



Azad Karimi, who is a Kurd from Iran, is grateful for the help he has received in Norway. Now he wants to give back by learning Norwegian and, in the future, get a job that can serve Norwegian society. He had visited several asylum reception centers in the country before he was granted residence and has gotten to know Norwegian society in Brattvåg. PHOTO: JOHAN BEHRENTZ

- The pen is more dangerous than a gun

He wrote about ancient Iranian history. He wrote about women's rights, freedom, and democracy. The Iranian authorities cannot tolerate it.

Juhan Behrentz

- The pen is more dangerous than weapons for a dictatorship, says Azad Karimi (44 years).

We visited him in his spacious but slightly tired flat in Brattvåg.

In the industrial village on the Sunnmør coast, far away from his hometown of Saqez near the multicultural city, Urmieh, north-west Iran, he learns to become a Norwegian. He learns Norwegian social life and language. In

2015, he came as a political refugee after leaving behind an arduous escape across the sea from Turkey to Greece and further north in Europe.



War: Kurdish forces face off against IS forces who at one point moved ever closer. They were defeated, but before that caused great unrest in, the Kurdistan region, the self-governing Kurdish part of Iraq. - One day I was going to work, and the streets were empty. People fled from IS, says Azad, who eventually managed to flee to Norway.

- I am eternally grateful for what Norway has done for me. Here is freedom. People are friendly here. I like Norway more than anything, Azad smiles and looks towards the kitchen window. A Norwegian flag hangs there. On the kitchen table is a picture of Norway's king and queen. Otherwise, the apartment is rather spartanly equipped. A picture frame with motifs from Kurdish history hangs on the wall, and a TV channel in Kurdish speaks non-stop from the PC.

He is himself a writer and journalist. Already at the age of 16, he wrote his first poems and had his poems published when he was 23. He eventually studied agronomy and Law and soon discovered that he could not write about everything.

- When I was 16, I hated the political system in Iran. It falsified the facts. It falsified history. I would rather listen to foreign radio and dream of becoming a newscaster. But as Kurds without the right political connections, it was impossible. It would have worked out if I had joined the reform party, but I see it as part of the same corrupt system, says Azad. He wanted to be independent.



Books: Azad Karimi has published several books and poems in Iran and Iraq. Several of them are about women's liberation. Azad believes that a large majority of the people in Iran want a political change, but the people are being held down by the regime, which also has contacts in Western countries. PHOTO: JOHAN BEHRENTZ

Several times he was summoned to the intelligence service, who wanted an explanation for what he had written.

- It eventually became impossible for me to stay in Iran. I traveled to the million-strong city of Erbil, the capital of the self-governing Kurdish region in Iraq. There I quickly got into radio and TV work, says Azad.

Kurdistan is the description of an ancient nomadic culture that existed long before today's borders with Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey were drawn on

the map. In the highlands, in the middle of the border areas of these countries, live up to 30 million Kurds who have never been granted an independent state. The large ethnic group has become a thorn in the side of the states in the area.



Kurdistan: The area comprises 25–30 million Kurds and is situated as a buffer between east and west. Kurdistan has never been recognized as an independent state. Map: Store Norske Leksikon/Scanpix

- Did you know that "The Three Wise Men", who we know from the biblical story of the birth of Jesus, came from Kurdistan? asks Azad, explaining that these astrologers who had seen the Star of Bethlehem had the magic religion.

- Nowhere else in the East did you have such a religion, he explains and shows that he is well informed about the history of Iran and the Middle East.



Story: Azad Karimi in an area near his hometown in Iran. The authorities did not like the fact that he wrote facts about the history of the Kurds. He felt more and more unsafe before he fled via Turkey to Europe and Norway. PHOTO: PRIVATE

He himself comes on his mother's side from an aristocratic Kurdish family that formerly had great influence among Kurds in Iran.

- I wanted to tell about the roots of Iran and the Kurds, but those in power in Iran want to erase history in order to create their own power base. If you cut your ties to history, you are also unable to think about the future, says Azad, and points to how Norwegians take care of their own history. In Iran, there is a dictatorship that uses the intelligence service to keep the people down. On foreign soil, the country is behind several terrorist attacks. Iranian media spreads hate propaganda against the West. Today's leadership, which dreams back to Muslim greatness, has no future, according to Azad.

- But I think the Iranian people will eventually rise up against this dictatorship, says Azad, who had joined the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in Iran.

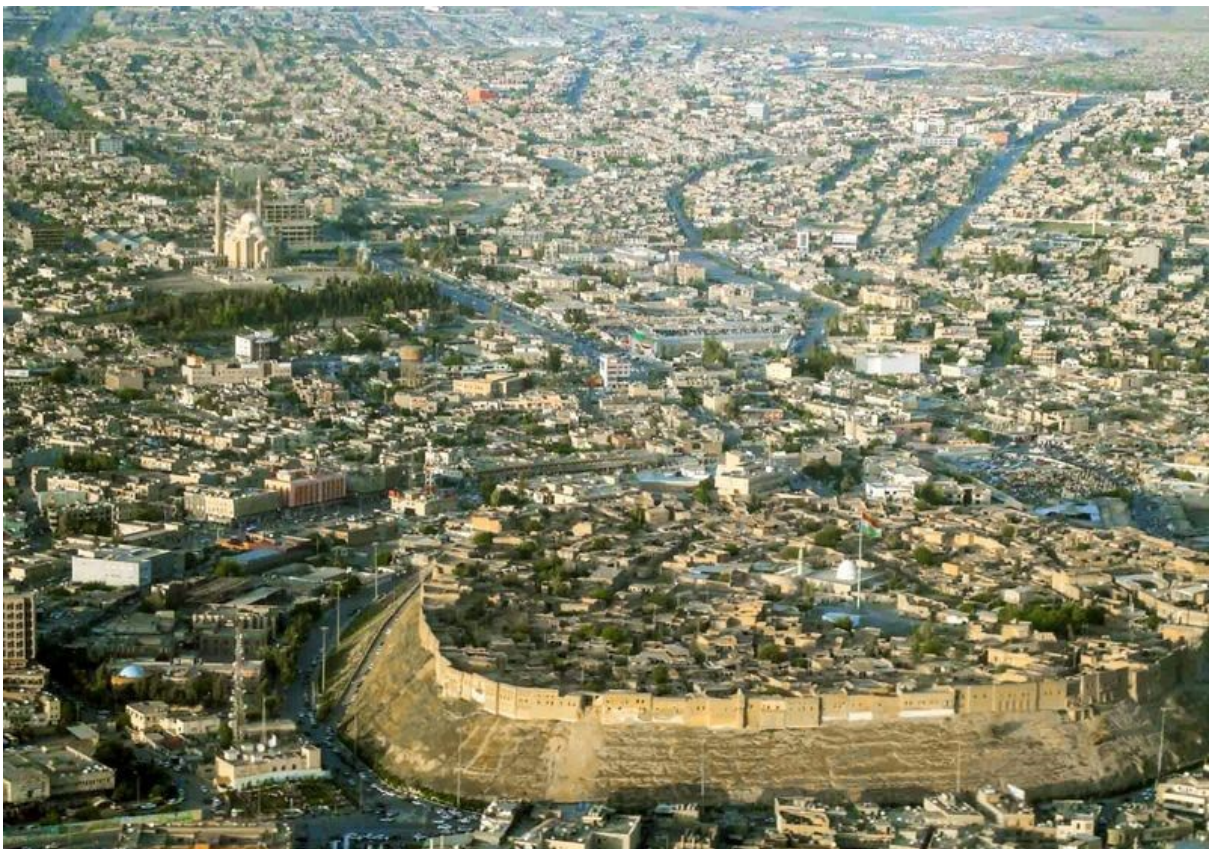
Azad Karimi wanted to create a new future for himself in Arbil, Iraq in 2012. He got a job as a news announcer on Kurdish radio and TV stations,

but he soon noticed that Iran had long fingers in the Kurdish community. After the Iraq war, a vacuum arose, which Iran took advantage of.



News announcer: Azad was working as a news announcer for Kurdish radio and television when he felt a fire under his feet. He fled from the Iraqi city of Arbil to Europe and Norway. PHOTO: PRIVATE

- I couldn't trust anyone other than those closest to me. I had freedom, but not security. One day when I was going to work, the streets were almost deserted. People fled. The Islamic State (ISIS) was just two miles away. The US helped prevent IS from capturing Erbil, but there were acts of war in which both Iraqi and Iranian forces fought against IS. I understood that I had to get to a safer place, says Azad.



Arbil: The capital of the self-governing Kurdish region in northern Iraq is Arbil (Irbil). It is built around an old fortress. PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

He speaks calmly, and we brag about his knowledge of Norwegian. After three or four years in Norway, he understands himself well and is highly motivated to learn more. Through Norwegian lessons in Brattvåg, he has gained practice as an "everything possible man" at NRK Møre og Romsdal. He has made good friends in Brattvåg, who also help him to develop the

language. Originally, he speaks and writes Persian fluently and knows three Kurdish dialects. He understands and writes Arabic alongside English.

- Now I'm putting everything else behind me. I have started a new life in Norway. I love this country, smiles Azad, who has his plans ready. After Norwegian education in Haram(Brattvåg), he wants to study media, for example in Volda.

- Norway has become my new country now, he smiles.

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You can read the English translation of this interview at this link:

https://qelam.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3537:interview-by-norwegian&catid=95&Itemid=527