

Africa, 2015-2016, Calais and UK

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When I was a young boy, I had my own dreams, like crazy dreams: I wanted to be like Bruce Lee. When I grew up, as a teenager, I was not following girls and things like that, I just wanted to be at martial arts, here I could practice karate or Kung Fu. I had this special idea of making my own martial art. But I couldn't do this, because already, when I was 20 or 21 I had an operation on my stomach that made me stop doing any self-defence or any sport. After that had become my new way of life, I started to think about how I could make myself a useful person; how I could be responsible; how I could make my life. Nothing endures but change.

After this operation, I really wanted to graduate from the military academy as an officer, but the operation also stopped this. They will not accept you if you have had any operation on your body. After that I went to university. I would have preferred to read law, but my qualifications did not allow me to enter into the law course. Because of that I chose something near to law, that is, political science. The government wanted me to work for them, they chose the people who have connections with the students to ensure their presence there, on the campus. I refused, like four or five times, to be with them, because I knew they were lying. They said things to me about 'democracy' or something like that. Even after I graduated, really, I took like three or four years to get my certificate from the university because the university had already seen the blacklist – you could see that my name was on the black list. After I had paid a lot of money, I was able to get my certificate.

When I started to think about helping people, that was really at university. While I was still at university I started a little charity union; we were called the political science union. We were twenty

people. It was my idea; I wouldn't like to say I was the boss - I was the organizer. I knew among the students, exactly who needed money to pay for university, I knew who was coming from the villages and hadn't found a place to stay. I went around to many charity places to ask, to collect money for these people, to help them. That was what made the government come and say, 'You will come with us!'. When I refused, that became a big problem. Like two or four times I said, No, no, no'. That made them destroy this charity union, my little union.

After graduation we should take military training. We have military service; you go to a military camp. The military service is not just training. You are part of the army, there is no difference between you and a real soldier. Unless you do that, you cannot work. : Unless you do your military service you can't move on, you can't get your university certificate. If you remember, I said I was suffering for three years before I could get my certificate. I should serve for one year – after that I should get the certificate. When I was near to serving one year, they said, I don't know, that something that happened that made me need to resume military service again, from the beginning. They said, 'No, no, go to the centre', and they sent me back. This was because of my union work.

After that, when I went to the Ministry of Work to ask for a job, they refused it. I could never work for the government in any way. Okay, that made me drop my certificate outside of my life. I was 25 or 26.

Work in the civil service would have been the best option for me; the private sector didn't take on anyone graduating in political science.

After that I worked independently in the market, as a trader. I got digital receivers, and I had a shop for this. I got a contact in a Coca Cola company so I started working there, in marketing, for the

international Coca Cola company. After that, I became a salesman for them. Coca Cola then transferred me to another company, a company for dairy products. I worked there for four years. And after that I made my own business, a store. I started my own store where I sold many things – something smaller than a supermarket, just selling small electronic equipment and devices. The store had a technology section with mobiles, iPhones, cameras, little radios with batteries and things like that.

When I came to make this business, I moved to another place, three or four hours away, because I had already discovered that some people were following me, even earlier sometimes, when I went out from the university. My father said it would be safer to remove from there to another place. My entire family had to move with me. I have one real brother and five half-brothers. It's not like here - when you are eighteen or twenty you choose your life and you stay alone. You can't stay alone until you are married, and even then you live close to your family.

After eight months you should be able to get your services, like electricity, water and so on. We had already paid, but after three months, no services had come to us. I knew all my neighbours around me so I organized a little meeting, again. I can't say no. We had a little meeting in a mosque, I took notes and went to the local government, and asked them, 'Why is this happening?'. After two days exactly someone from the government came in my store, it was in March, they asked me, 'Where is your tax receipt?' which I showed them. 'Okay; you must pay your taxes'. 'For what?' They said, 'For next year'. I had already paid my taxes three or four weeks ago. How can it be that I should pay for next year? I might live, or not live, in that time. 'You will pay!', they said. 'No, I will never pay', I said. We were shouting in each other's faces. I told him, 'If you want money, you can come

and take it by force. Not like this, I will never pay. Or I will close this store; I don't need it'. He said, 'You will pay, ah, you will see'. 'Okay, show me', I said.

After these things, after one day, someone was knocking on my door. I went to it to receive maybe a friend, something like that. When I opened my door I saw someone who then covered my face.

After that four or five persons put me in a pick up, they drove me in a particular direction for maybe 15 minutes. After that they came for me, and I went into a room, three by four metres. You can't see anything in this room. You could just hear some screaming. For maybe two days, I didn't know why I was there and where I was exactly. I had no idea whether it was really night or when it was morning, I was not able to tell exactly the time. If someone sat and lit a light, you could only see them by that light.

They started asking about my support of another (opposition) political party. They said to me that I was collecting money for these people to let them buy weapons. 'I didn't do this'. 'You had like a charity or something like that. 'I didn't do it'. 'You did. 'I didn't do it'. 'You did. You did'. After a while what they say becomes real. They took their revenge over me. By force. They did many things that were not good. After two weeks exactly, my uncle talked to an officer and asked him how to get me out. He should pay to get me out. When he had already paid, he came to me, and told me, 'You are here, ok. Tomorrow you will meet a judge. Just say yes and sign the documents they give you. That is all you should do'. I was prepared to do anything to get out. If he had asked me to kill I would have done it, to get out. Okay, I just saw one person at the table and I said yes, I signed. When I got out I asked him what things exactly I had said yes to. 'Okay, you signed and you said yes, that you were supporting the opposition party. You also said yes, that you will come here every week to sign in. And yes, that you are not allowed to go out of this country and also that you cannot

visit any doctor, never. And you cannot tell anyone about these things'. I said, 'Okay. Yes. Yes yes'.

When I was there, he also said four words: 'If you can survive'. 'What do you mean?' He said, 'I am not going to guarantee these people'.

I went to my auntie who lives far away from my place, like three or five hours. I rented a car to take me there, because I couldn't drive my car, my fingers were broken. I went there and stayed for three days. My brother called me, told me, 'Don't come back. If you are already away, go, go'. From there you can find smugglers to help you go to Libya'. I chose to go to Libya. It took three months. In Libya, I started to fight many fights. You can fight the police - they took your money, took your phone. Anything in your pocket, they took it by force.

That was this year 2015. This is the kindness of Libya – they clean you out. After that, there was nothing to do but to get out. After being out on the streets – there was no other way. I thought the best thing for me would be to go to Egypt; it would be better there. There, I knew someone who could smuggle me across the Mediterranean Sea. I needed someone who could take me the sea route to Alexandria, and from there I could get to Turkey.

People recommended me to go to Alexandria, because if I was anywhere else the police could get me. No one let us get off where we wanted, actually. Even if we offered to pay them we were told that we had to go to Alexandria – anywhere else we were told that the Egyptian police would detain and us and send us back. If there's anyone who wanted to get off, they would hold up the situation. So they make you go – there's no going back. There, in Alexandria, I could get in touch with people

that could facilitate the journey. I chose to come by boat. You have to choose between bullet or boat. I chose boat. When you go, there is no returning back. I chose to go. Okay, go-go.

We were on the sea for twelve days until we reached Sicily, and from there we reached here. So from Sicily to Turin and then to Ventimiglia. Everyone on the boat had different nationalities. There was a group of us; we were guarded all the way but we all got on together by chance. There were other Sudanese with me, and many other nationalities; it wasn't limited by nationality. And then we reached Ventimiglia and after that came to Paris.

The aim was to get to Egypt nothing more nothing less. I didn't plan on coming to Europe – it wasn't a dream or anything. I just wanted to be somewhere safe – even if that was Egypt. Any place to make me safe, that was all I wanted. It was not my choice to come here, I came here by force. I do not like Europe, I am sorry to say that, because it is not my culture, and even it is not my language. I didn't know them, they didn't know me. Because of that I didn't want to choose Europe. Never. Never. Even on the religious side. I am a Muslim. I know there are Muslims in Europe and that they are free to pray or not to pray. I know that. But what about my mother? If I was there in Egypt I can work; I know myself; I can work everywhere. But how about safety? You couldn't find it anywhere else. When I moved to Europe, I decided to stay in Italy; ok it's safe, it's good. But when I asked, a lot of people were there two, three years, in the camp, with no papers. It is not life. I came to Paris and went to LaChapelle Metro, I went to the (Jean-Quarre) school camp ; I saw people living under a bridge. This is not a safe life. This is not the life I am looking for.

I heard about Germany, I heard about many, many countries. Someone told me, 'If you go to Calais maybe you can reach the UK'. It is like an adventure, do you know, like when you are a kid looking

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for adventures? I am like an island, swimming, take me anywhere, anywhere. Okay, let me go to there.

It was big trouble when I came here. I can't believe this is Europe. Is it true that this place exists in Europe? Where is humanity, where is democracy? Where is all this bullshit? They just write it in the paper. I think, because we have come here, we are not human beings, we become animals, a new kind of animal. A new kind of animal that has developed at this time, it's known as 'refugee'.

We came here to see this really dignified life. Yes, I like it; it is a good life for the people. I don't want to talk about differences between white people and the black people. It is like we have been deserted. Because this is Europe, a place of humanity. I think one day maybe, we will develop ourselves to be human beings. But now we are not human beings. Like they have said, at the borders, some insects came across. I think we are still insects. That is true.

When I was trying to follow my dream of being useful to other people. I mentioned Bruce Lee – he is an ethical person. He protects persons who are weak. I like being a person who protects the weak. Maybe now I am another kind of Bruce Lee. I try to protect the refugees. They fight a difficult fight. Sometimes you can choose; I want to do this. Not that you should fight. You should help. You should try to do your best. To be useful, to be a man. You are not a man because you are strong, or because of your acts. You should put the weak before the strong, in a bad time not just in a good time. This will show you who is bad and who is good.

Many people ask me why I haven't applied for asylum in France. But this situation, here in the Jungle, is not likely to be one that encourages anyone to get registered in France. Before you come to the Jungle you have an idea of the Jungle. This destination is what it really is.

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o you want to know, 'Why do you want to go to the UK? I will answer that question. I have been here for three months, in this wonderful world, the Jungle. Really, it is wonderful. Because of the people inside, they are wonderful. You can see many nations, saying, 'Hi, hello', in different languages. You can see in their eyes that they respect you, but they can't say that to you. Even from their eyes you can tell if they want something; sometimes they are looking for a translator. Or yourself; sometimes you are asking someone, 'Please translate, if you need it. We are able to talk even in silence. You can find what you want. Someone sees someone who is cold. Maybe he will give you his blanket: 'Take this, you are colder than me'. You can find the real kind of human being here: That is making all these people real people

Since I came here I haven't encountered French volunteers. Maybe one, maybe two. Compare it to the number of British volunteers. All these people, they come from England and they support and they are a real help. You see volunteers who stay here for two months and never go to their home. Just because they want to help people who have no help; because of humanity. Also I want to go to the UK because of how UK people treat us. In here there is no difference between black and white. They respect you because you are human. This is the life I want, this is a dignified life. Every single day I spend in here makes me want to go the UK even more, because I discover and get to know more about that place. The French police will spray gas in your eyes, sometimes they will kick you in the stomach, sometimes they will beat you with sticks. You would think they are respected

people. Sometimes they detain you two weeks without anything, just because we are refugees. We do not see anything of France that make us want to stay here. No-one feels they are wanted by the French government.

You won't meet anyone here upsetting you. People will greet you and welcome you. That is what makes this a wonderful place. I don't have good neighbors in here, I have good brothers. I have brothers from Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt. Six thousand people, those are my brothers. I am a rich man. Because of that I sleep in safety. I can eat with anyone in here. I ask them and they ask me, 'Please come here, eat with us'. Do you know why? Not because of money, no. Because of respect. Respect, with a little smile. You can have) everything here, everything. Because they are looking for respect. Give respect, take respect. Not like outside in the city: 'Give me something and I will give you something'.. You can try this. Go anywhere in the Jungle, say, 'Hi', and you will hear, 'Hi, please come on in'. You will find people saying, 'Hi, hi my brother', and inviting you in. It is because of this, that I find it wonderful. What I told you about my dream of being useful for the people: I can be that here, all the time. I can help them. I can arrange something. I can ask for food for them. That makes me useful in here. Because of that, I find this place wonderful.

I find happiness here. How many people find true happiness? How will you pay to find happiness? How will you pay? How much? I think I find happiness in here. Real happiness. I am happy. If I go to the centre of Calais, to take a rest, one or two hours later I will miss the Jungle and come back here. Because I think I belong in this place. If I go to the UK, I will try to help the people here, from there. Until my last (pursuit) in my life I will try to help people anywhere. Anywhere.

I will do my best to help people. The best solution is ideally where a man helps as much as he can. 'God helps his servant as long as he helps his brother'. This is a hadith of the Prophet (peace be on him) and he cannot be faulted, he's right. The Prophet said that the best of men is the one who is most useful to the people. The Lord, God, he promised that, 'When you help your brothers, I will help you'.

I didn't pay anything for this caravan. It has been brought here to help me. I wear clothes. I didn't buy them. My life is good I am in a good situation. Eating, drinking, wearing clothes, sleeping good – that is all I need. I am in a better situation than the millions of people that sometimes can't find anything to eat at all, that cannot find a place to sleep. I am good.

One month later:

I've been very busy in the Jungle, and now I am doing less; I want to rest

I have three children – four, two and three months. I have never seen the smallest one.. When I think about them: The girl could be maybe – not a lawyer or a doctor – a pharmacist. Girls should learn to speak well, but they can be soft. Boys need to grow up strong, with military training, but not using force. As I said before, men should be like knights, with swords that they never need to use.

Six months later:

Now, I am living in a small city in Wales, waiting for my second interview. I have had my initial, screening interview. I do not have much contact with my lawyer; she just tells me I must wait. I am not allowed to work. I cannot volunteer formally unless a volunteer organization writes a letter to

the Home Office for me, to ask for permission. I do not want to do this; the Home Office might not like it.

Waiting and doing nothing is hard – I like to be busy and to organize things. Sometimes I wish I was in the Jungle, my shining city. Conditions were very difficult, but I could do many things.

I volunteer informally; I worked for a charity providing clothes for refugees for a month, for a church that provides food, and now I am translating for new Syrian families who come here and do not know any English. I am hoping to take some English classes, but the college will ring me later; the classes are full at the moment. There are some martial arts classes that will also start up again soon.

Before, I was living with people who did not speak English or Arabic. It was very isolating. Now, I am living with one person from Sudan. He has received only £19 from the Home Office since he arrived over two months ago. I think there has been a managerial error. I have rung the Home Office for him but so far no money has arrived. I am buying him food from my money and we are cooking together. £35 a week is not much for two people. But I cannot let him starve.

You can feel racism sometimes in people's eyes when they look at you, and in the expressions on their faces. Usually, I ignore it, or I pretend I didn't see it. It is less in London, because there are people from many different places there, unlike here.

When I am in the city centre, I take tea in a café run by Eritreans. Many Africans go there. I feel relaxed, because I do not experience racism there.

Yesterday, I had a bus ticket to go home from the city centre. The bus driver asked me where I wanted to go, and then he said that the bus did not go there, even though I knew it was the right bus. I told him that it was not his business where I was going, or why. But I got off the bus, and I caught the next one.

Sometimes I have trouble sleeping, and bad dreams. The doctor gave me some sleeping pills, but I only took a few; I do not want to get addicted.

The Home Office does not treat us as people; they do not want to see or hear us. They treat us worse than they might treat an animal.

Syrian refugees get help quickly. But their situation is not worse than that of many other people. I think the UK feels guilty that it has not helped Syria. But it is not good to create inequalities between people. We are all escaping war or persecution; why make differences between us?

You can't feel the same as a refugee, I think. You can imagine, and give a little support, but it is not much. Refugees have lost a lot. Even when they get their status, they are not in the same place as they were before. . Of course, some people are stronger than others. But I think that all refugees have lost some of their original personalities

Myself and some friends are talking about making a support network: HopeTowns. What I would like to do, when I get my status, is to use the talents that homeless people and refugees have, to help make a good environment for them. Refugees are not born refugees. Homeless people are not born

homeless, or drug users; they need treatment, and a place to live. There are many empty houses here that we could open up. We could also buy caravans. We need to distribute food to homeless people, not just to provide food banks. The people can provide support for each other because they know best what they need; all they require is somewhere to meet, and a little money for tea. We also want to have an Information Bus that can travel to all the towns in the UK, distributing information and discovering what the problems are and what is needed, so that people are not isolated and told 'just wait' when they come here. We could also receive calls from and give help to people arriving from, for instance, Calais. Already, we have some organisations that would work in partnership with us. We are making a database, and planning how to do this.