

It is one of many tragedies that still way too much migrants encounter. Fatou is a migrant from Ivory Coast who worked for a wealthy family in London. Although they provided her food and shelter, they didn't pay her, effectively exploited her as a modern-day slave. Isolated from society and without legal protection, her case represents many vulnerable migrant workers. Her undocumented status and foreign origin made her easy to exploit and ignore. Fatou's story exposes the harsh realities of migrant labor and the quiet suffering hidden behind closed doors in wealthy societies. My name is Hannes Bohl, I've been studying the exploitation of migrants for years, and I am going to give the victims of systematic injustices a chance to speak up for themselves and lay open the concept of modern slavery.

Hello Fatou, it's a pleasure for me to meet you here in Rome after we've chatted. I guess you're doing well?

Hi, yes, at least better now. After all it was a blessing for me to leave England with financial support of my friend Andrew and settle new here in Italy again.

To begin with; you were a modern slave, which is a bit different from our classic understanding of what is a slave. Whilst classic slavery is based on an racist and justified ownership of a person, modern slavery is a very blurry concept most people don't even know about. People can be forced by violence, threats, debts or social dependence into abusive and exploitative conditions with restricted liberties. Would you please tell us your experience on this phenomenon?

Of course. When I came to the UK I didn't have any money, so I thought to be lucky when I got a job at a host family. I should watch for their children and do the housekeeping in exchange my needs for shelter and food would be covered by them. What first sounded like a

Good deal, was later exposed to be a trap. My passports were taken away and I was given no money at all. I was bound to their house and didn't have any chances of getting in a better position, because, as I explained, I did not earn any money and could not travel freely.

Modern Slavery in Europe is mostly possible because of the vastly regulated labor market and the increasingly hard measures against unregistered migrants. Furthermore, migrants with poor language skills and few knowledge of the justice system can easily become victims of exploitation. Although the „modern slavery act“ of 2015 forces big companies in the UK to controll their loafer chains if they have a yearly sales volume of 36 mio pounds, the protection of workers have been lowered with the Brexit. How does it feel to be in that position, knowing this?

It feels like being trampled on. Whilst you are oppressed by the people, the state keeps you in the position with rules and regulations. You have to earn money to get out of your position, but also to get above. You are bound in your position because you do not earn any money. I have always seen the badminton matches over a wall in an embassy in my neighbourhood and have taken them as a symbol. You can only see the shuttlecock flying in the air, but cant see whats happening behind the wall as an outside watcher. The same thing counts for modern slavery; you cant see it very clearly, it is nearly invisible. The only thing you can see is the type of playing of the players. And there is a clear pattern; if you once get in a bad position, you can just save the moment and prepare for the next strike you have to defend. What I wanna say you with that metaphor is; if you are once caught in a position, you cant move out of it, you are forced to loose over and over again.

Very often affected people don't recognise their being as a modern slave because perpetrators commonly portray themselves as saviors, whose enslaved people owe something to.

What's also very common is that victims often compare their status quo to their earlier life, that was way worse or are to ashamed to admit being a slave. When did you accepted being a slave and what was the moment that made you realise it?

It wasn't a explicit moment that made me realise my being as a slave, it was more like a lingering thought after denying it for a long time. I multiple times thought to be a slave but then compared myself to known examples of slaves, which were more like classical slaves, so I could not recognise it. I guess my friend Andrew helped me a lot to figure out my situation.

While in modern slavery racism isn't the justification of slavery it deals as a good basis. Perpatrators often view others as less worthy and see them because of their disadvantages in racist societies as an easy target. Less sympathy for them and less legal protection because of stereotypes of the police can harden finding help for them.

I actually encountered racism, especially from the Derawells kids. They referred to me as something bad. For example; if they were dirty, they said something like „now you look like Fatou“ which is discriminating against my skin colour and shows the racist views the parents even gave to the infants. It isn't that kind of „I am more worthy than you because of your skin colour“-racism, it is more based on the beliefs that they can own poor people and racism is a way to keep certain groups of people down. What I think it's funny, is that they knew that their behavior was wrong, probably because they came from a country, that experienced colonialism, India, and fired me after I saved their son from choking one day.

Well Fatou, I wanna thank you for taking time for that interview and hope we will see again.

Thank you