

EP3-Nana_Marija

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(upbeat music)

Marija

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-Hi and welcome to Untold Hong Kong Stories, multimedia narratives from the margins.

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This is a podcast series where we hear the stories of people in our community,

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from Hong Kong non-Chinese locals to marginalized members of our community.

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We hope their stories will make us think about the way we live ours,

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creating a more inclusive and diverse society.

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My name is Marija Todorova at the Department of Translation,

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Interpreting and Intercultural Studies and our guest for today's podcast is Nana,

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an asylum seeker and a single mom of two teenage boys.

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Here she shares her story.

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[Music]

Nana

00:00:53.920 --> 00:01:06.320

[Speaking in foreign language]

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-I had a really nice job when I was in my country.

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I have been nine years, for nine years in Hong Kong.

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I'm a single mom.

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I have two boys.

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They are studying in the secondary school.

Marija

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-You mentioned you're not from Hong Kong.

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What does home mean to you?

Nana

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-It means that my sons are around me and I feel like I'm home,
safe, without no fear.

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And also feels like it's safe.

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And future, and a good future.

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And a good future with my sons.

Marija

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-We can hear that you don't speak English, right?

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So can I ask you, what languages do you speak?

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And how do you communicate with people here in Hong Kong?

Nana

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-My first language is Arabic.

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Because I came from a Middle East country.

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And when I came to Hong Kong, I couldn't speak English like the Hong Kong people.

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I studied English to communicate with the people here.

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But some of the old people here cannot speak English.

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But we can use the sign language with the old people or some people cannot speak English.

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And I'm trying to improve my language because I need to help my children.

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And I need to use the language in the hospital and the shop, taxi.

Marija

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-You don't get any interpreters when you go to the hospital or when you go to other places.

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Do you work with interpreters? Do you get interpreters?

Nana

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-It's not easy to find an interpreter.

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For example, when I go to the hospital for emergency,

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that will be so hard for me because they are speaking

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Cantonese and English and I cannot speak so well with them.

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When I came, I tried to find some friends to help me speak English.

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And I found it so hard.

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And I tried to join English classes to communicate with the people here.

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But now it's not that hard because I already joined the classes and I can speak some English.

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But if it's an important place like immigration, like a lawyer, like a decision in a case,

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I ask for an interpreter because there are some difficult words for me.

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But for example, I need the interpreter if I go to the hospital or the immigration,

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the lawyer. So I need to find an interpreter.

Marija

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-Yes, we do speak in English outside of this podcast and that works perfectly fine.

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Right. So let me just ask you something else now,

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because you're not allowed to work here in Hong Kong. What do you do with your time?

Nana

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-Yes, I have some hobbies like I joined the church activities.

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Also some classes like handcrafts and language classes.

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And also in my free time, I meet my friends and I stay with my children, talk and play together.

Marija

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-I know you also like cooking. Tell us a little bit about the dishes,

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your favorite dishes and anything you want to cook in your home.

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And how do you secure the ingredients here in Hong Kong? Can you find them in the shops?

Nana

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-When I came here, I found that it's not easy to find the ingredients that I need to use in my

Nana

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country dishes.

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Also, because when I came here, I was staying in the guest house without any chance to get any food

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and even the food we can get from the ISS, it wasn't able to us to bring from there because

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we are staying in the guest house.

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And later on, I tried to find and ask my old friends from here about the ingredients and where

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I can buy it. And they helped me and sometimes I use different spices and ingredients to make the

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food like what I want.

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Also, my kids like that I make them the food they want to eat.

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They remind them of our country.

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I cook here pita bread and falafel and rice roll and some kind of our home country food.

Marija

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-Okay, thank you. Thank you for sharing that.

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So, you say you couldn't find the ingredients that you needed in Hong Kong.

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I was wondering what are the places in Hong Kong that make you feel welcomed,

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where you feel that you're welcomed? Are there places where you can find the ingredients that

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you need or are there any other places around Hong Kong where you feel that you're welcomed?

Nana

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-Yes, I can feel that when I go to my church, I can feel that I'm in my home

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because I can talk to them with my language. I'm not a stranger and we can talk in the same language.

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Also, some refugees places like organization, I can go and feel like they are my family. I'm not

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a stranger. They can talk to me freely like no one is better than others.

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And they can help me with anything I ask.

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But there are other places they need to ask me to come. Then they take a picture of me, then

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post it, but I don't like that. And I don't feel okay in these places.

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I feel like they're just using us.

Marija

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-So, I just wanted to ask you is that if there's anything you want these organizations to do

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that will be more helpful for you?

Nana

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-There's a lot of organizations here. It's called they are helping the refugees people.

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Some of them help.

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But some of them, they don't help.

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I want all the organizations to be united.

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To really help, don't just say that they are helping.

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For example, I have some friends in Europe.

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They can help me to find a home and job.

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But they cannot help me in the process to from traveling from Hong Kong to there.

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I just need from the organizations and Hong Kong also to stop complicate the process to us and find a way to let us live from here or even live here normally.

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In my case, I have found friends from Europe. They can help me for finding a job and home, but they cannot help me in the papers.

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It takes a long time and I need to pay a lot of money.

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But if there's people from here or the government can help and communicate with the people there in Europe or Canada, America, they can help us.

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There's one organization here, they can help, but they only help the people that are joining in.

Marija

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-What will be your message to the others, the people of Hong Kong? How can they help you? What can they offer to you and your family to feel more welcomed here?

Nana

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-I want them to treat me as a normal, as I'm from here, we are the same, no difference between us.

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In my country, I had a good position in my work and my children had to go to good schools.

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But when I came here, they didn't give me any chance to work or to make a life better.

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So they don't give any chance to let me feel that I'm okay, I can work, I can make a good life and future for my children.

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I've been here for nine years and the rules are still the same and being worse than before.

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And I think before I came here, the UN was able to help others in some cases, but when I came, I got no chance to help.

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I suggest that if they open the second door to the UN, it will be helpful for us and better for us.

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Because the UN sometimes looks at us as a family with children, and the children should have a future.

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They don't look at us as if we don't want anyone in our country, that we are dependent on this country.

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I was wondering if they start opening the UN again and receive some cases that really need help.

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Like the families having children, they need to know what their future is like.

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And the parents want to make sure that they are safe and their children are safe.

Marija

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-You are mentioning the future several times in this discussion, in this talk.

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So what are your hopes for the future, especially with two teenage boys?

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What do you hope for them, for the future, and for yourself?

Nana

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-I am a mother and I am responsible for my children.

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My only concern is that I am not the one receiving them.

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If they stay here in Hong Kong, it will be difficult for them to go to college.

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If they stay here for a long time, I will find a problem to find a way to let them join the university.

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And I think I need to find a sponsor to let him pay for my children too.

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And also if we find a sponsor and my children join the university, if they graduate, they will not find a way or a chance to get a job.

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So I feel like they don't care about our kids and they don't feel what we feel here.

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My future? I wish I could start a small business, a small restaurant or something like that.

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But it is very difficult here. My ambition is gone.

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For my future, I was thinking to make a small business, but when I came here, I found it so hard.

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So now I cannot think anymore about my project.

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I see that there are people, my friends, refugees in different countries.

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They work and earn money.

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They save money and after a while, they can start a small business and grow with time.

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When I found that my friends from other countries, they can start their own job and make a small business, even they are refugees, I feel like it's hopeless.

Marija

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-Those are difficult words.

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Here in Hong Kong, the word "refugee" is different from any other refugee in any other country.

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It is difficult for a refugee to live here. Any other country gives him a chance to work and to be free and to move from one country to another in the same city.

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Here in Hong Kong, the people looking at the refugee people as they are homeless, they are so bad, even they don't like to talk to us.

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In the other countries, they can work and make a good life and they also can travel without any struggles.

Marija

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-I do hope you get a good future.

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For the end of our discussion, can you tell us what are the three words that will describe your life here in Hong Kong?

Nana

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-There is one advantage here, that I feel here is safe more than my country.

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This is the first word.

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And the negative words, that there is no hope and no future.

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And the third one, that there is no change. I have been here for 9 years and there is no change.

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The decisions are made for the worst here. They don't consider us as human beings.

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The rules are very tough.

Marija

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-Thank you very much Nana for this discussion. We do hope you find hope.

Nana

00:24:23.280 --> 00:24:25.280

-I hope.

Marija

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-Thank you.

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(upbeat music)