



This is a transcript from *The Messenger* – a podcast series produced by Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. *The Messenger* brings you into the Australian immigration detention centre on Manus Island – and reveals, in intimate detail, one man's experience of what it's really like to flee tragedy and seek asylum by boat.

Warning: This episode of *The Messenger* contains graphic content and mentions self-harm. If you or someone you know needs help, you can contact one of Australia's national 24/7 crisis services such as Lifeline on 13 11 14 or at lifeline.org.au, or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

Episode 6: A New Plan

Michael Green: From Behind the Wire and the Wheeler centre, this is *The Messenger*.

In early 2015, Aziz was called into a meeting.

Abdul Aziz Muhamat: So he asked me to wait, not to ask him or not to interrupt him until he finish. And then I just waited for five minutes, he was just reading for me something ... from his paper, like, er, I can't remember actually the points that he was, you know, reading for me. But the only thing that I, I, I heard from him, he say if you have got any questions so you can ask me after the sections, after I finish ... and then I say, yes.

MG: He sat facing an immigration officer and an interpreter, about to discuss something really important. After months of interviews, they were about to tell Aziz whether he'd been determined to be a refugee.

If the answer was yes – well, his future would probably continue to be uncertain. But if the answer was no, he was at risk of being sent back to everything he'd run from in Sudan.

Surprisingly, then, Aziz had other things he wanted to discuss.

A: That was my first question: 'Why you guys send me to the jail?' And then my second question: 'Why you guys release me from the jail without any charge?' And, you know, like, I start, you know, bombarding him with, er, heaps of questions and he hasn't got any answer to

answer even one of the questions that I have asked him ... And my final question that I have asked him, I say, 'In which country, or in which, er, article of the law that say, if somebody seeking asylums so he is a criminals?'

MG: At the meeting, Aziz was told that yes, he had been given refugee status. He'd been waiting a year and a half for this decision. But he was only interested in finding out why he'd just been sent to Lorengau and locked in a jail cell.

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You're listening to *The Messenger*. This podcast is about Abdul Aziz Muhamat and his life inside the Australian-run immigration detention centre on Manus Island. My name is Michael Green.

From the first night we spoke, one of the main things Aziz has told me about is how he and the other men have protested against their detention.

In this episode, we'll find out about the hunger strike that led to his imprisonment – and how, whenever one protest has been shut down, Aziz has started again.

How does he keep resisting as his time there drags on and on?

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In May last year, I was speaking with Aziz during a demonstration in the camp.

[Audio of detainees chanting and protesting]

MG: Hey Aziz ... it's Saturday night, the 14th of May. Thanks for sending those photos of the protest. Um, one of them I can see lots of you walking around the compound. Many of you wearing big yellow jackets; rain jackets, I think.

A: You can see the mens who are wearing a yellow jacket means a raincoat, because we had a heavy rain yesterday, for almost nine hours or ten hours. Although there is the rain, but no one want to say, like, I'm not going to—I'm not gonna, you know, stop protesting, because this is my right, and the rain will not stop me, and no one will stop me. And ah, they were chanting 'freedom, freedom' and ah, 'no more delaying'.

[Audio of detainees chanting and protesting]

MG: A couple of weeks later, the protest had died down. One night, Aziz was having trouble sleeping.

A: Hey Michael. Here is Aziz. Ah, it is, ah, one o'clock. 1am in Manus time. And ah, I was trying actually to get some sleep but I thought I can't actually, and I don't know what is happening to me, so I thought is really better for me to talk to you.

A: I'm trying to talk to you while I'm, while I'm walking. But unfortunately heavy rain came and stop me, so I cannot walk outside. But now I'm sitting inside the mess, and there is a TV on and there were three guys sitting and watching. And also, there were some guys trying to have a midnight meals as well, and also I can see the cleaners walking outside, and some of the guard as well.

A: In the noise that you can hear it around me is the rain, and where I'm sitting under the tent and enjoying ah, you know, look at the, the rain, the way it's just falling from the sky.

MG: He told me about the first time he refused to do what he was told.

It was October 2013, and only four days after the Australian Navy had intercepted his boat and taken him to the detention centre on Christmas Island. It was five in the morning.

A: Three officers ... they came and ah, wake up everyone, and then they tell us to pack up all our stuff like our belonging, just the clothes, leave everything on its place, just take your clothes, nothing else.

MG: An Australian immigration officer told Aziz that they were going to send everyone to PNG.

A: She say, 'If you really want to go or not, you still gonna go, we can force you to go.' And they called me up to sign on the paper and I say, like, 'Oh look, you tell us that if we sign or not we gonna go to Papua New Guinea, so why should I sign? If I sign, it means I agree to go. I'm not going to sign means I'm not agree. If you send me there it means you send me by force. So one day maybe I can claim for my right, because I haven't agree first time to go there.'

MG: So, did you end up signing or not?

A: Yes I never signed that form and ah, they gave me the paper with me and I'm still holding it. And not just me alone but a bunch, a bunch of the guys in here we came together with them, they haven't signed on that paper.

MG: As promised, and without his signature on the form, Aziz was put on a plane by the guards.

A: And we arrived on Papua New Guinea, or let me say Manus in generally, in early morning around ten, or eight in Manus time.

I was really surprised by what I saw. You know, I was near to the window and I saw like oh, like black people, you know, were walking down on the airport and I was like, 'Oh shit, where are we? Are we in Africa?' And the guy who was sitting close to me, he was like, he was just ... he dead of laughing, you know, and he was ... 'No no no, come on man, we are not in Africa, we are in Papua New Guinea!' and I said, 'Are you kidding me? We are not in Papua New Guinea, we are in Africa.' He said 'No, I swear to god we are in Papua New Guinea,' and I say 'Are—are the Papua New Guineans black people like us?' And he say, 'Yeah, they are black people, like you guys!'

They tell us that to get off the plane one by one, and then the cameras are everywhere. You know, you just ... everywhere you look, there were cameras, as if we were criminals or we were like, you know, what can I say? Like a political prisoner.

And ah, so the staff who came with us they did not get off the plane, they were just sitting on their seat, and I asked them why they don't want to get off the plane. They say, 'We don't have a visa,' and I say, 'Do you think that I have a visa?' And I say – I asked him one final question before I get off the plane – I say, 'How long do you think we're gonna stay in this place?' He say, 'I don't know.'

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MG: By the time one year passed, Reza Berati had been killed amidst a series of riots, and Hamid Kehzaei had died from a simple cut on his leg that got infected. No one's refugee applications had been processed. Aziz was still in detention.

When Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared in 2013 that all boat arrivals would be sent offshore, and never resettled in Australia, his promise wasn't entirely accurate. Although Aziz was sent to Manus Island based on that policy, the truth is that several of his boatmates are now living in Australia. Even though they'd been brought to the mainland because they were sick, Aziz told me that the difference felt pretty arbitrary to him.

A: This is what happened: most of the guys who were here now in offshore detention centre, they have got their boatmate they came together with them. They are now in Australia. So they're having a visa and community visa, but we are still here in offshore detention centre.

MG: What are the reasons that those people who have ended up in Australia have ended up there?

A: To be honest Michael, I don't know actually what's the difference between my case and their case. The only one reason I can say, they were sick when the first time we came there, and then what happened is that they just kept them there until they get better ... and something else happened. You know, policy is like—it's like a shadow. Sometimes it's just moving around from one place to another place.

A: You can't predict what will happen next, you know, because every single minute they pass a new bill, every single minute they introduce new things, so ... those people they got those opportunity and they end up in Australia, and we end up here in Papua New Guinea.

MG: To add to the sense of confusion, in 2014 the Australian government announced that there would be a limited amnesty for those people who hadn't already been sent to Nauru or Manus. They'd be eligible for a Temporary Protection Visa. That visa would allow them to stay in Australia for three years.

Scott Morrison: You may have heard that temporary protection visas are to be reintroduced. This policy does not apply to those who are on Nauru or on Manus Island, or have been transferred there.

MG: So those who had already been transferred offshore, like Aziz, would stay there.

Then, in December 2014, PNG announced that it had ruled on the first fifty men to be granted refugee status. In another world, that might have been good news. But when people are granted refugee status on Manus Island, they're confronted with a new problem: whether or not to accept resettlement in PNG.

Meanwhile, their access to basic services in the centre, like phone calls and activities, is cut back. For the authorities, this is a way of making living in PNG relatively more attractive – because detention becomes worse.

The day after PNG had announced the refugee assessments, Scott Morrison visited Manus Island to open a new transition centre in East Lorengau.

It was built as accommodation for refugees who agree to live in PNG. But the detainees were afraid they'd be moved there whether or not they agreed.

The scene was set for another confrontation.

[Audio from [ABC 7.30, 19 January 2015](#)]

Dylan Welch, reporter: As security guards watch, Manus Island detainees chant their one demand: freedom. The demand is at the heart of the detention centre action which began last week and now involves hundreds of asylum seekers, some protesting by sewing their lips. Some have gone without food and water for days as part of the protest which began six days ago, when detainees were told eight men were to be relocated to another camp on January 22.

A: From 2013 to 2015 we have two years, so we want to know our determination. We already finished up our interviews and everything, so we need to know what's going to happen to us ... before, we were on like peaceful protest, and from peaceful protest it turned to um, you know, riot, and someone lost his life. And so this moment we thought about it and we said, 'Okay, let's change the game.'

So it is like, okay, let's go on hunger strike. Hunger strike was a part of our rights and it's peaceful, and it's a very strong, it's strong. So the only way we can send message is the hunger strike.

MG: In any situation, hunger strikes are dangerous. But as we've heard many times, life in the centre was particularly gruelling.

The heat alone was a real risk. And now, hundreds of men were refusing to eat, and many, like Aziz, were even refusing water.

A: IHMS – they start, ah, asking the, you know, the Department of Immigration to send over a more nurses from Australia and more doctors, because the hunger strike, the situation, were getting out of their control. You know, how many people they admit them or they collapse in one day? It's like more than hundred men they used to collapse in one day. So when they take them down there, what they do, like, to give them drips one or two some people even they get like ah three, some people get four, is depend on your sugar rates.

I know it's really sound stupid but um... you know... there's nothing we can do to stop this indefinite detention centres ... at least we can take our lives away by our own hands ... I was actually, I wasn't scared at all. I wasn't scared at all, and I was just – I feel normal, the same feelings I had before when I was in, ahh, when I was ahh, making this decision to ... to go on the boat.

I knew that the hunger strike is the powerful message that every prisoners like us ... they can use it to achieve their goal, or they can use it in order to send their message to the world that we are really suffering, and we need help.

MG: He was right; the world was beginning to pay attention. This is from a BBC report:

BBC report: We have reports of a number of detainees stitching their lips together, even one swallowing razor blades. And now over the weekend it seems that a number of detainees have barricaded them inside one compound within this complex and are not letting the guards in.

A: And ahh, that was the only moment that when even the entire world knew about this detention centre, and that was the only moment that when half of the world they start condemning the Australian policy against asylum seekers. And that was the moment that where even in Australia some of the ordinary people in Australia they are... that was the moment only they knew that their government is doing this.

MG: Aziz even managed to get on the ABC's 7.30. Here he is being interviewed under the pseudonym 'David'.

[Audio from ABC 7.30]

Dylan Welch, reporter: Today, 7.30 contacted a detainee inside the centre who has been held there for the last year and a half.

'David': We agreed to do this hunger strike until the death, our death. We are not going to stop on this hunger strike. And we want the Australian Government or we want the entire world to know about what is happening at the moment in Manus Island.

MG: Aziz says he collapsed after days without food and water. He was taken to the medical centre, and put on a drip.

A: I got six drips on my fourth day when I collapse. They were trying to convince me to drink or to eat. They brought for me like a chocolate and biscuits and drinks and soft drinks and heaps of stuff, but I said, 'No, no, I'm not gonna try none of these things because I wanna go back to the centre.' And they say, like, 'No, we're not going to let you go back to the centre unless you finish those two drips.' They brought me back to the centre and then again I continue with my friends.

A: I wasn't moving around the centre because I was just sitting in one place ... and I spent all my time just like sleeping or, you know ... I've got my books with me, reading, playing, sudoku, crosswords, puzzles, stuff like that. So I always just kill my time like that and I haven't even feel like I'm really hungry or thirsty, because I was sitting under the shadow, and because we left our rooms and we just came and sat in front of the gym area, where like a hundred and fifty guys who were just sitting down in that place. So we make kind of a ... a bed sheet, we took a bed sheet, and we just cover it around from the sun and the rain, and we were just sleeping there all the time.

The drips, it's become a routine and normal for us. Like ... I was really dehydrated and they

gave me, like, more than eight drips at one time, and then they kept me there for one whole night.

MG: Eventually, guards wearing riot gear entered the detention centre. They broke the blockade in Delta compound and arrested the supposed leaders in other compounds too. Aziz was in Foxtrot, and someone had named him as a ringleader.

A: They have got my picture actually with them, and they were looking ... like we—they went everywhere, they search the compound. They couldn't find me because I was sleeping out of my rooms ... they found me in the gym area. So I had a bed sheet covering my face. They just pull out that bed sheet and ... they say, 'Okay, you're not allowed to take any things with you. Just if you wanna walk with us peacefully come on, let's go. If you are insisting or resistings, probably we gonna crack you.' And then they ask me to lift my hands up and I put my hands on my head, and I walked like politely without saying any words actually. So ... and what happened is that they targeted us as the ringleaders. They, you know, they took us to the jail but behind us, people they haven't stopped the hunger strike.

[Leigh Sales interviews Peter Dutton on ABC 7.30]

Leigh Sales: Yesterday's dramatic stand-off on Manus Island is reportedly over, but there are still many questions about exactly what happened and how it escalated ... A short time ago I spoke to the Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, in Brisbane. [...]

Earlier today, you said that a degree of force had to be used to end the blockade on Manus Island. What do you mean specifically?

Peter Dutton: ... There were people who had refused to take food; people who had refused to take water. Some were stopping others from receiving food and water and medical services, so it was necessary for that breach to take place.

MG: Aziz says no one was forced to take part in the hunger strike against their will.

A: We're thinking that if we just if we drag out the ringleaders or the community leaders out of the centre, probably the other people they gonna stop their hunger strike. But what happened was that ... people, they refuse to stop their hunger strike and they would just continue on their hunger strike. So that means they proved to them that we have got nothing to do with those people, and the hunger strike was personal volunteer, and no-one forced no-one to go on that hunger strike, and we haven't got any influence on those people. So whoever wanna participate we must welcome, whoever doesn't want, it's up to him.

MG: Meanwhile, the men accused of being ringleaders were taken to an isolation unit, known as Chauka.

A: So Chauka is a ... an ... isolation area. Well, it is kind of a, er ... you could say it's a tiny cell that where they used to take everyone who's actually misbehaving, everyone who actually, um, trying to harm himself ... and pretty ... I can say they really treat them very tough and harsh, and then even sometimes it gets to the point that where we gonna they beat you up.

MG: Along with Aziz, there were almost 60 other men accused of leading the hunger strike. After a short time in Chauka, they were moved to the Lorengau provincial jail – where conditions were even worse than in the detention centre.

A: And the smell, it's really unbearable, and, and it's unbearable, actually, smells. Like normally I put a, a piece of tissue on my nose before I sleep. Actually, I can't normally sleep because of the smell.

We have been seen you know friend of ours, you know, he has been beaten up in front of them and then like they have serious beaten, you know ... And then the guy was just bleeding everywhere, because they have got their police batons in their hands and then they start just kicking him, you know in his guts ... and then kicking him in his head with their boots. I think, yeah, I remember that me even, I say something to the police and I say like, 'Stop!', I shout it. When I say that, you know, one of them he want to attack me. But someone, I thinks, er, one of his friend, he just hold him from behind; he say, 'No, no, no – this is enough, this is enough,' ... and then they just, they withdraw back.

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MG: While Aziz was in jail, the hunger strike continued in the detention centre for another week. By some reports, up to 700 men refused food and water. It ended after a second round of arrests.

But the men in the Lorengau jail still hadn't been charged with any crimes. PNG's immigration Minister Rimbink Pato had signed documents to allow three local jails to be used as 'relocation centres' for the temporary housing of asylum seekers.

While they were held there, Aziz and the others started talking to some of the local prisoners.

A: Yeah, when I was actually in the jail, ah – yeah, I actually spoke with ... a few prisoners there, and ah, like, something terrify to me as well. Because I've been locked up in a place where there is a lot of ah, criminals such as like, rapers and then, ah, thief, and then like different, different sort of crimes ... So, so sometimes they spend, like, I spend half of my day,

just talking to them ... then you know it's kind of, what I can say, there is a fence between us, but they block the fence with the asbestos so you can't see the person on the other side. But you only talk to him under, so you have to bend down or lay down ... Otherwise you cannot see his face. You just talk to that, or sometimes I can see them, they climb up on the ... the tank of the water, which is, ah, very close to their rooms, and then they climb there and I sit down on the other side and then we talk. We normally talk about the centre and the stuff that going around the centre, and, and also they just asking me, how, after you get out of this place can you please send us some cigarettes.

Although we haven't committed any crimes and we haven't done anythings, then finally we just got released from that jail without even any charge, without having given any opportunity to see a lawyers or to talk to somebody else from the outside.

MG: The asylum seekers were going to be taken back to the detention centre.

A: And then the final day when, ah, they are taking us out ... those guys, they were just, they stood in front of the, their uh, cell. And then they just waving, you know, *bye guys, bye guys, have a safe trip* and like, uh, it's really touch my heart, you know.

When we got on the bus, number one, we were actually, er, shirtless. Why? Because some of our friends that we made with them on the jail ... we give them our shirt because we know that we are going back so we gave them our shirt. Shirtless and then also ... we don't have thongs, because we gave our thongs away to those guys in there.

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MG: Back in the detention centre, Aziz and the others were held once again in Chauka, and then another small compound called Charlie. They started a silent protest.

A: We haven't even said a word to them. Whatever we want, we just write it on a piece of paper, and then we show it to them and then they read it ... so, we drove them actually crazy.

They send the case managers, and then the case manager came there. They were trying to speak to us, and then we ignored them. And after that, they send other guys from our community ... and they were trying to talk to us and we just ... we don't talk to them, we ignored them. And they went back again ... and they say like, 'Look, you guys, you ... you were on hunger strike we sent you to the jail, and then we brought you back to the jail and then you guys are still protesting.'

They were trying to break the silence, but they couldn't.

MG: So, that's where Aziz was when immigration officials called him in to tell him whether he'd been judged to be a refugee. His still-unexplained trip to jail was fresh on his mind.

He wanted answers. Why were they taken to jail? How could they be held there without charge, and then released without any explanation?

A: And also I say, like, you know, many, many other questions. But he hasn't got any answer to answer for me, to reply for all my questions, so he say, 'I'm gonna discuss with my boss, and I will come back to you.' So, well, when I realise that actually he hasn't got anything to say to me, and I saw that actually he got very, very upset for me because I haven't actually, er, abused him but what I just say, say to him is that, er, I say 'You guys like, um, I only see a image in front of me, I can't see actually a real person in front of me.'

MG: You know from me, like, I would imagine that that would be such a, a relief that moment when you finally found out that they had given you a positive refugee status.

A: Er, actually to be honest, I don't have any feeling about having that refugee status, nothing to me ... And because what what we been through and the way that we have been treated, it's really atrocity ... and so it make you actually feel like even nothing, nothing ... It's just mean to me is kind of they put more pressure on me, but at the end of the day, they haven't win their, you know, the battle ... They asked me to go outside, I say, 'No, I don't wanna go.' They say, 'Why?' I say just like that 'Because I don't feel safe, and if I'm still in detention centre it did not provide for me any safety. How comes, how do you think that you gonna provide for me the safety when I left the detention centre?' That's it.

I told him that actually it doesn't bother me, so whether it is really positive or negative or whatever so it doesn't bother me. At the end of the day I know myself where I have come from and what I've been through, ... and I didn't left my country with a choice because I left my country, you know, forcibly and I have got no any options – that's why I came and seek asylum from your country.

I heard a lot of rumours which is saying that this process is really fake and, er, you know, Australia is not going to recognise this process ... but I didn't took their words actually. I just decided, then I did it on my own. And then when I everything, my, my outcome is like positive, I wasn't actually happy with that. I wasn't happy with that because the way that I have been treated, because I shouldn't deserve to be treated like that and it make me feel very upset. You know, I just took the paper from them and I brought it to my room and I throw it. Just under my pillows so like only two or three of my friends, they came and say congratulation but I just say it like, oh it's just normal, you know, there is nothing that I can feel happy about it.

MG: Have you received a like a legally justifiable reason for your treatment?

A: Well, we have been waiting for the, er, actually legal justified reasons for why we have been sent to the jail and until today since that time ... and no one from the official side came and explained to us why we went.

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MG: Soon after he was given refugee status, Aziz was moved to Delta compound. The officials refused to send him back to Foxtrot, where he'd been living before.

A: So I came to Delta ... and I went and then put dinner so when I was in the line like oh, like Hell ... then everyone want to shake hand with me ... and then some of them they say, 'Oh well, you must welcome, welcome to Delta compound and we are really proud to have you.' It make me feel like, 'Oh, after I came out of the jail I've been isolated for a month or two months ... and people actually were, was really, were really happy to have me among them.' And it made me really feel very happy.

On the second day, I just got on my shoes and everything and then I went and I want to play soccer. It's kind of really crazy there. Everyone ... they say, 'Oh come on, you just came in yesterday and then you want to play soccer today?' And I say, 'Oh come on man, I haven't been playing, I haven't been exercising for two months and I feel like my body's really itchy everywhere so I need to do exercise actually.' So I play soccer actually on that day and had a really fun with my friends.

And then that night, actually I couldn't sleep you know like I spent, I spent all the night because I was just talking to different community ... and then finally I went to my community, Sudanese, and then we had like kind of like very, very long conversations. And then we chat and we laugh and like, oh my God! Even I haven't laughed for a month or two months actually, since the hunger strike, and they ... they are making a lot of joke about me.

MG: Pretty soon, Aziz was trying to organise another protest.

A: I told them that alright guys, now we're gonna start a new plan ... we need to boycott all the activities. And what I mean by that means... you need to stop going to the gym, number one. Number two, you need to stop going to, to English classes. Number three, you need to stop going, participating in community orientation.

So I say we need to stop that ... we need to stop every activity and then at same time we need to ignore, we need to keep silent like ignoring the case managers.

MG: But someone leaked his plan. One day, a contractor from the 'behaviour management team' came to talk to him.

A: So ... he said, 'We have got a complaint about you.' 'Oh,' I said, 'Like, really? Complaint about me, who made a complaint about me?' He said, 'The Wilson security ... they made a complaint about you because we have got, um, some information from reliable resources that say you are inciting people to break up the activity, and you are telling people not to participate in an activity. And then, ah, you look like you want to create another mess in Delta compound.' And I say, 'Hey, who told you that?'

MG: He was totally busted, but he denied everything.

A: And I say, 'Oh my God ... whatever I have said in the, in those past days, now he has got the message and then the details and everything.' So what I said to him, ... I said I don't know nothing about it.

So he replied to me and he said to me, like, 'Hey, look, I'm not here to joke with you but I'm here to tell you this that this is a serious matter. So if you are really don't wanna take it in your considerations, that's ah ... it's up to you. But this is your files...' ... And then he start saying, like, 'Oh, inciting people to go on hunger-ah, on peaceful protest, again is the law. ... I just want you to stay away, if you don't I will send you back to the jail.'

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MG: Aziz abandoned the boycott, but he kept resisting detention in other ways – like working on the court cases, or speaking to me.

But there's something else, another way that Aziz protects himself from the situation he's in. And it's an extremely personal thing.

A: You know, when the first time I got a chance, at that time I was the, the ah, Sudanese community leader, I got a chance and I met with the Immigration Minister Scott Morrison.

MG: Aziz met with Morrison when the Minister was in Manus to open the East Lorengau Transition Centre. That was just before the hunger strike broke out.

A: I was just like kind of happier and I want, I've got a lot of questions and then I wanna just ask him the question, my question. And I thought that he is the only person right person, that

reply to all my questions. But what happened is that like, he just, he spoke to us about the five minute, and then he refused to take any questions and then he just walk off.

And the first thing that he said during the meeting, he said, 'You will never ever come to Australia. And if you do, you're gonna stay here for long time.' Means that, and I got that point from him on the first day and I said *look, I know, I've got no other option, right?* And then what he said is really clear. Why can't I just convince myself and tell myself that this is the reality. Deal with, handle it. I know it's really hard, but I must handle that reality.

And when he just left and like, I actually got to the point that I convince myself and I say okay, um, I know ... let me pretend that I'm in a space journey. And, you know, what I mean by space journey, you know, when you trying to go to the space, when the scientists they were trying to go to space, what they did first time – they need to build, they need to design the crafts and then they build the crafts and then after they did all that you know how many years it takes for them to build a crafts? Probably gonna take like nine years, ten years for them to build the crafts. And then after that they embark on their ah, on their journey.

So this is what I'm, you know, this is what I actually say to myself. And I put myself on the reality. and this is the example that I always give to myself. So, I'm just pretending that as if I'm preparing for a space journey, and the space journey, it takes many years.

MG: And there's another way Aziz pretends.

A: And also I thought about something else like a high school, hostel or university hostels. When you go there and you want to study in university, and like, you come from the rural areas such as like, far away from the city ... so sometime, some of the universities, they offer for you, like, accommodations. So I imagine myself that, like, I was just—I've got one of those you know, er, scholarships from the university. And then the university is Manus Island and then the scholarships that I have got, it means when I came by boat and then the immigration intercept me and then when they brought me here, I thought that the ... the accommodations that offer for me, it means this is the hostel. And then the lessons means that the ... the daily, you know, activity for the daily, you know, things that I always see, like from morning until like, such as like talking to case managers, going to IHMS, seeing people suffer, you know, talk to different peoples or this is my lessons.

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A: I'm really kind of man that always pretend ... I know that this is the, the... the reality, but I will try to convince myself that, I will try to convince myself to say like *this is not the reality*.

You know when I walk around and I do those visualisations ... I don't see there is a fence in front of me and I don't see like the guards ... or I don't see everyone here, like, anyone who's really harassing me. And also what I see is like, I'm just in a place where it is full of good people and, you know, nice people and more more safer than here and also what I see myself in, it's just kind of imagination like, you know, in a in a right place, not in a wrong place.

While I was doing those kind of technique, I never, you know, imagine myself that like, or I never say to myself that I'm in the centre. I always say to myself that like I'm out of this centre, I'm out of this centre, you know, and I repeat it like maybe a hundred times: 'Oh, I'm out of this centre, I'm not in the centre, I'm not in the centre.'

Maybe for three hours, four hours, I will be like in that atmosphere, which is where I feel like oh, I'm kind of smiling, and although sometime you need to pretend actually, sometime you need to pretend. You need to pretend that you are like a strong man you can keep up with this environment, with this atmosphere, but at the end of the day the reality is that ah, no matter whoever like strong enough, when he comes to this place he will be destroyed maybe just within a week or within two weeks. But um, you know, thanks to those counsellors, who actually keep up with me, and they were like, help me up, help me how to keep myself up.

I myself, I did all I could to keep myself ... ah, to keep my mind strong. I did all I could to, to let, not let this place to take over me.

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MG: Coming up on *The Messenger*...

MG: Oh hey, and I also wanted to tell you that I am going to ... send off my visa application. There's a chance that I won't get given a visa. In that case, I might not get to visit, but I'm gonna apply.

A: Oh, oh, good on you Michael ... but to be honest, my friend, er, I don't—I'm not sure actually, but there are a few other people that I been in touch with them, they have tried to come down here but they haven't got a visa ... but all I can say to you is like good luck and hope to see you down here.

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To find out more about The Messenger, and to subscribe, visit wheelercentre.com/themessenger. The Messenger is a co-production of Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. It's produced by Michael Green, André Dao, Hannah Reich, Bec Fary, with Jon Tjhia and Sophie Black and the team at the Wheeler Centre. Theme music by Raya Slavin. Thanks to Dana Affleck, Angelica Neville, Sienna Merope, Ben Doherty and also to Claire McGregor, Celine Yap, Mia Tinkler, Ruby Wawn, and our other volunteer transcribers.

Behind the Wire is a volunteer-run oral history project that helps people who've experienced immigration detention in Australia tell their stories. To find out more and to support their work, head to behindthewire.org.au.