

The Disappearing Law



There are places in this world where law protects you like a second skin. It walks with you into offices, hospitals, airports, schools, police stations &c. &c. It makes people speak gently to you. It ensures that your name is recorded properly, that your body is not touched without your consent. But for others, law vanishes at the moment of arrival. It fades with the accent in your voice or more quickly the darker your skin appears. It is torn like paper at the border. I know this because I arrived in Europe expecting the existence of Law for all, but instead the EU law is only positively effective for its natives.

The law that vanishes for us is not broken, it is working exactly as written, in footnotes and secret deals and non-binding agreements no one ever voted for. I have seen how the EU makes law a sophisticated tool, not to include us, but to protect itself from responsibility. The law becomes a border and borders become a weapon.

I write not to demand, but to ask. I have survived prisons that do not exist on official maps. I carry the memories of gun barrels pointed at children's mouths. I watched men get sold like secondhand goods on Saturday markets and women traded for sexual pressures. I do not bring threats with me, I bring trauma and the will to live. Yet the

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 2)

moment I cross into European space, I am no longer a human being. I became “irregular,” “illegal,” a “case number.” The law I thought would save me does not speak my name. It looks away.

So I begin to ask myself questions. Not legal questions, moral ones. What makes a person worthy of rescue? What kind of law recognizes suffering only when it carries the right skin, right language and right passport, right origin? If the idea of Europe is built on human rights, why are so many of us dying just outside its gates, or worse, inside its funded camps?

Borders as Instruments of Denial

The border I know of is not a line on a map. It is a decision. It decides who gets to live with dignity and who must learn to survive in fear. It is not a fence or a wall in the Balkans, it is a system that begins long before you reach it and follows you even after you cross it. I have walked through many such borders, and I have felt them shift shape. Sometimes they appear in uniforms. Other times in silence. But always, they hold the same question: ***Who are you to want safety here?***

These borders are signed into existence through Memoranda of Understanding,

Status Agreements, and informal legal instruments that give power to those who harm us and strip rights from those who survive. Immunity is granted to the powerful Almasri, Meloni, Salvini, Von Der Leyen &c. &c.. And abandonment is legalized for the vulnerable throughout.

I have seen the Mediterranean not as tourists see it, but as the last road for the unwanted. It is the place where hope floats until it sinks. Boats packed with the desperate do not cross for adventure and never will. They cross because EU laws want us reduced to subjects it can criminalise under its language. But the sea is now a courtroom, and the waves deliver judgment. Some are rescued. Others are left to vanish, and even their names become salt.

Europe built its border not just on the edges of its land, but deep into the cities where we try to breathe. There is a border in the job interview, the hospital queue, the police station. A border in the way people flinch when they hear your accent. A border in the way you are asked to wait. And wait. And wait. The truth is simple: borders are not designed to protect EU states, they are designed to exclude people and demonstrate that its humane laws are not for everyone. And not just any people, but those whose skin or status or silence fits the shape of undesirable. Us the Black migrants.

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 3)

Sometimes I wonder: what would happen if Europe opened its borders not just in geography, but in conscience? If it treated every body that washed ashore as a human being, not a subject to problematize. If it measured its greatness not by GDP, but by how few it lets drown or haunt with laws meant to make a civilised Europe.

But the system is too well designed. It does not fail, it functions exactly as intended.

I am not alone in confronting this invisible wall. Others, young, brave, unarmed stand in its path too. What happened to me in Libya, what followed me into Europe, what haunts every person who dares cross without permission, found a mirror in the story of El Hiblu 3. They too refused to return to death. They too believed that Europe would understand. What they received instead was prosecution.

The Accused Rescuers

I knew of Abdalla, Amara, and Khader long before the world called them the El Hiblu 3. In 2019, when I was still in Libya, incarcerated in Al Kararim concentration-like-camp after being pushed back to Libya from the middle of the Mediterranean. I heard what happened on that boat, a merchant ship that rescued over a hundred like me, only to attempt to return them to the very place I was rotting in.

These three heroes, just teenagers, stood up. They translated. They protested. They refused to be delivered back to the horrors in Libya.

Three years later, after I had made it to Italy, I flew to Malta in March 2023 and stood outside the court to demand their release. I didn't go as an activist. I went as someone who knew what Libya meant. I went as someone who knew that refusing to return there is not a crime, but an act of sanity, of life.

In April 2024, I was not just in the audience, I was part of the effort that saw them finally recognized for who they are: human rights defenders. Not criminals. Not threats. Not terrorists. But the irony was too heavy to ignore: they were not honored by the country they stood trial in.

They are still on trial. Every day, they must report to a police station in Malta. Their case has dragged on for more than four years. Their bodies are free, but the law still stalks them like a shadow.

And yet they live with more dignity than those who accuse them.

One of them is raising a daughter. He is raising her with patience and gentleness, despite being called a terrorist by a state that refuses to listen to the truth. I have seen him. I have spoken with them. And I can say with certainty: terrorists do not raise children

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 4)

with that kind of tenderness. Terrorists do not translate fear into safety. Terrorists do not protect women and children from being dragged back into hell.

But what about those who write the policies that sent them to court? What about the architects of lawlessness wearing suits in Brussels and Luxembourg?

Ylva Johansson, who oversees migration and Frontex under the banner of “Home Affairs.” Margaritis Schinas, who speaks of “Promoting our European Way of Life” while managing borders that have drowned thousands. Hans Leijten, now heading Frontex, a body more famous for pushbacks than protection who ignorantly says: *“I wish I didn't have to send people back to Libya”*. Siofra O’Leary, Koen Lenaerts, Fabrice Leggeri, all names attached to systems that criminalize courage and the will to live.

I wonder: do they have children? And if so, what do they tell them when they go home after work? That they made laws today that turned boys who saved lives into symbols of fear? That they upheld judgments that let countries deport people into death?

The real terrorism is not on those boats. It is in the boardrooms where decisions are made to treat rescue as disruption, protest as danger, humanity as threat.

But responsibility does not end at the Maltese shoreline. It stretches into the

polished offices of Brussels, where Ursula von der Leyen continues to negotiate deals that outsource European border violence while calling it protection. Under her watch, millions are spent fortifying walls, funding Frontex, and rewarding countries like Libya for intercepting the very boats that carry people like Abdalla, Amara, and Khader. The EU speaks of stability. But if this is stability, it is one built on detained children and broken families.

In Malta itself, the courtroom where the El Hiblu 3 are judged is not.... Their case passed through the hands of Magistrate Donatella Frendo Dimech and Judge Aaron Bugeja, and now sits before Judge Consuelo Scerri Herrera. Long before guilt or innocence could be determined, they were already burdened by physical confinement and psychological torture.

I call them the accused rescuers because the law now punishes rescue. It punishes courage when it is in black skins. If those three boys had been European, they would have been celebrated. Instead, they stand trial in a country that accepted them only as cases to prosecute symbolically, not as humans.

I write this because what happened to them could have happened to me had I had the courage to stand off against being pushed back by the Lady Sham vessel just two

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 5)

months before theirs. And what is being done to others in Greece, in Italy, in detention centers across this continent, is being done in the name of law.

But I ask again: What is a law that condemns you for not dying quietly? What is a law that jails children for insisting on life?

The European Lie

There is something unspoken in Brussels, in the offices of Strasbourg, in the manipulative speeches of leaders who speak of unity, freedom, and rights. The lie is not in what they say. It is in what they choose not to see because EU laws for us are non-existent in its humane form as it consciously foresees.

I have sat across from institutions that speak the language of compassion. I have walked into those offices with papers, images and videos documenting torture, killings, detention, starvation, enslavement and rape. They nod, they take notes, and then nothing. The system does not break, it simply looks away. And that is its design.

I have walked through UN offices in Geneva and New York. I have heard the words “international protection” and “durable solutions.” But I have also read the EU Trust Fund contracts and Frontex training

mandates that stretches to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Morocco &c. &c. The law they speak of in public is not the law they practice.

This is a place where legality becomes a costume. It wears the robe of justice, but underneath it is a machinery of death and denial. You are legal if you are useful. You are visible if you are needed. And if not, you disappear even while you are still alive.

What makes it worse is that they believe their own myth. That they are the guardians of human rights. That their policies are necessary. That detaining thousands without charge, funding prisons in Libya, Tunisia and elsewhere, and letting people drown is somehow the price of order.

They will say they are protecting their borders. But the question is: from whom? From the woman raped in a detention centers in Tripoli? From the boy who watched his brother die in the desert? From the man who dug graves for others before escaping his own death? From Pato who lost his little daughter Marie and his wife Fati to the scorching heat of the Tunisian border?

The real threat is not us. It is the comfort that allows people to live near injustice without questioning it. The lie is not just in the politics, it is in the silence of everyday life I see across Europe. The silence of those who walk past our protests in Rome,

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 6)

Brussels, Geneva, Berlin and elsewhere. The silence of those who know what happens and say, "It's complicated." The silence that lets law become a tool for exclusion to the black skinned, be it within or out of the union.

I carry my documents. I follow the rules. But no document can erase the feeling that, in the eyes of this system, I was never meant to belong.

The Market of Misery

There is a saying: *if suffering becomes predictable, someone is profiting*. I used to think this was just a metaphor. But I have lived long enough to know it is a fact. Misery has become a business, one with budgets, contracts, and signatures behind closed doors.

What they call "migration management" is not about managing movement. It is about managing the optics of pain. It is about where people are allowed to suffer, and how far from European eyes it must happen to remain acceptable. And above all, it is about who gets paid to make it happen.

Every cage in Libya has a law that made it possible. Not a criminal law but a migration protocol, a disembarkation clause, a funding agreement signed in Rome, Brussels and Berlin. These are the legal tools that turn

detention into policy and suffering into a conscious strategy.

I have seen the warehouses in Libya, where young men are hung upside down, electrocuted, and called "illegals." I have met and spoken girls who were taken from those same places, pregnant from rape, their voices shaking not from shame but from the absence of anyone willing to listen. These are not rogue crimes, they are systems funded, maintained and delegated.

Europe does not carry out the torture itself. That would be too messy, too direct. It pays others to do it. Through deals. Through "partnerships." Through millions sent to those who run prisons that have no name, no official oversight, but many, many bodies inside.

This is not a claim. It is a fact. I know this not because I read it in a report but because I lived inside it. I translated for those who screamed. I was made to clean blood with my bare hands. I was sold to a man who called himself commander and made us bend to his choosings. I was told, by men who said they did this because of money, that Europe was watching, and would do nothing.

And when the boats are intercepted at sea, when they are returned to these same places of horror, those who paid for the fuel, who provided the GPS, who trained the coast

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 7)

guards, they smile and call it “rescue.” assisted by Frontex.

How can something be called a rescue when it delivers people back into the arms of their torturers?

The answer is simple: when the goal is not saving lives, but saving the image of law worn in the boots of Frontex.

And in this market, the image of law is the most expensive product. The EU pays billions not to protect people, but to protect its narrative. It builds camps far from its borders, so it can say: “We are not doing it.” It funds detention centers under the name of “capacity building.” It provides equipment, training, surveillance, all under the language of order and cooperation.

UNHCR and IOM are part of this architecture. Their role is to manage the unmanageable, to put a blue stamp on a broken system. I have seen their offices. I have walked their corridors. In Geneva and New York, I told them what happens in Libya. But they already knew.

The truth is, this suffering is not accidental. It is engineered. Designed to discourage others from coming. To send a message that even if you survive the war, the hunger, the journey, you will not be welcomed. You will be processed, outsourced, denied.

Europe has outsourced its cruelty. And what shocks me most is not the brutality itself. It is the ease with which it is denied.

Sometimes I wonder: do those who draft these policies sleep well? Do they believe they are protecting something? A culture? A way of life? If so, at what cost?

Because I have met children who no longer cry. Not because they are brave, but because they ceased to exist. I have met women who no longer speak of what was done to them, not because they healed, but because they no longer hope to be believed. I have buried friends who died not just from wounds, but from the knowledge that the world had chosen to ignore them.

This market is not invisible. Its tracks are everywhere, in the surveillance drones above the desert, in the rubber stamps of unread asylum claims, in the eyes of those who smile in press conferences while thousands drown at the coast of Cutro or shot with water cannons at polish and hungarian borders.

They say the sea is dangerous. But for us the real danger lies on land in the decisions made, the deals signed, the lies printed in newspapers about “crisis” and “invasion.” There is no invasion. Only people fleeing what they did not choose, only people trying to live.

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 8)

And yet, the system has turned their survival into a spectacle of punishment.

Who profits from that? This question, once asked, must never be unasked.

Questions of Belonging and Law

There comes a point in the journey when you stop asking when you will be free, and you begin to ask if freedom was ever meant for you.

Not freedom in the abstract sense, but in the simple acts of being seen, heard, held by a system that does not fear your skin, your accent, your origin. A freedom to walk without explanation past the mountains of Oulx or Ventimiglia. A freedom to knock on the door of law and not be left standing outside as in Rome with Lam Magok.

And so I ask: What is the purpose of law, if not to protect those most in need of protection?

When a man drowns reaching the shore of rights, who is responsible? The sea, or the inability of the institutions on the land? When a woman is raped in a detention center funded by EU money, is her pain local or exported by EU? If the hands that tortured me did not speak English or Italian or French, but were trained and equipped by

governments that do, what meaning do their denials carry?

I ask them not to accuse, but to understand. Because something inside me still wants to believe in justice. Something in me refuses to accept that legality and morality must forever walk separate paths.

But perhaps this is the core of the crisis, not the arrival of people at borders, but the collapse of meaning within law itself. If law is not for the dark skinned combined, then who is it for? If our rights are negotiable, then are they rights at all?

The more I reflect, the more I see a pattern: those who hold the “right” skins, and passports are not asked to prove their humanity. They are presumed deserving. Their need is never criminalized. Their movement is a choice. But for the rest of us, existence becomes a burden we must constantly justify. We are told to wait, to comply, to be patient while the process unfolds. But the process has teeth that bite. And the waiting room is a place where many never leave.

There is also something deeper, a question of belonging. Who gets to belong to this world, not just legally, but wholly as a being? For me belonging is not just about documents. It is about recognition. It is about someone looking at you and saying,

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 9)

“You are part of this world. Your life has weight. Your voice matters.”

But when the law does not see you, you begin to disappear in other ways. You shrink your presence. You avoid the police, even when you are the victim. You learn not to get sick, because hospitals ask for papers before they ask what hurts. You learn not to dream too loudly. Because hope, in this context, is dangerous, it makes you believe that things might change.

I want to ask the people in power: what kind of society are you building when it is easier to die crossing a sea than to be welcomed on a shore? Oh dear Ita-Albania.

What vision of humanity allows some to carry the burden of proof, while others carry the privilege of exemption?

What is citizenship, if it becomes a shield for some and a weapon against others?

And perhaps most haunting of all: how many people must vanish before disappearance itself becomes a normal part of governance?

The law is supposed to be a light. But I have seen it used as a curtain pulled closed when we approach, so that suffering can be neatly hidden from those who claim to care.

And so I return to the question: what is the law for?

Between Exile and Silence

There are nights when I do not speak. Not because I have nothing to say, but because my body remembers what the world prefers to forget. In those moments, silence is not absence, it is my only language of survival. The only thing that remains after my voice is exhausted by pleading, explaining, justifying.

For me exile is not only the loss of land. It is the loss of recognition. You become a ghost inside living skin. You stand in lines that do not move. You write emails that return no answers. You tell your story so many times that you begin to wonder if it happened to someone else.

But I remember.

I remember the prison nights, when we slept in shifts because we were filled like objects who should not breathe. I remember the cold cement floors of the prisons. I remember the sound of bones breaking from tortures. I remember the smell of diesel in the overcrowded boat on the mediterranea. I remember the face of the man who stopped breathing beside me before dawn.

And I remember the silence of Europe when we screamed.

That silence still surrounds me. It follows me into train stations, airports, the European Parliament in Brussels, Strasbourg, UN

EU Law and Life of Us the Black Migrants (Page 10)

offices in Geneva, house of deputies in Rome, into social offices where people avoid eye contact because they know. They know something terrible happened to me and continue to happen to those whose skin is like mine. They just do not want to be responsible for it.

I do not write this to provoke guilt. I have no interest in pity. Pity is cheap and temporary. I write because memory must become a mirror. I write because if we do not say what happened, the world will keep saying nothing happened.

There is a kind of loneliness that comes from surviving what others deny. A loneliness not just of the body, but of truth. You carry a knowledge others cannot hold. You walk in cities that speak of peace while their money funds cages. You learn to navigate systems built to delay your existence.

And still, you rise in the morning. You brush your teeth. You make phone calls. You help others. You build, not because the world has been kind, but because your dignity refuses to die.

They call us migrants, refugees, illegals. As if we are movements without meaning. But we are people. We are memories. We are proof that borders do not stop suffering; they export it.

Some will ask: *what do you want?*

I want the right to exist without fear. I want a world where no child learns to swim next to corpses. I want a law that does not vanish when I speak my name.

But until then, I will continue to speak. Even if my voice trembles. Even if it is ignored.

Because somewhere, someone is standing at another border, carrying everything they have left in a small bag, hoping that this time, the door will open.

And when it does, let the law be there not to stop them, but to welcome them.