

Eritrea, UK, 2015-2016

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We can start from my journey. I said my name is Eritrea and I am representing the passing of many challenges on the way, and under suppression and in prison.

Let me start from my childhood. I was born in 1986. At that time, Eritrea was under the colonisation of Ethiopia (in the Derg regime). Eritrea was destroyed and many families were living under bad conditions. It was a bad situation at that time. Many people died. People were murdered because they helped their children go to struggle against the government of Ethiopia. At that time, the government of Ethiopia was not democratic. It was a dictatorship, like our government now, and that is why many people struggled. Five years after I was born, Eritrea got its independence.

I remember I was eager to go to school - my family also, especially my father. He was excited about me going to school because he was a servant, he was not educated, that is why he wished for me to be educated. I remember one day where I went to register for primary school in my hometown. The director did not give me the permission to start, because I looked a bit childish, a little too small - especially in height, I was too short. He told me, 'You have to eat "one ton"'. He said that to express his idea, that I should grow bigger. My father got angry because he was eager for me to get registered. I was clever, especially when it comes to reading and calculating in mathematics - subtracting and adding numbers. I was good at that time. My father went to the director and said to him, 'You can ask him anything that you want from the primary school'. The director was surprised: 'What are you saying?'. My father said, 'My son is clever, you have to register him. You can compare him with

others, you can ask him anything'. The director did what my father told him. He asked me many things, for example how to read the alphabet, how to add numbers, how to subtract numbers, how to multiply numbers. I answered the correct things and the director registered me immediately. My dad had taught me those things. Although he was a shepherd, looking after animals, he had been learning many things from his uncle. My father's mother had died and his father had gone to discover what there was in Ethiopia, so my father was living with his grandparents and that is why he was commanded by his grandparents to be a shepherd of their animals, which he was sad about. He did not want the things that had happened to him to happen for me.

I was the smallest person in that school. I was six years old. I remember I stood first in my class and everyone was congratulating me. From that time onwards, I was encouraged, especially by my father, he was saying, 'You will be a professor', 'You will be a doctor', 'You will be the bright future of this country'. His way of thinking is strong and talent-full. He encouraged me, and that was why I became clever. My brothers became clever because they were looking at me. I stood first until the eleventh grade.

In 1997 I started in junior school, that was from sixth grade to eighth grade. When we reached eighth grade, we took the general examination. You need to pass the exam to move on to High School which starts from ninth grade. I remember I scored 95%, an average of five subjects. The subjects were Mathematics, English, General Science, History and Geography. In High School I got high marks and was one of the clever students. And I chose the natural science stream in which the subjects were Mathematics, English, Physics, Chemistry and Biology.

From 1997 to 2003; I attended secondary school in my town. In 2003, our government proposed that everyone who finished secondary school must go to military training service. This was new for the whole society. After spending four months, you should do the twelfth grade, and after the twelfth grade, everyone should do the matriculation exam. I stayed there for one year and I took my matriculation exam. I remember I didn't get the highest score possible - that was due to English and Chemistry. I did well in all other subjects. I got 3.6 up to 4.00.

After that, I transferred to the Eritrean Institute of Technology. In that institute, the teachers and the doctors used psychometric tests. It was new in our country. There were 240 yes/no questions. I remember there was one guy who was travelling with a computer; he asked an adviser how to answer 'Yes' and 'No'. The adviser said, 'If the answer is "yes" you have to say "yes", if the answer is "no" you have to say "no"'. Instead of using the mouse, the guy said 'Yes!' out loud to the computer. Computers were new to us at that time. Everyone laughed at him. The adviser told us how to use the computers.

I chose to become a computer engineer. I was interested in becoming either a computer engineer, electrical engineer or a doctor in health science, but when I saw my answers at the computer, all my answers were 'Yes' for the computer engineering. That is why I chose that field. I attended for five years and I graduated in 2010. After that, the government, or the ministry of education, told us to serve them for about two years. We were promised that after three years we would work with our profession in our field and with enough salary. The truth was not that. I served in the military centre and I was an IT-teacher for the military leaders. It is difficult to teach IT to those that do not have any knowledge of English. The words in the computer are English words. I had many challenges to understand them and to teach them. After two years, I asked to be transferred to my field, but they rejected me. Oh my God, what can I do? They told us that after two years we would be assigned our field and that we would

have enough salary, but why had this not happened? I said this at a meeting and one of the leaders gave me a warning afterwards: 'If you repeat this, it is dangerous to you'. Oh my God, what can I do? I was sad about this. For about three years, they told me to teach mathematics. Though I have knowledge about mathematics, it is not my field. If I keep teaching mathematics, my computer knowledge will decline.

I am Christian, and one day I was reading the bible in my home and other people were coming to discuss the bible. We were talking about the apostles. I did not know if someone saw us but the police came and took us to a prison. We were there for five months and after that, they took us to a garden to work there. I had an opportunity to escape together with one of my friends, and we told each other that it would be better if we died rather than to be in prison there. We were running, and we could hear the soldiers shooting. I remember we had a two days' journey to reach Sudan. We spent two days on foot to the boarder and then I stayed in Khartoum for about twenty days.

I remember I was sick, maybe it was because of hunger and thirst. I did not have any other options than to leave Sudan, pass the desert to go to Europe. It is not safe to stay in Sudan. There is a link between the Sudanese and Eritrean government so if soldiers in Sudan catch you, you are sent back to Eritrea and might end up in prison forever. We were afraid of that and that is why I immediately left Sudan to go to Libya. I had to pay a large amount of money for the journey.

I had a cousin in Sudan and I stayed with him for twenty days. During that time, I did not leave the house. During that time, I took my IELTS exams so that I would be qualified in English.

My brother in Israel and my uncle in America helped me financially to leave Sudan and go ahead with my journey. I started my journey while I was still sick but it was not an option to

wait. My parents kept asking my brother, 'How is your brother?' They told him that chiefs from the government came to them and troubled them. 'Don't worry, he is in a better condition, don't worry', he told them.

The journey started in the Sahara. In the desert there were many evil things that you would rather be without. The smugglers are not good people. They are very cruel people, especially towards the ladies. We saw many evil things happening to the ladies. The smugglers liked to have sex with them. It was against their will, it happened by force. They were very cruel towards them.

The Sahara is not a comfortable place. It took us about two days to reach the Libyan border by truck. We faced many challenges because we did not have enough water and food with us. There was no option; we had to resist the hunger and thirst.

The Libyans accepted us at the border. We were loaded onto trucks. There were about four trucks and I got on the first one. It was a four hours' drive to the place we were going. The driver was driving fast and we told him to slow down. We were on a hill and suddenly our driver pressed the brake because he realised it could be dangerous, and moved the truck away from the path immediately. Another truck was right behind us because our driver was leading the way. The car behind us slipped down the hill, it fell down maybe twenty meters. There were about twenty-five people in the truck. 'Is this reality?' I thought. It was like being in a movie. I was in shock. There were ladies and even a six months old child in the car. God is good. Only four of the people died. I see such things in Hollywood films so I was really surprised at that moment. There weren't any nurses or doctors and many were injured. We didn't have any other option than to continue our journey.

One day we reached the destination: a border town in Libya. The smugglers did not care about the bodies. They might have buried them, I don't know. They were hitting us and they shouted at us; it was very terrifying. I remember thinking, 'Why am I doing this to myself? I have no other option, what can I do?' I was arguing with myself, with my soul, but there was no other option. We stayed in the border town for one week without enough food, without clean water, without washing ourselves. It was terrifying. I don't know how we made it through that week.

Thank you Lord, after one week we left and arrived in the coast area of Tripoli. On the way we passed through a city where ISIS were. We saw their flags. We were afraid of them. The smugglers told us: 'If you speak too loud ISIS will come and murder you. You have to stay silent'. They kept us inside a big truck. They used bricks and wood to construct a lorry that looked as if it was carrying a load, where we could stay inside. It was very hot, especially for the ladies and their babies. The babies were crying. We didn't have an option. If ISIS had heard us, we would not have been here today.

Thanks God we reached Tripoli's coast area. After staying at the coast without food and water for about one week, we had dehydrated our bodies and many people were suffering from diarrhoea and typhoid, and there was a lot of itching. When I remember that scene, I don't have words to explain it. I can say it is a kind of hell.

Then we continued our journey crossing the Mediterranean Sea. If you did not have the money to pay for the further journey you would have to stay in that hell. I paid money and was therefore able to leave. The boat was not really a boat and it was not a ship. It was made up of wood. The smugglers do not care about safety, they care about their money. About 700 people were kept in a boat capable of carrying 400 people, and I was downstairs. It is the worst place. If you are upstairs, there is a good temperature and a good wind - it is

comfortable to breathe. If there is any danger, those who are downstairs cannot be saved.

Those who are upstairs have better chances. If people come to rescue us, they will save the ones upstairs first.

We spent eleven hours on the boat until the Italian Navy came to rescue us. There was a big sort of misunderstanding. Some of the people wanted to get off the boat immediately and get on the Italian Navy's ship. The weight on the ship was not balanced. The Navy was shouting to us that if we did not keep it balanced we would turn upside down. This did not happen, thanks to the wisdom of the Navy. They brought one ship at each side of the boat and helped to balance the boat. Then slowly we were transferred to their big ship.

It took one night and six hours to reach Sicily. The Italian ship had come a long way to help people. Many would have died if it wasn't for the help the Europeans give the people coming from Africa crossing the sea.

In Sicily, they kept us in a wide building for five days. After five days, we started shouting. People forget the challenges that they have been through, all they remember is their ambition: where should they go? That was their way of thinking. Actually, the situation made us shout because most of the people needed to have care for their health. The Italians asked us what was happening and we told them, 'We want to move on from here, so why are you keeping us?' They told us, 'You can leave tomorrow, don't worry'. They took us by bus to different parts of Italy.

They took me to Venice but they did not give me a room. I did not have any other option than to continue to Milan where I stayed for two days. There I got food from charities but there were no places to stay. A smuggler asked where I was from - I didn't know his name but he was from Eritrea. We asked him where we should go and he told us that Italy is not a good place to stay. 'It is bullshit', he said. It would be better to go to the UK, he told me, because I

am educated, because I speak English and because I am able to communicate with the people there. 'UK has a good asylum support', he told me. I asked him, 'But don't other countries have good asylum support?' 'I don't know, but UK is better', he said. I asked him how I could get to the UK. He said he could take me there himself, so we went to a train station. He asked us to pay him but we had no money. He told us to call our relatives and then they could pay him. We didn't have an option: our relatives should pay the money in order for us to reach our destination.

We got on a train to Ventimiglia, and from there we got a car. There is a chain there between the smugglers. We went by car to Nice, by bus from Nice to Antibes, train from Antibes to Paris and from there we went by train to Calais. That was the journey until Calais. I did not expect to face further challenges there.

When I reached Calais, I asked the people I knew there how to get to England. They told me to go to the train station where they would show me how they attempt to get to England. I went there with them one day. I was tired. 'Oh my God, what should I do?' I went through so many challenges and now I am facing another one. I asked people why they did not seek asylum in France. A guy told me that he applied, he didn't get accepted and he waited for four months where they didn't give him any shelter. 'You have to go to the UK', he said.

I stayed in Calais for one month. After one month, I won. I checked the weather forecast on my phone and it said that there would be a heavy rain the next day. I used the rain to win. I went to the train station with two others and we got on top of the train. There were many cars on the train and we were under the cars. Even if they had looked for us, they would not have found us because of the heavy rain. A security man saw us and brought a dog but the dog didn't follow us. Thank you God for sending the rain. When I entered the tunnel I shouted and

no one could hear me. I shouted because I was very happy: 'I am going to England!!! Thank God!!!!'.

I was on the train until it reached its destination; then the security people came and I was laughing because I was happy. I did not consider whether they were going to detain me or not, it was not on my mind.

People in Calais did advise me regarding what to tell the police and about specific tricks. I didn't accept it. I was thinking that I must tell the truth. I spoke the truth and I am still waiting for my interview.

I registered with the police and they told me that they would detain me, but fortunately, it was only for one night. They asked me screening questions and I answered the truth. They brought me to Wigan, to what we called the Britannia Hotel, and after that they took me to Liverpool and from there to here, this small city in the north of England. Now I am living here, I know you and I know many English people. They are very nice people. Although it is difficult, it is much better than the challenges I have been through. They give us £5 per day. I can't say it is a good amount of money, but it is their rule and I don't have any comments about this because I don't have the knowledge. It is not too much but we use that money and we are living.

I am the eldest from my family and there are many younger ones in my home country and there are also others in other countries. I have my brother in Germany and another one in Israel. The other one was in Sudan, but they turned him back to Eritrea and he is now in prison. We are spreading in different directions due to the situation in my home country, due to the dictatorship. Our government is very cruel, they do not care about the people, there is no press and there are no rights. It is slavery. It is reminding me of the slavery in the

eighteenth century, it is like that; it is a pity. We cannot resist. The only option is to leave the country.

Our parents, our dads and our mums have spent their lives to bring us independence and they do not want any further civil war among the people. That is why there is no struggle inside the country, they are afraid of civil war. They prefer to leave their country. I think it is not the best option. Leaving the country means you are encouraging the dictatorship and their rules, but for those who start to fight against the government, they will take them immediately and imprison them. The situation is demoralizing the people.

Even outside of the country, if you organise a group to oppose the government you are in danger because the government has many spies outside of Eritrea. They investigate who is opposing the government and they know who is opposing them. They will take your family and imprison them. That is one of the main reasons why people are not opposing the government.

My family is happy that I am safe, but no one can be happy when they are separated from their family. Sometimes they say, 'It would be better if you were with us in this difficult situation'. It is difficult being separated from them. We are eleven siblings with one dad and one mum. Seven are back in Eritrea. They are younger ones so I don't know if they will leave the country. It depends on the government. If it continues like now, with the current government existing, I think the migration from Eritrea will not stop.

I like education very much, especially the invention and investigation of new things. In my childhood, when I started learning, I had a bright future in front of me to become a doctor or to become a professor. In England I want to continue my education and I want to participate in higher levels of investigation. I dream of eradicating some of the challenges that people are facing. I would like to travel to every part of the UK to share my ideas with the people.

Most of the southern people of the UK are facing the migration of people, and they have enough knowledge about that, but there are some people in the UK that do not have enough knowledge about this. I haven't had conversations with many people, but I have been told that education is better in southern UK. For education, Glasgow and Edinburgh are also better. For working, London and Birmingham are better. People say like that. I really appreciate the people of UK; I am not speaking about the government, but the people. It wasn't my expectation that there would be a fence in Calais, put there by the UK government.

My country is the most evil country in the world. Some people say it is the second 'hell country', following North Korea. In North Korea it is also dictatorship, we know that many people die in prison, we see that in newspapers and everything.

When I speak about my country, I am a witness. Many things have happened, many children and women have died, some are in prison. When passing the border in Eritrea, the soldiers shoot at people. How can you shoot your own people? If they don't want to live there, you have to let them go. For my brother who is in Israel, when he was leaving, it was difficult. He went to the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia and the soldiers caught many of his friends. He told me that two people died.

Instead of eradicating the bad things that are happening inside the country, it is easier for the leaders to kill people. That shows they don't have any humanity and that is why they are lagging behind and keep on lagging behind. Instead of showing us with their actions that they are building the country, they are speaking. They bark: 'We are building the country', 'Such a good country'. But how?! By speaking, how can you build? First, you have to respect your people, then you will build your country. But you know, they are bullshit, the government. Sorry for saying that.

My mum and dad, they are okay. I talk with them on the phone. They think about me always. They say, 'We are always thinking about you'. But if they were in a bad condition, they would not say that. They would need to resist telling me. They cannot tell me the truth. In Eritrean culture, people are secretive. If you are hungry, you don't say that. You do not want to make any trouble for people.

We are shy in Eritrea. If you for example would like to wash your body, you would first have to look and observe the environment. If there is not enough water, and you are asked if you want to wash yourself, you would say, 'No I don't want to wash myself, I am good', or 'No I don't want tea', if you are offered tea. Inside Eritrea at least. Outside Eritrea I don't do that now. If I had enough money to buy a car, and I asked my brother or other Eritrean people if they needed a car, they would say no. Until you actually buy them the car they will say like this. If I went to my aunt, she would not ask me, 'Do you want some food?', she would just bring it to me. Otherwise I would have been like, 'No, no, no'. That type of behaviour does not work here in England.

I educated myself. Learning means building on any part of your mind, it does not mean holding on to your culture. You have to eradicate the bad parts and keep the good parts. You have to be well talented. Learning does not mean counting grades and levels. It means you have to be well skilled. Your mind must think in a super manner. That is what learning means.

In Eritrea, the Pentecostal faith is not allowed. If you believe in the Pentecostal faith, immediately the government will imprison you. The government recognizes only Islam, the Orthodox Church, the Catholic and the Protestant faith as our religions. They use the old-

fashioned divide-and- rule, which is not good. The Pentecostal people are considered the messengers of the American government. It is not good. I was imprisoned for about five months because they accused me of being Pentecostal. They are racists. They do not know about any humanity, the government.

The worst thing that is happening in Eritrea is the open bribery. Culturally, in our society, it is considered an evil thing. So we are lagging behind instead of uprising. Our parents, they keep their mouths shut, they have pain inside, but they do not have any other option. They say that the government has betrayed the mothers, betrayed the heroes, who have sacrificed themselves in the struggle against the Eritrean government.

The son of our president, Abraham, was studying with us at the college of the Eritrean Institute of Technology. Now he is the leader of an Eritrean Air Force. He does not have the knowledge, but they placed him in the top. That is a shame.

I was in Liverpool for a while and I had a friend that I knew from before. He has lived in Liverpool for about six years. He is an Eritrean guy and he became my solicitor. He took me for the first screening interview. Now he is in Liverpool and I had an interview two months ago - and I am still waiting for my residence permit.

Later addition:

In addition to my true story in the introduction and later parts I would like to add some and summarize them.

When I was about four and half years old, Eritrea was under the Ethiopian colonial rule. I always never forget at the moment I was always going with my father to cultivate our farm lands. One day my father was ploughing and a lot of Ethiopian soldiers were passing through that way. I always remember one of the Ethiopian troops came to my father and spoke with him and immediately hanged his neck. And another one came and targeted his gun at my

father's face. I shouted loudly but no one was coming to help us. Finally the troops beat and stoned my father and he fell down. His backbone was harmed and I remember one soldier came and ordered them to leave my father. At that moment I didn't have any option. The only thing that I did was hugging my father and crying a lot. Because of that my father suffered a lot of pain and eventually he was cured. This was the worst event that I saw in my childhood.

Ultimately in the mid of 1991 the Eritrean People's Liberation Front defeated the Ethiopian regime and I remember many of our mothers were happy and celebrated but some of them were unable to believe the event and said, 'Are those who are coming with military tracks and tanks our children?' Anyway, it was a great day. But the Eritrean regime is betraying our heroes and our martyrs now. Because as it is seen in TVs and given in the media, many Eritreans are escaping from their homeland and following the desperate path, due to the dictator's rule.

Moreover, in 2000 there was a war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and it is known as the third aggression of Ethiopian forces over Eritrea. But this name is given only by the Eritrean government and people. At that time, a lot of bombs were launched by the Ethiopian forces into Eritrea; especially places on the border of Ethiopia were attacked by helicopters and missiles, and our village was one of them.

Most of the people fled to the central part of Eritrea. My mother was pregnant and my father got a rented house. There, we faced many problems. I remember one day I went outside and watched the Euro 2000 football match. It was night; I returned to the house we rented but the owner of the house had locked the compound. I was knocking at the door and the owner-woman shouted in front of me and told me to go away from there. My mother was stressed and begged her. At that moment, there was an English proverb that I knew; and that silently I

said: ‘At the time of prosperity friends are plenty: at the time of adversity no one helps among twenty’. These were the difficulties that I faced in my teenage years.

In 2001, I was a grade 9 high school student and I was one of the students who were engaged to go to vocational school. The vocational school in Eritrea is like a college. I stayed there for about two weeks but the promises that were told us were so different from the ground we faced. Before we joined there, they told us, we would be able participate in the GCSEs (matriculation exams in all subjects) after learning for two years. But the director of the vocational school affirmed that there would not be matriculation exams. It was just a diploma programme. And most of the students we joined there were the top class ones. We decided to return back to our former high school. After a petition, we did it and our former high school director was very happy to accept us.

Then I started a relation with a lady in that school. That lady was the most beautiful student in our high school. Everyone was liking her. She was famous in her beauty. And some of the students were gossiping about me: ‘How is this boy matched with her?’ And some of them were considering me as a lucky person. But some of them were angry because they thought that I might fail to meet my target. In particular, my relatives told this to my father and my father had a connection with teachers and tried to know the truth. But I was increasing my knowledge and my value, and I stood the second in all the classes, and everyone was surprised. One day, my father asked me about my relation with the lady, and I affirmed that ‘We are friends and we like each other’. He was really surprised by the answer and hugged me. Because in Eritrea it is not usual to have a friend at that age. We were friends for two years and then we went to a military training centre. Then we didn't see each other for about four months because in military training, males and females are placed in different camps.

After finishing military training, we started our twelfth grade courses. I met my friend and we hugged each other. Later, I heard a soldier abused her and took her virginity. I was changed into a crazy person, and was sad about her. In the military camp many girls are still facing the same problem.

Later I joined university, but she failed. Then we stopped our friendship, but we were simply continuing as a sister and a brother. From that time till I finished my degree I never had a girlfriend.

So as I explained before, after my graduation I faced many problems due to the Eritrean regime. In brief, my life in Eritrea looks like this.

In my conclusion, first of all I would like to thank my lord Jesus Christ who is always beside me and then my family especially my father and my mother who led me to be a perfect person. Finally, I would like to appreciate those who helped me to pass the difficulties and those who are still helping me, especially lovely Jasmine, Corinne and Chris. I wish peace to the whole world and to settle for those who are in desperate paths. Wishes, and solidarity among people of the world. God is good.

Eritrea.

Late 2016:

As I said before I have faced many problems and now I have got my residence permit and I am living in a country (UK) which has free press, free speech, free rights and free worship.

So I am going to be able to arrange my future plans. As I am graduated in computer engineering in Eritrea, my future plan is to continue my masters degree programs and I am applying to many universities. If not possible, I will again attend undergraduate degree programs. Then I want to work within my field and to have make contributions in that field. In addition to that, I would like to bring my wife from Eritrea, and I would like to have three children. So as to my expectations, my plans are going good, I got my residence permit after one year. Finally I would like to help my family and those who are in trouble. And I would like to do my best to make contributions for migration, solidarity, and bringing the world peace.