

“This, what’s going on now, this is my life.”

an interview with a young Muslim girl

interview by Stefánia Fábíán

I first met Yasmin in 2015 at a reception centre where she lived with her family. An NGO staff member was telling me about her work with children and the difficulties; she delightfully mentioned a 14 years old Afghan girl, a quick learner, who was learning the language really quickly, and doing well in other subjects as well. She happened to come our way. She was Yasmin. She greeted me respectfully, and asked how I was doing. At the time they had only been there for a few months, we spoke for a bit in Hungarian, then switched to English for a bit. Since then, I’ve worked a lot with her and her family, and I didn’t even realise how quickly everything changed. Looking back on our first meeting, it seems almost impossible that this interview, in which Yasmin talks about hardships, happiness, ambitions, fears, love, values and many other things in Hungarian, is with the very same girl.

I am Yasmin Ahmadi, I was born in Iran, but I am Afghan. I am in high school, I have those free times, I do sports – I do kempo and... Ask!

What is the place where you were born like?

First, Iran is a country in Asia. Where I was born was a touristy place, I think only for Muslims, and there are very nice places there, we say it’s a rich place. Because we have a prophet... First, there is one God, then there are prophets. One of the prophets died there and they turned it into a nice, really cool place, so every Shiite Muslim comes to pray there from all Arab countries. When the tourists come, they spend a lot of money, that’s why the city is so rich. They come from lots of cities, for example from Tehran, Esfahan when there are breaks and not only because of the prophets, but they also come because there are touristic places in many places.

How was it to live there for you? How old were you when you moved from there?

I was born there and I was there until I was 14. For me, it was a great city.

Did you go to kindergarten there?

Yes, but I don't remember.

What are your first memories from your early school years?

I remember school. I don't remember anything from kindergarten. Or maybe I do, but not right now. When I was in school, we moved, and my dad had built a two-story house, that was also about 15 minutes by car from my grandparents. I went to school there in first grade, but it was a bit far, let's say 15-20 minutes by foot. But it was really good to go every day with the girls. We used to set up a meeting point every day, like Jászai Mari square¹, we met there and afterwards we all went to school together.

Do your parents ever tell you what you were like when you were little? From when you don't remember?

Well, they told me that I started to speak really early. I was about 8 months old when I started to walk around. I was born at 7 months, so I was really tiny, nobody would believe that it was an actual baby. When my grandfather came to visit, he couldn't believe his eyes when he saw me, so he told my parents to throw out this little toy doll, because it's not real. They gave me milk with an injection and the like, because I was so tiny. There were no clothes in my size, because it was very long ago then, and they didn't make tiny clothes, so my uncle and my aunt went to the shop, they bought dolls and they would put the doll's clothes on me. I was terrifying, everyone thought that I was going to die, since I was so tiny, I couldn't eat or drink, not even cry. This is what my mum tells me. I have a pair of trousers, it's so small, imagine (*she shows how small it is*) with squares, really tiny. Mum said I was so little, everyone was afraid of me, no one could hug myself except for my mum. Not even my dad. He only started to cuddle me after I turned one, I was so tiny and terrifying. And she said that when I was in school I wasn't like a calm girl, I was always getting into trouble, but I was always really smart. And those poor teachers... I was a straight A student, but I was always behaving badly and I was offending my teachers. But they couldn't say anything when I was in primary school. I was there until seventh grade, those were great times.

Do you have any pictures of you as a baby?

As a baby? Maybe I do, yes. From when I was very small, 7 months old, I don't have any.

Did you spend a lot of time in the hospital?

No, I wasn't in hospital. I was for however months, in that glass thing...

¹ Jászai Mari square is located centrally, in downtown Budapest (translator's note).

Incubator?

Yes, that one (*she laughs*). Maybe around half a month or so, I don't know. Afterwards, we went home, and then too no one took a picture of me.

Did you need to take injections afterwards too?

Yes, I needed to get injections until I turned one.

Did your mother do that?

Maybe, I don't know. Maybe it was a nurse. First the nurses, then my mother learned from it, and then she did it by herself.

But you grew up nicely, right?

Yes.

Regarding school: you said, you were a troublemaker. Did you have any rules in school that were different from here? What do you remember?

In that school there were only girls. And we had these uniforms. And it was like, we had to be there at 7 o'clock in the morning, no, half past six, and we had to wait in lines, for example, the first grade had its own line when we said hi. We didn't go to the rooms immediately, we had to wait outside until the big teacher, I mean, the headmaster arrived. And we always had to stand in those lines with our classes. And I was the one who organized the kids. There is a welcome, first we pray while standing in lines, everyone from the first to the seventh or eighth grade. We only call schools primary schools until fifth grade, after that it's a high school. We were three girls, always together, we were very smart and very good friends, but we were also against each other. We were really good friends to each other, but when it came to studying we didn't know each other. (*laughs*) When we had tests and things like that.

Did you compete?

Yes, yes, always. And when we went to high school, we were with together, all three of us.

What kind of rules did you break? Like, did you talk during classes?

Yes. No one could leave me in silence, I mean I couldn't stay silent during classes. My teachers therefore told me: Yasmin, please, quiet be during classes and you can have longer breaks, OK? You can get more free time, just quiet be. I told them, no, I can only talk during classes...

Besides, I was a really good student, so they couldn't say anything, nor call my parents, because I was a good student. So they told me, if I don't keep quiet I'll get a really complicated test. I told them, it wouldn't be a problem, so I can at least chat. And it was really bad, I was always talking and joking with my teachers. But you shouldn't make joke of your teachers. I was a good student, they couldn't say that oh you get an F ... We were three girls, we were the same, in school they always said these are the three bad ones. There is a movie, titled... I think, you have it in Hungary... Three... What... Pistolmen? I don't remember its name... I saw kids here watching this movie. Three small... three men with guns... And in school everyone called us that, three men with guns. Because we were always together, always being bad, well... It was really good.

Did you get punished for this at? Like the warnings in Hungarian schools?

No, we didn't have any warnings, just when you'll get really bad they call your parents. There was a time when we were behaving really badly, they called all our parents of three of us, and, when they saw us, they just said: we can't do anything about it, they are the same at home. Schools couldn't say anything, if our parents couldn't do anything with us, the school can't either, sorry. Because we were good kids, we were just being funny on the side, they couldn't hurt us or say anything bad. But there were some kids, when they were just a bit naughty, the teachers did offend them, saying that they should study instead. There were very mean teachers, to whom we didn't say anything, we were so quiet, no one believed that we three actually were so quiet. Because we were afraid of her.

Are there other ways in which your school differed from Hungarian schools? For example, the subjects?

We had other languages: Arabic... We have English here, too. There was, how should I say... like ethics for Christians here, we had the Muslim version.

Like religious education?

Yes, religious education. We had religious education and many other things. We had more than 16 books. English, two types of Arabic, like literature and grammar. Also chemistry... It was the same, besides the Arabic language, because we had to understand the Quran.

As a child did you feel that you were born in Iran, but you were Afghan? Did it make any difference?

Well, yes. Not because of the classes. Until fifth grade in primary school, there was no difference, everyone was just a student. But when we went to high school, it started. Because the three of us we always competing, and me and Fatima, one of my friends, we started to compete in astronomy. We didn't know anything about it. We had a teacher telling us that there is going to be a competition of astronomy, and we should make a power point, and that's what we have to learn, because if you win, you have to present it to almost a thousand people. We started knowing that we wouldn't win anything, since we didn't understand anything, we didn't even know what a star was! How does it get big, how is it born... We started to look it up on the

Internet. And there was another girl, we gave her money to help us. We provided her the data, she only made us the power point. After almost a month our literature teacher told us, Yasmin and Fatima, you won. It was a city competition. You won first place. My God, we didn't even know anything. The problem was that, if someone wins, they had to give a presentation. And we didn't know anything. Imagine, there were 12 lines on one page, only on one page, the data and we made a 30 page long power point. And it was so much, we didn't have time, they didn't give us any extra time, like here, if you are going to a competition, you get time to study. The literature teacher was really kind, she was the best. She helped us make those data less... So 4 out of the 12 lines, only the most important ones, we only had to know that. So we started to learn during breaks. We started to study together during nights at home. The third girl, Sara, we weren't getting along with her back then. She started to behave badly, like "you two went, why didn't you ask me", and things like that... So me and Fatima, the two of us remained as friends. It was really good. And we presented it and we won first place again, because our presentation was so good. We couldn't imagine, we couldn't believe. We won two golds, and some money in a card and there is gold in it, I don't know if you have that here or not... And we got some papers, awards, and they were thanking us a lot. But we didn't understand a thing about astronomy. Seriously. We just tried. Well, that was our attempt. But this is all gone. And then they told us, thank you, we would like you to compete on the national level in astronomy. *(laughs)* At first it was a no, we don't want to, because we don't know anything, but then we went to the national and we won first prize there too. What we were studying, we didn't understand anything, but imagine it Fanny, it just got in my head! Well, how to put it... We learned it, but if you ask me now what a star is, I won't be able to answer because I don't remember. It's like English, I'll write a test tomorrow: at night I study, study, study, I write the test and if someone asks me two days later what I learned, I won't know, because I already have forgotten. And then we won first place in the national too. We got some presents and the like from the school, too. They always gave out pencils and such things you know... And then the third girl, Sara, also started to make these power points, but it was a bit more difficult for her, so the poor thing didn't win unfortunately. And then they said that the countries were competing against each other, for example we would have to compete with Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in Turkey. And when the headmaster said this, we were standing in the lines, and they said, Yasmin and Fatima had won and they are going to Turkey. After that it turned out that we as Afghans couldn't go further in this competition. We were really hurt by this. Well, we didn't study, we didn't know anything about the stars, but we tried and we wanted to go. We wanted to learn too, going further, astronomy, such things, it was really good. It was interesting, but we didn't care at first, because we didn't know anything about it. And when we finally understood a bit, and the teachers told us... We were really hurt. The two headmasters and all the teachers were there saying, Yasmin and Fatima, it's not our fault, but some people who are bigger than us, they said that Afghans can't go, we are really sorry, you are the best and they were saying things like this... So it turned out that we couldn't go because we are Afghans. Another one, the two of us, we were also competing in sports, we were really good at... There is a game in Iran, I don't know what it's called in Hungarian, it's a sport and we were really good at it. And we would have to collect data about that and make another power point.

What kind of sport? A ball game?

Yes, a ball game. Almost like volleyball. And we started to do the power point by ourselves. And the two of us won first place again. Again. First place. But they didn't let us go even to the local championship. They didn't let us go further. We felt really hurt by this too. After this we didn't go to any competition. Our teachers told us, even the headmaster, to go on and compete, there is no problem, at least you can show what you know, but we didn't go any more. Then Fatima got to married. I was really hurt by that.

How old were you then?

I am turning 17 soon, so Fatima is turning 18, she was 16 at the time. One day she came to school and... If someone is getting married... What do you call this? (*points at her eyebrows*)

Eyebrows.

Yes, she gets her eyebrows done, cleaning and like that. You know, we have this if someone gets married. In Iran, if you get married you can't go to school any more. It's forbidden. Because they would tell everything to other girls and they would get married too. That's why. This is the rule. They are really strict about this. And Fatima came to school like this. When they saw her, they got really angry, asking why did you come to school, how did you get married Fatima, you are too young, things like that... Fatima said, no, I swear I didn't get married, I just went to a wedding and I went to a beautician. I believed her too. I was her best friend, I believed her like everyone else. Even her mum came to school, saying that Fatima is telling the truth. Imagine that! And when I left, when we flee to Europe, when I was in the camp in Debrecen, one day I called Fatima, if she is doing al right, if she is still at school or not, how is the third girl, Sara doing... She said, Sara is still at school but I am not any more. But why?! She said she got married.

And did it turn out that she got married back then?

Yes, I was crying so hard, imagine! I felt really sick that day. If someone... If my dad died, I don't cry that much... Because with Fatima and Sara were my best times, my best period.

Why was it such sad news?

Well, because, we three were always together, even when we didn't get along with Sara, we were always missing each other at home. I was really hurt when Fatima said that she got married, because someone who gets married always will forget her friends... And I was also hurt because she didn't told me. We were best friends... Poor Sara, I just heard that she got married too. Imagine, Sara was competing in mathematics, she was the best in maths and physics, she always had the best grades. And she was competing on the national level, in the whole country, in Iran, imagine, she won third place. It's not nothing. It's a lot! On her own study level, in seventh grade, she won third place among all Iranian seventh graders. Isn't that something! And imagine, she couldn't go any further because she was Afghan. It's really bad. Currently,

Afghans have to buy their own books, they have to pay lots of money for school and even the uniforms have to be paid for... And in kindergarten, I wouldn't even say, in kindergarten you have to pay so much, so almost all the Afghan kids don't go to kindergarten because of that, because you have to pay a lot for it, a lot.

Did you also have to?

Yes, we also had to, but my dad was paying. But Iranians don't have to pay for any of that. Neither for clothes, books, nor for school. But still, it was a really good period.

When did you leave?

At the end of 2014. It was December, I guess...

Do you remember what happened before? Did your parents tell you that you were going to leave?

We were talking about this a lot, for two or three months. My dad sat us down. He said, come over here, when we went there he said, sit down here, I have to tell you something. We asked, what? I was really nervous that I did something wrong in school again, and that's the reason why my dad wants to talk to me. I was really nervous. And then Dad started to talk about our future. What would you like to be, first of all? I said, I'm not sure yet, maybe a doctor, maybe an architect, I said things like that. And Amir² also said he doesn't know, Zeinab³ was really small at the time. He said, do you want to study or not, this is the most important. Well, we were really smart. Well, we still are.... And we said, of course, why not? And he said, very well, there is an opportunity. You study in Iran, you go to university, I pay for everything, I would give my life too, just so you can study, but you have to know, if you want to go to university, you can only study a trade. Because in Iran, university students can only study a profession. Well, there are some people who will get 200 out of 200 points and they can study architecture for example, but they can't work, they not let them work. They have to go back to Afghanistan. So they are studying, studying a lot, paying a lot, but they can't work here. And my father said, this is how it is, what do you want? There is another possibility, we could go to Europe and you can study there. At first, I was really hurt by this, a lot. Why my dad saying this?! I didn't want to, I really didn't want to come to Europe at all. Because I had Sara and Fatima and we were really good at school, and I didn't want to leave school and things like that. I had all my family there: grandma, grandpa... I said, no, it's good here, we are going to study here. My dad said, OK. Amir said no, I want to go to Europe. Zeinab was too little. My mum said, I don't know, you have to decide, we are done, we have studied, we have done everything, for us, only your future

² Yasmin's brother

³ Yasmin's sister

is important. And then... I... They just looked at me.... When we were to leave, I said no again. I think so it was because of my school. It was really good. But every time they've hurt me because I was Afghan, I couldn't do anything. If I went to university, I couldn't have done anything. Because I would have to study two years in Afghanistan, that's how university works. It's like, you start university and study for a year, go back for two years to Afghanistan, study there, and then come back to Iran to do your final exams.

Afghanistan has been a battleground ever since the early 1970s. Civilians were forced to flee the country first by the internal power struggles, and later by the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan. The Soviets' war in Afghanistan lasted 10 years and its estimated civilian death toll is between 600 thousand and 2 million. After their withdrawal, chaos and internal fighting took over that led to the Taliban gaining power. The Taliban occupied most of the country, introducing strict rules that restricted personal freedoms and basic human rights. Collaborating with the al-Qaeda terrorist group, they practically terrorised the population. Independent press, celebrations, music were banned, women were banned from cycling, motorbiking, entering sports clubs or museums, laughing loudly, wearing jewellery; traditional Muslim wear for men and women and beards for men were made mandatory. Women were banned from school, from university, and they couldn't earn money. Corporal punishment, mutilation, and public executions were introduced. In practice, everyone had to constantly fear for their own and their family's lives.

After the terrorist attack on 11 September 2001, the USA launched a war in Afghanistan. Fights are still ongoing. "In Afghanistan, security conditions are generally poor. In 2017, more than 69 thousand people were injured in fights against the Taliban. In response to the growth of the extremist religious movement, NATO forces increased the intensity of air strikes, often causing civilian deaths. The UN – that estimates an average of 80 incidents a day in the country – has changed Afghanistan's status from "post-conflict country" to "country at war"." (source: <https://konzuliszolgalat.kormany.hu/azsia>) **Hiba! A hiperhivatkozás érvénytelen.**

From the 70s until today more than 6 million people have left the country, Afghan refugees account for almost half of the world's entire refugee population. (source: <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/publications/refugeemag/3b680fbfc/refugees-magazine-issue-108-afghanistan-unending-crisis-biggest-caseload.html>)

According to the UNCHR, almost 1 million Afghan refugees live in Iran, but considering the deficiency of the asylum registers, they estimate their number may be as much as 3 million.

According to reports, the situation of Afghan refugees is difficult in Iran: they are considered second class citizens, they can't own any property and have restricted access to education (until 2015, refugee children had no access to education at all in Iran), the attainment and revision of official documents is difficult and expensive, but without documentation, they can receive constant penalties, or get deported. The Iranian government prevents the integration of Afghani refugees in multiple ways, for example, children born to 'mixed' (Afghan-Iranian) marriages can't gain Iranian citizenship. Iran only provides limited access to the labour market to Afghan refugees, job opportunities are limited to the worst paid, lower-class manual labour jobs. The majority work illegally, for only a fraction of the average salary. (source: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/20/iran-afghan-refugees-and-migrants-face-abuse> <http://www.refworld.org/docid/549abc4c.html>)

And have you ever been to Afghanistan?

Yes, I have been to Afghanistan like tourists. When I talked to Fatima and Sara, they told me, Yasmin, you are so stupid, leave, you won't become anything here. I said, why you saying this, I won't leave because of you. They said I shouldn't do it for them, they are not my future. I said, you are right. I told my dad, it's OK, yes, I'm OK with it, let's go to Europe, but it wasn't by heart, it was just a saying. My dad showed us how the journey will be. How difficult it's going to be because it's not, how to say... it's going to be irregular. The journey will be really hard. I was really sad, I was saying that I don't care, OK, we are going anyways. At last we left, the journey was really hard, but having our parents on our side made it easier.

What was difficult in your journey?

Well, imagine walking for 15 days, spending your nights at places you couldn't even imagine, and surrounded by these dangerous people. Everyone was protecting themselves... It was so hard climbing the mountains and getting down, it was really hard.

Did you ever regret agreeing to leave during the journey?

Well, there are still times when I regret it. Like, why did I come to Europe, we had a much better life in Iran... There are times likes this. But there are also times when I think that I would never go back to Iran, never!

When you left, what was your destination?

Germany. In Turkey someone took 18 thousand Forints from us. No, 18 thousand Euros! We gave him the money, asking him to take us to Germany. He said, all right, it's going to be an easy journey and the like. We took a ship to Greece, but when we called him, he asked: 'why are you calling me?' 'I don't even know you.' We couldn't go back, not even one country, because the route was very difficult, very dangerous by ship. We couldn't chat, we didn't know anything, we didn't know anyone... After that, my dad still had money on him and we paid another man, but this from one country to another. We paid a man to take us to Macedonia, there we paid someone else too. Afterwards, we came to Hungary and paid another 2000 Euros to someone to take us to Germany. That person always did like not today, tomorrow. Not tomorrow, after tomorrow. And so on. Until we had the interview the socials are talking.

Was that in Debrecen?

Yes, we were in that camp there. And that man was in the same camp. One night, he said, OK, we have to leave now, it's time. We left, but there was only one cab for the five of us. And there is this rule, that only four passengers can sit in one cab. That man told me that I have to tell my father that one of us has to stay here. My dad said that we will never do anything like this. He said, leave your little brother, we will take him to you, or you should stay and your family leave, she told this to my father, or your wife can stay, or your daughter, or the little boy. I don't know, someone has to... My father said, I would never do this in my life. We all go together or no one does. My mum said the same. So we didn't go. The man said that he had already paid for the

cab, so we have to give him money again. And this again, was really bad. So we went back, and the day after tomorrow someone, one of the socials said that you have an interview⁴. You know her for sure. She said it's interview time, my mum and dad left and stayed there for almost two hours. They came back and she said they will tell you after one month if the first interview was positive or negative. We were trying to go until then, but after the interview my parents said that we won't go any further. Even if we go further, they will send us back. We were waiting, they said the first interview was positive. The second interview was in five days. They went there again, spent more than 5 hours there. They didn't ask my mum much, they were asking a lot of questions from my dad. And after a month, after almost two months, they said the second one is positive. In three months we got all our papers. In Debrecen they told us that it's really good that we stayed, why would you even go to Germany, such things. I then wanted to go to Germany, I really wanted to. Everyone were saying to me why do you want to go to Germany? I was the only one in our whole family who wanted to go to Germany, because I heard really good things: they give a lot of money, lots of good studying, everyone goes there, there are a lot of Afghans there... Well, I was young, I didn't understand much... And I always said to my father, you took us from Iran to here, and you told us that we are going to Germany and what country is this? Hungary. It's not good, look how this camp looks, I said to my father. I was hurting his feelings. And then there was a man, he always came to us saying, Yasmin, don't do this, this is a really good country, they gave you the papers really fast, it's unlike anywhere else. Even if you go to Germany, imagine, you would have to wait two or even three years. I said, this man is lying, he must had gone to Germany and they sent him back, that's why he's doing these things, so he isn't alone here. Imagine! It was really funny. My dad said, OK Yasmin, we'll send you to Germany, you have family there – because my dad has a bit family there. Go to them, go to a camp, you'll get German papers. I said OK, I'll go. My dad was only joking. (*laughs*) I was a really brave girl, it's always like that, I am really brave when it came to going somewhere alone and the like. It's good because my parents let me. I said, OK I'm going. A day after I said, Dad, am I going or what? He said no, I was just joking with you. I was so hurt! (*laughs*) But that boy came to talk to me, and I asked why are you always coming to us? And why you always say these things to my dad, so he doesn't go to Germany? He was so surprised, and he said Yasmin I am not coming to hurt you, I want to help you and your family. In the camp in Debrecen our family was the only one, there was no other family at the time. Mostly these single boys, we were the only family. And he said, look at your future, how good it's going to be here. It might be a poor country, they might gave the papers really quickly, but they don't believe it, and the families don't stay here. But look, in three years, this country won't give anyone papers so quickly. And

⁴ Here the interviewee is detailing the personal interview in the asylum procedure. “The objective of the asylum procedure is to establish whether the asylum-seeker is eligible for refugee status or subsidiary protection, and whether the principle of non-refoulement applies ... The asylum procedure will be carried out in 60 days, covering the asylum-seeker's interpreter-assisted personal interview as well. During the interview, the applicant is asked to provide details about the reasons for fleeing, the circumstances of reaching Hungary, and to present any evidence that may be available to support the application, including personal identification documents.” Source: Immigration and Asylum Office: http://www.bmbah.hu/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=421&Itemid=392&lang=hu#

he also said, you can go back to your family in Iran really fast, don't you want to visit them. And they I realised you are right, why would I go to Germany, this is a European country too. And poor him, he got a negative and he had to leave. They sent him back... He had to go to somewhere, and he went to Germany. On the last day he told me that I'll understand what he told me. And he was right. In Hungary, no one gets their papers so quickly now. We had everything after six months and they told us to leave, go to Budapest or anywhere else, just leave the camp. And then social workers came, showing us a little apartment, it's Baptist, and it's going to be great for you there. We went there and I was missing the camp a lot. Because I fell in love in the camp. *(laughs)* With this boy, whom could never marry me.

During the implementation of the project the Hungarian regulations and practices regarding asylum procedures and assistance changed completely. Earlier, asylum seekers and those under international protection could spend six months at so-called reception centers, where they were provided with shelter, food, health care services and social administration. Reception centers used to be open, so under the time spent there inhabitants could get informed of possibilities in Hungary, get in touch with support organizations or friends and relatives already living here; a slow integration process could begin, and their decision about staying in the country could be better founded. Now, with the exception of asylum seekers under 14 years of age, the designated accommodation during the asylum process is the transit zone. Inhabitants do receive shelter, food, health care services and social administration here too, but the zone is closed, asylum seekers can only leave it in the direction of the other side of the border. In this situation, they have limited access to information and therefore their decision about staying is less well-founded. Those who receive asylum can only stay at the reception center for 30 days, which is a very short time. Even some of their documents may not be ready in this time, and beyond obtaining those there is virtually no opportunity for any support to help integration.

Was he there alone?

There was his mother too. First he asked me, should he stay or not. I told him, it's your life, if you stay and it's not good for you, you'll say 'I stayed for you'. I told him it's your life, if you go forward, don't think that I said to you to go forward. I was very in love, he was my first love, I was 14.

Why was it impossible to marry him?

Will this be in the interview?

If you want it be, it will be, if you don't, it won't⁵

I'll tell you but I may not want it. Because among the Afghans there are many kinds of people. There are Hazara people, Uzbek people, Seid people, we are Seid, there are Kabul people, Herat people... And Seid people mustn't marry Hazara. Like Kabul people mustn't marry a Shiite. Shiite and Sunnite people mustn't marry. Now they do, they don't keep this, but in fact they mustn't. There are many problems: should their child be Shiite or Sunnite? And the Hazara too, because long ago the grandfathers had a big-big war and Hazara people killed Seid people, and

⁵ Later she allowed this part to be included in the interview.

Seid people don't want to marry Hazara people. And... he loves me very much too, I knew. It was very good times, there was red house,⁶ I always went to red house for him, and green house⁷ where we played foosball. And then one day I came, when we wanted to look at that flat at the Baptists, I had fight with him. He said I'll tell your mum and dad that I love you. I said don't say anything, because they don't want, my parents understand, but my grandparents don't understand these things, that people are all the same and the like. And I told him don't tell because then I can't meet you, I can't speak to you, because then my mum and dad would watch me very much. And then he said you really don't understand me, why you doing this? I thought about it, and then my dad said let's go to Budapest together the two of us to see that flat. Then I could speak some Hungarian already. And we came to Budapest, and then his mum called me and said, Amir is here and thank you that you sended him... (*pause*) The boy went to Germany. Just on the day when he didn't see me, when I was in Budapest. That was my baddest day. I went back into camp, but then I didn't like camp anymore. I rather wanted to come away earlier. But not before, before when they said we must go away I cried. Then I didn't care about camp anymore. Only red house was good.

(...)₈

Then I decided I won't fall in love until I'm older. And that's how it was really. I forgot the boy. Then somebody else falled in love with me too, from Iran. So they wanted to enroll me... or how do you say it... engage me.

From Iran?

Yes. And my parents know about it. And his parents, and almost everybody... Then they decided that after five years, when I finish high school and want to go to university, they will make this ring, so it's not marriage, just ringing and stuff.

Engagement?

Yes. For two years, and after two years we can marry.

Is it you who will make this decision?

I decide when it will be if it will be, I decide if it will be or not... I decided yes. Mum asked me, what do you want, what is your future? What I see is, I can only marry in my family. Because it must be a Muslim, and a Shiite, and a Seid, these are the four rules. And I saw that he is the most clever in my family. Who studies a lot, he is like me. And I told him, if we marry, I will still continue training. Because a Muslim girl can't even hold a boy's hand, imagine! And in my sport they touch you, your feet, your hands, everywhere. And I told him, this is my training. You keep my rules, I keep your rules, but this rule must be exception. He said OK. I told him I want to

⁶ A community center at the Debrecen reception center, operated by the Immigration and Asylum Office.

⁷ The community room of Menedék Association.

⁸ At the interviewee's request, some parts are omitted from the interview.

study further, he said he wants to study too. I told him, for five years I'll only talk to you, and after five years I will decide yes or no. And he said OK, until then we'll get to know each other.

Did you know him before?

Yes, because he's in the family, and we saw each other back in Iran.

Where did you learn Hungarian?

I learnt in the camp. I spoke very good English, and there was a red house, and everybody under 18 must go there for 9 AM, until I started school. To learn Hungarian language. There was such good community there that you wanted to go there yourself. There was a girl, she was very kind, she taught us Hungarian language. I started learn the alphabet, learn words. It was funny to me that there were words in Hungarian that mean something ugly or funny to us, so you wanted to learn yourself. Like "szia" (*hi*) means "black" to us. And "kösz" and "köszönöm" (*thank you*) are really bad, they mean very bad things. You can't imagine. (*laughs*) And there were sounds like "ö" and "ó" and the like, we couldn't say them, it was very funny, we started say them at home too. (*laughs*) The community was so good. We always made jokes, and we learnt something from those jokes. Those in that community, we all learned. My mum knows alphabet and everything she knows from there. And my dad too. And then after a month, after the second positive, we went to school in Debrecen. We must to. Then I learned at school. I had teachers and a separate Hungarian for Foreigners class, we learned there. Then we went to normal class. I learned Hungarian in six months, to the level that I could speak with people.

At the beginning when you had Maths, History, Hungarian classes?

I didn't understand anything. I only understood Maths, it was very good for me, because there were not so many words. But Maths was difficult too, because for you multiplication and division and plus and minus... You count totally differently than us. With multiplication you write the numbers next to each other, we write them under each other. With division you use these two dots, we have something like half a square. I didn't know what they wanted to do, it was very hard for me to multiply next to each other, I always mixed up which way you start from. And I always wrote for myself on a separate paper how I multiply. And the numbers! We have Persian numbers, you have English numbers. And when you write, I knew because I had learned English, that you write backwards. Though it's really us who write backwards. (*laughs*)

Depends on the perspective.

And Santa Claus! No... yes, Santa Claus, the man in that red suit. Santa Claus was the most funny. Imagine, one evening they made a Christmas tree. I didn't understand, before I was in the camp, what is a Christmas tree! They put lights on a tree and then they say it's a Christmas tree?! I got up morning, I went to red house, it was open from 9. Always when I got up, I quickly cleaned up and had breakfast, then I waited at red house, I was there at the door, I wanted to go in first. Then I went in, I saw a tree with lights, they said it was a Christmas tree. This was so funny, I laughed so much! And then I saw Santa Claus. I heard about Santa Claus in Iran, that there will be someone who bring presents and all, but I didn't believe. And when I saw... one of the staff became Mr. Santa! And I said, my god, someone we know they make Santa Claus?! And they give candies and the like?! That was very funny, that day in December. A tree

and Mr. Santa, and there were two girls, I don't know what they're called...

Krampus? ⁹. They had horns like the devil?

Yes, yes! Oh my god, who are these, what they do?! This was my Christmas day. And I got presents at school. And where I learned the most from was the Kiliki film. I learned Hungarian from the Kiliki book. Because we always went to IT room, teacher put in a CD, we watched the Kiliki movies. We understood almost nothing from it at the beginning, but in the end she always explained what it was. What we didn't know, she told me in English. We went to IT class, because after the Kiliki film, if you didn't speak and was ready fast, you could play, you could use the computers. And that was very good. It was very good in Debrecen. But in the end, when that boy, Amir, left, it was very bad time, but still it was good to play foosball and do handicraft at the green house. I will never forget the camp in Debrecen.

When you came to Hungary, did you know anything about Hungarians?

Nothing! Imagine! Oh yes – when I was in Iran, there were these phones, Nokia phones, and when you bought, it was Hungarian language written on it, and Hungary. I knew they came from Hungary. But I didn't know where was Hungary: Europe, Africa, Asia, where? I didn't know nothing.

And about Europe? Did you know anything about, for example, religion?

I knew that nobody would hurt me... That there are countries where people very hurt Muslim people, and there are countries where nobody cares about the others, how they dress...

What did you think about Hungarians?

When we were in camp, everyone said that Hungary is very poor country. When they said it, I thought, maybe Hungarian people are very poor, but in Debrecen there were no very poor people. There was a university, Debrecen University, I don't know exactly the name. And there were many Iranian people there. First I didn't know Debrecen, then when we got the second positive, we started going there. First we only went shopping to TESCO, and when we wanted to buy clothes and the like. But then we went into the town and saw the town and saw the university, that was very good, and we met many Iranian people. That's when I heard that in Hungary you can become very good dentist and very famous person. Many Iranian people come to Hungary to study, and that was weird to know, when before I didn't know anything about Hungary, that here it's very good, many Iranian people pay a lot for it, because here is good studying and very good university.

And did you know what kind of religion Hungarian people have?

Not about that, I didn't even search it. Oh yes, there was a girl, she told me that are many religions here. Some have no god at all, they're free, they don't want to be religious. She said there are many kinds of Christian, Roman Catholic and the like. And she said there are more who are free, who have no religion and the like. And some are religious but don't keep it. They

⁹ A horned, antropomorphic creature, in Hungarian folk mythology accompanies Santa Claus. (translator's note)

only keep the Easter. Girls get sprinkled, boys are given eggs,¹⁰ and the like. When they told this, I said this would be good, exciting. My first sprinkling, when I was sprinkled, was when I went to training with my coach, it was a children's camp, but it was very good, and I was the third responsible. And then we made fire, my two coaches left, I didn't know why, because we were always together, and this was interesting. They left and told me, Yasmin, look after the kids! They said, the boys sit down here, the girls on the other side, poor things, they should sit near the fire too. It was interesting, why the coach was suddenly so kind... And they left, and when they came back, they sitted down quickly, very quickly, and I was thinking, they are doing something... I heard sounds like glasses, but I didn't pay attention. (*laughs*) My coach said, let's talk about Easter. Like you have Ramadan, we have Easter. We talked about religion that day. Once my coach said, now boys, one-two-three! And everyone sprinkled us. There were three of us girls, and we were all wet. If someone asks me what is sprinkling, what is Easter, I tell them all. (*laughs*) But it was very good. This was the first sprinkling.

When you moved from Debrecen to Budapest, what was school like here? Was it different than in Debrecen?

Well yes. Here it was much harder, and they were very bad. First I missed Debrecen very much, I didn't want to study... First I didn't go to school for a month, because we came to Budapest in middle of school year. Otherwise I got papers, the teacher from Debrecen said I should go to sixth grade at least. When we came here, I went to school in 13th district. And they didn't let me go sixth grade, they said, you must learn in fourth grade. My brother had to go to third grade. Well, that was very weird with my brother. Amir, who is a 9-year-old boy, to go third grade, and a girl who is 14 go fourth grade? I was in a class where there were very young kids, I was oldest, I knew everything, I did all tasks in a minute. I told the teacher, if now I study fourth grade, when will I graduate, when will I go to university? They said no, or you decide to study in summer and do a test about it. I said we want to go back to Iran in summer, I won't study in summer and during school year too. That was not the only problem. She said, you must know all History, Literature was very difficult for me, I didn't learn anything from 5th grade what Hungarians learn. Maybe it would have been very good with Maths, and Biology and the like... But we didn't have those. I said OK, I rather won't learn. And we went back to Iran, I brought my seventh grade report. We had it translated into Hungarian and showed them, because they didn't believe that I had done seven years. They said OK, now you can go to 8th grade or 7th grade again to learn, I said I didn't want to go. We went to look for another school (*with the help of a social worker*). We found a bilingual school. First they didn't say nothing either, they said OK, two weeks trial period, you go to 8th grade, but it'll be a bit difficult for you, because they have entrance exams now. Then I decided myself that I go to 7th grade again, because it may be better. Because in 7th grade we had no Physics, we had Biology, Physics and Chemistry all in one book. But then I realized it's the same thing, only different books. In Iran we learned it together. But I studied and I did very well. And then I learned there until 8th grade, then I did central entrance

¹⁰ In Hungarian folk tradition, on Easter Monday boys sprinkle girls with water (or, more recently, eau de cologne) and get painted Easter eggs in return. (translator's note)

exam¹¹, and I went to high school.

Now how do you feel at high school?

There were times when not good, but now very good. Now I like it a lot.

What is difficult at high school? You have been going there since September, what has been difficult for you?

There are many Hungarian words... Like History is very hard to learn.

Can you say an example? Like the last thing you learnt from History?

I don't know, I don't remember. It's hard to understand all, because the kids go ahead, they won't wait for me, like I don't understand a word and teacher explains it to me, they go ahead. Because in the class it's only me who don't understand these. There are problems that I don't understand, or when I take notes, and the like... But there are other classes, like Maths, where I can feel myself very good. Because the teacher comes to me specially and asks, you understand or not? And she goes to everyone, she's very good teacher. Because in word problems there're many Hungarian letters and words too, but the teacher comes to me and asks, do you understand or not, or explains or gives the formula...

Talking about other things than school, how would you say your situation is now in Hungary?

After school my training is very important to me, I love it very much. There I feel like real. Like that's the real Yasmin. Really. There the community is such that I feel there I am real. My real feelings come out. I can talk there, I can give my own ideas, I can do what I want. And my masters, one of my masters was soldier in Afghanistan for five years. And what I don't know, I tell him in Afghan. He doesn't understand it so much, but it's still very good. Like when he tells me something and I don't pay attention, and he says: "Yasmin, bale?" He starts saying in Persian, in Afghan. And my other coach, the younger one, whom I met first, Peti, he's so cool. He always pays attention to us, not only me but everyone. And he always respects everyone. For example, I went to training somewhere else, and when I went in, they looked at me like they'd never seen a Muslim person before. When I started training in scarf, they always asked me, Yasmin, why the scarf, aren't you hot? But here everyone said: it's very good you keep your religion in Europe too. And I liked this very much. And the other thing, when my scarf comes off, when there are these fights, they always wait for me to do my scarf. Always! And they know I can't wear a short T-shirt. We have our own Kempo T-shirts, and they ordered so I have long-sleeved ones. My oldest master, who has black dan, he's very good, and the one I train with is also very good. The kids change all the time, it's not always the same people. But I'm the youngest at the training, and the only girl. There are, but they're mostly women. Kempo is more a boy sport. But they pay attention, and everyone is very respectful. When I don't understand something in Hungarian, they say it in English. What I don't understand in English, they start to explain to me. Like when I went to training, I didn't know right and left. I knew right and left

¹¹ In Hungary elementary school is until 8th grade, then students take a central entrance exam to determine what kind of high school they will go to. (translator's note)

in Persian, so my third coach, the one who was soldier in Afghanistan, told me which is left and which is right, he said it in Persian. And he sometimes asks me Afghan words.

Wasn't it strange for you to fight against boys a lot of times?

Well yeah, we fight, but it was nothing strange. I think because I felt so good. Because us Muslim people can't even hold hands with a boy. In Iran girls go to separate school and boys go to separate school too. Not in Afghanistan, only in Iran. And then I felt so good. My parents are not so strict about this. My father not at all. He just says, take care, that's all. But maybe if they were different parents it's 100% sure they wouldn't let me train because they know these rules. I felt so good there and my parents saw how good I felt there and they let me go. I don't touch him because I'm in love with him or something, but because I'm training.

Can you explain what you like about this?

Well, first I wanted to do karate. In Iran I went to such training two or three times, and I had a volunteer helper, and I asked her, can you find me karate training nearby? She went to look, and after two days she told me, there's no karate training near where you are, but there's Kempo. It may be strange because it's more tough, and harder than karate, because there's wrestling, leg kicking, head kicking, many kinds of kicking and hitting techniques, stand-up fighting, ground fighting, forms with weapon and normal forms. And you should know Japanese too. But we learn there, they teach us. When you take tests, you must know what's in the exam material, many words, you must know all in Japanese. Very good. And you must compete all the time. If you don't compete, you can't take a high belt test. And she said, if you want, go once and try it, see what it's like. Once I went with Zeinab, my little sister. First I went to the little kids because of Zeinab, until she gets to intermediate level or the like, because Zeinab is much more shy than me. And she can't get into a community so fast. Then we went in and started with stand-up fighting, boxing and the like. I saw I was the best, of course I was also the oldest. And I really liked that day. I thought, if this is stand-up fighting, what is form and form with weapon? Because I'm very much an action girl, a girl like I've always wanted to fight. Not really, but when I watch films, I don't watch love stories. Horror movies and action and fantasy... And I really liked it. Zeinab liked it too, because I was there with her. But really Zeinab still likes it. Now Amir is going to do kempo too. I said it's much better than karate. In karate it's more like forms. They work in a really relaxed way, kinda. Then when I was doing kempo with Zeinab for half a year, and I saw that Zeinab was really good, everyone knew each other, then after summer camp I went to the adult group. That's when I met this coach that I said that he was in Afghanistan for five years. I liked it from the very beginning. We got to know everybody. When I took the test for the yellow belt, I already liked more to be with the adults, and it was more exciting and more hard than with the kids. There were not so many forms, it was more fighting, wrestling, ground fighting, stand-up fighting... And then I started competing, and then I liked it very-very much. When I took the test for the orange belt, I liked that very much. Now in March I will take the test for the green belt, which is central test, which means everyone from Hungary will come... After green belt it's high belts, and if you want high belt, you take central test, that'll be very-very hard. I've seen videos, they break stones, there'll be breaking techniques and head-breaking techniques. Now I can work a little with the knife and the stick, this is a form with weapons. I became European Champion in form and in stand-up fighting.

I'm afraid that when I marry, my husband won't let me continue my trainings. I'm very afraid of this.

What would you do if he told you you can't?

When I marry, I'll ask for a paper, that I'll have a rule that I want to train. And he'll sign it. The day he says I won't let you go to training, I'll show this. If not, I'll tell my parents and his parents, before I'll talk about the training... And if not, I'll do something... divorce, or I don't know... But it's not so bad, if I talk to him, first I'll try to go to training a bit less often, and when it'll be better, I'll go to trainings like before.

You said that when doing kempo you feel more like the real Yasmin. If you think it over who you are, what are the most important things that come to mind?

That I want to freely... I want to talk a lot... At school I'm very quiet. I want to have many friends, and very bff¹²... So that it's not just Kamelah and Fatima, my Afghan friends, but I want European and Hungarian friends too. Because there (*at kempo*) it's only boys, I have no girl friends, but they're so cool that I feel the same like with Fatima and Kamelah... But at school I don't talk, because there's nobody who... There (*at kempo*) nobody knows each other... We're not with each other until the end of the day, only two hours, and we do those two hours so well that the community and the training is so good that when you go home, you miss them. Everybody, not just me. I don't know, I feel this. And I always joke at trainings too, and I get punished a lot, imagine... Really. I must always, what I hate, to do the ropes. And my masters know. If I do something, they say, Yasmin, there's the rope... And I also very hate the four count push up: Yasmin, four count push up! (*laughs*) Studying is important there, for example one of my masters is mechanical engineer and he always says, besides training also think of studying. I always got very good advice from him. My masters don't only think about that... Like when I have exams, I must study at school, they understand. They say a month before, Yasmin, now you're taking exams. (*thinks*) So I want to joke about, I said that... I want to be good with everyone... I want to understand everyone. In fact, at school the kids really want to help, but I don't want it like everyone helps because I don't understand something, that's very bad feeling. Like you're a cripple... So like you only have one leg, and I'll be very kind to you because you're missing a leg: poor thing, she's missing a leg, can't do anything, so I'll go with you... No, I don't want this. But I want it because of myself. You understand... And so I never tell the form teacher that I have no friends, because it's 100% she'd tell the kids, be friends with Yasmin, because poor thing has no friends... (*laughs*)

If we don't think of kempo or school, and you'd have to tell someone in short who you are, what would you say? Not what you do but who you are.

I'm an Afghan girl, who... give me an example what to say.

I don't want to give an example.

I want to be very good, and my future is very hard, let's say... I'm just afraid of life. Because life

¹² Best friends forever. Translator's note: Yasmin said 'bff' in English, but it's common among Hungarian teenagers to use 'bff'

is so hard. In Europe for example, it's very hard to be Muslim... Not always... No, this is not the problem... how can I say... Say an example! Who are you?

I won't, what you're saying is really good. (we laugh) Now this is about you! I know it's not an easy question.

Very much not easy. Like I always want to be good, just for my family, my dad and my mum. I could've gone with that boy, imagine that. I could've left my parents, I could've done it. I still could. This is a European free country. Nobody can hurt me, my mum and dad can't hurt me, because I can tell. This is Europe, not Asia or Afghanistan. But I do, I want to study very much, because my parents put their whole life for me. To bring us here, it was really very difficult, and very much money. They could've left this money in Iran in the bank and get more money every month. You know, in Iran there's rule, if you leave very much money there, you get money from that bank, more money. They could've done this. And they could've been... a very rich family for themselves. They only did it so we have something for our future. And so I want to do something so nobody could hurt my parents ever. I don't say I want to be very famous. I don't want to be a rich person, to forget everyone or everything. I don't want to be so rich, or so poor. And to have something about my future, so I can help. My parents. And after my parents someone else too. I want to study very much. But it's a bit more difficult than in Iran. Because there it was in my native language, and here not in my native language, and it's harder to understand. I can't be the same girl as in Iran, make friends with everyone, because we're different people. I'm Afghan, they're Hungarian, I'm Muslim, they're Christian or free religion. I can't joke, because here, whenever I joke, they won't take it as a joke and it'll hurt them. They'll think I do it to hurt them. The people can't trust me so much, because they've heard very bad things about Muslim people and terrorists. Well, I believe that... But still it's much better to live here than elsewhere.

Do others ask you about what it was like in Iran, or what it's like to be Muslim?

Yes, yes, and now they're making (a play) about me at the theater group, because at school every term they make big play, which the whole school will watch. I'm part of it, I go to theater group, and this year they decided to make it about my life.

Tell me when it's on, I'd like to see it.

OK. I don't think it'll be exactly the same, but they make it about me. A bit of my life, about the escape. When they said they'll do it, everyone ask me, how did you come, why did you come, and the like. And we had Literature class and we had tasks and we had to make a presentation and present it. It was called: "Where do I come from?" That was easiest for me, so I choosed it. I presented it to class, they also asked a lot, and also those who weren't there, they told each other, and it was very interesting for them too. Now I think the whole class knows who I am, where do I come from and what is my religion.

What did they ask? What was interesting for you? Were there any questions you didn't expect?

No, there weren't any... For them it was interesting where I came from, why I've come, how the journey was, how the people are, how they are dressed, things like that. What city I came from, what that city was like...

Do you ever get asked about religion? About why you are wearing a headscarf?

Well, I suppose they know... I don't get many questions about that. I got questions when I was doing my presentation... But they learnt about religions in History class.

Is it ever addressed elsewhere? By foreigners, or during Kempo trainings?

Not during Kempo, because they know. Well, at the first school in Budapest, they kept asking why I was wearing this headscarf. I suppose they knew nothing about it, and they weren't taught by their teachers. And yes, when I was in the bus, a passenger came to me and asked very nicely: why you are wearing this headscarf? I said because there are several religions in the world, and my religion is Muslim. And the passenger said that thank you very much and that's it. People used to ask about it in the bus. But not, like, offensive, thank God, nobody has ever hurt me yet, they were really nice, came asked questions and all that...

Are they asking these questions in Hungarian?

No, in Hungarian, always in Hungarian... sometimes also in English, some also asked in English, but not on the street, it was some kind of event... They asked in English and I answered in English that I wear it because I am Muslim, Muslims wear a headscarf so that men can't see their hair.

Has anyone in your family ever had any inconveniences in this regard?

Well yes, one of my friends, Azizah, she won't wear a headscarf because they made fun of her so badly. Neither to school, nor on the street. Kamelah also got teased, I don't know why, maybe they said something wrong... Once I was walking with Kamelah, and someone called 'Hello, Gran!', on the street, in front of my school... I said, "Hello Gramps", I said that really kindly, and got no response for that. But Kamelah mocked him back, she said go to hell, or something like that. And he said go to... it was something with refugee, go back to your country or something like that. He said it to her. I actually think, really, if someone talks nicely to me, I should also answer nicely... Had she kept quiet, they would have gone away, I think. Thank God nobody answered anything yet. But I've also heard better things, for example someone said that it's a good thing that you still respect your religion, even in this country.

And how do you see your future?

I see I'm going to high school, graduate, then go to university. I've done a test to decide what suits me best... The advice was, the advice of the machine was... it should be trade. Trade is not like buying and selling in a shop, not that you can learn in vocational school, not like that. Trade is like, as I'd said, I'd like to travel a lot to foreign countries, learn a lot of languages, I like Maths, also Physics, but Maths more. And the result was trade, because in trade I can for example a turbo for a car, like a Benz turbo... For example, first I should study Mechanical Engineering, and then sell it in another country, like a salesman, but in a field where I'm really an expert, both engineering and trade. But I don't know yet, everything is changing all the time, lately I've been thinking about this.

It is often heard that in Asia, especially in Muslim countries, it is quite a complicated business for girls to study. What do you think about this?

Yes, for instance in Afghanistan, girls can't study, or they kill you. That's what I heard too... but in Iran... Before me, before I was born, yes, then it had been really difficult, for my mum and for everyone. They didn't let her, they married instantly, and when a girl is married, she can't go to school. She gets a child shortly after and all that, that's why they say it's difficult. If I'd lived there then, or if I was in Iran, I would also have married. Really. I would already have a husband and after two years or one year also a child. Fatima, my best friend, maybe she already has a child. I haven't talked to her for more than a year. I mean it. That's why they say it's difficult, because girls marry instantly.

What do you think about this?

Well... it's not always good. it's actually not really good. Those who really want to study, for them study is good. But there are ages that girls can't choose if they want to marry or to study. Because when they see there is no future for Afghan girls in Iran, they ask why study, I'd rather marry. If I study a lot and can't work or anything... they rather choose to marry, it's for the better for them. That's how Fatima was thinking too. Her family is a very religious family. Her dad is like what a priest is for Christians, you know. I'm sure he wouldn't have chosen Europe, but rather marry his daughter to someone. I know Fatima has chosen marriage because she knew she won't become anything. If you want to study, if you study a lot, you have to pay really a lot of money. Her parents could have payed, but she couldn't have become anything.

So was it her decision? Or was it her parents'?

Well, both. A girl, if she can't become anything, rather marries, maybe it's better with a husband. Her parents said they couldn't come to Europe or anywhere their child could learn. They both thought marriage was better.

How does this work usually: if someone, say, a girl thinks she would choose marriage, then what happens? First she decides to marry, and then the family looks for a suitable husband?

No, first the girl turns 13, and many boys come with their parents and say I want your daughter. Girls don't make friends with boys and think about them. They give the girl some time. This is not true for all families, there are families where mums and dads decide who to marry their daughter to. If the boy is rich, smart, a good boy, diligent, the parents will like him. Won't care if the girl loves him or not. There are parents who care. Fatima's mum was a very good mum, this kind of learned person, her father a priest, he'd learnt a lot, and understood these things, and he said it was his daughter's choice. Yes... many boys come. For example, to me too. Always, during the summer holidays, a lot of families come, talk on the phone with my dad and mum, and say my son loves your daughter.

And do they?

Well, not like really... when a boy turns 20, their parents show them a lot of girls. You know, there are those films, short films, when they want to find a bride for the prince, they bring a lot of girls and he chooses one, you know? (*she laughs*). This is quite the same. Parents show them

a girl inside the family, because they have to be a Seid and also a Shia, you know... and boys should choose. Boys also know these rules, so they should respect them, poor devils. The one he picks, the one he liked the most, will be brought to him. But nowadays families turned much more sensible, or very scientific, and let their girls choose. They come to us, girls, accompanied by their families, they bring us candies and all that... and flowers (*she laughs*). The girl brings in the tea. She goes around, the last one is the boy, she gives the tea. Then the boy has to tell whether he likes the girl or not. They can talk to each other in a room, as long as they like. And you get time, a week, two weeks, three weeks, how ever much the girl wants, she decides how much. If she likes him, the girl's parents call the boy's parents and tell them my daughter liked your boy. Then there is engagement and all. If she didn't like him, then not.

Everybody must be very nervous at such an occasion, I suppose?

Yes, especially the girl... (*she laughs*). Because they are already in the family, they know each other. Like me, the one I'll be engage to, I know him already, I've seen his parents, made friends, we talked to each other, visited each other's family... Afghan people pay a lot of visits. We know each other, what the boy is like, handsome or not, things like that... They already know these things, only the future needs to be decided. And this is why the engagement lasts two years, to give you time to get to know each other.

And if you don't like each other?

If you don't like each other, now that's going to be very bad, you know... People are going to say, the two of them were together for two years, then left each other... People in your family are going to say that.

So this is very awkward?

Yes, that's going to be very awkward. No other boys will visit girl, it's going to be hard... And they won't give another girl to the boy either, as he already had an engagement. It is going to be this awkward. It's better if it turns out before the engagement, they don't do anything before it's certain that the boy wants the girl and the girl wants the boy. During this time, the girl's parents should find out what the boy is like, if he wants to study or not, what his friends are like, things like that... The boy's family does the same about the girl.

Do you already know what will happen after the engagement? As far as I know, the boy is in Iran, and you are here..

Well yes, this is a topic we often talk about with my parents. Because the boy I will have to marry is in Iran. Because I need to marry someone from the family, that's the problem. A boy should be brought here, I can't go back there. The boy has to be brought here, but it's very difficult.

Does this boy want to come here?

That's also very difficult, yes... But if he really loves me, he'll come...

Could you marry a Hungarian boy?

It wouldn't be a problem for me. It's just, you know, it will be hard to communicate with each other. I speak Hungarian, but the things needed in life are so hard to communicate. There are a lot of Afghan girls and boys who married Hungarian boys or girls. But when they have children, will they be Muslims or will they have some other religion? What language will their child learn? Getting to know each other would be so difficult, because my family has different rules, different customs, a completely different family from his. This is not always way to a good life, because... maybe it will be hard to understand each other. Because for example, in my life, a boy is not allowed to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, smoke shisha... Once a boy smoked shisha, I swear a didn't talk to him for six months, just imagine, I swear I didn't! He kept writing to me, Yasmin, I swear I won't smoke shisha, I only smoked it because I wanted to tease you... I still didn't talk to him. For six months. There are some in my family who smoke. Not my family, but for example in-laws and all. But my rule is, a boy shouldn't smoke cigarettes, or else I could also smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or smoke shisha, I could also talk to other boys, I could also kiss other boys... Rules I keep should also be kept by him, and those he keeps I will too. It should be like this.

What if someone says, go ahead and smoke?

No Afghan boy would do that. I'm sure. I know it. Afghan boys are very strict. For example, if another boy looks at the girl he engaged, he'll become very strict and very angry, and he'll hurt the other boy. A lot of Afghan men went to jail because of these things, just imagine. In Iran. Not only Afghan boys, Iranians too. They are very strict in this matter.

What do you think about this? Is this romantic? Or silly?

Usually romantic, but when they turn strict, that's silly. It's romantic, when someone is making fun of me and I need someone to defend me, then it's very good.

What if another girl looks at the boy?

Then I'll turn strict too! (*she smiles*) This is the way it is, really, I'm also very strict in this matter.

But what can you do?

I won't hurt my own husband. I'd privately tell him he shouldn't look. (*we laugh*) As I'm not allowed to talk to other boys, take the hand of another boy, neither is he. It's just right. It has to be restrained.

Now you told me how you imagine your future. Do you have a dream that you very-very much want to come true?

I'd like to graduate from high school and go to uni afterward. I'd like to have some real job I can be proud of, this is my biggest dream. Another big dream of mine is to keep on training, to become a grand master, but I don't want to teach. Not as a master, that's not so important, the important thing for me is to take part in tournaments and always to win a gold medal. I'd like to be really famous in this.

If you marry in a couple of years, will you be able to do all of these? Not only kempo but also going to uni and become an engineer?

It's not up to me, I really want to do it, it's up to the boy, if he let's me do it or not. If he lets me, I'll definitely do it. It's very good, if someone's able to help you. If someone marries, she'll have to cook, she'll become a woman. Women have their own tasks, and not only studying. If he understands this, I'm going to study. I already told him, who is to be, well not sure, but probably, that I'm going to study. If you don't want to let me, you'll wait for me until I'll graduate, and then. He said no, he also wants to study, he understands, so I can. The biggest problem is the training.

Does it ever happen that boys dislike their wives going to uni once they are married because they might be talked about if their wives studies, saying look, he's not strong enough as a husband, his wife goes to study and to work, he can't even afford the wife?

Yes, yes, yes (*she nods rapidly*). People in the family used to say this about my father. They used to tell my dad, what a pity, your wife keeps travelling to foreign countries, you can't keep her with you... why does your wife work? They are hurting him a lot with this. Why does your wife drive a car? Afghan women don't usually drive. Why your wife is talking to another man, laughing and things like that? My dad says, that's life. I love my wife being like this. She's like me, she's free. I don't want to chain her. If you chain someone, it will be worse, it won't be good. My dad always thinks positively. For example, when there is a Kempo tournament, he always told me to take off my headscarf, you'll get chocked he said, someone grabs it like this (*she pulls on her headscarf*) and beats you. My mum says nothing when dad says these things. But I answered him: no, I'm fine with it. If someone tries to beat me like this, that person knows nothing about Kempo. And my dad, when he went back to Iran, brought me a Muslim sport headscarf. He says, fine, if you don't want to listen to me, take the sports scarf, I bought it to you.

Do you wear it?

Yes. Well, not too often, it's so weird, all my trainers told me to wear it, it's very good they say, because there's nothing here (*she points at the piece of headscarf under her chin*), it's black. When I went to this tournament, to the European Championship, all the masters said I should wear it, it's good. I wore it, and when the stand-up fight ended, I put on the other one. It's a weird headscarf, I turn funny in it and all...

Do you have to wear the headscarf at home?

No, no. You don't have to wear it either when you're with women. Only when you are with men, but you don't have to when you are with your husband, or grandfather, uncle, great, other uncle... (*she laughs*). I also don't have to wear it when I'm with my father or siblings. But I have to when I'm outside.

Is hairdo an important thing? It's all under the headscarf...

It is when I'm in school, like when I dress for sport, they all see my hair, and everyone says, your hair is so beautiful, so long. My hair is brown. They say, oh, I like your hair a lot and all

that. Not only at school, girls at training also have seen my hair. Sometimes for example my headscarf falls down at training. One of the masters saw all my hair once. When we go to training camp, it's hard for me to get out of bed, and when I sleep, I take off the headscarf. He walked in and saw my head. I put the bedsheet on my head. It was an accident, it wasn't my fault.

Did you feel bad about it?

No, it wasn't my fault, I wasn't showing it, it was an accident. Poor him, he quickly left the room. When it falls off during trainings, they wait for me to fix it. Not like all falls off, just a bit. Men just wait until I do the headscarf. It's bad, because I never show my hair, so if my headscarf falls off, everybody is looking, just imagine. *(she laughs)* The masters and the boys too. There is a boy I used to go to competitions with. It's the two of us in the sports club who compete a lot. Not like offensive or anything, but he always tells me, Yasmin, you always go to competitions because Allah helps you. And when we go to competitions, he always does like this *(she pats her shoulder)* and says, go now, Allah will help you, and also tells me to watch out for my headscarf, make sure it doesn't fall off. And when we fight each other, he tells me, watch out for your headscarf, I'll pull it off. But not really, he's just kidding, he only pulls a bit. Then he says, oh, Allah has seen I've done this to you, he will kill me now and all *(laughs)*. When he too much does this, I tell Peti, and Peti says fine, I'll punish him. But just jokingly.

Other than religious matters, do you have different views on what is right and what is wrong, different from the people around you? Do you understand what I mean?

Yes, I understand. The same we used to have in school, Ethics... Everybody needs to understand that lying is wrong, it will only cause trouble. We need to help people... It's quite the same thing, except for the headscarf.

So you don't really see a big difference? Is there something you don't agree with but others do, or vice versa? Anything like that?

Well, yes, there is, for example I think it's wrong to drink alcohol. Also because of the religion, but also outside the religion. Very wrong. Or if someone takes drugs or smokes cigarettes, it's wrong. Because of one's health. If you smoke, your lungs will be bad sooner. And those who matter to me, I don't want them to be sick. This is why it matters. In our religion it's forbidden to drink alcohol. Smoking is for their own good. Those who drink, they don't understand something and do bad things, things that are not allowed in the religion.

Was this topic ever addressed with your classmates?

It was, at Kempo. For example I said that we don't drink or smoke, because of the religion. They said it's a very good rule indeed, very healthy, and they really liked it. They asked me if I'd ever smoked. I said I hadn't, only smoked shisha once or twice.

So you didn't talk to yourself for six months then? (we both laugh)

I told the boy that I'd done it twice, if you'd done it so far, fine, but not from now on. He said he never did. Maybe he did, once or twice. When I called him through this camera phone... it's

like a video chat... then I saw his friend smoking shisha, but I didn't see if he was or not. I said, I see you're in a nice place, you have such nice friends and so on... Then I turned off my camera, we were only talking through phone, and I asked, why are you going to places like this, why do you have friends like this? And he said, if my friends kill a man, am I like them too? If my friends do something really bad, and I was with them, but didn't do it, do you still think I also did it? He said this to me. Do you understand me?

Yes. And what was your answer to this?

I told him, if I don't put on my headscarf and I send you a picture without my headscarf, do you think I don't wear my headscarf here? What kind of difference is that? Or no problem to you that I don't wear the headscarf? He said sure it's problem for me, it's totally different to smoking shisha. I said, to you, headscarf, hijab, this that I'm wearing, is so important, so are drugs, shisha and drinking and all that to me. He said, fine, Yasmin, it's totally different to what you are saying. I said there's no difference in it, for me it's the way I dress, to you it's your smoking habits. He said, fine. He understood. He told me, I was just kidding, my family wouldn't allow me to smoke shisha, I did it once or twice when I was with the boys, and I couldn't say no. I said, fine. But I didn't talk to him for six months, then he apologised so many, he was such a nice person that I forgave him after six months.

Do your classmates ever talk about smoking or drinking?

I hear about it sometimes, like when they have Christmas or other holidays, they used to drink a tiny bit. I've never seen anyone smoking in front of the school... I've only heard that they were given some (*alcohol*) by their parents, but very little, when there was a holiday. Children in the school that I go to are different from the children I meet on the streets, or from children that go to other schools, vocational schools. Where I go, children are very nice, very sociable... they know a lot about the world and things. But I've seen children who know nothing about the world, nothing about the country next to them... Children that are allowed to do everything. Allowed to smoke, allowed to alcohol, everything. I've seen a boy, he is 12 and he's smoking. I've seen a boy, 9 years old, smoking...

What do you think about the situation of refugees in Hungary?

I tell you the truth. Everybody says that Hungary is not good for them. Because it doesn't give the support as, say, Germany. Yes, because Germany is a rich country, a country bigger than Hungary. They have, so they can give. If Hungary had as much money, it could have helped too. But I only say about my family. They say there are no jobs in Hungary, it's hard to work, it's hard to learn the language, the country is poor and so on. But not from the point of view of my family. Also, these things are not important. Those who really came because they had to flee, for them these things like money and things like that, they don't really matter. What matters is to find a place to live, and, I guess, to learn. We for instance came for studying.¹³ And if someone

¹³ Further social work conducted with the family has found that their reasons were far more complex than that. It is common with families that parents don't share the real reasons behind their flight with their children, in order to protect them; but it is also not uncommon that the memories of the children "change" with time, and they simply omit inconvenient memories from their story.

really wants to work, he can, anywhere he goes in the world, to whichever country. If my parents didn't want to work, they wouldn't, even in Germany not. If they would work there, so can they here. Anywhere they can work somewhere.

Many Hungarians never met a refugee, and they don't know what it means.

Well, sometimes, when I'm in the bus, some people stare at me like they have never seen a refugee or a Muslim person. They didn't learn about this at school. They are olderly people, aneient people, mostly, as I've seen. But people of today, who go to school nowadays... Some are very bad, because on television they only show terrorists, only the war, nothing good. Terrorist doesn't mean the same as tourist, it doesn't mean the same as refugee. As we say, there are Hungarian good people, bad Hungarian people, just like there are good Muslim people and really very bad Muslim people. They don't learn there are also people like that. Someone should introduce them to these people, to the refugees, to the fact that they are not the same as terrorists.

Do you know what integration means?

With refugees? Yes, I know.

What do you think it is like when a refugee person settles into a country, into a society?

It is very difficult for a refugee person to settle into a society with different people, because a refugee is always thinking about what has become of his people, his country... And I think it's very difficult for him to settle in. Well, they are coming to save their children, their lives, not to die and to be able to live... But there are also people from Iran, who came because they did something wrong against Iran.

What do you think would help your family or other refugees to have a better life in Hungary?

People should be shown on television or something, show that life is hard for a refugee or a foreigner, just like if you went to Iran or any other countries. It would be as hard for you as it is now for us. Also, people should learn about religions, people, countries... I don't know, it's hard... But if I have been in Iran and you would have come to Iran too, it'd has been weird for me how you live. You don't wear headscarves? In school we were never taught about these things. We were never told that there were different kinds of Europeans, different kinds of religions! We were never taught about that. My mum and dad and granddad for instance told me that Europeans don't wear headscarves, the are freed and all that... It always was strange to me, I have a headscarf, why don't they? Good God, they are not Muslims and all that... My parents didn't know anything, they just heard things from my grandparents. If school would have taught us these things, we would have known, school is cleverer than a mother who has never learned about anyone. It's better if school shows it to the children. It's also better if they wouldn't always show war and terrorists and things like that all the time... but also about the life of the people, about the life of a different society....

Was it strange for you when you first saw a lot of people without headscarves?

Well, yes. I said, God, what's this?! Also when people are kissing on the streets! That was the weirdest. Just imagine! This was the weirdest thing, what they all do, freely like that? I always didn't want to look, God, what they are doing! Good God, mum, don't look, dad, don't look, ooooooh, it was really weird. How free the Europe is, like really this much?! And back then I didn't see any Muslims around, that was also weird, was I really the only Muslim person here? Later I found out that there are other Muslims as well, who don't keep their religion and take off the headscarf. There are a lot of Muslims here.

Is it not weird anymore?

No, not anymore.

Not even kissing?

No, I got used to it. I already know that they are kissing because they are free to do so, they love each other, I don't know... They don't hurt anyone... but if someone did that in Iran... *(sighs)* Good God, everyone stares at them, ooooo, what are you doing, have you no place to go, have you no flat to go to?

Are there couples in your school?

In the tenth grade... In Debrecen there was a couple, they were kissing in every break, that was really weird for me. Good God, are they really doing this in school?! It was really very weird for me. And I thought for myself, if school is like that, what do they do outside school? When they are on the street? Or at home and things? Then I realised that this was Europe. It's free.

What about clothing? Not only about wearing headscarves, but also about very short skirts and trousers in summer?

We dress the same as now, only garments are less stiff...

Wasn't it strange how other people dress here?

Yes, it was! In Hungary, my father used to say, they are so well-dressed when it's cold, just like Muslims, maybe even better than Muslims. Really! I don't see their hair and legs, nothing! They are so well-dressed, ever better than a Muslim, really! My father always used to say... He says, Hungary should only be seen when it's cold. When some family members come to Europe or to Hungary, he always says, it should be cold, only come when it's cold *(she laughs)*. But when it's warm, good God, as if they were naked... There are some... they are almost naked... now this was strange at first. First when I came it was cold. I came in December. My dad told me, look, these people are quite the same as Muslims, they just don't wear any headscarves. And when it got warm, I told him, watch it now, my beloved father!

You got used to it by now?

Yes, I got used to it...

We are nearly finished... is there anything you'd like to add? Do you have any message to those who don't know anything about refugees?

Don't judge too fast, you don't always have to judge fast, I see a Muslim, I see she is wearing a headscarf, or I see a refugee - you don't have to judge too fast. The terrorists you see on television, they are not the same as refugees. Refugees are called refugees, because they are seeking refuge. From something bad. From war or something. Don't judge them too quickly. Refugees should not be here... first take a look, talk to them, it's allowed to talk to them! Then decide if they are good people or not.

(I had already turned off the recorder, we were still talking, then she started to tell a story, I asked if I could turn the recorder back on, and she said yes.)

It was the five of us, and the taxi that drove us through Serbia said go here along and there along, then walk a bit more, then there is the border between Serbia and Hungary. We were walking more than three hours, searching for the border, it was night, I don't know, 1 a.m., we just couldn't find it. Then we heard, like, dog noises. We were very scared. We thought dogs won't hurt us here. They never hurt us anywhere. We went forward, we were talking very loudly, and we heard that the dog noises were getting closer. Not one dog, just imagine, at least ten. They weren't like dogs, they were like wolves. We thought that there are some houses around and there they have dogs. We thought so. We saw their red eyes nearing, more than ten... We were so afraid! Just imagine! Me, mum, Amir, Zeinab. My mum was in the middle, and we, Amir, Zeinab and I around her, and we hugged her so much, my mum felt we were dying. All dogs and wolves came running towards us. My dad had a knife. Not a knife, bigger than a knife, like, this square one, to chop meat. That big one. I didn't see anything, I was hugging my mother so much. I said we are dead, that's it. And then I heard my dad shouting, but like girls, not shouting, but...

Screaming?

Yes, screaming! He was screaming so much I thought they'd killed my father, they'd eaten my father. And I started to cry and pray. I called the names of Allah and all that. I started crying, and one of the dogs, or I don't think they were dogs, rather wolves or something... I didn't see anything, I didn't want to see anything. Suddenly my dad said, it's done, come, quickly, let's go. My dad, when we didn't see him, screamed and went to the dogs, or whatever animals they were. They got scared and went away, all of them. Or I don't know, maybe he kicked one of them... and they got frightened. Because my father screamed so bad. He screamed so much, all three of us thought he was dead, that they killed him. That was very bad... very bad... Now when I think of it, shake like this... It was very bad... And then I saw my dad was alright, I became so weak I fainted. I was the only one. I love adventures and tension and everything, but then I became so weak I fainted. When I woke, I didn't know, when. Then we walked on, we saw a... a hospital or an old-age house... or something like that, I don't know what city it was, we went there, knocked on the door, I asked 'This is Hungary?' He said... I don't know what he said, maybe he said I don't speak English or something like that, I said Hungaria? then I think he said yes, moved his head like this, yes (nods). Then we realised it was Hungary. We also saw a police, And we went to him ourselves, because we were so afraid.

Was it dark?

We didn't see anything, just imagine, only the red eyes that came toward us. And also those noises. I was the first to say, dad, look, there is a dog coming, they said, there are houses there, they have dogs, and the dogs heard there were people coming, that's why they are shouting...

Did your father say anything about this afterwards?

No! He didn't talk about it!

Has he since?

Nothing. He hasn't said anything. We haven't asked. Didn't want to ask. But it's over now... We didn't want to think on it... That's it.

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