

## **Anas Aremeyaw Anas transcript**

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** People in Malawi were selling human body parts and they use them for ritual purposes. Black magic. The community started gathering around us. They said we were there to commit murder. So we tried to explain that no, we are journalists. They said, “No. We don’t care that you are journalists. The rule is simple, we will kill you.”

**Ramita Navai:** From *Aurra Studios*. This is **The Line of Fire** with me, Ramita Navai. I've been working in conflict zones around the world for nearly two decades. And in this series, I talk to fellow journalists about covering war and the life-changing moments of confronting death. Welcome to **The Line of Fire**.

My guest today is Africa's most famous investigative journalist and for good reason. Anas Aremeyaw Anas's extraordinary deep undercover work regularly exposes high level corruption. Foreign policy magazine has named him a global thinker.

And Barack Obama called Anas a courageous journalist who risked his life to report the truth.

His motto: name, shame, and jail. Anas welcome.

Anas this is the first time I'm interviewing someone whose face I can't see. In fact, very few people know what you look like.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Correct.

**Ramita Navai:** Even when you're reporting on camera, you always keep your face hidden.

Why?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** The nature of the work and the security implications that come along with it. The beads you see on my face is a representation of not just hiding the face, but also a representation of what is ideal on the African continent. Beads are very normal. They are found in most African countries and they are also secretive because of the places that they are worn. So the basic aim of having beads is one of security implications, so that I would have the capacity to tell another story tomorrow across the African continent.

**Ramita Navai:** What other disguises do you use?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Well, it depends on the kind of investigation that it is. We've done prosthetics on a number of occasions where you would be an old man. There are investigations that I've done that I'm a complete woman. You can be a white person, you can be a black person. I've made good use of makeup artists, and that

enables us to change dramatically from one shape to the other, depending on the type of investigation that is available.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas I'm going to take you back to how you ended up in journalism, what happened?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I grew up in a military barracks in Ghana. And at that time, the military was in full control.

My father was in the military and I was used to seeing a lot of human rights abuses within the barracks that I grew up in. There were lots of people who were brought and punished. Some shaved. And I learnt that I needed to do something else that would save or help people who are in such situations. So I found out that, well, you could be a journalist or a lawyer.

So I went for it. And then I started by looking at some of these issues of human rights abuse. So I keep saying that I'm a product of society. I grew up not really knowing what to do, but learnt a lot from society and asked myself, how can I place myself in a situation to be able to help the poor and the needy within that kind of environment?

**Ramita Navai:** Anas what brought you to investigations? How did you make that move from ordinary journalism to the deep undercover work that you do?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I asked myself how could I be in a position to impact in a more convincing manner to my people?

And I felt that I had to look at it in the context of my society. And I found my environment to be very ideal for undercover journalism. Why do I say so? We live on a continent, the African continent, where there's a lot of poverty, where people do things with impunity. And if you even did a story that is right, you have huge businessmen taking you to court. You have people wanting to take your life. So I said to myself, if I want to do a story, the story must be strong enough. It must be evidence-based. It must have hard core evidence. So that if you took me to court, you would lose.

If you decide to attack me, society will come to my defence because they can feel and see that hard core evidence. So when I say I am going undercover, I mean, I have my hidden cameras. I film the details, the minute details of the crime that is being committed. When I come, I don't just publish. I team up with law enforcement agencies, because as journalists, we do not have powers of arrest and there is nothing more painful than doing a story and finding out the next morning that the same criminal that you did a story about is working with you on the street.

So my point was that once I've been able to document this evidence, there must be a way where I would team up with law enforcement agencies. One step forward, we take that criminal to court. I don't leave it there. I testify. And I ensure that that person is jailed.

And I'm not talking about journalism that I'm about to practice.

I'm telling you about journalism that I have practiced, for example, the Chinese sex mafia story ended up with the people being jailed 45 years.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas I mean, first of all, I can't tell you how much this excites me as a journalist to hear you talking about evidence gathering like this and to actually nailing people. Because as we both know in our industry, this doesn't happen often, but this is something that you are extraordinarily good at. Now tell me about this Chinese sex story.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. The Chinese sex mafia story was a group of Chinese who had come to see that there was a lot of gold in Ghana. So they were businessmen and apart from the business, they decided that they would just get into a village in Ghana, they went and got a lot of Chinese females and bring them for sexual exploitation.

So what I did was I went undercover. I took up a job in the brothel and was a cleaner.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas when you were undercover investigating the trafficking of sex workers, you spent seven months undercover as a cleaner in a brothel. Tell me about that.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. That story I indeed took up a job in the brothel.

**Ramita Navai:** Which brothel was this? How do you even get a job as a cleaner in a brothel?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah. So that's what I said earlier that you do what we call reconnaissance. So in the reconnaissance, you're going to find who is the manager of their place. And you got to pitch your wanting to clean the place for them. And sometimes you are lucky you get it immediately, other times it takes three, four months before you get it, but the recce tells you the scope you have.

And the work we did proved that the only way we could get in to be able to see what was happening was if you were a cleaner. So I went in there, cleaned, and that's how in the end I understood and I knew the rooms and everything. That place was called peach blossom palace. I remember the name, that was the name - peach blossom palace.

And I worked there for a long time, cleaning the condoms, the sex workers and filming also the atrocities that these girls went through. So that's how I got this story.

**Ramita Navai:** And while you were working, you were secretly filming, you were rigged up?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes, yes, yes, yes. So I got a lot of footage.

So I filmed the sexual assault on them, the money exchange bait and all that. You know, when it comes to human trafficking, you need to prove beyond reasonable doubt. So you have to collect evidence that is admissible in court.

So I took all this evidence and then I went to court. I testified and they were jailed all together 45 years.

**Ramita Navai:** How many were jailed?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** There were four, the traffickers. And then of course the victims were about seven and they were all returned to China. Another man who raped girls as young as three ended up being jailed for 15 years as a result of the story that I did.

Another problem I had with that investigation was I recall the BBC asking me a question because I was also dating a young lady who was working in the brothel and I was only dating her to get information. So I remember they asked me a question, so we are breaking the girl's heart? And I was like, okay. Yeah, it's true. I'm breaking the girl's heart, but comparing the breaking of the heart to the number of people I was saving, I thought that was better. So I had to go and apologise to the girl.

**Ramita Navai:** How did she take it?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** She was disappointed initially, but later when she read more about me, then she said she had forgiven me.

She phoned me to tell me she had forgiven me.

**Ramita Navai:** So you came clean to her?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas but what are the ethics of that? Because that in itself is dishonesty right there.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah. But the act of subterfuge is dishonesty, but to what end? That's the thing, to what end? Does the end justify the means? It doesn't mean you should kill anybody to justify.

But how was there any other way I could go in without having her? If there was, I would have. And at every state we have to do a comparative analysis and I guess she forgive me because she did a comparative analysis and realised that we have saved a lot of people.

She herself wasn't happy about how the girls were being treated.

And even in court, she came to testify for me.

**Ramita Navai:** She did? And she was a sex worker.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes.

And as I speak to you, there are many other cases ongoing and people are getting jailed. So like I said, I'm not telling you about something that I'm about to practice. I'm telling you about something that I do regularly. I collect evidence and that's why I'm a lawyer. When I go undercover, I know exactly what I need to meet that threshold of evidence gathering. So when I am before a judge, I know exactly what I need.

Some people disagree with my kind of journalism. They think that it's Rambo style journalism, and that the work of the journalist is that you should just talk. After giving out the news you're done, leave it there. I say, no, my journalism is influenced by my society. I'm a product of society. There's no point in doing journalism that doesn't lead to the progress of society. My journalism is people centred and that's what I do.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas, tell me about the way you operate. So you, you started talking about it with your disguises, but how do you operate on the ground with cameras? How do you get this evidence?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** So I've been undercover as an inmate in prison.

I've been undercover as a patient in a psychiatric hospital. I've been undercover as a lawyer in another land, Malawi. I've been undercover as a pimp. I've played many, many roles undercover, I've been a female undercover, have been a male, I've been an old man, I've been a young boy, everything.

So how do I do it? I don't do this on my own, I do it with a team. We are guided strongly by what I call the BBC Ofcom rules, which will stipulate that before you go undercover, there must be prima facie evidence before you even attempt. And I keep saying undercover is always the last resort. What a conventional camera can do there means there is absolutely no need to use undercover cameras. So what prima facie evidence simply means in a layman's language is that this man that you say is corrupt or has been taking bribes is in the habit of taking that bribe so that you can convincingly prove that yesterday he took it, today he took it and tomorrow, if I pick my hidden cameras and I go, he will take it.

So, undercover journalism is not a fishing expedition. You go knowing exactly the rules and regulations that govern it. And if you get any of these steps wrong, your evidence is messed up. It will not be admissible in the court of law. So after having done our reconnaissance and going through all the steps and being sure that this man is. Now, we have a state we call characterization. Which is if I'm going in as a

military officer, am I well-dressed as a military officer? Am I walking as a military officer?

If I'm going in as a footballer, am I well dressed as a footballer? Am I playing football very well? If I'm going in as a mad person, am I well-dressed as a mad person? Am I playing that role? And we have specialists in this stage who come. The key thing is your colleagues. Once you are undercover, can they make the differentiation between what you originally look like and how you now look?

The disguise bit is very, very important because that's where the risk is. And you have a few people who will come tell "Okay, yes. I truly see a madman here." So yes, this passes for it. With all this done, then you are ready.

And normally in my team, I don't wear one camera because we know what cameras can do. They can fail. So I would wear two or three cameras for an undercover mission. And usually there's a remote person, somewhere else who is recording and recording and taking live transmission from what my camera is taking.

This is to ensure that if I am arrested whilst I'm undercover, there's a backup team that has this. The backup team will now lead me to our security protocol. Undercover is a risky venture. So before you go, have you ensured that you have all your security protocol? I can't go into details here, but I can just mention security protocol, making sure that if you were in trouble within the next five minutes, anybody could come to your rescue.

Apart from this, you are good. If you have all this together, you are good to film.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas has your cover ever been blown?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. My cover has been blown before.

I had one that I did the bully rebel raid where a Chief in Ghana was abducted and taken into the Ivory Coast by rebels. I took a disguise as a crown prince, and I went into that town and I went with another chief. So we met the rebel leader. We negotiated for the release of the captured Ghanian and things were going quite well.

But just as I was leaving the rebel territory, a mate of mine that I attended the university of Ghana with identified me and he was my roommate. So he shouted V-mate. We are called, we are vandals. That's the name then, so the short form of it is V-mate. So he shouted V-mate, then the rebels started looking around. "Ah, but we thought you were a crown prince? How do you know this guy here?"

And I'm like, no, I don't think I didn't mind him. I just kept on walking, but I realised I was in trouble then. So I asked that we leave because at that time I had secured a release of the one I was looking for, that person had left the territory and was already in Ghana. So I just needed to get my body out of that place.

So I got on a motorbike and we sped off. It was a terrible journey. I nearly lost my life in that journey, but I finally had to jump into a river and swim to the other side of Ghana. While the rebels were chasing. So, today I won't do it again. I mean, I think that I could have been a bit more cautious because I see when I reevaluate the time when the chief was released, I should have left with him.

Why was I waiting? What more did I want to get? There was another story about gun running that I was interested in. But hey, you've come here, you have a mission, you've achieved it very well. Why do you have to wait? So today when I look back at that story, I blame myself. I think I could have done a lot. And if I was shot dead, I would blame myself badly for it.

**Ramita Navai:** This is dangerous work Anas. What kind of dangers do you face doing these investigations?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Well, multifaceted. Danger to your personal life, danger to your family, danger to your team. That is when I say danger I mean physical harm.

**Ramita Navai:** Tell me about the danger to your family. What do you mean?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Well, danger to your family here would mean that if people can get you, they want to find your child, if you have a child. They want to find your mom, if you have a mom. Want to find your dad, if you have a dad.

So, that danger is not restricted to me alone, but it's about me and my team. Anybody's dad.

Apart from that physical danger, we have legal dangers, which is we also know that there's some rich people whose job is just to frustrate you. So they are looking at how do you feed your family? If apart from journalism, you do anything else. They want to go into that sphere and frustrate you there. So when you are hungry and they offer you a bribe, you will take it. They don't like independent journalists at all.

So those are the kinds of dangers that we face. Of course, when you are dealing with a drug community, you know that as for them, it is shoot and kill, they will just shoot you and kill you.

**Ramita Navai:** Have you and your team ever been threatened. Do you ever receive death threats?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** [Anas laughs] It's normal. I mean, I don't remember doing any story without receiving death threats. I've become so immune to it. If I do a story and I don't get a death threat it means that story is not hitting enough. It's normal. I mean, let me take the case of my colleague Ahmed Suale who was shot twice in his heart and once in his neck and killed at close range in his house. So he had this done in the football story.

**Ramita Navai:** Tell me about the football story.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** So the football story is called betraying the game. Anyone who wants to can see it on the BBC. Where top FIFA officials, top Confederation of African football officials, top Ghana football association authorities were busted in a scam, a webscam where referees took bribes to change the score lines of football, where yellow cards are fixed, where people can buy matches.

So this is not a story only about Ghanaian football, it's a story about African football and more importantly, the world cup, which was played in I think Russia. Yeah. So, because one of the referees, one of the corrupt ones, was just about to be a referee for one of the world cup matches, but he was withdrawn as a result of my story.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean, this was huge.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. It was a huge story.

**Ramita Navai:** And when you say these people were busted. You busted them.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes, that's what I mean. Kwesi Nyantakyi who is a top FIFA executive - I mean, we did a sting operation where he came to meet our team in Dubai and took a bribe of \$65,000 where we filmed it. And then he was doing deals to make money from the FA matches that were going to be played, FA sponsorship, he was going to make millions of cedis from it. We filmed all this. So we sent all our evidence to FIFA. Eventually he was banned for life. Now, the other African referees, over 50 of them, were sacked. A lot of the executives of GAF were all fired as a result.

So Ahmed was one of my colleagues who was deeply involved in this story. And when the story broke it had political leanings as well as football issues. So we got lost. Usually when we do stories and we realize that the heat is too much, we'll get lost means that we hide ourselves somewhere.

So we were there for some months.

**Ramita Navai:** Where?

Somewhere in the countryside or do you leave the country?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Sometimes it's outside, other times it's within some farms within our country. We just take time off. So in that investigation, yes, we did all that. One day after doing all our checks, it was okay to come out.

We all came out. But the difficulty is Ahmed said he wanted to go and see his family. I said, I also wanted to see some friends. We have rules whenever we are supposed to go out. The rule is never be alone. Always be with people.

And indeed Ahmed when he went stayed with a lot of people. If you listen to the narrative of when the people came to shoot him, he was with a lot of people. So they found it very difficult to target him. I, on that very evening, I was within a hospital. I remember I was walking in between patients and usually snipers find it very difficult in such situations to take you out.

So they timed Ahmed until it was time for the prayer, the Muslim Maghrib prayer. So he went and just as he sat in his car, they followed him up, shot him twice in his heart, one in their neck. And he lost control of the car. So he went and hit something else and then he died.

It was a huge problem for us. I had to reconvene every member because you don't know who else is in danger. They had to go to our headquarters, which is a secretive place that nobody knows, but which has a hundred percent safety. And then I needed to also move because I needed to see it and believe that indeed my colleague had been shot.

So I followed up, I met a lot of my own personal security. We went to the morgue. I saw his body. It was a very sad day for me. Someone I had just spoken to in the afternoon shot dead. So the dangers we talk about are real.

**Ramita Navai:** Real and profound, how did you deal with that?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** It was difficult, particularly how do you deal with his young children, their family, what do you tell them? They know that you've been with him for a very long time. And the question is why didn't they kill you? What was magic about you that you didn't die? Why should he be the person to die?

I asked myself those questions. I would have preferred that they killed me rather than my colleague.

**Ramita Navai:** Well there's a name for that, survivor's guilt. Is that what you felt?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. I felt that for three days it was quite difficult, but then the responsibility of protecting the rest was key in mind.

And for some strange reasons, anytime we were working together, Ahmed would tell me, "Boss, you see, all we are doing is very dangerous, but one day if I'm killed or if you are killed, we won't give up, work hard. Even when we are holding your body, work hard. And so if I find myself killed any day, do not stop. Keep working, keep putting the pressure on." These were the words that kept us going. Even in the difficult moment.

**Ramita Navai:** And did that surprise you when he spoke in that way?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah, I think it surprised everybody because those who even lost it got around again immediately and said, look, I can't lose it now because

Ahmed is not going to be happy with us. If he sees that I'm all gone down. So let us push the frontier. So we had to push back. And I'm glad that that's why we are alive today. If we didn't push back and we had shown that weakness within us, I'm sure they would have come for many of us again.

**Ramita Navai:** And when you say they would have come from many of us who killed him, who are they?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** It's a difficult question because whatever you say must be backed by legal evidence. So the state says they are still investigating. So we are waiting, but we have no doubts that people who don't like our work killed Ahmed. And they're always out after us we know.

**Ramita Navai:** How do you know?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** We know because we haven't backed down. The same issues that make them come after us. We are still on it. We don't let them get away with their crimes. We know what they do. And we will not give up, even if it means that they take all of us, we are not going to give up.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas, do you live with any fear that you might be targeted?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I was purged of fear long ago by my editor in chief, Abdul Malik Kweku Baako.

I learnt to cherish journalistic scoops under his feet. And one thing he taught me is being afraid, I mean, it's not part of our vocabulary. Fear is not part of it. I was purged of fear long ago and that's one thing I instil in my team members. Journalism is a hot kitchen. If you don't have the energy, you get out. But once you come and you stick out your neck, like we are doing, the bad guys will come after you. Look, a lot of people are in jail because of our work, they have children, they have friends, we don't expect them to be smiling with us.

**Ramita Navai:** But Anas fear is also human. How can you purge yourself of one of the most human feelings?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah, so we don't crack under pressure.

It doesn't mean that in our own quiet moment, we don't suffer what humans go through. But what you get from us is us being afraid under pressure. Us being afraid to tell the story, we will tell it. If it means that we should go back home after two days and cry, we will do that. But in the moment of the action, there is no fear.

**Ramita Navai:** Have you ever cracked?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah, there are sad moments, but I don't crack under pressure.

Crack under pressure of a story? Hell no.

Because the moment you crack, that's the end. That is the end.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas, did Ahmed's murder change you?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. It changed me in a way. It taught me that we don't have life every day and that you've got to do what you've got to do because time and tide waits for no man and that you can only account for what you have done.

You can't procrastinate. If it's there, do it. Because you never know. You are already in the bad books anyway. You must have to work, keep pushing. So I learned quite a lot from Ahmed's death.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas what has been your most dangerous investigation?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** So football comes in as one. I think one of the danger - it can't be one, of course it can't be one, but one of them that comes to mind was Malawi's human harvest. The story I did for BBC.

**Ramita Navai:** What was that about?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** So it was about people in Malawi who were selling human body parts. So they chop the human body parts for them and they use it for ritual purposes.

**Ramita Navai:** So kind of black magic?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Black magic, yeah. And I did this story together with my colleague Darías.

It was quite a traumatic story because we got into Malawi, we did some fantastic filming, good work. We got the people who were doing the killing.

We even got confessions from them of how many people they had killed and all that. You know, so digging deeper, you know us, we want to see, okay, so where did you put the body? How do you do it? We want to know all that.

**Ramita Navai:** How did you get them to confess?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I went undercover as a businessman. I went as a businessman who wanted to be very rich and I had seen a soothsayer who had asked me to bring a human part. And I had heard that they were very good at that.

So I had come for them to give me the human parts. So that was my cover story. So we managed to get them, of course, telling us how many people they had killed and all that. And we wanted to move it a step further, but the problem on that day was when they took us to the grounds that they do their murder.

**Ramita Navai:** Grounds they do what?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** That they do the murder. The location. Apparently, the people in the community had observed that over a period of time, some people came into that particular forest to kill.

So whilst we were filming and talking to them and everything, the community started gathering around us.

**Ramita Navai:** So, Anas their community members were being killed for body parts?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. And they were getting murdered within their own enclave. So after a while, when the child is reported missing, you go to the forest and you find the limbs of their child chopped. And the mother is all wailing.

And they thought that anybody who came there was coming to perpetrate.

And there were lots of people around us and they said, we were there to commit murder. And within a twinkle of an eye, these guys had disappeared into the forest leaving us. So we tried to explain that, no, we are journalists.

And the community said, "No, we don't care you're journalists. The rule is simple, we will kill you."

So they started throwing things at us.

**Ramita Navai:** How many of them were there?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Hundreds of people. Angry mob.

**Ramita Navai:** And you're in the middle of the bush?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes and I was with my friend Darías and we're holding hands. So one of them who was a community leader suggested that before they kill us, why don't they take us to a particular chief of their village. And that chief, they say they will perform some ritual to show whether we are innocent or we are guilty. But the difficulty was the journey to the chief's place. Apparently, they had this notion that you go through a valley, a particular valley, and when you are able to come out of that valley without dying, then it means that you stand a chance of not being a murderer.

So that's where the difficulty was. So they marched us. And whilst we're going, people threw stones at us, some threw knives.

**Ramita Navai:** Were they hitting you?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes.

**Ramita Navai:** The stones were hitting you?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes, the two of us.

**Ramita Navai:** And what was going through your mind at this point?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I was bleeding. Darias was bleeding. It was difficult moment. But we held each other and we said we needed to survive this.

Because once I heard that the hurdle was to cross that valley and climb up to the mountain. We just needed to resist it. So I switched my body off. Switching my body off means that I was not going to get any pain. I told my mind that no matter the pain, I'm not going to feel it today. So we kept on.

**Ramita Navai:** Were you feeling fear?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Look, you don't have time. You have to - you need that energy that will keep you alive. There's no room for fear. So what I'm trying to say is that at that moment what occupies your mind is how to survive this. So we held each other's hand, it was difficult. There were times that I couldn't stand the pain anymore, I was falling.

There were times that Darias couldn't stand the pain and he was falling. We had to hold each other, lean on each other to get across that valley. It was difficult. Very, very difficult moment.

**Ramita Navai:** And Anas when you were being beaten, you were surrounded by the mob when you were being beaten. Did you think that this was the end?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. I thought at a particular stage, this is what happened. Darias fell. And they had hit his head. So blood was coming out. They hit his head with a block.

In my attempt to take him from the ground for us to move forward. Somebody hit me with something on my hip and for a moment I felt I was paralyzed.

I don't know what happened, how I managed to get some energy back in my spine, but I felt I was paralyzed. And at that moment, I knew because my colleague was

down, I was trying to get him up and I felt that numbness of your leg can't go. It can't move again.

But I got back and it can only teach you to fight. Just move. Go. There was no time. So I held him, we pushed each other, we're going, they were following us. It was terrible. Our cameras were rolling. Hidden cameras were rolling. When all this was happening, you can watch it on the BBC. Malawi's human harvest. I don't like watching it, but hey, it's the hazard of the profession.

**Ramita Navai:** How long had the journey taken?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Well, I can't recall, but this thing would have started at about 5 and at around 10:00 PM, we're still in the village.

We left the village around midnight. It was difficult. So we got up the valley. The chief came out to meet us. Now the chief came to meet us. He said, "Well, after everything that you've gone through, I don't think that you are murderers. So come I'll protect you." So he puts us in his house. the villagers get alarmed. They torch the house with fire. They torch the house with fire and we're in it.

**Ramita Navai:** So you're in the Chief's house.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** And they were pushing the doors.

**Ramita Navai:** And his house gets torched?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes.

**Ramita Navai:** And you're inside?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** And they were attacking the chief and attacking all his guards, pushing the door to come in and kill us. But of course, we had a backup team at that time. The backup team of men, policemen were coming. But it got so intense that now the chief has to speak to some people to bring a car around.

And then somebody deceived the people to look at one direction as if that's where we were. Then we quickly ran into the car and we moved and here was the mob chasing us. It was a difficult and traumatic experience. Of course the policemen came, they started firing, they took us to safety.

We went to the hospital. The next morning, I said, "Darias, we've got to go back to the village because you see..."

**Ramita Navai:** You're not being serious Anas?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah. Yes.

Because you see, once you leave with it, you leave with it forever.

**Ramita Navai:** You went back?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah. We had to. Against the decisions of a lot of many other people, I said for the sake of our physical well-being we had to confront it. We went back, met the entire village. Everybody was there.

**Ramita Navai:** How did you know you were going to be safe?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah, we took safety precautions. We had police people, but we wanted to understand why the people felt we should be killed. I didn't get it. And I understood them after the explanation. This is what they said, that you guys, you think you're a journalist, you stay in cities and do your work.

We are here in the village. How many people have died in this village? We kept on reporting to you. You never came to our aid. So we decided as a community that anybody who comes into this community we'll kill the person. And so you wouldn't have been the first, we've been killing people when they come here because you don't listen to us.

You don't care about our plights. A big lesson there. If we decide to fold our arms and any place burns in society, it will come at us.

**Ramita Navai:** Did you feel any anger?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. I think I did. Why? We are here because of you. Nobody's minding you. We are here. We flew all the way from Ghana, cameras all the way from London, to come and tell that same story and you want to kill us? Why? Yes. I think that was, I think we were angry. Yeah. We were like why what's wrong with these people? But after going back, sitting with the people who were holding the knife, you can recognize some of the feelings, seeing them smiling again at you and us eating again together, it kills everything. You know, that you came around the situation. We couldn't have gone back to our homes without doing that reconciliation because it would have always followed us.

We all saw them differently and we could put ourselves in their shoes. And of course, when they took us through the number of murders that have happened in the community, their children and other people who have been murdered there we could understand.

**Ramita Navai:** And Anas do you think you've got over the trauma of that incident?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I think it is better now. It's better now, because time has... Has... It's better now. It's better now. It's just like any other story that I have done now. But it's not something that I like talking about too much. I won't talk about it. So,

I mean, I won't be talking about, it's something that I want to just finish talking about and go on to something else.

That's what it is.

**Ramita Navai:** How did it change you?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** It brought me back to that same feeling I had when I was a patient in the psychiatric hospital. That story was one story that always comes to me with a lot of nostalgic feelings.

**Ramita Navai:** I mean, this story for me is the stuff of nightmares, going undercover as a patient in a psychiatric hospital and getting stuck. Tell me why you went undercover and what was happening and what you were investigating and how you went undercover.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** My sources said they got easier access to cocaine within the psychiatric hospital than on the streets. So they thought they were going for rehab. Rather, it's a hub for a lot of sales. Also, there was a lot of abuse, human rights abuse of the inmates. People were caned, people were chained and beaten mercilessly.

And they were also taking some expired drugs in there. So this was the reason why I went. The food was very bad and knowing our style was to document.

When you get admitted in a psychiatric hospital, first of all, you have to come up with a good story.

They will let you do some tests to confirm, they will ask you questions. So we got all that done. The recce stage has been done. Everything has been done perfectly. Then when I got in, of course they will start with the injection. The first thing was sedating. So they sedate you. Sleep and sleep and sleep. And then now they will start giving you some tablets.

Of course, you know, I didn't go there to sleep. So before I went there, knowing that the medications I take will make me drowsy. I've spoken to my doctors outside who had also given me a caffeine oriented drug that I take after taking their medicine. So when these two reacts, I get to stay awake a little bit instead of sleeping all day.

So within the first one week here was I coming into contact with sedation, making you drowsy, taking tablets and taking another form of tablets to correct that effect in my body. It was way too much.

Now, unfortunately while I was battling with all this drowsiness and all that, the cocaine syndicate opened.

The opportunity was there. Here was the head standing in front of me. We hear you do cocaine. We have some for sale. My cameras were rolling. So I wrote, I felt him telling me that, okay, well, if you want to buy this, this is, this is that. Because in those syndicates too you must touch and feel the cocaine. You must try it. Because you have to buy it and you have to inhale it in front of them.

**Ramita Navai:** Have you ever tried cocaine?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** No. I bought it, I inhaled it and everything was filmed all right. But after taking in this. I became too drowsy. I couldn't even - I didn't have a sense of time. So I had to touch that red button, which means I can't stand the investigation anymore. I would lose my life if I continue. So my parents suppose parents, of course they were not, they were my own friends came in with their car and there was an ambulance waiting.

So they said they would take me on something they call parole which allows your parents to take you. And then they took me in the ambulance and they put a lot of drips on me. They said I was going through something they call detoxification because I had taken too much in my body.

When I woke up in the hospital here were my doctors around me, they said in view of what has happened, we don't think that you should go back to the story again. We asked you to do a story, we didn't ask you to go and die. This is too much. You can imagine what goes through the mind of a journalist.

I have gone there. I have filmed the cocaine syndicate. I have filmed some human rights abuse. I've done this. I've already taken medication. I'm already suffering for it and you are telling me I can't go back? Hell no. I said, no, I have to go back and finish my work. A lot of negotiation. Maybe today I'll rethink it again.

But I had a big fight with them. They said, okay, let's give you this medication, go back. So they gave it to me. And then I went back into it, filmed everything, and came back. Here was the trick. When I came back, you know, some of the medications they gave, it's supposed to apparently prevent - it has fertility issues. So when you take those medicines, it affects your fertility. So when I came back, these were difficult for me and meant, I recall my girlfriend coming to visit me. And you just can't. I wasn't a man that I used to be and the girl was like is there anything wrong?

I said, okay. So I dialled prof's number. I said, prof, "Look, I'm back. And this is what is happening, is not working properly. This is not how it used to be." And prof says yeah. I told you that you are going to suffer this, but you just need to calm down. Don't go to any woman just stay there, eat well, with time, this is going to come back.

I said, okay. So that day I look for good food, a lot of fruit. I ate. I'm in a hurry. So next day I invited my girlfriend to come again, come. Same trouble I called doc is about, I said, take a week, one week. So back and forth on the seventh day difficult, but it came back to life again. And I thank God is now working well.

**Ramita Navai:** I'm very happy to hear that Anas.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I need it. I'm good.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas, what happened to the cocaine syndicate that was working in the psychiatric ward?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** They were busted happily.

**Ramita Navai:** Because of your work?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. Again, the president went there and their food intake the president increased it, all the nurses who abused they were taken off. Some were taken to court. That is all what I call impact.

There's no point in doing journalism that has no impact. You must - the fruits of our journalism must be visible to us.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas what does corruption do to a society?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Totally destroys society. When you look at the overall effect on our health system, now the public transport system on our ports, on our sick people, on our disabled.

Then you see that the effect is very devastating to society.

**Ramita Navai:** In this globalized world, this connected globalised world, how easy is it to remain anonymous?

Just so our listeners know, by the way, a friend of mine has seen you in the BBC bureau and tells me that you were wearing beads covering your face. That's just extraordinary dedication to your work. But also I think it really illustrates the absolute danger you are in.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah, you can't have less than six passports. You have lots of identities. Initially I had about 15. Now it's come to six.

Sometimes you have to wait at airports because they have to understand who you are. It is not going to be easy with the technology coming down, but maybe one day there'll be no need for undercover journalism. That's why we have to keep pushing the frontiers.

**Ramita Navai:** How do you live with the constant pressure and the constant danger?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** It's a difficult life that I have to tell you. So you can't go out on normal holidays where people are going out and going to clubs and you can't do that. You also can't sleep in one place. I have close to 12 places where I sleep.

I decide where I want to go depending on the day or dependent on where I find myself at that time in the day. It's not easy, but I've become accustomed to it.

Also, you know that you do this at the peril of your life. If you mess up, you get shot. So.

**Ramita Navai:** So you have to live in the shadows?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yeah.

**Ramita Navai:** Do you ever think you want to give it up live a normal life?

There's no, you don't have that luxury. So if I give up now, it only means that all the people my stories have gone against are coming after me.

My strength is my work.

**Ramita Navai:** Do you enjoy your life Anas? Do you like your life?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I've read to find solace in it. And I find happiness in it. Whether you like it, that's all you have. And so you have to find happiness in it. We try, we try.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas, I want to ask a question about trauma. Quite a few of my colleagues who have experienced frightening situations who have been in terrible situations have sought help for the trauma they've suffered in the form of going to see therapists. And we're from countries, I'm from Iran, you're from Ghana, where this isn't as culturally acceptable.

How do you feel about that?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** I used not to understand why somebody must see anybody at all. But I've taken time to read and have taken time to speak to some psychologists and today I'm their number one supporter. I think that anybody who goes through trauma ought to be given an opportunity to be examined and to go through therapy.

And I realised that when I was in Malawi what pushed me back to go there was that I was dealing with the trauma in my own way. And I knew that I couldn't stand it if I didn't confront it. I don't want to have nightmares of people that I fear. I needed to demystify that space. So I think what happens to me and you who are not used to this system is that we have developed local mechanisms in our minds to deal with

this trauma. Whether they effectively deal with it or not is another topic to discuss. maybe I should have seen a psychologist. It is better for somebody to share experiences with you so that you are not alone in this.

Honestly, I had no idea about these things. And I started reading about them. I've gone through some of this. And I think that if I had this, I could have healed faster. Yeah. So my perception of it has changed maybe five years ago, you spoke to me I say Why? You don't need any of this psychologist, no, you are fine, but no, we are different. We react differently.

**Ramita Navai:** I'm so happy to hear that. Because I think especially with men, in our cultures, there's a lot of pressure to appear manly. And that makes me really sad.

**Ramita Navai:** Has any good ever come out of your traumatic experiences?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** What would I call good? Good would be the impact of the story. Did the story go down well? Yes it did.

So yeah, on most occasions I've had traumatic experiences turning out to be very good stories and having great impact.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas I always end my interviews with my guests with one question and that's what is the one bit of wisdom you would impart to our listeners from your experiences?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** When we make mistakes, no matter who. We have to be honest enough to admit them because that's the only way we move forward as a society.

Honesty, honesty, that's it.

**Ramita Navai:** Honesty. Is that the key?

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Yes. That's the overriding piece of wisdom that has shown not only in Malawi, but everywhere. You are honest and transparent you'd always, even if you fall, you will bounce back with integrity.

**Ramita Navai:** Anas thank you so much for talking to me today. You are really the most dedicated and fearless journalist I have ever met, and it's been an absolute honour and I am in awe of your work. Thank you.

**Anas Aremeyaw Anas:** Thank you so much. It's an honour to be here.

**Ramita Navai:** To find out more about Anas's extraordinary work, I recommend watching his documentary BETRAYING THE GAME - a 2-year undercover investigation into corruption in African football which resulted in nearly 100 football officials being caught

accepting cash on camera. It's on the BBC website - where you can also find the other documentary Anas was telling me about - Malawi's Human Harvest. The links are in the show notes.

Thank you for listening to this episode of **The Line of Fire**. If you'd like to follow me, my Twitter handle is at @RamitaNavai.

And if you've enjoyed this episode, review, and subscribe. And tell your friends they can find us wherever they get their podcasts.

Until next time.

**The Line of Fire** is a podcast from *Aurra Studios*.

It was presented by me, Ramita Navai, and edited and produced by Chris Scott. Our executive producers are Matt Raz and Richard Osman.