

Am I a human being?

Torture victim and refugee, Marie Therese Njila Nana, tells [Laura Hughes](#) about the suffering she has endured in England, the country in which she had hoped she would begin her new life

Thursday 31 January 2013



Photo credit: bensmawfield

“English people need to know that there are concentration camps in their country where aliens are tortured and oppressed. Please help me! I cannot go back to Cameroon and cannot endure this anymore.”

Marie Therese Njila Nana is a victim of torture who fled Cameroon for her life. Having had her appeal for asylum rejected, Marie has been held in Britain’s Yarl’s Wood detention centre for nearly nine months now. Struggling with the fight to not take her own life, Marie faces forcible removal on the 11th February, despite the fact that the Judicial Review of her case is on the 21st February.

Marie was bound and tortured by her own family, in a tribal ritual, for converting to the Pentecostal church. After refusing to marry an elder in the Church and marrying a man from another tribe, nine masked male members of her family came to her home and beat her into submission. Marie told me how they had tried to ‘purify’ her until she was scarcely conscious. Marie was subjected to ritualistic abuse. She described how the men lit candles, covered her with chicken blood, and forced her to drink it.

Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre is the main facility for the detention of women in the UK and is operated by the private contractor Serco. Asylum is protection granted to someone fleeing persecution in their own country, this is provided under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Asylum seekers can be detained in UK immigration detention centres for years. A report in May 2012 revealed that two women due for deportation were kept at the removal centre in Bedfordshire, for two-and-a-half years.

Through her tears Marie told me of how the guards in Yarl’s Wood have treated her as an animal. Taunting Marie with questions; ‘do you want to kill yourself?’ and ‘how do you plan to do it?’ Marie is traumatised and psychologically delicate. Her medical records from July 2012 noted, “passive suicidal

ideation was present. For example, she described going to bed in the evening in pain and wishing she would 'not wake up at all'. She described frequent thoughts of death, and felt 'there is a small thread keeping me alive and if it is cut I will die.' She denied concrete plans to end her life, 'it is not that I would do something, but that I would allow it to happen.'

The medical report cited, 'complex, unremitting and distressing psychological symptoms and should be considered unfit for detention on this basis. Specialist mental health input including assessment by a psychiatrist with expertise in somatoform symptoms and post-traumatic stress should be offered at the first opportunity.'

"I am not well. I have a medical report from medical justice six months ago who requested for me a psychiatrist specialist and a neurologist to help overcome the trauma of my past. Nothing has been done. Three weeks ago my lawyer tried to bail me out without success. I need mental care. After this I was so depressed and when I wrote to my Lawyer to explain to him my depression and ask for help, they seize the letter and began to oppress me more. I can't bear this situation more, it's too much for me, I need help."

The UK Border Agency says, "The UK has a proud tradition of providing a place of safety for genuine refugees. However, we are determined to refuse protection to those who do not need it, and will take steps to remove those who are found to have made false claims." The Home Office have not rejected Marie's claims, but have said she could relocate in Cameroon. She fears that her torturers would find her and finish sacrificing her, "The big city doesn't know what is happening in the countryside. It was in the countryside they tried to kill me."

In the letter of refusal, denying Marie the right to remain in the UK, the Border agency reproached Marie for the fact she didn't complain to police when tortured in her own country. "When finally with the help of a priest and an association I succeed to be received on the 2nd February, they sent me to Wigan and asked me to go and sign weekly in Manchester. On the 17th April 2012 they courted me in Dallas court, when I went to sign and served me with a letter of refusal and a removal direction on the 24th April 2012. On this same day I found myself in Yarl's Wood detention until now."

Marie chokes on her tears, "They come into my room and ask 'are you ok are you ok?' How can I be ok under this torture and oppression? I thought that I had come to a safe nation which should protect me, but I realise that I have thrown myself in the den of lion. On the 23rd April I was in my room and I pushed the emergency button because I needed help and I wasn't well, to my surprise the Officers came and shouted at me. I tried to apologise but he was so aggressive against me until his colleague began to cry trying to calm him down."

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"I am treated as a criminal, just for having claimed asylum. I just fled for my life, hoping to find sanctuary here."
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On one occasion Marie was told she was to be moved to another unit. "But I wanted to remain in my unit. Then four officers came and one of them twisted my neck, I can't forget this horrible moment, what to me is a torture, they twisted my hand back and handcuffed me backward, they carried me like a luggage and I screamed because my right arm was cracked and they didn't care."

On the 21st December, Marie's case was heard and still the judge asked the report of current actual condition. He said she was depressed and needed help. Marie wrote to her solicitor, hoping that they would help to get her in touch with the specialist she needed. When the guards got hold of the letter, they started to monitor Marie day and night. "I could not sleep during the night. Having a shower was the worst because under the shower the officer would open the door of the bathroom and watched me bathing. I asked the female officer to get in the bathroom so that I could shut the door, because I felt humiliated."

"When she refused and continued watching me naked drying myself, I was so shocked and felt humiliated, assaulted, abused and tortured mentally, physically and emotionally." Marie was being looked at by officers and other detainees passing along the corridor. Marie told me she will now only shower at night, "I could not eat or not drink freely because I fear to go toilet to open my bowel or to wee because a man officer is there just to observe me. I am treated as a criminal, just for having claimed asylum. I just fled for my life, hoping to find sanctuary here."

It was at this moment the UK Border Agency ordered a removal direction for 11th February 2013, knowing that Marie had a judicial review on the 21st of February. Marie is terrified of being in the hands of the UK Border Agency. She has repeatedly been taken to the airport before being told that her flight home has been cancelled. Marie told me of how she was taken to the airport in her night dress and denied the time to put her shoes or knickers on. "After destroying me mentally for more than eight months, now they plot to send me back to my killers."

I asked Marie if she wanted to stay here in England. Down the phone, a broken and hysterical voice whispered, "Yes I want to stay here. I want to live. I want to live free."



3 comments

Rachel

31 Jan '13 at 11:57 am

"UK Boarder Agency."

Report

Fiona Parker

31 Jan '13 at 1:23 pm

We need to cancel the flight which will take Marie back to Cameroon. Please sign this petition to help.
<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/stop-virgin-atlantic-airlines-from-flying-marie-therese.html>

Report

Moustapha Nimaga

31 Jan '13 at 7:56 pm

She said she is a HUMAN BEING and she added "I am treated as a criminal, just for having claimed asylum. I just fled for my life, hoping to find sanctuary here." these few words coming from a Humain Being is not acceptable nor imaginable because United Kingdom is a country of the voiceless, a country of peace and security. So something most be done so that such treatment should be repeated.

Report

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