OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

TRANSCRIPT

"CITY OF THORNS: A CONVERSATION WITH BEN RAWLENCE"

A conversation with Ben Rawlence and Howard French

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ANNOUNCER:

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HOWARD FRENCH:

Welcome everyone. Thanks-- thanks for coming out. Fortunately not as cold a day today as it was yesterday. I-- I-- I-- I have-- yesterday we had a brief phone conversation. This is the first time I've met Ben. I've known his work since Radio Congo and have enjoyed him-- as an author-- from the very first.

And I begged off talking about how I wanted to approach this conversation. So now I'm gonna spring-- the terms that I have in mind. And because it's a conversation it's negotiable. You can saw whatever (LAUGH) you'd like and proposed whatever you'd like. But I have-- I have three particular lenses in mind for coming up the book. (THROAT CLEARING).

First of all, one should b-- begin by saying what a remarkable work of reportage this is. Getting r-- really deeply into seeing and into (COUGH) character and personal histories and experiences. And-- and developing a real kind of fly-on-the-wall kind of perspective on-- on some much of what you read in-- in these pages. But, you know, the book pretends, or is ostensibly about, a particular place, a refugee camp this is-- set to be the largest refugee camp in the world. It's really a permanent city-- in-- in effect.

And-- but it's really about a lot more than that. And so the three lenses that I-- would propose get to this notion that I have of this being about more than that.

(NOISE) It's about entry or arrival. It's about-- (NOISE) the lived-- experience of this camp as a city. And it's about exit-- of those few who managed to-- to move on beyond the city.

And so when we get into the conversation-- I'd like to sort of have you tackle each of those themes. And I'm familiar with the stories just 'cause I know the book. But many of you, I assume, h-- will not have yet read the book. And so we can choose some of the best-- histories and anecdotes to kind of get at these three different-- very different types of experience, if you'd like.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. (THROAT CLEARING)

HOWARD FRENCH:

Before we do that, though, I'd like-- (THROAT CLEARING) excuse me, to just do-- clear up some kind of biographical business here. I mean-- you-- you can't read an extraordinary work of reportage like this without wondering about the person who produced it. And so I-- would like to begin with you telling us how you came to this topic. I know a little bit about it from the blurb, et cetera. But I think the audience would benefit from having--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

HOWARD FRENCH:

--and an a more-- a more extended explanation of this. You know, you spent years at this project-- in-- in various capacities. What drew you there-- professionally, personally, what made you persist and stick around-- and-- we'll I'll just stop there. That's enough of-- of-- of an entry point, I think.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Okay. Thank you, Howard. It-- it's a pleasure to be here. I agreed to the three lenses. I think that's an interesting way of thinking about it. In terms of my-- my own background, the Open Society Fellowship came at precisely the-- the right point in-- in my journey Dadaab. Because I first came t-- to the place in 2010 as a researcher for Human Rights Watch in the Horn of Africa. Prior to that I had worked as a speech writer in politics in the U.K. to the liberal party trying to stop Tony Blair's

war in Iraq.

Having failed I felt a bit heartbroken and pretty cynical about British politics so I went to get involved in what I thought was perhaps more pure politics in-- in a sense of human rights-- advocacy for Human Rights Watch-- first in Uganda and then in Kenya. Elections in Kenya in 2008. Ethiopia, Somalia and Nigeria-- other countries.

But the experience this-- the experience-- of-- of working as-- as a researcher for Human Rights Watch during that time the most arresting-- experience I had was in Dadaab. (COUGH) And it was not only-- the just the-- the sheer fact of this city that I had never heard about and (NOISE) shocked me the way that it-- it-- it-- it-- it was there and-- and shouldn't be really.

But it was the every day stories of how people survived and lived in this place. And actually the view of the world from this kind of planet that was a part from the world s-- in-- in a-- the phrase that I-- that's often in my head is a Zen Buddhist idea of being in the world but not of the world.

And-- and it feels like, very much like-- a separate-- separate world. And I was fascinated by how those people saw the rest (THROAT CLEARING) of the world. So quite quickly, after that initial-- experience, I-- went back to Dadaab-- under my own steam-- on holiday, if you'd like, from Human Rights Watch, (MIC NOISE) and tried to get around and meet people and see if I could write a book about-- about the place. (THROAT CLEARING). But I arrived on the week that the Medecins Sans Frontier workers were kidnapped. So the whole place was on lock down. (NOISE)

And very quickly it became clear that I wouldn't get permission from the U.N. to-- do the kind of project I wanted to do. It was also very-- clear that it was gonna become too expensive because I-- you-- but at that point then you were mandated to have, and you still are as a result of the kidnapping security, so you have to visit-- foreign visitors, especially white-skinned ones like me-- if-- if you get kidnapped in the camp all of the services are shut down.

So the biggest disservice you can do to the refugees who are relying on the U.N. is to get kidnapped. So some kind of gung-ho journalist like me coming in there would not have been-- been useful. So I had to rethink. And that-- at that point then I took stock and made the application for the OSF fellowship and then that enabled me to go back for pretty much two years on and off-- interviewing people again and again and again as is necessary for-- for this kind of work. And that process finished-- m-- only a year ago, really. I mean, the last-- the epilogue was written (COUGH) in-- in the summer.

HOWARD FRENCH:

So did you arrive on vacation and then leave quickly or did you just (NOISE) simply abandon the idea of this vacation trip--

BEN RAWLENCE:

No. I-- I stayed for two weeks (THROAT CLEARING) to do as much as I could.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

BEN RAWLENCE:

But it became clear after those two weeks that it-- it wasn't gonna work in that-- in the way that I had imagined it. I was hoping to sit-- basically go and live there for--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

BEN RAWLENCE:

--for a while in the camp with the people (COUGH) I met. So it-- it posed all sorts of-- all sorts of problems because then the kind of intimate reportage that I wanted to do is best accomplished when you actually live with people. If you're trying to get there with a truck full of armed policemen and you're only s-- able to-- to stay for two hours because then the policemen are tapping their watch and saying, "We gotta go back to the U.N., bomb-proof compound." It made the whole thing a lot more complicated. So the conditions under which the research were done were-- were very difficult.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Never mind the intimidating effect of the police presence in the first place. Right--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Exactly. Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

H-- I-- I'm a journalist so I'm gonna ask a couple of technical questions that I hope won't bore the audience here. But how does one apply to go to vacation at a place like Dadaab? I mean, under-- you were no longer with Human Rights Watch, I mean,

under what auspices does one approach the U.N. to ask for permission for something like that?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Well, I mean, you-- you need a permission from the Kenyan government, the department of refugee affairs and then you need-- the U.N. can't really s-- well they-- I suppose they could stop you. But generally they don't. They allow people, visitors, to come. They require that you stay in the compound so that they can keep an eye on you. But the-- (THROAT CLEARING) the-- the department of refugee affairs, I had got my permission before the kidnap. So they were very relaxed about it. They thought it was a big joke.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

BEN RAWLENCE:

You know, you-- I introduced myself as a freelance writer. You have to have a sponsor. So I got my agent in London to write a letter saying, "Here's a good guy and he wants to research some stories." And that was fine. They stamped the letter and they gave me permission. After that I had to always go with a letter from Myself saying, you know, "This is what he's up to," and "he's bona fide," and so on. So you-- it-- you know, it-- there's paperwork but it's possible.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). So you go off and you get a fellowship and then you return. What-- can you describe a little bit your sort of entry points into this society as you returned now with an official project and the backing of an organization like this.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Well-- for the (THROAT CLEARING) initial-- visits with Human Rights Watch I met in-- translators-- community leaders, people like that. And then through my own subsequent trip I h-- met other people, new-- some of whom were-- three of whom I then followed up with who were in the book-- from that first trip. So I already had those relationships.

I cast the net quite widely. I-- I was, to begin with, I was terrified, to be honest. How would you even start a project like this? How do you choose your characters? I knew

I wanted characters 'cause I knew I wanted to upend this sort of big-picture analysis. And I wanted to approach it from the ground up.

But how do you choose those characters? I-- I don't know. So I started off with-- just casting that very widely. I interviewed about 50 or 60 people. And picked the ones I thought were-- had interesting stories, who-- came from interesting places or some who had-- were recent arrivals, some who were born in the camp, 'cause the camp is 25 years old. And that first trip was about six weeks. And then I went back six weeks later for a month. And then we sort of narrowed it down. And after a year I had about 12 characters. And then the final cut was nine in-- in the book.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). You describe the population of the camp in terms of generations. You-- there-- from memory I think you-- you-- very roughly talk about two different, distinct generations. Could you tell the audience what you had in mind by that?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. I mean, it-- wasn't a device in the sense that it-- this is just a r-- a description of how the-- how the camp is. (NOISE)

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

BEN RAWLENCE:

The camps were formed in '91 by 90,000 people coming from Somalia-- when the s-- the government collapsed and the civil war began. That core population see themselves as a kind of, if not aristocracy, then as-- as sort of-- (NOISE) yeah f-- founding fathers, if you'd like, of the camp. So there are those-- there are-- there's a core population in the camp. And then new-- waves of refugees have come in the late 2000's. And 2011 was a very big influx from the famine in-- in Somalia, southern Somalia in that year.

And then of-- every-- every refugee has their own story. So people have come for-- for many other reasons. But in the camp there i-- there are these two main populations. And the older generations have, of course, much more completely lived in the camp for longer. So you have-- three generations now. You have people whose grandchildren were born in the camp who are now in primary school.

You have people who have no memory of Somalia, who grew up in the camp, who went to school in the camp, who speak Swahili, who speak English, who are now

pursuing-- degrees online and so on, Who very much see themselves as-- part of-- how do they see them-- they see themselves as-- as a sort of middle class in exile waiting to go back to Somalia to try and rebuild the country.

And they have-- a model government-- they have their own little-- what they call cabinet, which meets in the white house-- in-- the youth center in the camp. So they-- they have-- you know, a real sense of themselves as-- you know, the sort of saviors in waiting, if you will. Then the more recent-- arrivals, the victims of the famine like Eesha (PH) in the book who-- who brought her five children-- 16 days on foot from Somalia.

They have-- a very different relationship to the camp. They-- they don't necessarily see the camp as home. They don't-- haven't quite yet buried generations of their families in the sand there. They don't have the material attachment to the land. And that's why-- so both of those different groups have very different ideas of-- (COUGH) of exit.

They have different, for-- for those who've come more recently, going home is much more of-- of an option-- because they still have the relationships back home. They perhaps still have access to the land where they can make a living whereas the guys who were born and raised in the camp, there is only exit for them. And that is-- another country really.

HOWARD FRENCH:

So you-- you anticipated-- what I wanted to ask you a little bit-- which is-- about the theme-- the theme of longing which is a very sort of powerful motif that runs through much of the book. And I was gonna ask you if there's some differential diagnosis about longing-- longing that separates these generations. In other words, the people who have no-- memory of-- you know, they're generations into this experience versus the people who have relatively recently arrived. How do they process this longing differently?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes. (THROAT CLEARING) There's a word-- in Somali which is boofis (PH)-- which is-- (THROAT CLEARING) a kind of depression really, which means this-- this longing for resettlement. Because, according the refugee lore, there are three durable solutions, three possible, durable solutions to-- to being displaced.

One is to return to your home country. One is to be integrated in your-- a country of asylum, in this case Kenya. The third is resettlement to a third country. So usually that means Europe or America. And that-- that word boofis, which people use jokingly and-- when, you know, when somebody's not doing to well or-- for example, my friend Tawani (PH) in book when hears that his sister has been selected for resettlement in Canada he has a headache for a week.

He's flat out. He can't cope. It's too much. Why isn't it him? You know? Why-- why-- why not me? You know, when he's done so much and he's contributed so much to the youth club in-- in the camp? Those who've grown up in the camp have-- a part of that culture, this whole culture centered on leaving. So to remain in Dadaab in some ways is some kind of failure.

And when the phone rings and there's somebody in Minneapolis or London or Italy, and they the s-- they-- you know, they-- they ask for news from home, all the guys-- I was sitting with the-- these guys passing the phone around very sort of tentatively talking to-- to the friend in Italy but they all felt ashamed that-- that they h-- didn't have either the audacity or the cash to make that journey themselves.

So-- for-- for people who've been there since 19-- since the 1990's they are also the victim of an outdated international policy. Once upon a time the U.N.-- had their quotas, as it still does, have a quota system for resettlement. So you share the burden of the refugees in the camp. And rich countries generally accepted much, much larger numbers. So when the camps started people were leaving to-- to North America in the thousands to Canada, to the United States and in lesser numbers to Europe.

Now that's-- pipeline is sort of that-- has shrunken, shrunken, shrunk, has narrowed. So at the moment we're talking about just over a thousand people a year who get resettled to the United States or to-- to Europe. The U.K., for example, takes around a hundred a year.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Re-- remind the audience of out of how many what population we're talking about.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. The-- the total population, the official refugee population is around 400,000. The unofficial size of the camp is probably closer to 600,000. The birth rate in camp is 1,000 a month. So there is no way that this (NOISE) quota system is ever going to diminish that population, let alone, you know, start-- start dropping-- start-- the numbers start dropping.

So this-- this is the cri-- in number-- pure numbers terms, (THROAT CLEARING) this is the global refugee crisis. And part of the symptom is the numbers of people coming into Europe illegally. But the-- the bigger part, the hidden part, that doesn't get into the news so often is the existence of all of these cities which are growing. Both the number of cities are growing and each of those-- each of the cities is actually growing.

But to return to the-- to the culture point, if you were-- came to the camp in the '90s your s-- part of the reason you're not going to leave is because you're-- you're hoping that you're going to be what they call in process. That you're desperately waiting for

your number to come up and that-- that it's going to be your turn to have resettlement to the United States.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I-- I was quite touched by, and I don't-- I don't know how this plays into the generational divide if at all, but I was quite touched by-- there's a moment in the book where he described the arrival of Facebook via the mobile phone as being-- kind of aggravator of this boofis. That instead of-- p-- being a source of relief because it's connecting you with the bigger, broader community out in the world and you can sort of keep up on the news and maintain conversations with people and-- and what not. It's actually a source of-- of despair.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Why-- why is that?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. It-- I mean, it-- it's like sand in the-- your face really. Because you're, as I said, the culture centered (THROAT CLEARING) on leaving so people are-- very much connected. There are-- all of the camps have their own names. And all of the-- the youth in-- in those camps have their own Facebook groups. (THROAT CLEARING)

So, for example, the main camp that I focused on was called Ifo. There's five. And there's a Ifo-youth closed group, mind you, on Facebook. It took me a long time to get admitted. But (LAUGHTER) it's all in Somali anyways so I don't (LAUGH) understand very much. But-- some of it's in English.

But-- they-- they-- people there are posting and, of course, you have very close relationships to people that you grew up with, you went to school with. Some of whom are in-- as I said, Minnesota or-- (COUGH) or London. Some of whom are in the camp. And the disparity is-- is very, very difficult to take. So my friend, Tawani, for example, feeling, you know, pretty much every time he logs on feeling depressed. It's a reminder of what h-- you know, the bad luck that has befallen him that he hasn't-- has-- hasn't had these opportunities. So one-- sorry. (THROAT CLEARING)

One of the curious consequences of this is that people are quite creative with Facebook. So you might see-- people saying that they're from a town that they're not from. So what-- one of the characters in the book is-- while he's in Dadaab he's

actually-- his hometown is Accra in Ghana.

And he was recently in Paris, France. And-- there's a picture of him under the Eiffel Tower with his face photoshopped onto somebody else's face. And he's laying claim to these images that are inaccessible to him. They're accessible in that way. So he's building-- a sort of imaginary life for himself that he would like to lead but which is out of reach.

HOWARD FRENCH:

So-- going-- going back to the-- the older generation, the aristocracy, as you put it. These are people who in one sense is, very generally, have no illusion that they're ever going to make it out of the camp. What-- even though they have this moment of tension when the phone rings. Right? What-- what are the psychic (NOISE) costs of this?

And beyond that, I wonder also, because the-- our audience will not have read the book again, if you could speak to the-- I think the audience thinking-- wondering what-- what it means to be in a refugee camp for an entire generation. Being a second generation in a refugee camp what does this mean? Just simply sitting around waiting for the telephone call or is there some other kind of life in-- in-- in-- in-- in a refugee camp. Of course there's an economy there--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes. Yes.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--so-- so what does this all mean?

BEN RAWLENCE:

The-- yes. I mean, it-- over-- over 25 years there has grown up a black market, a gray economy. So there are shops in the camp. There are buses. There are hotels. They are soccer leagues. There are-- y-- in-- in the market you can buy an iPhone. You can buy a tractor. Yeah. You can buy tomatoes. You-- you can buy ammunition. You can buy everything. And it's very--

HOWARD FRENCH:

You can buy sex.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah can buy sex, too.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Alc--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes. Alcohol. Yeah. Drugs possibly. Although I never tried. But you can-- you can-- it's very connected to Somalia so there are a lot of smuggled goods from Somalia. There is, of course, all of the-- the rations, the refug-- the U.N. food, which is on sale. Back in the-- in the original, early days the only way to really acquire cash, if you-- unless you brought cash with you from Somalia or you sold stuff-- was to hoard your rations and then sell them.

So if you wanted to start a business you had to go hungry. You-- you-- i-- saved-- a kilo of rice every week for a year and then you could start a shop, for example. So there was one guy in the-- in the-- in the book who-- who did th-- whose wife did that for two years, started a shop. And now he's a very rich man. He can't leave. He's still in the camp.

But he did actually wire his sons in California $75,000 to buy a truck to start a business because he didn't like the fact that they were cleaning toilets. So there is money. There are some millionaires. Very few. But there are-- there are some very rich people. There is this-- this black, gray economy.

And, although, I mean, the s-- the psychological, you know-- yes that is a-- a world of sorts. It's-- it's a city that functions in a dysfunctional way. It is a life. And-- and people are-- do adapt to themselves to it. Nevertheless, they are aware of this other world spinning outside which they're not a part of. And that does create incredible stresses on-- on people's sense of self.

So the way I thought of it was-- was-- as a kind of pressure cooker. It's a bit like the *Truman Show* where-- you know, as-- when you gradually realize that there is this other world outside-- and you feel the victim of some kind of joke. So the-- it's like the sky is really pressing down all the time. And it makes the people's sense of self quite slippery.

So yes they do understand at root that they probably will never leave. But it's very hard for people to accept that. So your daily life is this constant struggle to manufacture hope, to find something to believe in, something to-- to-- to latch on your-- latch your ambitions to, to believe that, you know-- for example, Cairo (PH) is a young girl who spends her whole life working very, very hard-- at school because Canada offers scholarships to the top ten girls who graduate secondary school in the camp.

There are only 2,000 places at-- at secondary school, is an intense competition to get a place. So when she graduate primary school there was a big party-- her whole extended family was delighted that she might have-- that meant (THROAT CLEARING) that she had a shot at getting to Canada. So all the secondary school kids dream of going to Canada, they look it up on the internet. They pick which courses they're gonna do at which universities. They get very excited.

But only 20 make it-- ten-- sorry, ten girls and ten boys every year. So she unfortunately missed the cut. Just. And-- and-- and didn't-- didn't get there. So one day she's saying, "Yes. I'm gonna go to Canada and it's gonna be like this, that and the other." And then the next day she's saying, "(MAKES NOISE) Oh Ben, you know, I'm never leaving here. What am I gonna do?" And then another day she's saying, "Well, you know, maybe I'll buy a illegal Kenyan ID if I get some money and I'll go to Nairobi. And so every day you're trying to think of something that gives you some sort of horizon.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I'm-- one-- one of the great triumphs of the book is the sort of depth of realization of the-- of the actual characters. And so-- returning to the-- the idea of these three lenses, I wonder if we can get into to some-- some individual stories. And if y-- if you don't mind starting with the sort of ingress, the-- arrival into the camp. And there's a very dramatic, I don't remember the name of the character--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Guled (PH).

HOWARD FRENCH:

Guled. Right. Yes. Very dramatic-- you know, story involving escape from Al Shabaab and-- his arrival in the camp and sort of understanding the landscape of this place af-- afresh, really. And then you also mentioned the mother-- later who arrives with five children. So I wonder if you-- could you sort of lay out the-- the-- the lineaments of those two individual stories?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Sure. Guled is-- a young boy who, at the time I met him woulda been about, I think, 17. He was-- born in 1993. Around-- (THROAT CLEARING) as far as I can ascertain he doesn't really know. But it would have been pretty close to the date when the black hawk down helicopters were shot-- shot down in-- in Mogadishu. And he was born in Waterglade district which is the district in which they-- they crashed.

He then spent the next 16 years growing up in the city. His parents died very early on. But his elder sister survived. He was raised by her. And she sold petrol in the-- in the ruins of-- of Mogadishu. All of this time he was still going to school because, although primary enrollment in Mogadishu was down to about 25 percent-- although it's a war zone people were still struggling. It was-- for them it was an act of resistance. It was part of, you know, trying to stay alive and-- and have hope.

So-- a long story short, but by 2010 he's going to primary school and one day he-- just after break he's in-- he-- he was sitting in class and he sees the teacher at the front of the class-- sees the color drain from him face and he sees him going into shock. And it-- everyb-- all the te-- all the children wonder what's going on.

They turn around and they see seven Al Shabaab guys with black-- scarves wrapped around their head and machine guns walking down the center of the classroom picking out all of the tall-- tallest boys in the class. And Guled is one of them. They take the seven boys outside, put them into a pick up tr-- truck, blindfold them and drive them to a training camp.

So for the next month Guled is-- a conscript for Al Shabaab. They dispatch him as a hisbah, which is the morality police into the town of Mogadishu to try and-- the-- the-- the main occupation of the police is to check on-- the businesses, to check that women are appropriately dress, that men are appropriately dressed.

As he put it no Balotelli haircuts. Balotelli a soccer player in the U.K. with a big mohawk. (COUGH) So you have to-- you have to look demure. No music on your telephone. No smoking. And they cane people who are abroad-- during the prayer times. Guled is only 16 but he has a wife because one of the consequences of the war is that people marry very young, that-- also families are very keen for-- to marry their young daughters because that's a less of a mouth to feed.

So he w-- another girl at primary school-- was his wife, also is the same age as him. And on-- one of his first outings as a hisbah he-- the patrol comes across three young people-- at a shop. His patrol-- apprehends these people, puts 'em on the ground, starts beating them. And it's only when the girl starts squealing that he realizes it's his wife.

He doesn't say anything. She doesn't say anything. They look at each other. They realize that if either of them speaks they're dead. So he goes back to the training camp. She, who had been so far worrying where he was, now knows where he is. And they-- they don't see each other again. A month later he gets the chance to, I won't go into details, but he escapes from Al Shabaab. He then decides that-- it's too dangerous to go to his wife because they might follow him and they might harm her. So he goes to the refugee camp. He has no real idea of the refugee camp other than it's probably his only option.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Well-- I mean-- he has an idealized sense of the place-- beforehand doesn't he?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes. He-- he, I mean-- the people-- people's idea of the camp is shaped by rumor, really-- that it might be a gateway to resettlement. That probably there's education, which there is education. So he goes with these ideals in mind. And he knows one boy who used to be at his school who was there, or, who he has heard tell is there. So he travels 400 miles through Somalia on a bus-- going through checkpoints for Al Shabaab, desperately holding his breath hoping that they're not communicating with the Al Shabaab in Mogadishu.

Of course, there are-- hundreds of runaways from Al Shabaab. He's nothing special. But he doesn't know that. He gets to the border town and then he's faced with another challenge because the camps of Dadaab are 70 miles inside the border with Kenya. There's no official transportation from the border to the camps.

If the Kenya police pick you up their first instinct is to return you to Somalia because Kenya generally doesn't want more refugees. So the-- the challenge facing the refugees is to get to Dadaab without being stopped by the Kenya police. And th-- when you get there then you present yourself to the United Nations. They will give you a ration card and register you. And then you're safe. But if you get caught in that no-man's land between the border and the camp you can be robbed, raped, beaten up, thrown back.

He finds-- a passage on a sugar truck, because one of the-- interesting aspects of the border economy is the smuggling of (COUGH) sugar from Somalia in Kenya. That-- that's another story. But-- he-- he gets on a sugar truck. Arrives in the camp. And begins to try and-- the first sort of chapters of the book are him trying to make sense of this place. Wondering, "Well how-- where do I go?"

There's no fence around the camp. It's, as I said, it's these five-- sorta-- they look like moons-- from the-- if you look on Google Earth it looks like these grids, these grid-like moons that are orbiting the town of Dadaab. And he arrives in one of them. And he looks at and what he sees is these big h-- thorn fences which are what's-- pretty much the borders of all the road-- these-- they're called Camore (PH), these fences which are latched together to keep the wind out.

And he tried to find his-- his buddy Nor (PH) who he's heard about. And by complete coincidence later that day he does actually bump into Nor. And then he-- lodges with his friend. he has to t-- find his way around to the U.N. office. Nor shows him where he has to go and present himself and get fingerprinted and have his photo taken and get his ration card and so on.

And then he begins the process of going to the ration distribution center which is this huge warehouse where you're-- you-- you get processed, you go through and you-- you get given a spoonful of rice and a spoonful of maize and a spoonful of oil. And-- and he finds out actually that there's no room for him, there's no house because he's a single person. The camps are overcrowded. Kenya has said they're full. There's no more land being allocate (COUGH) for the camps. So he doesn't have anywhere to

live. He doesn't have-- a house in the camp.

So i-- and Nor, of course, is-- is in the same position. He's squatting in somebody else's compound. Once upon a time the compounds were quite big with a hut in the middle and then space around them. But since they've been too overcrowded families will just divide them, cut them up.

So you have these houses squashed up against each other, closer and closer and closer-- like a sort of farming family in U.K. that doesn't want to-- split-- split the territory. They keep-- (UNINTEL) doesn't wanna sell the territory, they keep splitting into smaller and smaller parcels.

So he eventually finds lodging in the house of somebody else-- for which he pays a small amount of rent which means one of two days a week that he's hungry because his rations won't stretch. And then he begins to-- to try and make a life in the camp. The first thing he does, in fact, is sell some of his rations to buy-- a scratch card so he can phone his wife, Marium (PH) in Mogadishu so that he can tell her where he is and they can begin the process of her trying to come to the camp. Which is another very-- very long story--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Yeah. So-- you know

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

HOWARD FRENCH:

I-- I mean, this-- may have sounded like a very long answer to my question but he has-- really only just-- (COUGH) really begun to touch up on this guy's story. And he could have written a book just about this person--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--and it would have been a very satisfying book. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And in fact, probably very satisfying movie-- because the story of his exit from Somalia (NOISE) is very dramatic. And the bus rides that he-- that Ben just sort of-- mentions (BACKGROUND VOICE) in passing were-- incredible. I mean, I've-- I've been in a lot of perilous travel in Africa and like to think, "Wow I've experienced danger." (LAUGH) But as I read that I'm think, you know, this is gonna go bad at any second. (COUGH) Like fatally bad.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

It doesn't, obviously. But the-- so one of the remarkable elements where you d-- ended (COUGH) just here is, it gets at this kind of existential problem that all of these people, (COUGH) in one way or another face, is that-- so he's dreaming of getting-- he's moti-- he's willing to face death to get to this camp.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes.

HOWARD FRENCH:

To escape Al Shabaab. To--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--escape Somalia. Right? So in order to attain such a state of motivation you have to have an idealized view of this other place you're going to. Right? That's-- that's the only way one can brave those kinds of odd. Right?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes.

HOWARD FRENCH:

No sooner does he get to this place then he begins to understand h-- just how complicated and how un-- sort of non-utopian the place (COUGH) is.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes.

HOWARD FRENCH:

But then something begins to happen in his mind, which is where you left off. Which is, how do I get my wife to come?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Right?

BEN RAWLENCE:

So he-- well first challenge is to get the money to (MIC NOISE) make a phone call 'cause there's--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Right.

BEN RAWLENCE:

--no ready cash in the camp. And then the-- the phone call, I've interviewed both of them about the phone call, and it was-- very-- funny but also heartbreaking in the sense that he-- she said, "What's it like?" And he said, "Oh well you can get resettlement to America and there's education and there's food and there's this and there's that."

She said, "Oh okay. "How's the war?" She, "Oh it's terrible. It's really bad. It's, you know, there's AMISOM mortars going off and so on." And he said-- he said, "Well come." "Okay. Great. G-- I'm gonna come." So-- she has this sh-- now has shared the idealized view of the camp. And she said, "Well how am I gonna come?" H-- she said, "I need 50 dollars for the bus." He's like, "Oh shit. How do I get 50 dollars in this camp?" There's no, you know, he could have hustled the money perhaps in Mogadishu but in the camp.

So he starts then trying to work in the inform market in the camp to get the 50

dollars so that she can come. Again long story, but he fails. And she has to borrow money from family members to-- to get on the bus which she eventually does. She arrives in-- in the camp-- early 20-- 2011. And she's got a secret that she hadn't told Dadaab, which is before-- it's-- told Guled, which is before he was kidnapped. She got pregnant.

So now she arrives in the camp. She's six months pregnant. Of course, he's delighted. (BACKGROUND VOICE) She on the other hand, is horrified. (LAUGHTER) "I've come to this, you know, hell on earth, which is (THROAT CLEARING) 45 degrees. There's nothing to eat. I'm pregnant. I need to eat. I need to feed my, you know, my-- growing child." And she starts demanding juice and bananas and all this stuff which he can't get.

So their relationship is just in-- under incredible strain. And she ends up having a cesarean-- because the baby-- is-- is too big-- it's too hot. And she blames-- the-- the fact that she was unable to have a natural birth on her presence in the camp. And-- and on this terrible situation that Guled has gotten herself in. And she wants to go back to Mogadishu. Her mother-in-law, you know, his mother-in-law, her mother is in Mogadishu, they've got a washing machine in Mogadishu. Yes there's a war but it's better than the camp and her--

HOWARD FRENCH:

She has high expectations and high standards basically. (LAUGHTER)

BEN RAWLENCE:

High maintenance, yeah. But-- but, of course, for her y-- very m-- th-- this is-- this I-- I don't sort of really get at the-- the dilemma of the-- at the individual level. For her the camp doesn't make sense whereas Mogadishu would despite the fighting. For him the equation is different. He can't go back to Mogadishu because he's afraid of Al Shabaab.

So this-- that really, I think, shows you the-- the-- the micro-- decisions that people make and how finely balanced all of these things are that, you know, your-- it's not that everybody wants to leave or everybody wants to go back. It-- it very much depends on your own personal circumstances. And those personal circumstances are tragic. Inevitably they're tragic.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

BEN RAWLENCE:

And-- and that's I s-- you know, that's really the-- the commonality. That's the entry point for the story, really, is to appreciate that tragedy.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). So if w-- you could just finish this chapter-- of the ingress-- with--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Eesha.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Eesha's story please.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Eesha, later that year in another part of Somalia-- the famine in the rural areas is building and building and building. And you may remember the-- the news stories at that time. Of course, it's intimately connected to the-- to the war with Al Shabaab. Eesha lives in an Al Shabaab area.

No aid is getting through for various-- political reasons, both of the U.S. policy decisions and also Al Shabaab. Finally she was a rich lady with her husband. They had lost of camels. They had cattle. All of them are dead. After the last one dies s-- they finally decide, "Okay. We're gonna go to the camp."

Al Shabaab, curiously enough, give them a 25 kilo sacrifice of rice to allow them to get to the camp. So-- in that area they had-- a humane-- Al Shabaab commander. In other areas they were not so humane. She and five other families then begin the process of walking to the camp (THROAT CLEARING) because, of course, they don't have money for transportation.

And the famine-- the cost of transportation went up by about four or five times. So-- every-- every car was being commandeered and hired for thousands of dollars-- s-- which is why that the big outflow from southern Somalia during the famine was on foot. So they joined this flood of people on foot. And it took them 16 days walking at night because it's too hot to walk in the daytime. And they had one donkey cart between the five families.

When the kids got tired they would put the kids on the donkey cart. And then they would rotate them because there wasn't enough space on the donkey cart. And when

the kids started flagging and-- and-- and not, you know, walking fast enough then they would start scaring them and pretending there was a lion coming and trying to keep the kids moving because they were so tired. They were so hungry. They also were very-- they had to carry water, of course. So Eesha was either carrying a child or a 25 liter jerrycan on her back the whole way.

All of the kids lost the soles of their feet during the walk because the shoes got shredded in the-- on the hot sand. And then after that the soles went. So she used to wrap-- used to use the water rather than drink it with wet shreds of cloth and wrap her children's feet in this-- in the cloth and then-- you know, slowly they made it. (NOISE)

There-- in their little group they-- nobody dies. But overall, I mean, that-- in that period, in-- the famine in southern Somalia, 250,000 people died. Most of them children under five. But she finally made it to the camp. And then-- the-- the, at that time because the-- Kenya has said, "The camp is full. It's closed," all of these people were piling up in the bush outside the camp. So the camp is a temporary slum.

And then there was a sort of temporary suburb of the temporary slum which was growing to-- it-- i-- i-- it peaked at around 70,000 people-- who were just building huts at the edge of the camp. And, of course, the services were overstretched in the camp and they couldn't process all of these people. So even when you got to the camp you were still waiting 21 days for a f-- food, for-- water, to be given a, you know, a house and a plastic sheet and blankets and all the rest of it. So people in terrible shape are dying right in the camp even though they'd actually made it. So 16 days Eesha had to make it to the camp. And then another 21 she had to survive until she finally got-- got her rations.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). For the second lens I'd like you to use the stories, if you don't mind, of Moona (PH) and Munday (PH).

BEN RAWLENCE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

HOWARD FRENCH:

This is a couple that-- is-- comes together across a religious divide and-- and-- and a nationality divide as well.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

But I think they give-- they help illustrate many dimensions (BACKGROUND VOICE) as life in the camp.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

So if you-- if you could just sort of lay some of that out for us.

BEN RAWLENCE:

So the majority of population in the camp is 95 percent Somalis. But there are other populations. Kenya has-- an encampment policy-- contrary to international law which means that most of the refugees who-- it-- it grants asylum to it ships to one of two camps. Dadaab is one. Kakuma is the other. In fact, the second largest refugee camp in the world is Kakuma.

There are a large number of Sudanese people-- who come to seek refu-- refuge in Kenya. There's-- a small population of Sudanese in-- in Dadaab. There's a bigger population in Kakuma. There are also a lot of Ethiopians. There are some Rwandans. Some Burundians. Ugandans. Congolese. A few Eritreans. Among the-- the-- the refugee pop-- the Sudanese population are some lost boys-- w-- whose story, I think, has been w-- explored to some extent here with-- people like--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Ishmael.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Ishmael Baeh and-- and-- sorry, *What is the What*, the book by David Eggers about Valentino Deng. So one of Deng's friends-- was a guy called Munday who-- while s-- several of the lost boys, many of the lost boys were resettled to places like Minnesota. The-- the vast majority still in camps or in the region. And there's a group of lost

boys in-- in Dadaab.

One of them is called Munday. And Munday-- is still there. He's 35 now. He's not a boy anymore. But he met-- a young girl called Moona who was-- came to the camp when she six months old. And she was forced-- into a marriage-- at 14 with her math teacher because she had fallen in love with her math teacher and she'd fool around with him and that wasn't very good. And she had to marry him.

So she married him and-- he-- unfortunately died quite quickly. Then she was forced to marry his older brother who was much older and who she-- didn't want to be with. So she had one child from her first marriage. She had another child from the forced marriage to the brother. And-- she was-- basically she ran away and she wanted to find somewhere safe to be where the family couldn't find her.

So she took a job-- working in the German-- aide at compound as a cook. And the-- the aide agencies all live in Dadaab town, in a kind of three-square-kilometer bomb-- it's like a green zone with security, with-- lots of towers and-- bomb-proof vents. What's it called? Blast walls. Blast walls and barbed wire and so on. So by-- by going to accept this job where she had to live in the Germany-aide agency compound she was-- then able to escape the-- retribution from her family for running away from her second husband.

In the Germany-aide agency compound she met a tall, handsome plumber from Sudan called Munday. And they got to talking. And-- he-- he thought, you know, he-- he-- they-- they finally got together. And-- i-- I-- sorry I-- I have to-- paraphrase a very long story. Again, it's-- could be-- it's a love story. It's a movie. I mean, it-- it-- (LAUGHTER) it's like *Sleepless in Seattle*. But-- (LAUGHTER) she-- Sleepless in Dadaab. H-- he-- his story is, and this is part of the-- the beauty of in-- interviewing these people over such a long time. His-- h-- he thought he'd fall in love with her and this was all great. And--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Don't we all. (LAUGHTER)

BEN RAWLENCE:

And-- one day-- one day she started complaining and say, "I've got a headache. I've got malaria." And he said, "Oh darling, you know, I'll get you paracetamol. I'll take you to the clinic," and all this stuff. And then it kept going on and on and on. He thought, "You haven't got malaria." And he-- he-- I don't quite know how-- how this worked. But he-- he stole some of her urine and he took it to the clinic. And he found out that actually she was pregnant. And he said-- "What's going on? You know, why haven't you told me."

And he thought-- his version of events is that she fooled him. That she-- that she had deliberately got herself pregnant-- because she wanted to get back at her family. The-

- the way that she wanted to shame her family was to have a Christian child (BACKGROUND VOICE) because that was the way of-- of getting revenge at them for-- for forcing her to marry this guy who ineffectively raped her-- because he was her-- he-- he was allowed to. He was her husband-- under the customary law.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Let-- let me just pause to say (COUGH) I don't remember this detail but I know this is-- a very common pattern. N-- n-- this does not-- I don't mean to express moral approval of any kind but her-- original husband's brother inherited her under customary bride inheritance. (COUGH)

BEN RAWLENCE:

Exactly.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Is-- is that right?

BEN RAWLENCE:

That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. So anyway, they-- they got over this initial hiccup and they continued their relationship. And they had the baby. She was fired. He had to run away from his job because the-- the Somali community was-- wanted to kill him for impregnating one of their-- their daughters.

So they-- they had a long process then of-- of being-- of trying to run away. So they were always either seeking-- sanctuary with the police, with the U.N. or with their own community. And they had various altercations and falling-outs with all of these people as they were trying-- and with each other as they were trying to stay alive and keep their-- keep the baby.

When the baby was finally born-- the aide agency arranged for the baby to be born in the Dadaab hospital, not in the-- in-- in the town hospital, not in the refugee hospital because there was a rumor of a plot that the community wanted to seize to infant and-- and sacrifice it, basically, as-- because it was an affront to-- the-- the hard-line, Muslim community in the camp. Especially her family who were-- who were very, very upset. A kinda honor killing, if you like.

So there-- after that their relationship deteriorated further. And they-- he started drinking and he started hitting her. And she had other relationships. And it all got very complicated. In the end-- I'm happy to say they patched things up. They had another baby. And they finally, after some intervention from me at the very end--

after we-- I'd finished the book, it's in the epilogue-- they w-- were finally granted the emergency resettlement to Australia that they were supposed to have. So now they live there with their three childhood.

HOWARD FRENCH:

W-- w-- which was based on the idea that they were the targets of discrimination because--

BEN RAWLENCE:

They were-- at risk.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--of this cross-religious marriage. Right--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yes. Exactly. But it took three years of them living-- having-- having met the criteria and been told, "Yes we're going to, you know, evacuate you to Australia ASAP." It took three years for that actually to happen. So that gives you an insight into how bureaucratic and-- sclerotic the U.N. can be.

HOWARD FRENCH:

So just to finish with the lenses-- under what other circumstances does one manage to escape this world? You-- so Moona and Munday served two purposes for-- for-- according to our scheme. But--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--are-- are there other ways out?

BEN RAWLENCE:

There are-- there are basically th-- there are a few ways out. The first one is to return to Somalia and brave the war (COUGH) and make the best of it. The other one is to wait for official resettlement, which is basically like waiting for a lottery ticket. The-- the odds are very slim-- for that.

Most of the resettlements slots are reserved for people who are at risk. So vulnerable people-- people like Moona and Munday who-- whose lives are at risk. Former child soldiers. People who have particular cases-- victims of domestic abuse and so on. So those-- that formal quota system, as I talked about earlier is very, very-- the numbers are very, very small.

If you have the money you can buy a Kenyan ID card or a Kenyan passport. Those are quite expensive-- and it's not always guaranteed that the documents are genuine. And even if that is the case-- the-- the-- s-- Kenyan government, in its pogroms against the Somalis often rounds people in Nairobi, shreds their documents and sends them to Dadaab anyway. So even just being Somali in Kenya can be-- a risky business even if you have-- a Somali p-- a Kenyan passport.

The-- the final option, which is where I left Guled, in fact, at the end of the book, is that (COUGH) if you consider your options and you think that-- none of these apply to me, I don't have the money to buy my way out. I can't go back to Somalia. I'm not gonna get resettlement in the camp. Some people try and make the journey to Europe. And it's a long way. But increasingly (COUGH) young-- that's what young people are doing. It costs around 10,000 dollars. In-- people in the camp might have a little bit of money. They probably don't have that much.

But what tends to happen is extended family will invest in one person's journey (COUGH) with the idea that they will then get repaid at the end of it. So that's a model that we're seeing more and more. And the-- the other-- route, not just to Europe, is to the United States via South Africa by boat into Brazil or South America and then up through Mexico. And that route, the traffickers charge-- more like 25,000 dollars. But the returns, I think, are probably better than Europe.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I-- I'd like to shift directions a little bit and talk about-- the way other-- the-- the way the outside world-- responds to all of this. And I'd like to use (NOISE) two-- w-- that we could go-- we could slice this very thinly and talk-- talk about lots of different entities. But we don't have time to do that. So I'd like to talk about two particular states, this country (NOISE) and Kenya.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

HOWARD FRENCH:

There's a really intriguing-- passage at the very beginning of the book-- where Ben is called in, I think, to the White House to-- have a meeting with the National Security Council and to brief them on-- on-- on the situation in-- in these refugee camps. And-- and I read this with sort of my-- (COUGH) my-- my jaw-- agape for several reasons.

But-- w-- w-- what-- so-- to be fair to the audience, so the-- the National Security Council, I don't know why they invited you in the first place. Maybe you wanna talk-- explain that a bit. But it's-- it-- my recollection is that once they understood that your story was that most of these people do not risk becoming Islamic-- militants then they-- they White House's attitude was, "Well then why should we care about them?" Is that-- is that correct?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Well they didn't say it like that. But I-- (LAUGHTER) that was definitely (LAUGH) the impression I walked away with.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Right.

BEN RAWLENCE:

I mean, I went there as-- as an activist, part of the, you know, my role but for Human Rights Watch and as an OSF fellow is to meet with policy makers and to try and lobby them and give them information about-- you know, the-- the work that we're doing. So-- part of my-- my goal in writing the book and doing the research was to try and debunk this myth that refugee camps are hotbeds of extremism.

Because so much lazy policy is based on this assumption. And it's-- pretty much a given in-- in liberal thinking that poverty and marginalization and human rights abuse generally contribute to radicalization. In fact, the empirical research that is out there is pretty unclear. It-- it doesn't-- really point to-- to any kind of links.

And my experience in the camp was that there was certainly no clear relationship between poverty and extremism. There might have been-- a very simple utilitarian one in the sense that some people who were-- who were poor might be more likely to accept jobs with Al Shabaab because Al Shabaab pays a salary.

But there-- there certainly wasn't-- m-- any-- a direct link with young people in the camp feeling that because they were forgotten and marginalized that Al Shabaab op-- offered a better future for them. That was certainly not the case. So the meeting in

the White House was to try and explain this and to say, "Listen your funding the Kenyan security services, your--" you know, pretty much supporting this-- tacitly supporting this policy of-- scapegoat the refugees and beating them up every time-- a bomb goes off in Kenya-- and actually you need to understand that the camp i-- is not-- Kenya keep saying that, you know, with need to close the camp because it's full of extremists.

And I was trying to say, "Well actually that's not really true." If you go there, and of course, none of the U.S. embassy staff are allowed to go there 'cause it's too dangerous-- for them-- that-- that-- that the real picture on the ground is very different, that you have these grids of-- which are very easily policed.

The surveillance is quite strong. There's a good relationship with the local police. There's a community policing program. The residents live in these very tightly-knit communities where they've been for 25 years. They all know each other. If somebody from another clan shows up who's a stranger from Somalia-- he's very quickly identified and the police-- are called and the person is taken away.

So-- you know, the idea that Al Shabaab's planning all these big attacks in the camp is-- is completely nonsense. But I-- I confessed to-- I suppose-- an-- an uncomfortable irony, really, which is that-- all of the time that I've been doing this kind of liberal advocacy, the idea-- the-- the-- the narrative has always been, you know, you must look after this camp. You must treat these people better because otherwise they might get radicalized.

And actually, you know, this is my own research-- m-- problematizes that quite a bit. (COUGH) It's-- it's-- it's not-- it doesn't necessarily follow at all. At which point I saw the-- the k-- (LAUGH) the people in the-- in the National Security Council just sort of relax and-- (LAUGHTER) bring the meeting quietly to a close. (LAUGHTER) Well in that case, you know-- but I-- I-- I, you know, I did try and make the point, and I made the point, and I've made the point since in other (UNINTEL) which is that-- if you want to do counter-radicalization the first thing to do is, don't call it that. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

The second thing to do is to recognize that the most effective way of inoculating kids against-- this kind of ideology is primary education. What Al Shabaab-- Al Shabaab's main targets in northern Kenya and in Somalia are primary schools because they want the madrassas to be the only option. So i-- i-- foreign policy, for me, in-- in the Horn of Africa is really very simple and very cheap. But somehow beyond the gasp of the clever people in Washington.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I-- I wanna challenge that a little bit.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Sure.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Not to defend the people in Washington. (LAUGHTER) But there's a line in your book which says, "The f-- the-- the biggest casualty of civil war in Somalia is the idea of the Somali state." And I think that's j-- just right.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

HOWARD FRENCH:

And so if that's true, and if one byproduct of this war has been this immense population of refugees-- then what beyond the question of radicalization, what should a-- reasonable foreign policy approach be to this part of Africa that will, among its byproducts, in time perhaps help-- alleviate the refugee pri-- crisis?

BEN RAWLENCE:

There's so much that-- that needs to be done. There's so much that's wrong. The-- one of the interesting things I learned about the view from Dadaab, looking at Kenyan politics, looking at regional politics from the perspective of the refugee camp was just how similar the conflict economy of southern Somlai looks to the DRC, to Congo.

Where, in-- in fact-- i-- the-- the war is, in a way, business by other means-- where the Kenyan state has pretty much annexed southern Somalia through its proxy, this-- this state called Jubaland and it's controlling all of the trade from the Kismayo port down into Nairobi. And there are very big interests at stake.

The whole of the Kenyan domestic sugar market has pretty much been geared to the military operation there to make sure that 30 percent of the Kenyan sugar market, which is supplied from s-- smuggled sugar-- which keeps one of the characters in the book in business 'cause he works in the market and that's his-- that's his thing, so I-- I-- my introduction to this was watching the price of sugar going up and down in the market and realizing how it connected to the regional politics. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

But that-- we're talking about probably 5-- half a billion dollars that-- that's at stake in that particular economy that the Kenyan army has its finger in. The problem then

for the United States and-- and its-- and other allies who want to engage and who want to find partners in the region with Kenya and Ethiopia is that they un-- they do know that. But nonetheless they need partners. They need people they can work with. They need-- forces they can share intelligence with and so on. So it-- it's-- very, very problematic. And nobody wants to-- acknowledge that Kenya is not (COUGH) a-- what's the word? And benign--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Honest broker.

BEN RAWLENCE:

--an honest broker. Is not an honest broker in Somalia. Ethiopia is not an honest broker in Somalia. And the first thing that anybody talks about in-- in a discussion about regional politics in-- in the camp or in Somalia-- as a whole is the borders that the British and the Italians and the Ethiopians drew in 1884, 1885.

That quarter of Ethiopia is Somalia. Quarter of Kenya is Somalia. Djibouti is Somalia. So these are all, you know, big-- and-- and then that means that-- that the domestic politics of Kenya and Ethiopia play out in Somalia and the domestic politics of Somalia play out in those regions of Kenya. So it's no-- it's no surprise that the Ogaden region of-- of Ethiopia is-- is at war. That northeast province of Kenya has been at way and is still unstable.

So-- I think the-- the-- my shorthand reading of the-- the international approach to the region is that they don't appreciate the history enough, even if they understand it. And they don't-- care enough about trying to resolve it. I mean, it-- it-- it's not-- there isn't the level of engagement, for example, as there was with South Korea or, you know, rebuilding Japan after World War II. This is no where near that kind of engagement.

There is a token engagement. There is money being spent. It's the largest amount of money on the table. But it's by no where-- by no stretch (NOISE) is it-- is it gonna be enough to-- to, you know, of bring this state together. And there is a very-- the-- one last point. There is-- quite a short-sighted policy (COUGH) in Somalia, which I think matches-- what the U.S. has previously done in Afghanistan which is this very utilitarian approach to paying off war lords who we can work with for particular short-term projects to get particular people or bring stability to particular areas at the expense of the nation. And, of course, these are-- are kind of free radical--

HOWARD FRENCH:

Sure. This is familiar in Iraq, in Afghanistan. I mean--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--d-- you find local intermediaries and-- to the extent they're useful 'cause you-- you avert your eyes to whatever bad--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. And you're--

HOWARD FRENCH:

--bad news (UNINTEL) them.

BEN RAWLENCE:

--you're undermining the overall goals in the long term. And-- I don't know what it's called in-- in Afghanistan or Iraq. But they call it the two-track policy in Somalia. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And actually it's kind of one track undermining the other track as far as I can tell. (LAUGH)

HOWARD FRENCH:

Right. This-- idea of not caring enough is another motif that runs through the book. And it's expressed in a very-- different area-- which is the response to the material needs and specifically the nutritional needs of this refugees. So you have these arresting scenes in the book where the U.N. and various other relief community characters who-- inhabit-- has a very sort of special insular world in Nairobi.

H-- have-- these-- begin to formulate these dire-- forecasts that th-- pretty-- and it's-- and it's good science. They pretty much know for sure that in three months there's gonna be X number of people who are not covered and-- and likely to starve. And there's-- begin to send, you know, alarm messages to Geneva and New York and to various other places and then they knock off and they go to-- sort of fancy bars and have their nice expat evening-- in Nairobi. Right?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

HOWARD FRENCH:

Knowing just how-- you know, hopeless this all is. I mean, there's this--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--incredible fatalism that attaches to the whole thing.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Right? But is there, I mean, i-- is there really any solution to that? I mean, how do ever get beyond that?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Well I think what I try to do both-- more, specifically for the refugees but also for the other actors in-- in the region, is to try and-- and show-- the big picture, really, is to show that-- th-- the U.N. is made up of these well-meaning people who are working in very difficult-- situations. And who are constrained on all corners. The refugees are constrained in so many ways. And their-- their imagination then sort of fits-- the space that's allotted.

And I think the-- the ambition and the-- the compassion of the-- the aide workers-- i-- i-- in a way operates in a similar way that you-- they-- they do what they can. And then they realize that nobody's listening to the famine early warning system, which incidentally is working well, since all the lessons we've had over the last 20 years.

But at the end of the chain you're pressing the alarm button and the fire brigade's not coming because the political decision has not been made. And that's (NOISE) really-- is-- was the problem. But those guys who are making those messages who are-- who are trying to work within the system nonetheless have to accommodate their daily life to their job.

So they shut the door, they go and get drunk. You know? I mean, that's what's-- that's how-- how-- as many of you know who've worked in the region that's how-- how people cope in-- in these-- in these situations. And, you know, they-- they are

having-- mental health issues too. Just-- perhaps of-- of a lesser order.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I wanna save time for questions but I-- I want-- I have-- a final kind of-- a-- a-- a writer's question for you. The-- I use the phrase-- the clichéd phrase, "Fly on the wall." The book is not told in first person, of course, it's told in third person.

But it's told-- to-- it, you know, very often-- extraordinary sort of degree of detail-- as if, I mean, these are stories that extend far back in time and, you know, somebody washing their clothes one morning or cooking, you know, at-- whatever s-- p-- specific meal. As a reader I wrestled with that not because I didn't find the prose absorbing, which I-- I really did.

But because I wondered, and this isn't-- a fault, really, I'm-- because I have the privilege of being able to ask you, I wondered, you know, how does-- how does one know which pieces are reconstituted and-- and if-- and if they're-- and if-- if-- if that's a lot how did you manage that? I mean, I don't know how-- how you pulled that off. You pulled it off well. And which pieces are witnessed.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Right. Well if I ever have the privilege of teaching a non-fiction class one of the challenges--

HOWARD FRENCH:

I might be able to help you with that. (LAUGHTER)

BEN RAWLENCE:

One of the-- one of the cla-- tasks I'd like to set for students is to try and identify which bits was I present in the room and which bits have I (UNINTEL)--

HOWARD FRENCH:

So-- so-- because maybe 'cause I'm a writer I couldn't stop--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

--wondering page by page.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I mean, it really became a fixation.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Okay. Well I'm-- I'm honored that that was a problem (LAUGHTER) or an observation. I-- what I very much tried to do was-- was to try and-- e-- ex-- make it seamless-- and as much as possible I was in the room with the people as things were happening. But-- what I also did was multiple interviews-- of-- of a kind that-- other journalists have pioneered like Barbara Demick and Katherine Boo and people like that.

So, for example, Munday and Moona, I would interview Munday-- at great length and lots of drama. And then I would interview Moona. And then I would go back to Munday and then I would go back to Moona. And actually the story of evolved as I did it because on the third time I interviewed Moona she said, "Well actually, yeah, he's right. (LAUGHTER) You know, I did-- I did, you know, I did kinda cheat. And I knew it was my time." (BACKGROUND VOICE)

So, you know, you-- you sort of emer-- the picture builds up like that. And then, of course, I interviewed Moona's mom and I interviewed-- her best friend and other people and tried to cross check and, you know, like that. (COUGH) And then with the-- there-- there was two sort of models. One was the-- that sort of-- close reportage of-- the-- the journalists I've spoken about.

The other was-- the-- I studied quite closely-- *The Grapes of Wrath*, which is also an attempt to try and humanize a disaster, to try and, you know, focus public attention on the m-- the intimate stories but to relate it to the bigger political forces.

So for those-- again, like the London conference on Somalia, I was therein the fringes and I talked to some of the-- the foreign office officials and so on. I saw the room-- so I can, you know, it was from there. But then the communiqué and what was-- agreed later, you know, that again, is from in secondary interviews later on.

So-- I tried to build up the whole equation, really, so that at this point, when we're talking about the refugee crisis, you can see the whole picture. You can see the people at the-- at the center of it. Why they fled. The reasons why they're stuck in

this place. The effect that that has on them. The political impasse, if you like, that keeps them there and all of these policies and so on-- and-- and these themes like the war on terror and so on which shape their experience and which prevent-- us from-- from fully appreciating their lives. So it-- it's-- it's an attempt to-- to get the whole picture.

HOWARD FRENCH:

You-- you also avoid, just as-- matter of technique, you avoid a lot of he said, she said, you know, which I think helps you pull of this-- I don't wanna call it a trick 'cause that sounds cheap, but this whatever it is, this exploit of-- of kind of making the thing real.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. I set-- I generally set the-- the accounts against each other, (NOISE) you know-- this is-- according to Moona and then Munday said, da, da, da, da. And yeah. It-- it's-- it-- yeah. I don't know what to say really. (LAUGHTER)

HOWARD FRENCH:

Well done. (LAUGHTER)

BEN RAWLENCE:

Thank you.

HOWARD FRENCH:

So I think we'll take questions now.

MARGOT BESCUZZI (PH):

Hi. My name is Margot Bescuzzi. I'm retired editor and writer. I just wanna comment the-- the analogy with the Palestinian network, the Palestinian camps. It's very interesting. This is much more dynamic like people going in-- as well as reproducing in those camps. But I have a technical question. How did you handle language in your deep (NOISE) interviews with people?

BEN RAWLENCE:

Some of the-- the characters, some of the people speak English and Swahili. (BACKGROUND VOICE) And I speak those two languages. Some of the others only spoke Somali and for those I had-- a t-- I had a succession of translators. But one guy in particular who-- who did most of that.

KEVIN KELLY (PH):

Hi I'm Kevin Kelly. I'm the U.S. and U.N. correspondent for the nation media (UNINTEL) Kenya--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Nice to see you in the flesh.

KEVIN KELLY:

It's-- sounds like a great book, Ben. I'm really looking forward to reading it. So, yeah, thanks for doing this too. So are you saying that there's no Shabaab presence at all in the Dadaab? And I have a second question too. Given the corruption, given the back and forth across the border, given the surreptitious behavior on all sides, I would think that there must be some Shabaab influence in Dadaab. The Kenyans certainly think so.

And secondly, is this camp gonna be there pretty much forever? I mean, the U.N. wants to repatriate people gradually as security, if it ever does improve in Somalia. Do you think that significant numbers of people will go back to Somalia or this older generation, the aristocracy, and as people age the younger generations (BACKGROUND VOICE) they're not gonna go anywhere, this is becoming a permanent Somali community? I'm interested in your thoughts on that.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Sorry, remind me the first point again.

HOWARD FRENCH:

The-- is Shabaab--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Oh yeah. No Shabaab-- Shabaab is there but very, very-- transient. I mean, people come and go. The-- the-- the core population that live there-- there may be some sympathizers who are passing on information and so on. But they really-- their-- their influence is very, very limited. And they-- it-- it's most to do with Somalia. It's not to do with (NOISE) the population in the camp.

And-- and the-- the people in Garissa, I mean, Shabaab is in Garissa much more (NOISE) than it is in-- in the camp. Wi-- Garissa's the-- the nearest, largest town where the university (UNINTEL)-- ex-- (COUGH) executed a lot of people. Dadaab is here to stay in my view. Even if-- s-- some people go back to Somalia and some people sort of bleed away into Kenya there will be a core of the city-- for sure.

Because it-- it functions and because for many people they've invested, they-- (NOISE) they've built houses. Concrete is illegal but people have started pouring concrete in-- in some of the older camps. So I think it's gonna be very, very hard to uproot a city the size of New Orleans-- just like that. I-- I don't think it's going anywhere.

The wider point is that there are more and more of these refugee cities and they hare lasting longer and longer. And the Palestinian example is signal (NOISE) because the Palestinian situation was supposed to be the exception. That the refugees were there pending an international settlement, which, of course, never comes. But that is increasingly the situation for everybody else now. They're-- you're supposed to be a refugee pending a durable solution and the durable solution never arrives.

So more and more Gaza is the future, I think, for the camps in Chad, the camps in Kenya, the camps in southern Ethiopia-- the camps in Yemen-- Sudan, CFR. I can go on. But, you know, I-- I think-- we-- the-- that world and that, you know, the people concerned with-- with international policy need to find ways of dealing with this fact.

Rather than pretending that these places are temporary we need to start treating them as permanent and trying to get around the legal obstacles to treating them as permanent. And giving them-- the provision that they need. Giving them perhaps the movement that they need. Allowing them to work. Finding some sort of-- way of making-- life there a bit more bearable.

LORI:

Hi I'm Lori. Thank you so much for the-- I'm looking forward to reading the book. So I'm a disaster and emergency mental health specialist and working with the refugees and displaced people. And you mentioned coping. And-- I've worked in other areas of the world and I'm curious in such an established, long-lasting camp if there are services, mental health or behavior health, psycho-social services provided, to both the ex-pat community? And if so, if that's accessible and well received. And then also to the inhabitants of the camp. And if that is offered in a culturally

appropriate way rather than western models instilled in them.

BEN RAWLENCE:

There is a little bit of mental health provision for the refugees. Not very much. But there is also-- there's-- (THROAT CLEARING) there's a cultural barrier in the sense that-- people are often referred for counseling but they don't go. So no matter how culturally appropriate you try and make the counseling people will avoid it because they're not familiar with, you know, that-- that as a solution, really.

So there's some of it. I'm not aware of any psycho-social counseling for the expatriate stuff. Or-- but expatriate's the wrong word rally because in-- in Dadaab now, because white skin has such a premium, the most of the-- the f-- aide workers are (NOISE) Kenyans. So it-- there's been big shift towards hiring m-- many more, what they call national staff, rather than international staff.

BERYL GOLDBERG (PH):

Hi I'm Beryl Goldberg. I'm a freelance photojournalist and have spent a lot of time in Africa. Any-- many places. But do you have any s-- and this is like American-- average American-- I heard you on the radio the other day and thought, "I can't stand this. I want to do something." But I know aide agencies are in such disrepute. I mean, what-- the average ideally, both of you actually--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

BERYL GOLDBERG:

--think of what (NOISE) people can do to--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Well I think part-- part of the-- (THROAT CLEARING) the-- the challenge of the-- the refugee crisis we face at the moment is changing our own societies to be more adaptable, to be more welcoming. Europe is undergoing a bit of an existential crisis abo-- Germany is coping much better than other countries, perhaps because it's had a reckoning with its past.

And it has less of-- of a sort of nat-- or at least-- ideas of nationhood in Germany are-- perhaps a bit more discredited than they might be in (COUGH) other-- other more-- (UNINTEL) societies like Britain, for example. (NOISE) So I think there's--

something to be done in terms of our own national societies. I think that there are-- there are definitely-- organizations that are doing good things. It's always a question, I think, (THROAT CLEARING) when-- when you want to support work in-- in-- in another country or in an area that you don't necessarily understand intimately it's always hard to find people that you trust and who you think are doing good work.

In my view, Medecins Sans Frontier, hands down, every time, in every crisis, they're just fantastic. They're always there. They work with everybody. They do-- they also do advocacy which they-- they-- they speak up about the things they see, which people like Save the Children and Oxfam often can be a bit more hesitant about doing.

So (THROAT CLEARING) I'm a big fan of theirs. The other interesting thing in the camp is-- this private-- Canada is the only country that allows private sponsorship of resettlement for refugees. Some countries in Europe are starting to pilot programs. But it was be great if-- the United States started looking into it. What that means is, a group of people get together, raise $80,000 to $100,000 to sponsor (NOISE) the-- one person to come from Dadaab rather than the cost of-- or wherever. You know, wherever you choose to sponsor somebody.

And that is-- a private route out of-- of a protracted refugee s-- situation rather than waiting to fulfill a government quota, which, of course, the numbers are always politicized. (THROAT CLEARING) Part of that is also-- I mentioned Cairo, this girl who wanted to go to Kenya.

The-- there's a trust that works with refugee camps across the world-- providing and coordinating these scholarships for young girls and young boys to go to university out of refugee camps. And that trust is called Windle Trust, W-I-N-D-L-E. And I'm a supporter of theirs. And-- I also-- often-- tell people that-- to look into that if-- if you're interested in supporting young people to have-- education from refugee camps.

KRISTEN TYMESON:

Hi. My name is-- Kristen Tymeson and I'm with FilmAid International here in New York. But I worked with FilmAid in Kenya and have been to Dadaab a few times. So we probably crossed paths I think. But I wanted to ask if you've been able to talk with any Kenyan government leaders or Kenyan media leaders at all. Because I know-- a lot of-- a durable solution-- one of the possible dur-- durable solutions of being able to stay in Kenya really relies on them. And so I was wondering if you'd had a chance to speak with them at all.

BEN RAWLENCE:

They-- they laugh at me, the Kenyan government--

KRISTEN TYMESON:

(UNINTEL) sure. (LAUGHTER)

BEN RAWLENCE:

No. They're-- they're not interested. I mean, they're-- they're-- there are some people in the Kenyan establishment who are sympathetic other refugees. But by and large it's very conservative, very hostile. What we would call right wing. You know, possible fascist approach to the refugees-- is very scary how the-- the Kenyan establishment views them.

Media leaders, there's-- there's a section in the book actually about-- where I met media leaders at the time of-- what they called Usalama Watch. So the Kenyan government rounded up all the (NOISE) undocumented refugees and put them pack to Dadaab. But not just refugees. Pretty much anybody that looked Somali.

And there was this very frightening level of-- xenophobia in the Kenyan press. (COUGH) And I and another OS-- not OSF fellow but-- a fellow of the Open Society in Kenya went to meet media leaders and said, "What's going on? You need to cool it down." And they said-- they were very frank. They said, "We've never seen anything like it. You know? We d-- we agree with you and we're trying. And in our editorial meetings this is a live issue. But people are ab-- spitting blood because there were bombs going off in Nairobi and everybody wanted (THROAT CLEARING) to blame the Somalis."

So, yeah, it, you know, I mean, you-- the U.S. and the U.K. and all these other countries have a lesser-- have-- have a similar problem (UNINTEL) perhaps to a lesser pitch. But, you know, we all have a role, I think, in-- in all of our societies in trying to encourage intelligent debate-- about that.

ROBIN GROWTH (PH):

Hi. I enjoyed this very much. My name is Robin Growth. I'm a former CNN correspondent. And-- the stories that you've told today are-- (NOISE) very touching. But what I wanna know is what your life was like. You were imbedded there in-- in many respects. And how did this experience change you? What did you learn about yourself and how did you cope?

BEN RAWLENCE:

I'm tempted to say I-- I never want to leave home again. But-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) I think that-- that's just 'cause I've had a baby recently. (BACKGROUND VOICE) I-- I was there for seven months on and off. But-- because of the security problems I was in the-- in the green zone. I was in the-- the U.N. camp. So I would

have to go out through the security gates every day with my-- car and my driver and my translator.

And then I had another truck full of armed guards who would usually stay a distance away and drink tea for a couple of hours. And then we would go away and then we'd come back again. 'Cause they had a two hour limit. I wasn't allowed to be in one place for more than two hours. That then shrunk to one hour. Then in the end that was half an hour because there was an elevated kidnap threat-- towards the end of my stay there. So it made the research quite tricky.

I didn't-- I had-- I think I managed to keep a distance during the-- all of the research, gathering all of this information, assembling it. And I channeled a lot of my sense of injustice about the situation into the book. That's why I wrote the book. That's why I'm, you know-- I-- I get exorcised and I can shout on NPR and elsewhere. And, you know, it's because I-- (COUGH) I felt that-- I felt angry about the situation and I've tried to control, you know, put that into a control fashion into-- into the book.

On a personal note I-- I didn't cry during-- any of that-- that research. Although I felt for all of those people. What, for me, was the most heartbreaking thing was-- before Christmas I sent a box of books to the camp, to all of these people, and I had to write in each, and dedicate them to that person, and I-- didn't know what to say. I said, "Thank you for sharing your story and I hope that maybe it might have some positive outcome." But I think both they know and I know that that's probably not the case. So that-- that's when I cried was then.

QUESTION:

Can you elaborate on that just a little bit more? On those discussions even as people start jumping into the project with you, the what's in it for me? What's the outcome? Why-- why are they doing this?

BEN RAWLENCE:

I was quite clear right from the beginning that this has very little benefit for you. And they understood that. And they s-- most of them, no all of them in fact, were very clear. Like, "That's okay. You know, it's g-- great to see you. We like to talk to you." They want somebody to listen to them. They want their story to-- to matter. They don't wanna be just another number on a ration card.

And so this was also exciting. This was a sense-- this was an opportunity to participate in something. You know, several of the people are unemployed. They're sitting around. When I show up and buy everybody lunch and bring present from London it's great. You know? And we chat and, you know, I-- and I was quite clear about the risks as well. For-- so Guled is-- we changed his name. And we-- (COUGH) changed his wife's name. And we had to camouflage certain aspects.

But everybody else I was very clear about what, (BACKGROUND VOICE) you know,

y-- what it meant and what it might mean. And that-- that, you know, I also had to be clear that there are-- there is a slim chance that by participating in this that their story might come to somebody's attention. You know, there might be a book club in Canada that wants to sponsor a university place for Cairo, for example, even though she missed the formal opportunity. Or, Moona and Munday, their case, their emergency resettlement case was lost.

But at the end of the research I went and follow up with the U.N. and said, "What's going on?" You know, e-- you know, s-- had followed up before but they had (UNINTEL) me off and said, you know, "It's private. You can't look up this stuff." And then I found somebody who was more sympathetic. And they finally checked. And they said, "Oh. Oh. Sorry. This file's been lost. "

So f-- for three years they were sitting there waiting. "Why isn't it moving? Why is our case not moving?" So finally that case moved. And, yeah, I mean, I-- the-- I-- I did use some of my advance to buy Guled a motorcycle so he can start-- a business and-- and make life a little bit better. So there are little things that, you know-- there has been some-- some benefit for them in-- in s-- in small ways.

HOWARD FRENCH:

I think for-- what many in the audience who are not journalists might not realize, at least in my experience, is the power of s-- it's a very simple thing but that-- feels alien to lots of people with regards to strangers. That a stranger with be generally interested in your life and writing about it.

So you're one person in a crowd and a stranger who has this vocation to be a journalist approaches you and is willing to undergo hardship-- personally and to travel distances and to sit out long hours and-- because simply they wanna know your story is an incredibly powerful thing.

And so I think that even though you had-- this kind of pro forma disclaimer that you used with them that this is not gonna liberate you from your fate necessarily-- I think that-- I'm-- I'm imagining that this was another kind of sort of psychic reward for them. It's certainly been my experience as a reporter.

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah. Tawani-- for those of you that-- that find out about him in the book (NOISE) he-- he was on-- CBC radio in Canada last week because they asked me if they could speak to him. And I asked him and he said he'd be happy. And for him, that was fantastic. He said, you know, I've got-- he was on the radio. He was able to tell 23 million listeners in Canada that the people in Dadaab are running out of hope and please remember us.

And he was, you know, very happy for that opportunity. And I, you know, we-- we're friends and we all-- we're-- I'm still in touch with everybody on Facebook. And, you

know, hopefully let's see how-- how things go. But, you know, the-- just because they're there doesn't mean-- now they're at least participating in another conversation-- which is something.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Final question from me, Ben. Is there a sense perhaps-- in which the timing of-- refugee crisis as an issue on the global agenda, which is focused on n-- very different groups of refugees-- is unfortunate for these people? In other words, if the embodiment of the refugee in the global imagination today as somebody coming from Syria-- and that's already in itself overwhelming--

BEN RAWLENCE:

Yeah.

HOWARD FRENCH:

Does this-- objectively or-- or at least in the imaginations of these people hurt their cause?

BEN RAWLENCE:

It-- it hurts them in-- in both ways. I think at the macro level there is a benefit in the sense that any attention to refugees is good. And we are seeing some policy movement, some more creative thinking about how to unlock protracted refugee situations. There certainly has been a flurry of high-level panels and thinking and so on about Dadaab, as well as other refugee situations. So that's good.

But on the-- on the day-to-day level the focus on Syria (NOISE) has been actually quite harmful because for the last three years now every November the World Food Program is facing a funding crunch and it cuts food rations. So the end of the book Guled, this is last year but I know it's true this year as well, is going hungry because the food rations have been slashed because-- the numbers from Syria are too great.

And the political attention on Syria means that the Syrian rations are not cut. But all the other refugees that are out of the spotlight are going hungry because of Syria. And they feel that resentment quite strongly. Munday and Moona told themselves that the reasons their case had been lost was because it was the turn of Syria now and they'll come back to us when the-- they've done-- dealt with the Syrians. So that was the story that they made up for themselves. They had no real reason for believing that. But that was what they thought.

JULIA NEWMAN (PH):

My name is Julia Newman. I'm a documentarian. I wonder once you've gotten your footing and felt like you knew to some degree where you were did you think of-- of trying to bring in-- a tiny crew and-- and shoot any of this and-- and make a documentary?

BEN RAWLENCE:

I've been approached by film crews-- many times about going to Dadaab. And all of them get very excited when I tell them about Dadaab. And as soon as we talk about the security (NOISE) risks and the costs of going there-- they all lose interest quite quickly. (LAUGHTER)

MALE VOICE:

Well with that-- Howard, did you wanna say?

HOWARD FRENCH:

I just wanted to say thank you very much. (APPLAUSE)

BEN RAWLENCE: (OFF-MIC)

No. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

MALE VOICE:

Thanks to both of you.

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *