The background features a collage of elements: a teal rectangular overlay on the left, a white paper-like texture with faint, large, grey letters 'S', 'W', and 'S' on the right, and a bottom section with a light blue and white pattern. The text 'Becoming a 'migrant'' is centered in white on the teal background.

# Becoming a 'migrant'



## Denaturalising the process of becoming a 'migrant'

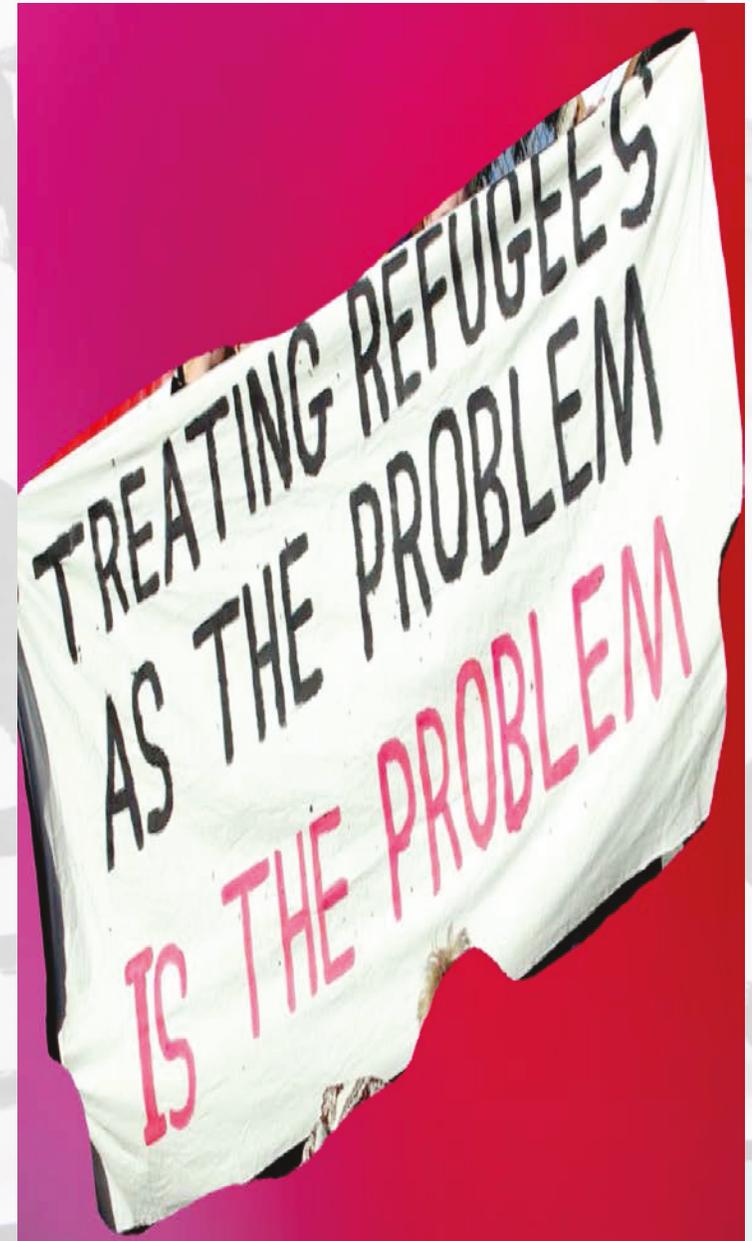
Our project tried to denaturalise the processes of being constructed as a 'migrant'.

People move and then come to understand that it is this journey that will define their identity in the place of arrival.

We asked people when and how they came to understand that they were 'migrants'.

Our project tried to understand how people learn that they are regarded as a 'migrant' by others - often to the exclusion of any other facet of identity.

Our respondents told us how they came to understand themselves as 'migrants' and what this identity implied in the UK.



This person learned to refer to herself through official categories, despite her misgivings

**In response to the question, 'do you think of yourself as a 'migrant'?**

I would say yes and no, because like she said I've been here twelve years as well, but then when you go to the Home Office or when you seek asylum it's kind of been drummed into your ear.

It's just like my case is under trafficking and at first it was like do you know what trafficking is and they explained it to me. And then it kind of had to get to the stage where I had to identify myself as one, so sometimes it got to the process of, every time I want to say, I can't really say it out so they say I am, so that it was that call me. But do I want to be?

But then I think I don't want to be called that. They say I am this, they say I am that, but obviously eventually I started saying okay, I am a trafficking victim

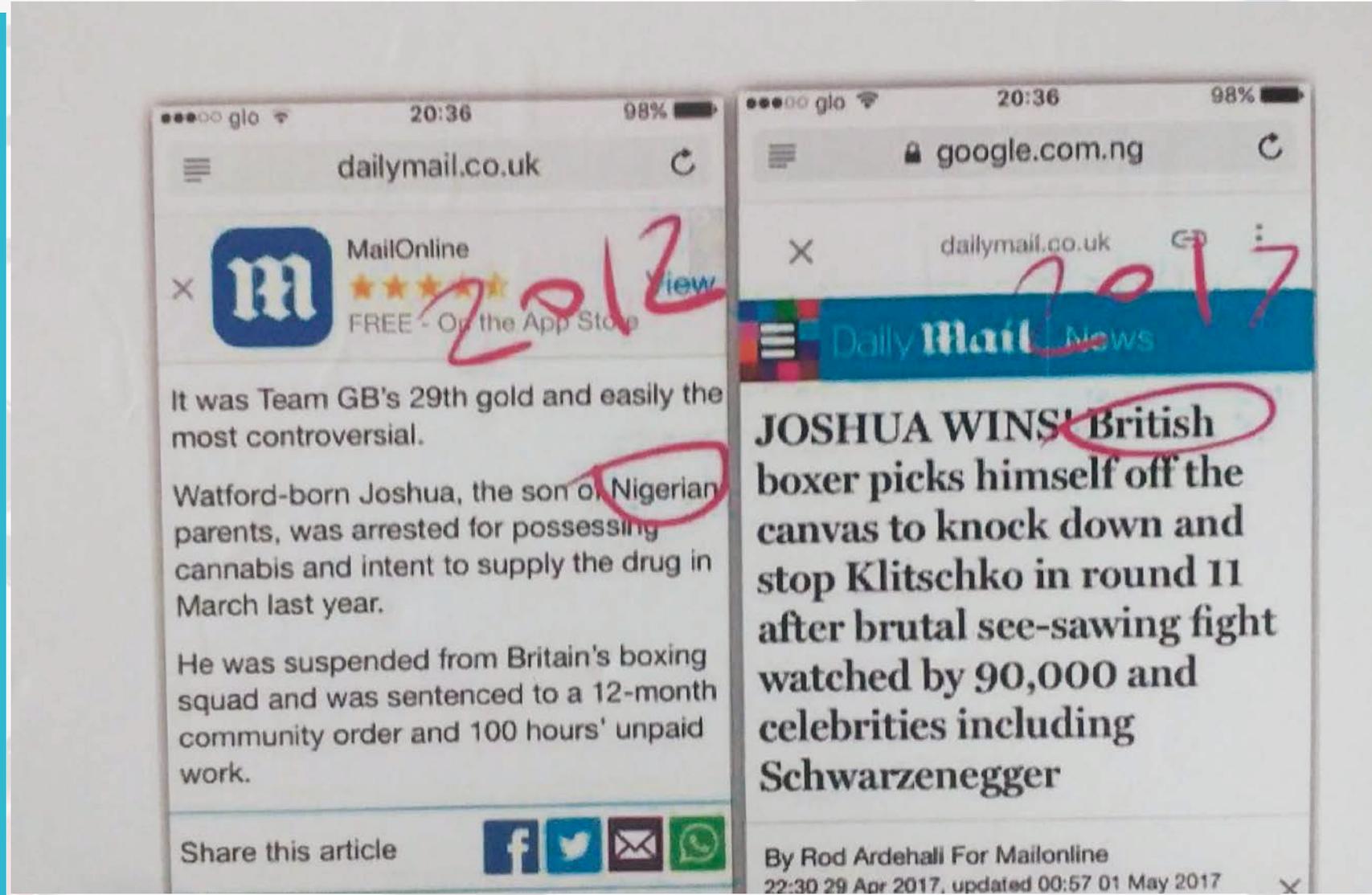
Despite the separation that is imposed on many migrants, some also feel that displacement eroded their previous identity but did not offer anything in its place

But now that you then speak this way, your friends are like no you don't even sound Nigerian anymore. Nigerian people that would meet me would be like I didn't know you were Nigerian when I met you, you don't look like Nigerian and you don't sound like a Nigerian. Now I don't have any nationality, I don't belong anywhere.

Our respondents felt that it was not possible to stop being categorised as a 'migrant' and that a lot of this continues to be linked to race

Actually, I have never felt 100 per cent British, because of the way people of my colour have been represented in media. For instance, if a criminal maybe commits a crime in London, if that person is white, it's going to be said a 30 year old man committed a crime, but if that person is black, they will emphasise a 30 year old black man of Nigerian descent who came to the UK as a refugee has done this and that, which means that one way or the other they say it's us and them, but basically they understand we are different from them.

Our respondents pointed to this example to explain how blatantly negative attributes were connected to 'foreignness' while positive achievements were claimed as 'British'.



Racism played a central role in persuading our respondents that they were not 'British' and would not become 'British'.

So you were saying that when you first had leave to remain that you did feel British then? Did I understand that correctly?

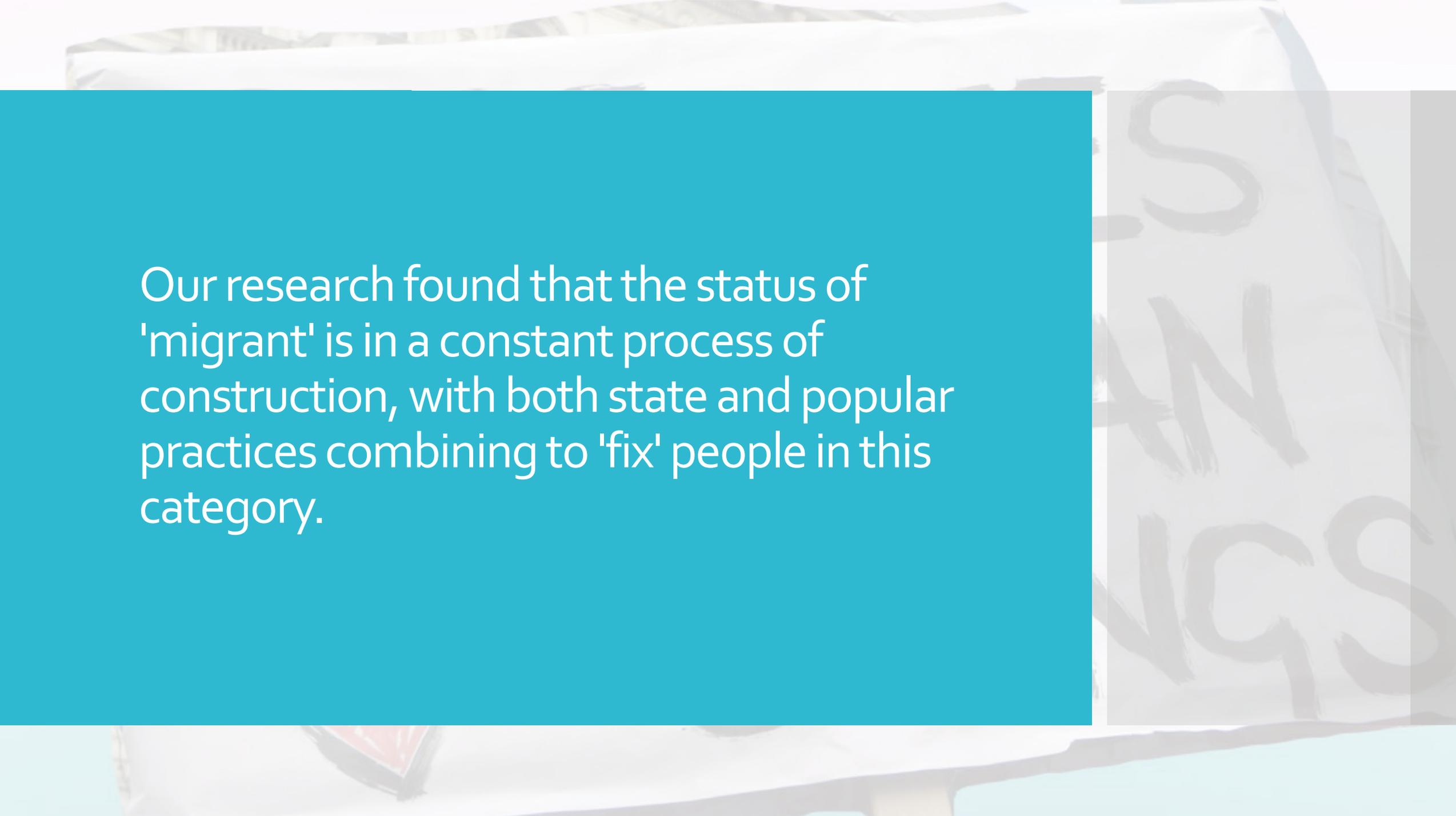
R: Yes, that's right. I was proud to be British. I could even sing the national anthem. Now I can't sing it any longer.

I: So how soon after getting your leave to remain did you start to feel no, I am a migrant and a migrant is something different?

R: Yes, actually how soon? Let me say when I started noticing how we are being represented, shortly thereafter, because I started noticing immediately, in was it 2003, that something was very wrong, even before Brexit, actually. Blacks were more represented on Crimewatch than on any other programme, and that wasn't really good enough, and also when I applied for jobs with all the qualifications I had I would discover that somebody with lesser qualifications than me would get the job because of their skin colour.

The experience of being made into a 'migrant' was described as a feeling of being under constant suspicion

I think when I come to this country first time I feel like I'm different. I feel like I am not human, because sometimes I'm the thief or something, I feel maybe they will catch me. So the first time I feel like that.



Our research found that the status of 'migrant' is in a constant process of construction, with both state and popular practices combining to 'fix' people in this category.