



## Janusism

Maissara m. Saeed

*Altes Brot ist nicht hart, kein Brot, das ist hart* — Old bread is not hard, no bread, that's hard. This German proverb reflects rationality and relativity of what's integral to the concept of life and living. Economic inequality affects what and how we eat, where and how we live and what educational opportunities we can afford. For me, I take it one step forward to add 'Bad freedom' is not hard, 'no freedom' is hard.

My name is Maissara m. Saeed and I was born and raised in Sudan, where the government decides everything for you — which god you should worship and how, how to love and who to love, even how to dress.

In Sudan people have no freedom, neither personal freedom nor political. This absolute lack of freedom in Sudan is the main reason, which pushes youth to leave their beautiful home country.

I grew up during the civil war between the Northern and Southern Sudanese, the war that led in 2011 to separation of Sudan into two countries. Our family lived in *Al-abasia* neighbourhood in Khartoum the capital and my father worked as lieutenant colonel in the army, while my mother was a housewife; she did not have a job. My father passed away when I was 4 years old, and so did my mother when I was 10. Economically I had a relatively good childhood in Sudan as my mother's family has had a good economical condition during the seventies, eighties and early nineties.

Many people in Europe, in particular, in Germany do believe that we are leaving our home and trying to gain asylum in Europe, because we are poor people, seeking money. Now, after 7 years of living in Germany, I can understand why they think so; when a man builds his life on materialism, he will lose his sense of both freedom and responsibility.

Actually, my extended family in Sudan has a very good social standing and is economically stable. And in the last years before leaving Sudan, I was working as a medical scientist at hospitals as well as a tutor at Khartoum university, but whatever the economical inequality which can be seen in Sudan, my fundamental motivation to leave Sudan was the lack of freedom and life threatening circumstances; altogether poverty is just a manifestation of the core problem which is the lack of freedom and democracy in Sudan.

From my point of view poverty in Europe or in Sudan is a man made phenomenon. Because in 2010 when I newly arrived in Europe, I was restricted from having a job because I had no right to stay in Germany at that time. And when I could get the permission to stay, the authorities here did not recognize my qualifications or they recognized it unfairly — that means there were fewer opportunities for me than those who had already graduated here in Europe. Further more, the authorities in Germany control the usage of other languages for national security purposes, and as a result if the migrant does not succeed to have very good German language skills, that means he or she is on his/her first step towards poverty in Germany.

It is hard for me to say that the official German system is welcoming new comers, and it will be tricky if I said otherwise; but the ground realities are not all-smooth sailing. Yes, honestly, to live in a democratic and free society can be life saving. I could survive and maximize my opportunities here through an intensive engagement in/with the civilian society, and it was my school through which I could learn more about the reactivity between politics, society and economy.

Upon my arrival in Germany I faced a completely different reality and system. Although I enjoyed my partial freedom, but I recognised that people in Germany have a different concept and understanding of what freedom is or means and what human dignity means. And when I say people in Germany, I mean those who have a great portion of wealth, power and media apparatuses. They think that, to give a man a bed, food and money is quite enough for his dignity and freedom, while all laws and regulations will tell you as a foreigner: you are not equal as a citizen.

When I left Sudan I had had the imagination about a different freedom in Europe but unfortunately that imagination was a slap on



"No one is illegal"

my face by the hand of reality; which is how, I started the journey of Janusism in my life.

Janusism refers to Janus — the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, passages, and endings in ancient Roman religion and myth. He is usually depicted as having two faces, since he looks to the future and to the past.

I found myself become a Janus in Germany, not only with two faces, but also two minds, two hearts and two souls. It is all about cultural and social differences between Sudan and Germany. In Sudan for example, we are living in a society which lives collectively, while here in Germany the society is build on individuality, so it was challenging for me to adapt between these two; the collective atmosphere or the individually one.

My work in Refugee rehabilitation and political activism had me meeting several people and allied networks. In May 2015, I was invited to join the *Learn2Change* (L2C) conference and being part of the network has been one of the most enlightening experiences that I have had in my life.

The network includes activists and educators from the global south, like India, Hong Kong, Uganda, Malawi, Chile, Colombia, Tunisia and Brazil and the Global North. Strangely enough, when I say Global North the network is primarily composed of members mainly from Germany.

Whoever be the representatives in the network, I found myself alone and isolated in an isthmus of Janusism between the Global North and South, particularly when we were trying to realise our



"We fight. We're not giving up! Never"

vision into reality ground. It is a fact that people in the Global North and Global South are not economically equal. And this of course will affect the productivity of any kind of working relationship and system, like the L2C network. Sooner or later economical gaps will affect the degree of commitment to the network, if they do not already do. From my observation, while many participants especially from the South surely see and know that these opportunities to engage with and travel to Germany happen only because it's fully funded. None of us would be able to make the trip or participate if we had to do so ourselves.

L2C has a chance for greater impact not just on global issues but in empowering its members from the South economically, and elevating the idea of solidarity from a rhetorical to a practical level.

This unspoken economic gap among L2C Global South's members as well as the need to draw attention to it triggered me to undertake a survey among ourselves in the network in order to 'see ourselves' and 'think again' about our network.

In September 2017, during the L2C's periodic conference I tried to place the question of 'poverty' at the centre of discussions and address the financial realities of our members in the network. 'Poverty' is the key word, which can be the common talking point for those from the Global North and Global South — because the root of problems, access and opportunity is money or the lack of it. Acknowledging this reality and then finding ways to tackle it help 'learning and changing' effectively.

As a political activist, who sees the world and the relationship between Global North and South with two faces, minds, hearts

and souls, we need to learn more and more about/from local communities in the Global South and North.

My big concern is about the Global South network members and their local communities; the fact is that we are not equal wealth-wise — neither as individuals nor societies.

In this regard, it is up to the network members to recognise this disparity and show solidarity among us to reflect the true meaning of equality. How can we address social issues and bring about change in equal measure and with equal commitment of time and passion, when half of us have to worry about earning a living alongside?

If our members are not financially secure on the personal front how can we take up global issues, even if we are passionate and committed to the cause.

The prompt study was conducted between March 19<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017 in Barnstorf, Germany. The goal of the study was to allow the members to look at their and others' reflection in the mirror of 'financial stability' and to rethink of themselves and their place in the North-South relationship, keeping in mind the economical gaps.

11 members (5 persons from global South and 6 persons from global north (Germany) participated in a written questionnaire of 7 points and questions — income, working hours and important living conditions was investigated and examined.

The study showed that only 36.4% of L2C members have permanent jobs, while 63.6 % have either temporary, voluntary or others form of jobs. 16.7% from Global North members have permanent jobs in contrast to 60% in the Global South. Also the results reflected that, the monthly income average for the L2C members is 980 EURO. It is 1,475 EURO in Global North and 388 EURO in L2C south, (L2C north: L2C south = 5:1). Despite that, the working hours per week in L2C south are 44.2 hours/week in comparison to 27.4 hours/week in L2C North. 100% of the L2C North members said they have health insurance. 60% of L2C South, have health insurance while 40% have not. 60% of L2C south are men, while this 40% are women. In comparison, L2C members from South are younger (average = 35 Year old) than members from North (average = 45 year old).

In this finding there are still discussion points, which are:

(1) The sample of the study resembles approximately (18%) of the total number of L2C network which is still growing and still not fixed in its structure.

(2) The living cost needed for satisfactory living conditions vary from one country to another.

(3) The social and cultural norms vary when it comes to 'talking openly' about money, wealth and living conditions at a personal level.

Accordingly, I strongly recommend the starting of a deep, transparent and serious discussion about the social welfare gaps among L2C members. Actions should be proposed to (learn) more about and from the local communities in both North and South, giving a priority to local communities of our members in South and how economic inequalities in their local contexts have kept them from having a 'good', fulfilling and respectful life and how we as members can work towards solutions to alleviate that.

If I am in a position to send a message to the members, funders, followers and others it will be 'we should be attentive and very sensitive to our economical and welfare differences and gaps in our day to day life while we are trying to work together to make the world a better place'. It is not accidental that the eradication of poverty occupies the very top priority in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Maissara m. Saeed* is a founding member the German Sudanese Association for Development (G.S.A.D.) and Umbaja e.V.

He lives by the motto: 'Connect people, help people!' He looks at himself as a connector between two different cultures: the African and the European. Globally he focuses on education in the fields of migration and human rights in the European context as well as the education about poverty and eradication of it. He believes in thinking out of the box in his global learning engagements through evidence-based activism in the associations and the business he founded in Germany.