

Dana Mahmoud's note

Speech at Atelier Populaire Oslo / Palestinerleir, Kunsthall Oslo 12th April 2012.

Mentally Tired, Emotionally drained, sick of life, mentally tortured... These are common phrases that became part of my daily life, the day I'm not saying them loud, I'm thinking them, or I can see them written silently on my mother and sister faces. When I first arrived in Norway it was the 23rd of December 2008, by the time we were allowed to be placed in an asylum reception and had some rest, the people in Tanum were making gløgg and giving away julekake, they were in a good mood and everyone were excited to tell us what jul means to Norwegians. I thought the rest of our days will be like this, especially that the asylum reception we were placed at afterwards used to be a hotel on top of a mountain that is close to a ski center.

Then life started, we were transferred to an isolated village in the southern Norway, which has only 1200 living souls according to Wikipedia, mostly are older and they like to keep it to themselves. Which is nothing close to what I was used to back in the United Arab Emirates where I always lived in a city and always been able to have a busy social life.

We have accepted our new reality, after all, we know it is not a choice that we can make and the Norwegians in the asylum reception were so friendly and wanted to know more about our culture, our food, and us. Walls started to grow taller around me in the asylum reception, especially when I was offered a job in an international NGO that is based in Oslo and my request for a work permit was rejected.

By then 22 months almost passed by and we didn't get any answer about our asylum application, it's not easy to feel that our whole life is on hold because we are lacking papers, which is the main reason why we came to Norway to seek protection from this situation. Then the first rejection came from UDI, asking us to appeal without defining a destination that we can go back to. UNE answered us also with a negative answer, asking us to go back to the United Arab Emirates.

I saw cases in the asylum reception where people got rejected the first time and then they reverted their rejection into acceptance the second time, but when we were rejected from UNE I knew the road was not going to be any easier and I started to lose hope, I'm not allowed to work, I'm not allowed to study since I can't open a bank account and deposit the money required for foreign students.

I knew my life have stopped right there, someone had pushed the pause button and forget to start my life again, left the room, switched off the lights, left us in the dark in one bedroom with small kitchenette and a bathroom and very little amount of money every two weeks to stock our fridge with, without knowing what tomorrow is hiding for us.

Life became a collection of insomnia, nightmares and strong negative feelings toward everything, until the Palestinians decided to sleep in the streets to show the government what a great mistake they are doing by treating refugees like this, especially us Palestinians who have been refugees for generations and we feel it's time for us to rest. I am grateful, because through them I was able to meet many brave, proactive Norwegians who are refusing their government practices against refugees and against undocumented and who want to make a real difference. Every day I meet a new face I know our number is growing bigger and we are able to convey our message to even more people who are in most cases were not reacting because they were not aware of the situation and the reality of us the undocumented.