

EPISODE TWO

# NO LIONS IN PARIS



**AS I  
AM**



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## EPIISODE TWO - NO LIONS IN PARIS

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### FILM SUMMARY

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For centuries, travel writing has shaped the way we view the world. But when's the last time you heard from a travel writer with cerebral palsy? As we accompany Musa Kirokote on his journey from rural Kenya to urban France, we are not only introduced to a new place, we are also given the chance to encounter a new way of experiencing a place. In this episode, Musa takes us to where dogs dress like humans and humans eat like goats. His observations call into question certain features of daily life that some might consider "normal."



"I DIDN'T STAY TOO LONG  
BECAUSE... I HAD TO GO  
BACK TO THE ONES WHO  
LOVE ME THE MOST."

-Musa Kirokote

### FILM THEMES

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- **Animal vs. Human**

Like most travel writers, Musa recounts certain striking food and dress traditions. While eating a salad, he remarks at the strangeness that people would want to eat like goats. While observing passers-by on the street, he comments on dogs wearing clothes. These observations raise questions about which behaviors and practices are distinctly human and which are distinctly animal. Some people might find these "mix-ups" amusing while others may not even notice them.

- **Cultural Enrichment**

From handshakes and hugs to bows and even special ways of breathing, traditional greetings are wide-ranging. In the film, Musa talks about being greeted with a kiss on the cheek. When he returns home, he wants to bring that form of greeting back with him. Conversely, when it comes to food, Musa talks about carrying traditional dishes with him to France. Githeri, ugali and chapati are very popular dishes in Musa's community and he advises other visitors to come prepared with food from home. Musa's journey shows how opportunities for cultural enrichment abound when two different cultures meet.

- **Strange and Poor: A matter of perspective**

On several occasions, Musa remarks at the poverty of Paris or of the French people. The viewer might be confused by such statements unless they consider Musa's perspective as a Kenyan man from a rural tradition. In Musa's experience, not having farmland is a mark of poverty. Because his traditional cuisine does not include snails, it seems as if it is a food choice made out of desperation. There are many examples of how Musa's unique perspective influences how he interprets and talks about aspects of his journey. Consider his comments about the "stomach" of the plane, free gifts from white people, and whether or not there would be lions in Paris.

- **Polite lies**

When Musa said the snail tasted good but his facial expression revealed disgust, everyone at the table began laughing together. Musa had been caught telling a lie to be polite. The habit of protecting friendships by telling polite lies is particularly useful while traveling. Musa finesses some awkward experiences of cultural exchange when he uses polite lies to show he is a gracious guest. When we are faced with the prospect of hurting or offending someone, we may tell them something we expect they want to hear instead of the truth. Our verbal lie may not be convincing if our body language says otherwise. Luckily, in Musa's case, this was humorous and it built relationships.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are other examples of behaviors and practices that blur the lines between what is distinctly animal versus what is distinctly human?
2. In what ways does your identity and perspective influence your understanding of different cultures/environments? What things do you think are normal that other people might consider strange?
3. When have you felt foreign?
4. When you visit some place, either locally or globally, that is new and different from your previous experiences, how does it affect the way you see your "home"?
5. When was a situation where you needed to tell a polite lie to preserve a relationship/friendship?

## BEHIND THE SCENES

This film captures Musa's first experience traveling abroad. While most of the story is cheerful, being in an environment so different from his home was very difficult. Six months after the trip, when the director met up with Musa for a follow-up interview, unfortunately, one of the most prominent memories he had from the trip was how embarrassed and afraid he was after spilling the drink on the woman in the plane. As a foreigner and a person with a disability, there were times when Musa approached strangers for directions on the streets of Paris and they avoided him, looking at him with fear, pity, or even revulsion. Musa is known by his friends as supremely positive, but these looks eventually got to him. He really meant it when he said: "I have to return home to those who love me the most."

## IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

What shapes your view of different places and people around the world? How could you become more familiar with the unfamiliar? Consider which voices are informing your understanding of the world and seek out different perspectives. You may be surprised by what you find.