In what ways can visual media be used, and be useful when looking at human rights issues?

Introduction

Through an anthropological exploration of my own graphic narrative *#DontDeportLuqman* (2016), *Palestine* (2001) by Joe Sacco and *The Vanni* (2016) by Benjamin Dix, this essay will demonstrate that graphic narratives should be considered as a reflexive, post-modern (Hathaway, 2011), post-colonial (Hodapp, 2015) ethnographic form that can be valuable when representing human rights issues. That is, a visual form that captivates the audience in a *haptic visceral engagement* with the narrative, whereby various *sensory* and *cognitive modalities* are drawn from which facilitate emotive, and physical engagement in more complex ways than simply text alone (Scherr, 2013). A key line of thought will be how the *haptic engagement* required of graphic narratives allows them to foster sympathy and identification with others in ways that transcend *subjectivity*, *temporality* and *spatiality*.

This essay will argue that the engaging nature of graphic narratives, combined with their horizontal orientation in the public sphere (Galchinsky, 2012; McLagan, 2003) renders them intimate yet accessible to larger audiences when representing sensitive human rights issues that have a media manufactured *compassion fatigue* (Moeller, 1999) surrounding them. Through doing so, graphic narratives present the potentiality to bridge the distance associated with the readership of academic publications, popular culture and the general public.

Furthermore, this essay will argue that graphic narratives challenge *hegemonic representational forms* (Chute, 2008) and *dominant ways of seeing* (Holland, 2012), can help to produce global *structures of feeling* (Williams, 1977; Alexander, 2006), and to tell *partial truths* (Clifford, 1986) by acting as *contact zones* (Hodapp, 2015) that humanize and reduce distance between the narrative's subjects and their readership.

In short, one will argue that graphic narratives not only demand to be viewed differently to other representational forms, but through such a viewing allow us to think, imagine and see differently (Holland, 2012) human rights issues.

A Methodology and Introduction to #DontDeportLuqman

#DontDeportLuqman (2016) gives voice to multiple informants that participated in the campaign, occupation and protests throughout March 2016, whilst I the ethnographer and graphic novelist took a backseat and acted as mediator and composer of the ethnographic information given to me.
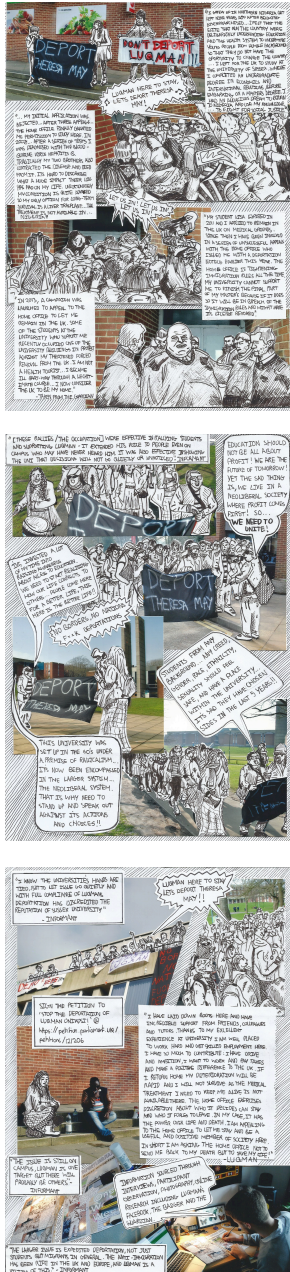
#DontDeportLuqman (2016)
Pp. 1-4

Through complications that fell outside of my control, an interview with Luqman himself could not be secured, however, his perspective was obtained through a secondary source (Onikosi, 2016) and incorporated within the piece.

The ethnographic data that was utilized in the construction of this narrative was collected through interviews, sound recordings, participant observation, the phenomenological experience of 'being there', secondary data sources such as The Guardian (Onikosi, 2016) and photographs taken throughout. This data was then complied into a composite whereby multiple perspectives, voices, discourses and temporalities were simultaneously positioned within the graphic narrative.

The combination of ethnographic information collected from primary and secondary data allowed for a richer, multifaceted, complex representation of the events that took place. *Ethical considerations* were made to anonymize the informants and subjects of the photographs, as consent could not be gained due to the public nature of a protest. The visual aesthetic of the narrative is an interpretation of the work by Dix (2016), and the methodological process I undertook was a reflection of Sacco's (2001) work. Through doing this project I furthered my understanding of not only the *power of graphic imagery* when dealing with rights based issues, but also the diverse ways in which ethnographic data can be represented both visually and linguistically to different audiences.

Theorizing Graphic Narratives and their Applicability to Human Rights Issues

Human rights culture seeks to be reflexive on equality, freedom and our fundamental dignity (Galchinsky, 2012: 67). It shares many of the civic and ethical tasks with *human rights law*, however it tends to participate horizontally in the *public sphere* (Galchinsky, 2012: 67). Human rights culture attempts to cultivate a *civil society* in which human rights can be understood and meaningful. In essence, it attempts to make people *want* to respect the rights of others (Galchinsky, 2012: 67). *Palestine* (2001), *The Vanni* (2016) and *#DontDeportLuqman* (2016) attempt to make ethical claims on their audience, and subsequently offer the potential to produce actors in the global arena (McLagan, 2003: 609).
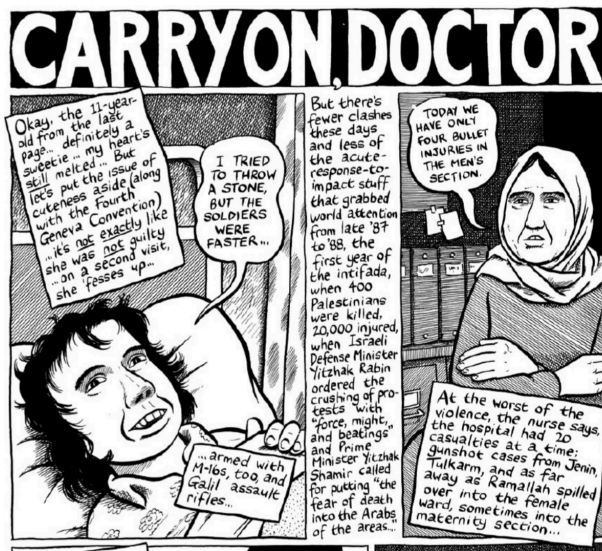
The Vanni (2016) from http://positivenegatives.org/comics/the-vanni/the-vanni-comic/

They function to visually instigate a *politics of recognition,* that is, to make claims of *recognition* and *humanness* against counter-discourses regarding the suffering of others (Scherr, 2015:114). By visually addressing multiple audiences, they foster *sympathetic understanding*, and *structures of feeling* (Williams, 1977; Alexander, 2006)*.* It is this operational mode in the public or civic sphere, combined with their *visceral visuality* that lends graphic narratives the potential to critically address, draw attention to, and represent issues of human rights.

Graphic narratives share the most basic composition of *frames* and *gutters* with comic books. These gesture towards the rhythm and pacing of looking and reading through the structures of each individual page (Chute and DeKoven, 2006: 767). McCloud (1994) offers a definition of the visual form by claiming that the "juxtaposed pictorial […] images in deliberate sequence, [are] intended to convey information and […] produce an aesthetic response in the viewer"

(Sacco, 2001: 34)

(McCloud, 1994: 9). However, images do not function in an illustrative way in relation to the text, but instead comprise a separate narrative that travels through temporal moments in divergent ways (Chute and DeKoven, 2006: 769). In light of this, graphic narratives should be thought of as *cross-discursive* because the visual and verbal narratives that constitute it do not merge together to create a unified whole, but remain distinct (Chute and Dekoven, 2006: 769).
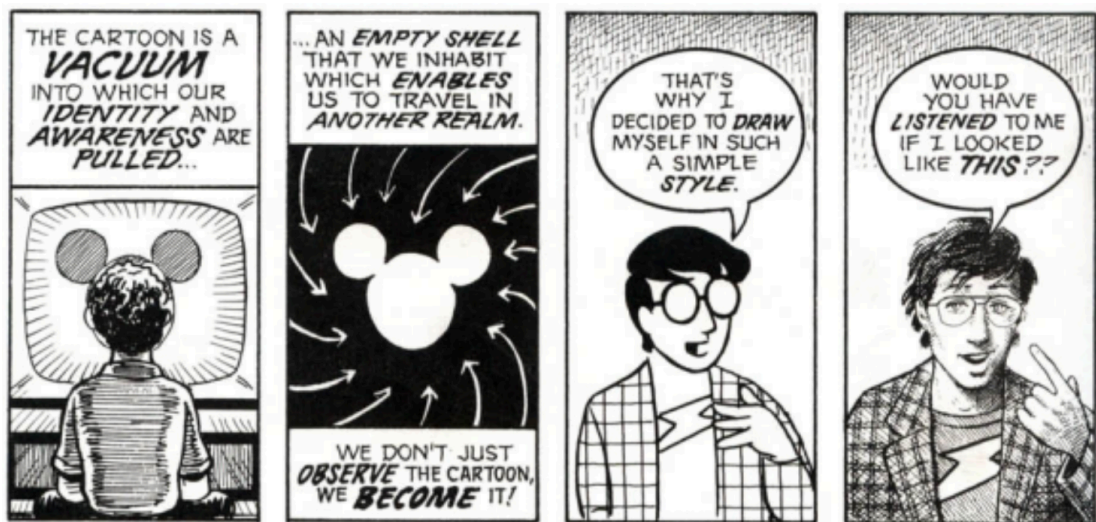

(McCloud, 1994: 30)

Graphic narratives could be considered as a *haptic form* just as much as a *visual form*. This means "in order to process the image-text relationship, readers must draw on various sensory and cognitive modalities that render the reading experience as physically intimate" (Scherr, 2013: 21). This haptic visual engagement has been termed, albeit in a different context by Marks (2000) as *haptic visuality*. Haptic visuality is a vision that is not solely cognitive, but one that

also acknowledges its location within the body (Marks, 2000: 132). Marks claims, haptic visuality and haptic visual forms highlight the audience's involvement in the realm of representation in ways that differ to the more distancing aspects of other visual media (Marks, 2000: 176). The term *haptic* indicates both a literal touching, and the touching of emotion and feeling more generally (Scherr, 2013: 21). As such, a *haptic experience* of graphic narratives provides both an *immediate bodily encounter*, and simultaneously a form of "emotional engagement experienced as bodily feeling" (Scherr, 2013: 21).

What does the mean for graphic narratives if they engage in forms of *haptic visual representation*? As an artistic strategy haptic visuality should be understood as a means of incorporating *emotion* and *sensation* in its communicative reach; therefore haptic visuality calls attention to the role that *affect* plays in the encounter between audience and graphic narrative (Scherr, 2013: 21). Although *haptics* are what makes the reading of graphic narratives such an engrossing, emotional, connective experience, they also reinforce and maintain degrees of *separation*. This separation is whereby the subject recognizes their involvement in the realm of representation that is feeling and seeing, whilst simultaneously recognizing a *radical autonomy* in *engagement* and *readership* (Scherr, 2013: 22). For to touch, is also to be touched, and touch is an activity where *subjectivity* and *objectivity* come into close proximity but never become entirely indistinguishable (Stewart, 2002: 178). This is why Whitlock (2006) claims that the unique *visuality* and *vocabulary* that graphic narratives possess has the potential to "produce an imaginative and ethical engagement with the proximity of the other" (Whitlock, 2006: 978). The *imaginative* and *ethical engagement* graphic narratives demand on behalf of their audience could be considered a means to instigate *narrative interiority*, that is to provide a perception from the inside that can aid in evoking sympathetic identification in ways that no external reportage can achieve (Galchinsky, 2012: 71).

(McCloud, 1994: 36)

Graphic narratives are composed through an assemblage of raw materials drawn from a multiplicity of perspectives and discourses that are then assembled to form a *coherent whole* (Hathaway, 2011: 253), usually by one author from start to finish (Chute and Dekoven, 2006: 770). The creative process of *coalescing* a multiplicity of perspectives and discourses through a medium that is inherently cross-discursive, echoes that of the ethnographic and anthropological

#DontDeportLuqman (2016:3)

project. When Clifford claims "ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the ground of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion" (Clifford, 1986: 2) one is reminded of the *methodology*, *form* and *content* that defines my own and other's (Dix, 2016; Sacco, 2001) graphic narrative projects. The creative process of selection, omission and coalescing data provides the basis for claiming that graphic narratives should be consider an ethnographic form.

Graphic narratives align with the *postcolonial project*'s agenda to restructure Western knowledge formations, invert power structures, re-orientate ethical norms, and generally refashion the world from below (Young, 2012: 19). *The Vanni* (2016), *Palestine* (2001) and *#DontDeportLuqman* (2016) all attempt to visually give space to the *misrepresented* and *underrepresented* *subaltern* groups in which they focus. Gramsci stressed that the *subaltern* do not control the means to their own representation (Gramsci, 1971:21). Graphic narratives present an alternative – a means for *visual self-representation* in the face of the *hegemonic textual representational initiatives of the dominant classes.*

(Sacco, 2001: 15)
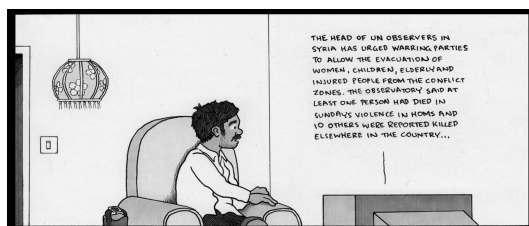
Throughout *Palestine* (2001) Sacco gives visual representation to the average Palestinian. He offers a banal portrayal of the everyday human rights abuses the Palestinians face that break with their hegemonic, orientalizing (Said, 1979) *misrepresentatio*n within the media.

The Vanni (Dix, 2016)
http://positivenegatives.org/comics/the-vanni/the-vanni-comic/

Dix throughout *The Vanni* (2016) offers to visually demonstrate the hardship of life after the Sri Lankan civil war that came to an end in May 2009, by focusing on the testimonies of those who were there, survived and now find themselves in a different context. Through demonstrating both visually and textually the on-going suffering and hardship of everyday life

post-conflict he tries to combat the *underrepresentation* these people have faced through all kinds of media, and create a form of *visually instigated haptic shock,* that will slowly but surely start to change public opinion and raise awareness of the human rights abuses that occurred.

The ways in which raw data is visually *narrativized,* or mediated and translated into a complex fiction that "usefully steer[s] you back […] to reality" (Spiegelman, 2011: 150) is what makes the piece *intimately*, or *haptically engage with its audience.* One could claim that the constituent visual and linguistic elements within graphic narratives not only exist in a *cross-discursive relationship*, but also that this relationship bestows the possibility to simultaneously present *multiple perspectives*, *discourses* and

#DontDeportLuqman (2016: 2)

temporalities through a singular medium. I echoed this plurality of narrative in *#DontDeportLuqman* (2016) as I recognized this as a means to foster haptic engagement within the readership, whilst simultaneously increasing the validity of the perspectives being represented. Both Sacco (2001) and Dix (2016), like any good ethnographer, draw from multiple perspectives and discourses to inform their work, which is then amalgamated into one narrative or *partial truth* (Clifford, 1986) that pertains to being representative of the informants.
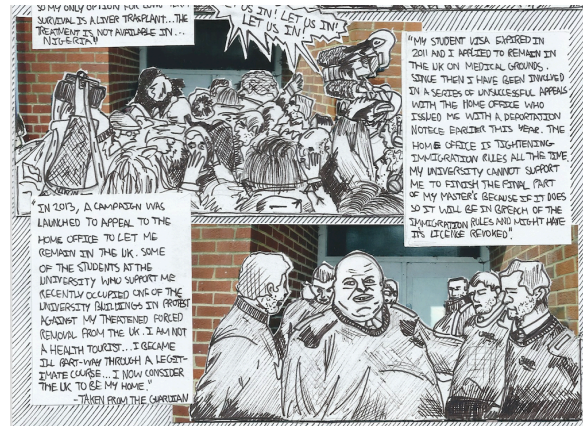
#DontDeportLuqman (2016: 1)

If we consider the individual as the "indivisible unit of symbolic currency" (Adams, 1998: 82) within human rights discourse, and their testimonial narratives function as a kind of "intercultural technology" (McLagan, 2003: 607) that can reach agents with the power to instigate change, we begin to see the potential of graphic narratives that pull together multiple testimonies into one composite narrative. Both the *legitimacy* and *authority* of the claims being made increase immeasurably when they can be seen to be more representative of those affected. If graphic narratives are a visual composite of multiple perspectives, discourses, testimonies and temporalities, this forces us to consider that *cultural expression* is "infinitely complex and depends as much on the interpretative skills of the reader as they do of the composer" (Hathaway, 2011: 264).
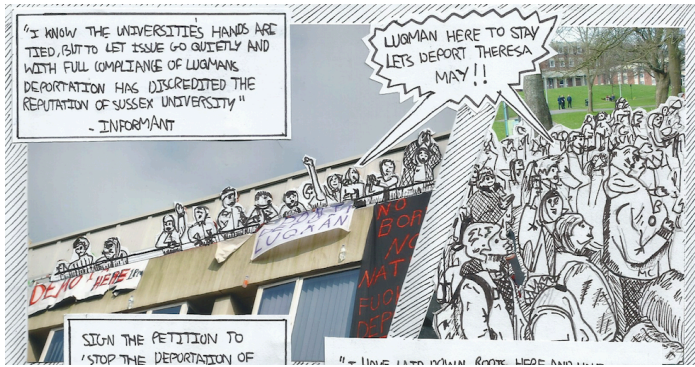
#DontDeportLuqman (2016: 4)

In *#DontDeportLuqman* (2016) I attempted to foster the *haptic visual engagement* associated with graphic narratives through creating a *temporal dislocation* between the visual components of the narrative with the written ones. This was made possible by the use of *frames* within the piece. The text that originates from within a frame, and placed within traditional comic speech bubbles is speech taken from the *temporal moment* the frame represents. The speech that falls within or outside a frame, but within the angular speech boxes represents information elicited outside of that *temporal moment*. Through creating a dislocation between the temporality of text and image I wanted to create a narrative that requires *subjective agency* in its readership, or *haptic reader participation*, and therefore *emotive* and *cognitive demand*. The piece attempts to use haptic visual methods to foster intimacy and sympathy with the issues being presented through acting as a *contact zone* (Hodapp, 2015) *of haptic, visual, literary and ideo-poltical modalities.*

This demonstrates firstly the potentiality of graphic novels to tell complex narratives that transcend temporal moments, and secondly, reinforces Groensteen's point that frames can "supply a reading protocol, or even an interpretation of the panel" (Groensteen, 2007: 50). This combination of temporalities and perspectives lends power to graphic narratives when exploring human rights issues due to the fact that the issues tend to be on-going, and not fixed in one temporal dimension, something that can be easily *visually* and *textually* represented in the graphic narrative form.

The combination of photographic backgrounds and illustrated foregrounds in *#DontDeportLuqman* (2016) was an attempt to locate the issues both visually and imaginatively in the 'real world', whilst simultaneously providing anonymity to the participants. Inspiration for the visuality of this narrative comes directly from the work of Dix (2016).

The Vanni (Dix, 2016) http://positivenegatives.org/comics/the-vanni/the-vanni-comic/

Through providing anonymity to the protesters involved I wanted to foster a *haptic engagement* with their actions. By not knowing the identities of those there, I hoped it would become easier to identify with the issues they were protesting by placing oneself in their shoes. This could be considered as an attempt at *political mimesis,* that is the process by which an affective link is formed between the bodies in the visual representation and the bodies in the readership (Gaines, 1999: 90). Visual representations offer the potential to "produce emotion in the spectator" (McLagan,

(McCloud, 1994: 36)

2003: 608), or *structures of feeling* (Williams, 1977; Alexander, 2006) that position people as "poised to intervene" (McLagan, 2003: 608). Furthermore, by *illustrating* elements of the representation it shows that "things like this happened" (Sontag, 2003: 47) without placing these actions irrevocably in the past; although the protest may have been and gone, the oppression faced by Luqman and the systemic denial of his basic human rights is still on going. This resonates with Taussig's (2011) point that photography is about *taking,* that *stops time,* and illustrations are about *making,* which *encompasses time* (Taussig, 2011: 21).
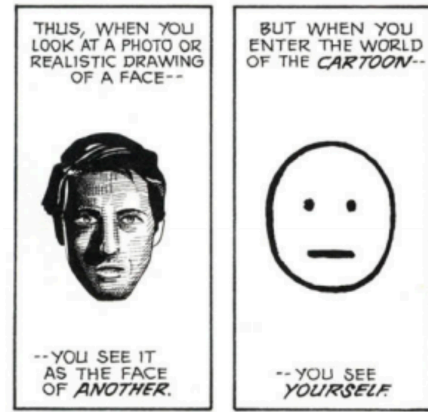
I found that the graphic medium offers an opportunity not only to break from the *voyeuristic relationship* found in much human rights media (Scherr, 2013: 32), but also to escape many of the *imperialistic power-embedded relations* associated with a *photographic approach* to the *suffering of others* (Sontag, 2003). In essence, this project allowed me to challenge not only the *hegemony of textual representation*, but also the *politics of seeing* human rights issues.

Conclusions

Through developing my own graphic narrative and exploring others, I gained an understanding of the potential that *graphic visual representational forms* present, and how they can be *affective* in addressing larger audiences when looking at *human rights issues.*

Through *narrative interiority* graphic narratives offer the potentiality to *imaginatively* and *ethically* engage with human rights issues through the *autonomous visual,* and *textual* engagement they grant to their readership. Through challenging *hegemonic representational practices* and *the politics of seeing,* they encourage forms of *political mimesis* between the *audience* and *those represented.* Graphic narratives foster *emotive* and *sensorial* responses, and cultivate potential actors in the global sphere in ways that other visual and textual media cannot. Through highlighting how both the *audience* and *creator* both play a significant role in the act of representation, graphic narratives present the potential "for recognition and justice [...and...] to form citizens' sense of responsibility for suffering others" (Gardner, Herman and Keen, 2011: 135).

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Appendix

#DontDeportLuqman (2016)

"I GREW UP IN NORTHERN NIGERIA BUT LEFT NINE YEARS AGO AFTER BECOMING DISENFRANCHISED... I FELT THAT THE ELITE THAT RUN THE COUNTRY WERE DELIBERATELY UNDERFUNDING EDUCATION AND THE HEALTH SYSTEM TO UNDERMINE YOUNG PEOPLE FROM HUMBLE BACKGROUNDS SO THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE THE COUNTRY ... I LEFT FOR THE UK TO STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX, WHERE I COMPLETED AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE IN ECONOMICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, BEFORE EMBARKING ON A MASTERS DEGREE. I HAD AN AUDACIOUS DREAM TO RETURN TO NIGERIA AND USE MY KNOWLEDGE ... TO FIGHT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE"

DON'T DEPORT LUQMAN!!!

DEPORT THERESA MAY

LUQMAN HERE TO STAY, LETS DEPORT THERESA MAY! ♪

"... MY INITIAL APPLICATION WAS REJECTED... AFTER THREE APPEALS... THE HOME OFFICE FINALLY GRANTED ME PERMISSION TO STUDY HERE. IN 2008... AFTER A SERIES OF TESTS I WAS DIAGNOSED WITH THE BLOOD-BORNE VIRUS HEPATITIS B. TRAGICALLY MY TWO BROTHERS ALSO CONTRACTED THE DISEASE AND DIED FROM IT. IT'S HARD TO DESCRIBE WHAT A HUGE IMPACT THIER LOSS HAS HAD ON MY LIFE. UNFORTUNATELY MY CONDITION IS QUITE ADVANCED SO MY ONLY OPTION FOR LONG-TERM SURVIVAL IS A LIVER TRANSPLANT... THE TREATMENT IS NOT AVAILABLE IN... NIGERIA"

LET US IN! LET US IN! LET US IN!

"MY STUDENT VISA EXPIRED IN 2011 AND I APPLIED TO REMAIN IN THE UK ON MEDICAL GROUNDS. SINCE THEN I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A SERIES OF UNSUCCESSFUL APPEALS WITH THE HOME OFFICE WHO ISSUED ME WITH A DEPORTATION NOTICE EARLIER THIS YEAR. THE HOME OFFICE IS TIGHTENING IMMIGRATION RULES ALL THE TIME. MY UNIVERSITY CANNOT SUPPORT ME TO FINISH THE FINAL PART OF MY MASTER'S BECAUSE IF IT DOES SO IT WILL BE IN BREACH OF THE IMMIGRATION RULES AND MIGHT HAVE ITS LICENCE REVOKED".

"IN 2013, A CAMPAIGN WAS LAUNCHED TO APPEAL TO THE HOME OFFICE TO LET ME REMAIN IN THE UK. SOME OF THE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY WHO SUPPORT ME RECENTLY OCCUPIED ONE OF THE UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS IN PROTEST AGAINST MY THREATENED FORCED REMOVAL FROM THE UK. I AM NOT A HEALTH TOURIST... I BECAME ILL PART-WAY THROUGH A LEGIT-IMATE COURSE... I NOW CONSIDER THE UK TO BE MY HOME."
    -TAKEN FROM THE GUARDIAN

"I KNOW THE UNIVERSITIES HANDS ARE TIED, BUT TO LET ISSUE GO QUIETLY AND WITH FULL COMPLIANCE OF LUQMANS DEPORTATION HAS DISCREDITED THE REPUTATION OF SUSSEX UNIVERSITY"
- INFORMANT

LUQMAN HERE TO STAY LETS DEPORT THERESA MAY!!

SIGN THE PETITION TO 'STOP THE DEPORTATION OF LUQMAN ONIKOSI!' @ https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/121206

"I HAVE LAID DOWN ROOTS HERE AND HAVE INCREDIBLE SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND TUTORS. THANKS TO MY EXCELLENT EXPERIENCE AT UNIVERSITY I AM WELL PLACED TO WORK HARD AND GET SKILLED EMPLOYMENT HERE. I HAVE SO MUCH TO CONTRIBUTE: I HAVE DRIVE AND AMBITION, I WANT TO WORK AND PAY TAXES AND MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO THE UK. IF I RETURN HOME MY DETERIORATION WILL BE RAPID AND I WILL NOT SURVIVE AS THE MEDICAL TREATMENT I NEED TO KEEP ME ALIVE IS NOT AVAILABLE THERE. THE HOME OFFICE EXERCISES DISCRETION ABOUT WHO IT DECIDES CAN STAY AND WHO IT FORCES TO LEAVE. IN MY CASE, IT HAS THE POWER OVER LIFE AND DEATH. I AM APPEALING TO THE HOME OFFICE TO LET ME STAY AND BE A USEFUL AND POSITIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY HERE. IN SHORT I AM ASKING THE HOME OFFICE NOT TO SEND ME BACK TO MY DEATH BUT TO SAVE MY LIFE!"
- LUQMAN

"THE ISSUE IS STILL ON CAMPUS, LUQMAN IS ONE TARGET BUT THERE WILL PROBABLY BE OTHERS"-
INFORMANT

INFORMATION SOURCED THROUGH INTERVIEWS, PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION, PHOTOGRAPHY, ONLINE RESEARCH INCLUDING LUQMAN'S FACEBOOK, THE BADGER AND THE GUARDIAN.

"THE LARGER ISSUE IS EXPEDITED DEPORTATION, NOT JUST STUDENTS BUT MIGRANTS IN GENERAL. THE ANTI-IMMIGRATION HAS BEEN RIFE IN THE UK AND EUROPE, AND LUQMAN IS A VICTIM OF THIS." - INFORMANT