

#BLACKMIGRANTSLIVESMATTER- LONDON

The Brexit process has dominated the political, media and social debate in Britain since the referendum in 2016.

Today, while there is still a lot uncertainty on the shape and future developments of this process, as well as on its outcome there is little doubt on the fact that the anti-migration rhetoric used by Nigel Farage's UKIP, as well as by the Conservatives, who played a pivotal role in the success and reach of the mantra "take back control".

This mantra has been successful, despite the fact that the U.K has remained fundamentally not exposed to the influx of the so-called "refugee crisis" because of different factors, including the most obvious geographical one.

British Prime Minister Theresa May and French President Emmanuel Macron have already signed a new version of La Touquet agreement, which enables UK border patrols to be stationed in Calais; this agreement is not connected or dependent on the developments of Brexit and will therefore continue even in a no-deal scenario.

However, features of the hostile environment implemented in Britain can create unexpected victims, like the Windrush scandal proved.

The idea that is presented, by the rhetoric dominating all over Europe is that the repressive system is made in order to protect borders, that those who are trying to reach the continent, and the U.K are too often 'economic migrants' and generally don't play by the rules of an oppressive system.

THE KAFKIAN STORY OF VICTOR

Bail for Immigration Detention is an independent charity, based in Finsbury Park and focused on providing legal advice and representation to migrants detained in removals centres and prisons in order to secure their release, while providing legal advice and representation to migrants and challenging the brutality of this status quo.

Following an interview with Celia Clarke, Director of BID UK and thanks to Rudy Schulkind, who works at the same charity, I got in touch with one of their former clients, Victor.

I met Victor in Waterloo following a phone conversation and we sat at a nearby cafe.

While I had an idea, or a potential perception of what could have been his story, as he started describing his experience I could not help but feel, that despite the brutality, his was a Kafkian story, and probably not the only one.

Before sharing his own story, Victor introduces me in detail to the structure of Operation Nexus, an operation that, according to its description on the British government website, aims to improve the management of foreign nationals and foreign national offenders.

The word management is telling, as it fundamentally means reducing the net migration with all the means necessary.

As Victor explains, also in connection to his own experience, this was actually part of the hostile environment structure and could be perfectly connected to the reiterated commitment promise of Theresa May, as Home Office Secretary first and Prime Minister afterwards, of cutting the net migration figures of hundreds of thousands.

"I came in 2004 from Nigeria to study, I went to uni, I started my Bachelor in 2006. I met this lady, we started living together in Highbury, met the parents, went on holidays and it just carried on for me."

In 2008, following the continuation of the relationship, Victor and his partner went for two interviews at the Home Office also in order to prove that their union was not a sham and he was then granted two years of Leave to Remain at the time.

However, years later Victor applied for a divorce due to the progressively rocky nature of the relationship “At the time I was working at UCL and saving with the prospects of buying a house. I wrote a letter to the Home Office in order to explain the situation and to find out if I could get leave, even though I drifted apart from my wife. I did not hear anything from the Home Office for a year, from 2011 to 2012, so I went to a solicitor and he said that it could have been possible to make an application on humanitarian grounds, which costed £ 6,000. Lawyers are also scandalous on that.”

“I was still working and continued working, as whenever UCL contacted the Home Office in order to find out they were told that my application was pending, and it also carried on with the solicitor who requested an additional sum to carry on the paperwork and when in 2013 he requested another amount of money, I said no, because I needed to know what was going on after two years and UCL, my employer, needed something tangible”

When the Home Office could not offer anything tangible, Victor had to find another job as the University had to let him go.

In this following job, he presented his Nigerian passport and specified that he had a pending application, when asked. Then they gave him a conditional offer of employment while they were checking with the Home Office. “I was told one day by my boss at work that I needed to show up at a certain place the following day. I thought to myself "That's a very unusual request", but I turned up the next day and saw immigration enforcement staff that accused me of having committed fraud and misrepresented my situation and supplying fake documentation.”

“They took me to the police station and I did not realise what was about to happen. They brought me a lawyer who told me to opt for no comment, while I wanted to talk, but the lawyer labeled it as standard procedure. However, it worked against me.”

“They brought my ex wife to court and said that the marriage was a sham, despite the fact that I went to the Croydon branch of the Home Office, and that it was the time when you still needed to have a certificate of approval as foreign nationals to get married and after the certificate I went back to get the leave to remain. They used my letter following the split up and said that I did not leave, while I knew I had to leave, despite the fact that I was working at the time and the Home Office kept telling UCL that I had a pending application.”

They created a document without a face and a totally different passport number, saying that it was what he provided. “All this justice...just because I am a foreigner, the Article 6 , the right to a fair trial, was not exercised. The Home Office made a report that contradicted everything, I appealed to the High Court but the Home Office made it throw it out as I appealed too late but by that time I was imprisoned. This is the circle of how this happened, looking back they made sure that they could operate in a way that would lead to a warrant for a custodial sentence, as when you get that over twelve months, you are facing deportation. Before I knew it, I was sentenced, in 17 minutes, to 9 months, and then 18 months. Nothing was mentioned about my son, my partner, so I got to prison. “

Victor then explains that he ended up in Pentonville, one of the worst places where anyone could ever be, with people who had committed all kind of crimes and everyone wanted to know how he ended up there and no one believed him.

He was working, he was playing by “the book” when he should not have worked, according to the logics of the hostile environment.

He was then moved to a foreign national prison, a real prison in Maidstone. "It was an hostile place initially and a member of staff asked me why I was there. She did not believe it and I explained the fact that it was the system. I had access to some books, they were kind to me and allowed me to order books, I started reading the PSI prison manual and I came across the policies of nexus and their impact of prisons. I started to see a pattern of prison population increasing when these laws coming from Theresa May, Home Office secretary and then Prime Minister. This is human trafficking in modern day society. How else can you catch migration, if EU nationals are allowed to freely move, the only way to shut them down is to making them criminals. I started to understand, I challenge their decision to deport me, my partner and I wrote a letter to the Home Office, they did not respond, while I finished my sentence in May 2017".

The story continues, and I feel more and more astonished, as well as disgusted by the inner mechanisms of the system.

"It is still ongoing, a bracket in a bracket, people got released by detention, you get released but you are still liable to be detained. While I was on this charter flight headed to Nigeria, I was told that I should seek asylum. So I did, and called on the grounds that I had not been to Nigeria since 2004. I was born in the North of the country, which is a Boko Haram territory, my parents fled, many members of my family have been killed, my parents passed away....my life is here, and I applied on that basis. They did not even come to pick me up, they just gave me those documents that basically proved that I was never on that flight".

The Home Office provides a monthly report, which is a barrier to removal.

"The night before my bail appeal they told me that they were going to move me again and that they had activated suitable crew, which means that if they would have to transport you in pieces. I said that I was not

going anywhere, as I had bail and I was already in detention. I applied to see a doctor, I applied for a medical record, I applied for physio and did not get none. Sixteen heavily armed G4S officers bashed through the door. the doctors, nurses and mental health specialists were there....I still have an inflammation in my testicles, I have an hydrocele for life. I got battered just to be moved”.

The brutal baiting was not reported on screen, but the moment in which these agents barged in the cell, has been featured in an episode of BBC Panorama.

The brutal beating also led to a singular outcome as the man who was in the cell with Victor won his case because he managed to get to court.

“He won compensation, based on the trauma that he watched me going through. I still have not been to court”.

He turned however this experience in a constant struggle and focused on advocacy, not only for him but for all of those in detention.

We are talking about a business, as only three legal firms are allowed in detention centres and a business in itself, as Victor mentions, and again a business, considering that a company like G4S manages them and its staff does not refrain from committing brutalities.

G4S, is a British multinational in the security sector and not a contractor like any other, but the [world's largest security contractor](#), as it is involved in the management of prisons, as well as of detention centres also in [Australia](#).

I live in London, a vibrant city, an open city, a city that does not represents the U.K in its entirety.

The stories of Victor, or of the Windrush generation may be different but they follow a pattern, the pattern of institutional racism.

But I also cannot help thinking that someone like him, who had lived in the U.K for a long time and was nevertheless still exposed....and if this is the case with him, what could be the fate of someone who manages to reach the U.K from Calais, who lacks a network and knowledge of the rules of the system?



SILENCE ~~HATE~~
CHANGING WORDS CHANGES THE WORLD



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