jalab, a young Syrian man, arrived in the Netherlands in 2022 and sought asylum there. Mazen is one of those individuals who possess ambition and determination to shape their own future. Since his arrival in the Netherlands and initially residing in Camp Leeuwarden, he worked as a translator with COA as part of a service and assistance initiative for fellow refugees. Later on, he moved to Camp Utrecht after obtaining residency.

From that point forward, Mazen has been striving to organize his professional life, aspiring to work in his field of expertise, providing aviation services at airports. Additionally, he has the ambition to continue his academic studies, which were interrupted in Syria due to the war. We conducted an interview with Mazen Jalab to provide a brief overview of his life.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE DETAILS OF YOUR LIFE?

My name is Mazen Jalab, and I am working as Flight operations controller. I started my job back on 2008 in Syria and it was my first job with private company working to provide high quality of aviation services. I build my career very fast by focusing on my job, training and not hesitating to work on any kind of flights, cargo, passengers, private and so forth.

WHERE DID YOUR INTEREST IN THE WORLD OF AVIATION AND AIRCRAFT COME FROM?

My passion of aviation comes from my father, as he was working e-ticket and DCS manager at Syrian Air, and I used to go with him to the airport and see what he was doing. I worked for almost 4 years in Syria before the war started, and I had to move to Dubai to continue working in the same career, and on 2017 I had started a new position as Operations Control Supervisor which helped me a lot to get more knowledge about aviation services.

WHEN DID YOU ARRIVE IN THE NETHERLANDS?

On 2022 I had to move to Netherland for some private reasons, and I had to start a new life as a refugee in Netherlands. We stayed in Ter Apel for few days and then, we moved to Leeuwarden WTC. I was shocked when we arrived, and first I refused to accept living in such place, but they told me it is very short time. I had to accept what was chosen for me by God. On the second day I went to COA and asked them to volunteer with any activities they have, and from there I met Mr. Fared from COA, he didn't hesitate to help and he sent me to many activities such as The Tall Ships Races Harlingen. Then he offered me to volunteer at activities and language Center.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR INTEGRATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

The working at Language Center helped me a lot to get in touch with Dutch people and I learned a lot about their culture which helped me a lot to start integration. I also volunteered as translator for 4 months with COA before getting transfer to Utrecht, and now I started learning Dutch language in official school after I got my stay permit in Netherlands.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES YOU MAY FACE?

I hope I can continue the same job, and I still don't know if I am going to face any challenges in the future, but I think I will face some difficulties of requirements and some Dutch certificates, and I hope I will pass all difficulties by integrating and build my new network which is very important.

DE NIEMANDERS BACK IN THE FIELD



It was on one of those typical drizzly Dutch days, with a variation of the fifty shades of gray weather, that we arrived. AZC Grave. Sign in at the gate, wait. Inside, we hoped to find more colorful characters, which instantly brightened our spirits. Making music together, what could be better? As De Niemanders, we've played and written music in many places, but never in an AZC. Robert and Colin, our hosts at AZC Grave, had spread the word, ensuring a fantastic turnout. Rick, our producer and new member of De Niemanders, had set up a mobile studio and was as eager as a sprinter before the start of the Olympic final.

H. The first person who timidly appeared at the doorway, smiling, was H. A friendly Syrian man, resembling an old neighbor of mine. Syrian people are like us. H, who hasn't seen his wife and child for nine years, used to run a family business, an electronics store, before a rocket strike wiped everything out. Now he's here. He traveled ahead, and now there's this hellish eternal waiting, making phone calls, sorting things out, and then he has to go back to Denmark (the country where he entered Europe), and suddenly he's back in the Netherlands. It's like being caught between two stools, with an added wall and cabinet. He must be there somewhere, in between.

H. despises Arabic music, much like how I detest Dutch hits. He loves AC/DC. When Wout or I play an Angus Young riff, he looks at us with shining eyes, as if witnessing a miracle. We wanted to create a song with him. AZ/CC. It hasn't happened yet. After a while, I asked him if he wanted to do something fun together (I like him): go to the movies, visit a guitar store, but he declines everything. He wants to stay in direct contact with his wife and child; he allows himself no luxuries, no distractions, not even when I offer. It's as if he feels he doesn't deserve it. It's these moments that make me think: What am I thinking, really? I think too simplistically. I don't feel it.

I hope we can play and sing 'Wish You Were Here' by Pink Floyd together because he misses his wife and child terribly. Rick asked him if he had ever played his own version for his wife. He said no. Rick said, 'What if we record a version of you singing it for her?' That would be fantastic,' H. replied.

That still has to happen. So much is happening, and everything that isn't happening is palpable too.

I. I, who casually entered the room next, is from Somalia. He's in his early twenties and has great charisma, a mix of Bob Marley and Nelson Mandela, and sure, let's throw in Obama too. After a few sessions, I felt like we were dealing with a young king, who might not know everything because he's so young, but naturally understands every path that leads to the heart. He has no family left. Maybe that's what I feel, independence. Forced upon him. He has a hundred thousand followers on YouTube. While we were jamming, he received an award from YouTube.

I. has a penetrating, somewhat raspy voice, with a natural character akin to the hissing of waves, the rustling of tree branches, the sound of the earth. A man who just is and makes no effort to be anything or anyone else. The jams we create go in all directions, and it's as if we're plucking things out of thin air: even the 'aap-noot-mies' plank (a learning tool for Dutch children) hanging on the wall is incorporated into a textual outburst of pure improvisation. The atmosphere is filled with joy, and Rick's beats swing like crazy.

C. A day later, C. walked in, a young woman from Kenya, who has an incredible voice. The term 'stormy throat' is quite apt because when she truly lets loose, it's a tornado racing down our spines. We recorded a steamy version of a funky gospel song. The lyrics spontaneously came to life in the heat of the moment. And when she's not singing, she's glued to her phone, like all young people do. We later meet her to refine her vocal prowess a little bit, so she rounds out the notes and doesn't sing around them. We believe in her. We plan to record her by the end of the summer.

But, like with many things, we have to put in effort. Making arrangements outside the AZC sometimes proves challenging. We don't really have a clear understanding of their situation. I know nothing of war except through images.

'SIE GAUNER'

After lunch and after H. showed us his small room, two cheerful Syrians entered. 'I haven't played for twenty-five years; I was a pianist,' one of them immediately said. His family, he told us, created children's programs and wrote children's songs. We watched videos of his grandfather. It was a bit like our show 'Klokhuis' (a Dutch educational TV show for children). We beamed. It was brilliant. The men hardly had any teeth left. Poverty does not look good. It breeds prejudices. They looked like gypsies. 'Sie Gauner,' that's German, and that's where the word comes from,' said a grandson of the famous gypsy orchestra leader Tata Mirando to me once. 'You, crook!' is the literal meaning. A bit comical, saying 'you' and then 'crook' afterward. But yes, poverty, stress, and uncertainty don't bring anything good.

I brought a lively little rascal with him, M. , and being the people person he is, he noticed I was quite tired. He put his hand on my shoulder: 'Are you okay?' 'Yes, just tired.' M. has a beautiful son, who occasionally comes to visit. At first, I thought he was a girl. M. laughed, and his son happily did too. I felt a bit intoxicated with joy. Father and son shared their smiles with me. That's something many people don't know or don't want to know. What gifts do these suitcase-less strangers, who want to stay, bring us? I know one thing: post-traumatic stress can create communication difficulties, but music and poetry can be fantastic bridges to healing and understanding.

Once back home, I reflected on my own worries. As I said before, I was completely drained and felt like wandering away from my life to start something else. It was a strange situation. It wasn't the same, of course. I thought: I actually have the perfect state of mind to empathize, but it was more complex than that. Stay calm. Always good advice.

A FIELD OF FLOWERS

Two men from Iran and Syria had brought a saz and an oud. The strange thing was that they played inspired music, but suddenly I realized I couldn't say how good it was. I simply couldn't analyze it because, due to those quarter tones, everything, especially for a Westerner, was right on the edge. But then again, I also don't know who the best classical pianist is. I know what I find beautiful. Whether something is off-key or not, I can tell. After an hour, I realized that those two instruments didn't really harmonize in terms of tuning. You learn as you go. Nonetheless, we could use plenty from those jam sessions. Later at the AZC in Arnhem, I learned more about playing the instrument from oud player Odama.

A playful lesbian couple had also joined the group. Why do I mention that they are lesbians? Because they were persecuted for it. And you don't flaunt that in an AZC either.

There are just as many conservatives there as in our 'world'. One of them played the sas beautifully, her grandfather's old sas. It was quite out of tune, and I mean the sas. The player was an artist, and she walked from Turkey, where she ended up, all the way to the Netherlands.

Occasionally, groups of elderly people come in, they laugh modestly, shrug their shoulders, and we don't get into serious conversations. Even with gestures, we don't get much further, but the joy in their twinkling eyes speaks volumes. Sometimes, they sit in a row with a drum, and there's always one who plays it well.

The smile is the shortest distance between strangers, and music connects. It's a golden combination that always works, and every time, we reach magical moments where everyone looks at each other, grinning widely, with a look that says, 'Do you realize what's happening?' 'Yes, absolutely.' Winks buzz back and forth, like bees in a field of flowers.

THE SCENT OF EGYPT

Former asylum seeker K. now works as an intern in Grave, and he dreams of a good job. He assists everywhere in the AZC. In September, he will start a higher education program. We also worked on a song titled 'Oorlogskind' ('Child of War') with him for a day. He wrote the lyrics. 'I don't necessarily have to sing it in the studio,' he texted me later. But I felt that if I did it myself, the authenticity would be lost. I tried, but I noticed I started imitating his accent. In my life as a singer, I've often immersed myself in lyrics, even someone else's, but empathizing with this felt uncomfortable. Eventually, it worked out. An experience in itself. Perseverance.

Egyptian TV producer/camerasman S. is a chatterbox, and then some. He talks as if someone is pouring a bucket of cold water over his back every five seconds. But now, he's quite down. S. loves his country immensely, misses the scent of Egypt, and his eyes glimmer when he speaks about the Sinai. Egypt is a complex country, he says. If, for example, your uncle disappears, and everything indicates that he's in prison without a trial, and you inquire about him, you get imprisoned without reason too. After a while, you're released, for a week, and then they warn you not to play detective again. S. ended up in the Netherlands after a detour of more than ten years. A pure odyssey. He sleeps poorly because his interview with the IND is approaching. Will he become a recognized refugee or not?

He was rejected, and it made him even more despondent. He has one more chance, a few days later. A week after this, when we were there again, suddenly the door burst open, and he shouted loudly, 'THIS PHONE CALL MADE ME SO HIGH!!!' It was clear we had a title for a new song.

At the end of the afternoon, sometimes the door opens, and a group of cheerful children peeks inside. They had lessons next door. At the end of the day, fearlessly, they climb on us. It's as if a bunch of confetti cannons are being set off. A crazy mess. That's good. There's already too much fear around them and in their parents' hearts. Ending the day with joyful and amazing children, it can't get any better.

And having fun is something people there have to do in that nerve-racking period living in an AZC. It might sound strange, but 'you have to enjoy it a bit' because afterward, regardless of whether you can stay or not, you have to work incredibly hard.

The real work begins after the verdict.

SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT

Being a writer, I believe in the magical power of a metaphor. It makes complicated things easier to understand. So today, I will use it to talk about one thing that I consider very important: the psychological state of a refugee person.

Imagine a situation. One day, you wake up with enormous pain in your stomach. The pain is so strong that no painkillers can help you. So, you decide to go to the hospital to see the doctor. But when you finally get there, you discover a new problem: there are no tickets, so you cannot understand what your place is in the waiting line. "Our system doesn't work today," says the assistant at the reception. "Just take a seat somewhere. The doctor will call you himself." A couple of hours later, you realize that no one is calling for you. Even worse: the doctor calls the people who arrived after you, much later. Did he forget about you? Who knows. "You need to wait," says the assistant over and over again.

At the end of the day, you finally get called. "This may be just a virus. Or this may be cancer," the doctor says. "We need to take a test." OMG. Cancer?! "When can I get the results?" "I cannot really say," the doctor responds. "Maybe tomorrow. Maybe in a week. Maybe in six months. The lab is too busy at the moment," says the doctor, "there's no chance to estimate the time you will have to wait." So, nothing to do about it: you return back home and start waiting. Now let me please ask you a question. What is more painful: the pain itself, the long waiting, or the uncertainty of waiting for the results?

WAITING IN UNCERTAINTY

Such a story is not just a metaphor for me. In 2014, I experienced enormous pain in my face. The doctors said there's probably a tumor in my brain causing that pain. I lived two weeks waiting for the brain MRI. Luckily, everything was clear on the MRI scans; there was a different reason for the

pain, and I was cured. But I will never forget those weeks. Living with a feeling that maybe I will die soon. Two weeks of uncertainty, two weeks of fear. But at least I knew when exactly we will know for sure – precisely two weeks, fourteen days.

The refugees do not have the same privilege: no one tells them the exact dates. "When will I have my interview? When will they tell me the decision that affects my entire life? Why am I transferred from one camp to another? Why have the people who arrived after me already passed the procedure and got the status, while I'm still waiting for the interview (and there's no end in sight)?" No answer.

It's not about waiting itself: some things really demand time. The system's capacity is not unlimited. There is a shortage of specialists, too many refugees, not enough resources. Those are objective limitations leading to the long waiting; we all understand that. There's no problem to wait a while if you know what to expect. The problem is that you can't estimate how long this waiting may take and what the decision will be. Maybe a week, maybe a month, maybe a year – with a 50% chance of being rejected.

There are flames behind us and a safe place ahead – but what if those in power will say "no"? What if the gates will remain closed? What if we will be sent back to our country, back to the danger we were running from?

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SOUL

We have to understand that a real refugee is a person who experienced something very bad in his or her life. Sitting in the camp, we were joking: "How to distinguish a refugee from a liar? If a person visits the mental health specialist at the camp, it is a real refugee." That means there is a story behind every real refugee. Tortures. War. Threats and persecution from special services. Killed relatives and loved ones. Burnt houses.

UNCERTAINTY OF WAITING: THE EFFECT ON HUMAN PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE

Ruined lives. Those things leave footprints in the soul. All you want is just to forget about them – but you can't. It's a part of your life; it's a part of you. The only thing you can rely upon is a hope that maybe one day the new life will begin and ease your pain.

In the camp, I saw a lot of people with post-traumatic stress disorders, depression, and anxiety. Many couldn't sleep or eat for weeks. Many used antidepressants – just like me. I'm also the one who visited the psychologist at the camp. The things that happened to my family back in Russia are hard to forget. That's why I can feel the pain of other refugees: I'm one of them; we all passed through the same. Different countries, same story.

The psychological state of refugees is already awful at the moment they arrive in a new country to ask for asylum. And the uncertainty makes all this inner pain much worse. Day by day, month by month, we were balancing between hope and desperation. Some people are strong enough to resist it – some are not. I know several cases when the long waiting and uncertainty led to divorces. People just couldn't deal with all that stress, and parted. And some people even committed suicides.

HALF ALIVE AND HALF DEAD

To be sincere, my family was extremely lucky. Our asylum procedure took only 13 months – which is really fast compared to the average. The last three months were the hardest for us: we had our interview in February, and the decision came almost three months later, at the end of April. During those months, I felt just like Schrödinger's cat: half alive and half dead at the same time. Yes or no? Positive or negative? I presented all the documents and evidence to the IND, but what if they will consider it insufficient? All this stress affected my body. I felt like there's a nine-inch nail in my chest and it was hard to

breathe. My hands were shaking; my heart was pumping; my stomach was aching. Sometimes I was crying out of desperation. It was one of the hardest periods in my life.

It was such a relief when finally everything was over, and we got the status. Now we're on the safe side. But what about my friends who still wait for the interviews and decisions in the camps?

What I'm trying to say is that a little more certainty could help refugees deal with stress and anxiety. Just a more transparent system: knowing what your position is in the line, the exact date when you will get the decision, some more information and answers. Just a couple of simple things that will make your path more predictable. We cannot erase the refugees' pain – but we can limit it. I think they deserve it.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Name: Pavel Avraamov
Age: 41
Country of origin: Moscow, Russia
Time in NL: 1.5 years
Profession: Online educator, running a small online school

Pavel Avraamov, a 41-year-old online educator, hails from Moscow, Russia. Dedicated to his work, Pavel is involved in teaching through a small online school together with his wife. In response to the war in Ukraine, Pavel and his family sought asylum in the Netherlands. He had been a political activist in Russia, bravely speaking out against the conflict. Pavel's vocal anti-war stance made him a target, leading to threats from Russian officials and authorities. Their courageous decision to seek refuge in the Netherlands was met with success; in April, they were granted refugee status and a residence permit.

In the wake of a new year, Pavel Avraamov found himself caught in a web of conflict, propaganda, and personal struggle in Russia. What began as a simple video lecture evolved into a documentary, exploring the insidious influence of propaganda on Russian citizens, and even his own family, who viewed Pavel's activism as betrayal.

For Pavel, a political activist and a renowned teacher of the game 'GO', the publication of his book on Go Strategy, translated into English and Ukrainian, marked him as a traitor in the eyes of Russian officials. His crime? Selling books in Ukraine, an act perceived as collaborating with the enemy. In a nation torn apart by conflicting beliefs about the ongoing war, Pavel's story is not unique. He shares a common thread with the growing number of Russians who have fled their homeland, seeking refuge from persecution and the shadow of propaganda.

NEITHER SHORE NOR SHIP

Escaping the ever-tightening grip of Russian authorities, Pavel, along with his wife, daughter, and even their two cats,

embarked on a perilous journey. Their destination: the Netherlands, a place they hoped would offer respite and safety. Their arrival, however, marked the beginning of a new struggle—navigating the complex process of seeking asylum and integration.

The challenges faced by Pavel and his family are emblematic of a larger crisis. The Russia they left behind is a land gripped by fear and censorship. Many Russians who disagree with the war are now silenced, unable to voice their dissent without risking imprisonment or worse. Fleeting their homeland, they face new challenges as refugees, encountering emotional and systematic barriers based on prejudice in their adopted countries, such as difficulties in opening bank accounts, struggles in renewing temporary residence permits, particularly for those acquiring Russian citizenship leading to rejections, and issues in securing employment.

Those governmental limitations are based on prejudice," says Pavel. Misconceptions like 'all Russians are responsible for the war in Ukraine' prevail, despite the fact that Russians who leave the country often

do so in opposition to the war, not in support of it. Hence, the limitations imposed on them are emotional, not rational, highlighting the critical need to recognize the diversity within these communities.

UNCERTAINTY AND INVISIBILITY

Pavel's story sheds light on the plight of these remarkable 'Niemanders'—the Russian refugees who have become nobodies, trapped in a state of uncertainty and invisibility. Their desperate escape from a country they once called home is a stark reminder that not all Russians are supporters of the war; many are, in fact, its victims. Their voices, often drowned out in the cacophony of political rhetoric, call for understanding and compassion.

Pavel's plea is clear: the world must recognize that not all Russians are the same. They are not a monolithic entity of war supporters. Behind the headlines and political posturing are real people—families torn apart, individuals traumatized, and lives upended. The tragedy unfolding in Russia demands empathy and action, for the sake of those who have been silenced, for the sake of the Niemanders.

WAITING IN LIMBO

THREE SYRIAN REFUGEES' STORIES OF ENDLESS ASYLUM PROCEDURES

Three stories highlight the challenges faced by Syrian refugees seeking asylum in the Netherlands. Abu Hussein, diagnosed with bone cancer and viral hepatitis, is dependent on his son's assistance due to his deteriorating health. Abu Abdou, who fled war in Syria and Ukraine with his family, has been living in uncertainty, waiting for his residence permit for over a year. Mohammed, arriving in the Netherlands with his son Mohi Al-Din, who suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, faced challenges related to frequent relocations and unsuitable living conditions in camps. This is their story.

The Syrian crisis remains one of the biggest humanitarian crises facing humanity. Waves of illegal migration by Syrian refugees continue to accelerate as they flee from war, violence, and destruction. As a result, the stories of Syrian refugees are varied and filled with sadness, encompassing their mental and physical pain. In this dossier, we will review three different human stories of refugees who arrived in the Netherlands over a year ago and embarked on a long journey of procedures with the IND (Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service). According to their accounts, each refugee has a unique human story that requires urgent attention from the IND. However, IND may have a different perspective on the files of these refugees, but the humanitarian cases and the difficult circumstances they are living in need to be verified.

ABU HUSSEIN

The story of Abu Hussein (Ali K.), who sought refuge in the Netherlands, carries a lot of pain and illness, according to his own account. The disease has taken a toll on his frail body, making it impossible for him to support himself if it weren't for the help of his son, who accompanied him on his journey from Syria to the Netherlands. Abu Hussein's main complaint revolves around his asylum case's lengthy procedures and the time for the IND to schedule his second interview for temporary residency.

Abu Hussein recounts the details of his story from the camp where he currently resides in the Netherlands, saying: "I entered the Netherlands in April 2022 after entering illegally. I had a fingerprint record in Italy before

applying for asylum in the Netherlands. The first interview took place in August 2022, and I moved between camps in the north during this period. Meanwhile, my illness worsened as I suffered from bone cancer and Hepatitis C, which forced me to use crutches and a wheelchair for mobility and to meet my special needs. I wouldn't be able to dress myself or put on my socks and shoes without my son's help."

Abu Hussein continues, "I did not expect my case procedures to be delayed for so long, given my desperate need for my family's support, consisting of my wife and three children, who would provide me with proper healthcare. After breaking the Italian fingerprint procedures in April 2023 with the court's approval, I am waiting for the second interview to obtain temporary residency to initiate the family reunification process. Abu Hussein hopes for expedited asylum procedures to reunite with his family, who will take care of his deteriorating health in recent times.

ABU ABDOU

The second story is about the Syrian refugee (Abdul A.), Abu Abdou. He came to the Netherlands from Ukraine, escaping with his wife and young son from the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. Abu Abdou, who had previously fled from the war in Syria and sought refuge in Ukraine, found a haven in the Netherlands, which opened its arms to refugees from all over the country.

Upon Abu Abdou's arrival in the Netherlands in the fifth month of 2022, he expected his procedures to be quick, just like his brother, who obtained temporary residency after only two months. However, Abu Abdou is still waiting and has not yet received his residence despite over a year passing since his presence in the Netherlands.

Currently, he lives in a camp in the north, in a single room without public facilities. Abu Abdou mentioned that he has frequently contacted his assigned lawyer and the WVN organization. Still, he has not been given any specific appointment for a second interview. He wonders how long he will continue to move between camps with his small family. He desires to integrate into Dutch society and enter the job market,

like his fellow refugees who quickly completed their procedures.

MOHAMMED SH.

On the other hand, the story of the Syrian refugee, Mohammed SH., is somewhat different from the previous two stories. He entered the Netherlands two years and two months ago with his 24-year-old son. Initially, he believed that his asylum procedures would be quick, assuming that his son's medical and psychological condition would expedite the IND's decision to grant residency. However, a year has passed, and he is still in a state of waiting. Despite that, Mohammed is one of the local community's most integrated and active refugees. He assists older people and organizes drawing courses, as he has a talent for drawing. Additionally, he volunteers with the COA organization as a translator.

Mohammed speaks about the difficult psychological impact his son, Mohi Al-Din, has been experiencing. He entered the Netherlands at the beginning of last year with his son suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. Due to the frequent relocations the young man experienced from Ter Apel to Bodel, then to Leeuwarden, and finally to Almelo, his mental condition deteriorated significantly.

The living conditions in the camps did not suit him, according to his father. Mohi Al-Din has been transferred to a psychiatric hospital for treatment after his mental health deteriorated. After approximately 13 months in the Netherlands, Mohammed hopes to have his second interview as a gateway to obtaining residency. He believes that this process will help as part of his son's treatment, although having his mother and siblings by his side is also crucial for Mohi Al-Din and receiving the necessary care and treatment.

Mohammed expresses his gratitude to the Netherlands for welcoming Syrian refugees and providing a safe haven for their families, hoping to obtain residency to integrate into the local community and contribute his expertise to the country that embraced him and his son, Mohi Al-Din.



NACHT VAN DE NIEMANDER

LET'S CELEBRATE THE POWER OF MUSIC AND STORIES!

On December 30, 2023, pop venue Luxor Live in Arnhem will explode. De Nacht van de Niemander celebrates – from eight until late – the power of music and stories. The stages feature acts and artists by whom De Niemanders were inspired; be it musically, in terms of ideas, in terms of energy or in terms of stories. Some they met last year during their trip to asylum seeker centers, some are old musical friends, and others were tipped off by friends and fans. Punk, psychedelia, dabke, hip-hop, rock, Sufi music, Arabic club tunes and spoken word will blast from the various stages in the Arnhem pop temple.

Here are the artists that were confirmed at the time this newspaper went to press and which you will therefore definitely hear and see on the 30th. But there will be more, so keep an eye on De Niemanders Instagram and website for last-minute additions to the line-up!

RUDEBOY

Patrick Tilon aka Rudeboy tells it like it is. Music is his path; he is averse to dogmas and keeps popping up in new surprising constellations in which he shines his associative and poetic light. Rudeboy is one of the greats of the Earth, and that is why we are proud that we can join him on two songs from his oeuvre on December 30.



PLOEGENDIENST

Rapper Ray Fuego (SMIB) is an elusive creative phenomenon. A singer and songwriter who is really honest and hyperpersonal and dares to show. He dives in headfirst with the pounding machine Ploegendienst – together with artistic heavyweights Bastiaan Bosma (Mich, Aux Raus), Bram Swarte (Malle Pietje and De Bimbo's), and Michiel Beffers (Firestone) – on the 30th of December. We, De Niemanders, love unexpected combinations and hard energy, and we are happy and proud that Ploegendienst is joining our party!

SHAMZON

A Syrian-Dutch live sensation from our neighboring city Nijmegen. The band, from top 10 hit producer/masterful keyboardist Abdul Rahim Al-Saleh (رحال اصل دي حرادب), makes music in the Arabic tradition. Sparkling, hypnotic & super danceable. Sounds like Rizan Saïd, Altin Gun, and Omar Souleyman all together in one live band with western dance influences. Check them out!



ISMA IP

A phenomenon in Somali youth culture. Rapper ISMA IP built his fan base while he fled the war as a refugee. We met him with De Niemanders in an asylum center and made some hypnotic songs with him. He is now building his live career, and we are proud that we can welcome him as a solo act. Scan the QR to hear his incredible work.

SINAN ARAT'S SUFIDELICA

Sinan is a Turkish flutist who has traveled many worlds. Whether with a psychedelic rock band, Nederlands Blazers Ensemble, or solo: he unmistakably finds his place and sound in the music. He is a student and master of many wind instruments. On December 30th, he brings two musicians and a dancer to enchant us.

YALLAH! YALLAH!

A long DJ set full of Moroccan hip hop, reggaeton from Egypt and Israel, speed dab from Lebanon, trap from Syria, Palestinian hip hop. The best vibes from the Middle East and beyond. Scan the QR and dive into their beats.



ISMAÏL MAMO PLAYS 'SHE SENT ME A TIKTOK OF 99 CENTS'

Where does ignorance take you when you just arrive in a new country? When you don't speak the language and don't know the culture? Ismail learned about his new country through entertainment, and we get to know Ismail through entertainment.

DE NIEMANDERS

The musical collective De Niemanders started in 2018 in Dutch prisons. This resulted in an acclaimed album that was released in 2020. They have been making music in Dutch asylum centers since December 2022. An album is in the works. On December 30, you will hear prison songs, sneak peeks of some AZC songs, and songs with special guest Rudeboy.






















MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED!

EAT, SLEEP, WAIT. REPEAT...

KEYWORDS EXPLAINED
Mark the keywords which you are familiar with in your life.

- **Vluchtelingen (Refugees):** Individuals leaving their own country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.
- **Asielprocedure (Asylum Procedure):** The process in which an individual applies for asylum in another country and is assessed for eligibility for international protection.
- **IND (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst) (IND - Immigration and Naturalization Service):** A government agency responsible for implementing migration policies, including the assessment of asylum requests, in many countries.
- **Asielzoekerscentrum (AZC) (Asylum Seekers Center):** A facility where asylum seekers reside during the evaluation of their asylum request.
- **Vluchtelingenstatus (Refugee Status):** A legal status granted to an individual when they are recognized as a refugee and are entitled to protection.
- **Migratie (Migration):** The process of people moving from one area to another, often with the intention of settling in a new country.
- **Mensenrechten (Human Rights):** Fundamental rights and freedoms inherent to all individuals, regardless of nationality, race, gender, religion, or any other status.
- **Dublin-verordening (Dublin Regulation):** A European legal instrument determining which country is responsible for processing an asylum request within the European Union.
- **Integratie (Integration):** The process of incorporating newcomers into a society and adapting to the culture and customs of that country.
- **Detentiecentrum (Detention Center):** A facility where individuals are held pending migration assessment or deportation.
- **Grensbeleid (Border Policy):** Policies determining who is allowed to enter a country and under what conditions.
- **Humanitaire hulp (Humanitarian Aid):** Assistance and support provided to people in emergency situations, often in the form of food, shelter, and medical care.
- **Familiehereniging (Family Reunification):** The process of reuniting family members of refugees in the country where the refugee has received protection.
- **Traumaverwerking (Trauma Processing):** The process of dealing with and recovering from traumatic experiences, often experienced by refugees due to war, violence, or persecution.
- **UNHCR:** A specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for the protection and well-being of refugees worldwide.
- **Staatloosheid (Statelessness):** The condition of not possessing the nationality or citizenship of any country, leaving individuals without the legal rights and protections associated with citizenship.
- **Xenofobie (Xenophobia):** The irrational fear or dislike of people from other countries or cultures, often leading to discrimination, hostility, or exclusion.

Are you up for a fingerprint sudoku?



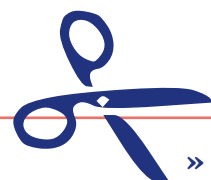
Use the fingerprints to finish the sudoku with the following rules:
 Each row should have all fingerprints, no repeats.
 Each column should have all fingerprints, no repeats.
 Each 3x2 rectangle should have all fingerprints, no repeats.

» Want the answers? Check out www.niemanders.nl

E	G	G	A	S	I	E	L	P	R	O	C	E	D	U	R	E	U
V	T	N	F	S	T	C	R	S	J	N	X	F	J	X	K	G	B
F	D	I	A	E	R	Z	I	U	O	S	N	F	C	M	S	W	G
B	D	N	M	I	A	N	X	T	I	A	P	D	X	S	F	N	I
Q	E	E	I	T	U	K	M	A	R	K	I	V	C	E	I	E	N
P	T	D	L	A	M	M	O	T	J	U	O	K	S	R	N	I	D
G	E	R	I	R	A	E	B	S	P	Q	R	Y	E	Q	E	T	G
R	N	O	E	G	V	N	C	V	V	S	B	G	K	O	G	A	R
E	T	R	H	I	E	S	H	Y	V	S	R	K	N	L	N	R	H
N	I	E	E	M	R	E	M	K	O	U	W	Q	B	B	I	G	U
S	E	V	R	B	W	N	F	Y	B	U	L	I	P	C	L	E	C
B	C	-	E	G	E	R	M	N	X	U	N	E	N	Y	E	T	O
E	E	N	X	R	E	I	P	L	Y	C	H	V	R	T	N	K	
L	N	I	I	Q	K	C	G	Q	K	Q	B	C	H	H	I	V	
E	T	L	G	L	I	H	Q	R	S	N	Z	Y	R	R	C	R	Q
I	R	B	I	R	N	T	R	V	E	A	L	B	U	N	U	M	J
D	U	U	N	T	G	E	C	R	H	P	T	H	M	L	S	N	
G	M	D	G	W	U	N	Q	M	M	D	T	K	Y	E	V	T	Z

Word Search! Can you find and cross out all the words?

- Asielprocedure
- Dublin-verordening
- Inburgering
- Mensenrechten
- Traumaverwerking
- AZC
- Familiehereniging
- IND
- Migratie
- UNHCR
- Detentiecentrum
- Grensbeleid
- Integratie
- Status
- Vluchtelingen



**IT'S TIME
TO TURN
NOBODIES
INTO
SOMEBODIES**