

“I Was Born to Be Free”

poems

by people imprisoned
in immigration detention centres

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The World Beyond

A peep through my window
Makes me feel like a widow,
Grief-stricken to the toe, Like a King Fish being pursued by a foe;
Cribbed, cabined and confined,
Without a nose to smell then world around.

Over the twenty-feet fence
And towards the horizon,
Nature opens up its beauty.
Aircrafts that cross my view, birds that flap by in joy,
The landscape gardening that is new,
Thanking the spring message.

But while I stare and peep
My life seeps sorrowfully in a deep.
Wrapped up in despair and confusion,
Like at the confluence of White and Black Volta,
I see a future that is bleak,
And a dream that is meek,
Oh fate, why hast my destiny slipped?!

– *From a hunger striker at Campsfield, 11 April 1994*

Escape?

Arrived

Immigration

Interrogation

Detention: detained, imprisoned

Group 4: abuse, threat, discrimination

Case: adjudicator, hearing, appeal dismissed

Meanwhile: abuse repeated, threats

Fed up: protests, demonstrate

Arrested, interrogated, charged

Court, magistrate, solicitors

Remanded, suppressed, but supported

Court, adjourned, Crown, barristers, court case

And still

They continue to remind me of

Horrors faced back home

*– A prisoner in HMP Bullingdon, Oxfordshire, one of the
Campsfield Nine charged with riot in 1997, all found not guilty on
17 June 1998*

The Guest Room

In the rest house
There is a guest room,
It's right downstairs if you're coming down,
And if you're going up it's at the top.

It's well ventilated, sweet-scented,
The curtains are covered in little red hearts,
The light gently touches the flowers,
And the sheets and the elegant old armchair
Form a décor that is dreamy, mysterious,
Where everything's floating.

No one knows it,
No one ever goes in.
They do allow visitors,
But the furniture is so valuable,
The parquet floor itself so delicate,
That the guest room is closed
To curious people, the dreamers, those who are pursued.

In order to get in you'd have to have
Dozens of keys., open dozens of locks,
Know passwords and carry magnetised,
Information-packed swipe cards.
But the cards would never have the right code anyway
Because they often change it
For fear of inquisitive people
And other lay-about.

When it's raining the room is double-locked
To make sure no passers-by stay there.
So no one ever goes in.
Soon the guest room will be
A secret room,
Where people will go when shame or remorse
Fills the rest house.
There people will consult then gods
Who will say if our laws are good,
If our customs are healthy,
Our rules just.

And, since we are,
As everyone knows,
Welcoming, hospitable,
The gods will reproach us with nothing,
Nothing that our neighbours won't pardon,
The people who always did believe they could
Drop in at the rest house
For drinks.
They'll go to the mother-in-law's
To see if she's got a guest room too.

The guest room and the rest house
Are protected by a lightning conductor,
So that we can look after our friends better,
But since they don't come any more
They don't derive much benefit from it.

When evening falls and it starts snowing
They allow passers-by the privilege
Of looking at the lights on in the rest house.

Because that's when people from dry countries

Just love to come and clutter up

The rest house neighbourhood. They've never seen snow before,

So (provided they've been through the proper formalities)

They're allowed to look at their guest room,

From a distance,

And they all come

To compliment us on our generosity.

- *French original by Mamadou Diouck, delegate at Europe Barbelée conference on detention organised by FASTI (Fédération des Associations en Solidarité avec les Travailleurs Immigrés), 15-16 March 1996 in Lille, northern France; translated by Bill MacKeith*

I MET THEM ALL

YOU MET THE PRESIDENT

I MET THE GOVERNOR

YOU MET THE POPE

I MET THE MURDERER

YOU MET THE KING

I MET THE RAPIST

YOU MET THE QUEEN

I MET THE DRUG DEALERS

YOU MET THE PRIME MINISTERS

I MET THE CAR THIEVES

YOU MET THE SCIENTIST

I MET THE PSYCHOLOGIST

YOU MET THE GENERALS

I MET THE TERRORISTS

YOU MET THE POLICE OFFICERS

I MET THE PRISON OFFICERS, KNOWN AS GOVS!

YOU MET THE DOCTORS

I MET THE PSYCHIATRIST

YOU MET THE LORDS, LADIES, GIRLS, WOMEN, CHILDREN AND BOYS

I MET THE CRIMINALS, GOVS AND RACISTS

IT'S A POETIC FEELINGS WANTING TO BE FREE,

BECAUSE I WAS BORN TO BE FREE

– *From an unnamed detainee, 1998*

Judges

Have you ever been to a court and watch any of the judges?
Those people carry some serious grudges
Don't get me wrong, breaking the law must be punish
But if you're innocent, your life shouldn't be tarnish
People who are guilty are getting away free
The one's that are innocent, lost their liberty
Most judges don't use their moral authority
Some just trample on one's dignity

I would like to see justice serve right
Not by someone using their might
I have seen judges made up their mind before the case is tried
By punishing victims because someone lied
Have you ever been to court for a trial?
You have to be firm while fighting for survival
Those egoistic people go on like they are God
But in their home they are treated like a Cod

There can be no peace without any justice
Time after time the UK Border Agency abused its office
I have even seen judges abusing their power
In the eyes of the law, they are treated differently from the others
What kind of example those judges are setting?
The justice system is only being, belittling.

– C.C., *detained in Campsfield, 2010*