

FREE OR DONATION

Promoting grassroots arts and culture on Merseyside

NERVE

ISSUE 27

**FACTS,
REAL STORIES,
ART, CULTURE AND SO MUCH MORE**

**BINNING THE
MYTHS ON IMMIGRATION**

Why the Refugee Issue?

This edition of Nerve is dedicated to the stories, the art, and the views of Liverpool-based migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We aim for this issue to tackle the myths that are pushed daily by the likes of the Daily Mail, Daily Express, The Sun, The Star and 'reality' TV programmes, and offer up the chance for migrants themselves and organizations that support them to tell their stories.

Being involved in community activities we know there will be people who have an issue with this, and want to continue to believe what they read in the media and blame people who come to this country for all their own and the country's ills.

Nerve, since it started in 2003, has focused primarily on grassroots local issues, both positive and not so positive, such as homelessness, corruption, the treatment of workers, zero hour contracts, pollution, and, more than anything, the takeover of our city by people whose primary motive is to make profit out of the city and its people.

For our work Nerve has been threatened by Merseyside Police for highlighting corruption and the treatment of the homeless. We have had our web host threatened with closure for exposing a company that was polluting Kirkby and causing health issues for the people there. Luckily we never backed down and, with the support of our followers, have seen off this threat.

It is no accident that the vast majority of asylum seekers wanting refuge in Europe come from countries where violence, mayhem, murder or war is happening, and despite propaganda claims, only a tiny proportion of these arrive in the UK. In fact the UK take less than 1% of the world's refugees, with 80% of refugees only getting as far as the adjacent country from where they lived. Millions live in refugee camps in and around the countries they have come from, hoping one day to return to their homeland.

Nerve is run by volunteers, mostly people born, bred and active in the life of Liverpool. We know the city has changed, more for the benefit of business than the benefit of the people, and for many born here the city centre feels like a strange place, an unwelcome place.

But this is not because of immigrants fleeing here or migrants looking for a better life, as the corporate owned press want us to believe, but because the very city our forefathers and mothers built is being stolen from us, and handed to companies that want to make a profit.

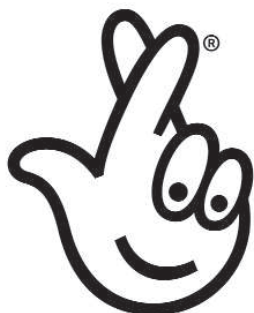
Support services that our families built and paid for are being handed over to corporations. The parks and fields we owned are being sold off to private developers to build houses, that the majority of us cannot afford to live in. The places of beauty, the places we escape to from our bricked up areas, are also being taken from us and given away, so they can become areas that only the exclusive can enjoy.

But we believe that the newcomers, fleeing wars and poverty, have a right to tell their stories, where they come from; what they do; what their dreams are; and what they offer or can offer to this city.

Only by allowing ordinary people, often coming from extraordinary circumstances, to tell their stories can we begin to understand the things we have in common, the interests we share, and the desire to make life better for us all.

NERVE is run by volunteers. To continue we need to raise funds for the running costs for our office, our website and printing. NERVE is still free, but donations are welcome. You can donate on the website or take out a £2 monthly standing order to help us.

For a form see the website: www.catalystmedia.org.uk
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Photo of the camp at Calais. Credit: Empathy Action www.empathyaction.org

The media, politicians, and the bloke down the pub all define 'refugee' differently.

By Jared Ficklin

These days even the most uninformed person knows that refugees are big news. Armchair lawyers, better now called keyboard lawyers, hand down solemn or strident opinions on who is or isn't a refugee in the comments section of online articles. But what is the truth? What does 'refugee' mean? Where do they come from and why are they here?

What is a refugee? The media, politicians, and the bloke down the pub all define 'refugee' differently, usually depending on the point they're trying to make. But in the UK, 'refugee' has a legal definition: someone who is outside their country of origin and cannot return there because they would be at real risk of serious harm; but only if that risk is because of the person's race or ethnicity, religion, political view or some other personal characteristic. A refugee must not be able to get protection from that risk inside their country, whether from the police there or anyone else, and there cannot be any safe and reasonable place inside their country to flee to. If all these conditions are met, and assuming the person isn't himself a terrorist or a serious criminal, then they can stay.

How many are there in the UK? Not many. Overwhelmingly, refugees are in countries next to the one they left. Almost 70% of refugees in the world are in the Middle East or Africa. Turkey hosts nearly three million Syrians. Lebanon has over a million more, approximately a quarter of its population. The UK takes about 40,000 claims per year including dependents, and of course, many of these claims will fail. This is only 3% of the asylum claims in the European Union. As a whole, Europe only takes 6% of the refugees in the world. Despite the hysterical coverage of the refugee crisis, the number of asylum claims in

the UK is still less than half what it was in 2002, when more than 85,000 people claimed.

So who are they? In 2016, most people who claim to be refugees (often called 'asylum-seekers') came to the UK from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Syria. This list of countries is hardly surprising. The UK helped to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and those countries have not recovered to become functioning democracies as some hoped. Instead, violent extremists took advantage of the power vacuum to flourish and terrorise their own people and us.

As we all know, the conflicts in the Middle East and Asia regularly spill over borders, and everyone with a television or the internet has seen the hell on earth called Aleppo. Many others come from Eritrea, called "Africa's North Korea", where any sign of political dissent or unsanctioned religious practice results in detention and torture. In Eritrea, every 18-year-old gets conscripted indefinitely; asking to go home to visit family can earn a beating. An escape attempt might be worth years in a filthy cell with dozens of others, a floor drain for a toilet, a mouldy piece of bread once a day and no way to pass the time except to watch one's only set of clothes rot away.

Why are they here? Politicians like to keep things simple, so they usually pretend that there are two groups of people: refugees and 'economic migrants'. But this is not just too simple, it is plain wrong. Take the example of a Syrian family who fled the war in 2011 and lived in a refugee camp in Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey. The family might have had some savings to live on or a relative abroad to send them money. They might have received food in the camp, but human beings need more than food. They need the chance to work, worship, study,

marry, and all the other things they lost when the bombs fell on their home.

Even in the best refugee camps there are security problems, and children are at risk of exploitation for their labour and even their bodies.

Unscrupulous employers are clever; in Turkey, some would rather employ children, or adults who haven't registered as refugees because they can pay them less, and it's off the books.

The family might be 'safe' from the bombs in the camp, but they can't live. When the money runs out and the only option is prostitution or the sweatshop, the family might make the decision to come to Europe as a group or to send the strongest on ahead.

In order to hide from this reality, politicians talk about 'pull factors' that draw 'economic migrants' to Europe and the UK. 'Pull factors' can include everything from social housing and benefits (only available to refugees who have been recognised under international law, and only in limited areas) to rescuing people from drowning in the sea.

The fact is that a refugee is defined by what is behind him or her, not what is in front. When politicians would let people drown on the pretence that getting in the boat changed their status, they ignore what being a refugee means. Fleeing persecution and death is what makes a refugee. Trying to have a life doesn't unmake one.

Jared Ficklin is a Co-Director at University of Liverpool Law Clinic. The law clinic offers final year law students direct experience of representing real clients, under the supervision of the Clinic's in-house legal team of qualified lawyers. It provides much needed free and confidential legal advice and assistance to the public.

BORDER INCIDENTS ON THE BIG SCREEN

Steve Moss examines the cinema's extensive relationship with migration and asylum issues.

Chaplin's silent film *The Immigrant* (1917) was one of the earliest to depict the difficulties of migrating to a new land without any money in your pocket and the struggle to retain dignity in an unwelcoming place. These themes are not new and have been reflected in cinema from across the world ever since the moving camera was invented.

As a nation founded by immigrants, it is hardly surprising the subject of migration crops up so often in American cinema, often being employed to set up a 'culture clash' storyline. The most celebrated film of an immigrant arriving in the USA is *The Godfather Part II* (1974) with Vito Corleone arriving on the boat from Sicily to escape the threat to his life back home and struggling to make a new start.

Several films depict families making the move from Ireland, such as Jim Sheridan's *In America* (2002), but the most frequently depicted type of immigration to the USA is that from across the Mexican border. *Alambrista! (The Illegal)* (1977) is the story of a Mexican man who crosses into the States seeking work to support his family back home. He lives in constant fear of immigration raids and discovers that the American Dream is unattainable for some. The emphasis is on his status as an

exploited outsider. Another hard-hitting film, *Sin Nombre* (2009) takes a similar approach to the story of a Honduran teenager with dreams of a brighter future, travelling with her family on freight cars towards the States. The journey and all its accompanying perils are the focus of this film, showing the hardships people endure in order to reach the North. Ken Loach was lured across the Atlantic to make one of his most powerful films, *Bread And Roses* (2000), the story of a union organizer doing his best to help illegal immigrants working as office cleaners in LA. This 'invisible' class of people feature also in the satirical *A Day Without A Mexican* (2004).

Many of these films fit into the 'road movie' genre. The Oscar-nominated *El Norte* (1983) is a portrayal of two Indian peasants fleeing from Guatemala to the USA. The horror of their experience getting across the border is shown in unflinching detail and when they finally reach their destination they discover they still don't fit in - life remains very hard for those without official documentation. *The Golden Dream* (2013) is a harrowing tale of three teenagers from Guatemala making the long journey to the land of opportunity along railroad tracks. The director depicts the

characters displaying values of loyalty, love, honour and sacrifice to emphasise that these are people just like us.

Michael Winterbottom's grim docudrama *In This World* (2002) follows two young Afghan refugees from their camp in Pakistan on their highly risky journey towards London. Using the underground network of human smugglers they follow the path of millions of others who risk life and limb for a chance of a better tomorrow. Shot in documentary style, with the crew and actors travelling together on a dangerously authentic route through the region, the film gets into the truth of the refugee experience like few other films.

Last Resort (2000) paints a bleak picture of the end-point for many of those who make the journey successfully. While their claim is being considered, a young Russian woman and her son are confined for months to a refugee centre in a joyless grey seaside town with fences, vigilant policemen, huge dogs, food vouchers and surveillance cameras. The film allows us to see life from an asylum seeker's point of view. Closer to home, *Grow Your Own* (2007) was filmed in Liverpool and based on a real-life allotment where a number of plots were given to traumatised refugees.





Charlie Chaplin in *The Immigrant* (1917)

The film displays a real optimism regarding community spirit in illustrating how people can be brought together by the things they have in common, in this case their love of making things grow.

From the other side of the Channel, in the ironically-titled *Welcome* (2009) a Kurdish boy from Iraq begins swimming lessons in an attempt to cross the Channel to join his sweetheart and seek asylum. His instructor takes him in in the knowledge that he faces arrest for offering shelter to an illegal. The community of struggling aliens in Calais is captured with authenticity. In *Terraferma* (2011), the quiet traditional life of a small Sicilian island is challenged when a boatload of illegal immigrants arrives, forcing the inhabitants to choose between the 'law of the sea' and

the prospect of being punished for saving them from drowning. This battle between the local carabinieri and the fishermen who represent an older, more humane ethos impacts on all members of the struggling family at the centre of the film.

Ousmane Sembene's *Black Girl* (1966) depicts the journey of a Senegalese woman who becomes nanny to the children of a wealthy white couple and moves with them to France. Once there her hopes for an exciting new life are dashed as they force her to work as a servant and keep her from leaving the house. The film addresses the effects of colonialism in Europe and is a vivid portrait of her increasing isolation and despair as she yearns to return to Senegal.

Even sci-fi films have tackled the issue of

asylum. In *District 9* (2009) a spacecraft full of sick aliens arrive in Johannesburg. It is quite unambiguous in its grim depiction of a shanty town where thousands of these refugees are kept, brutalised by police and stereotyped as criminals and terrorists. *Children Of Men* (2006) paints a picture of the UK imposing oppressive immigration laws in order to maintain control of all those seeking refuge, hunting them down and forcing them to live in vast penal colonies. There seems little prospect of the subject of migration ever drying up as a source of inspiration for films when it is such a major issue in the world today and taps into so many established film genres.

For a longer version of this article see our website - www.catalystmedia.org.uk



Stills from (left - right) *Black Girl* (1966), *Bread And Roses* (2000), *Grow Your Own* (2007), *Sin Nombre* (2009) and *The Golden Dream* (2013)

FROM ISIS BOMBINGS TO LIVERPOOL

Adan is a Syrian Kurd, his city Kobani was under siege by heavily armed ISIS.
Interview by Darren Guy

My name is Adan. I am Kurdish from Kobani, in Syria. I grew up in a Kurdish family. The Kurdish culture and language is banned in Syria and Turkey, so we learn Kurdish dance, Kurdish music and Kurdish language in secret.

Just growing up being Kurdish made me political. You feel the discrimination. I watched the continual arrests in my area of many people, including my cousins many times.

How did you escape Syria?

Kobani the city that was almost destroyed by ISIS, after they stole all the weapons from the Iraqi army, is right on the Turkish border. I walked across the border, about 2 kilometres, trying to reach the nearest village on the Turkish side. Guards saw me and chased me, so I ran and managed to hide. When they went I got to the village and from there managed to get

to Suruc, take a 16 hour bus journey to Istanbul. My cousin was working in a restaurant there.

All the young people from my area, Rojava, ran away from the war to Istanbul. They pay a lot more wages in Istanbul, much more than Syria. The daily wage is like 60 lire (£15). In other cities you get 30 lire. I got to Suruc first. This was the area in 1916 that they cut the border, separated the countries, so Kobani (Syria) was separated from Suruc (Turkey).

Suruc was where ISIS blew up hundreds of students last year, killing thirty who were heading to Kobani as part of a rebuilding project. They were a mixture of Turks and Kurds and other groups. They came down from Istanbul with all the equipment to build a school. The students tried to go through the border first in the morning. But they were met by the Turkish soldiers and the

commander, who refused them access, said "Come back, and I will send all of you to heaven". They marched back to Suruc and held a protest, and within ten minutes of the demonstration, a suicide bomber walked amongst them. If they had been allowed to cross into Syria this wouldn't have happened. It is well known now that the Turkish authorities were supplying ISIS with weapons and were also encouraging ISIS to attack the Kurds.

Did you witness any of this?

I was not in Suruc when ISIS bombed it, but in 2013 I went back to Kobani, from Turkey. When in Kobani I was working in medical aid for the Kurdish Red Crescent (similar to the Red Cross). I was heading towards the Red Crescent office and I heard this huge explosion. It was so big that the glass hit me. I started running towards the centre. When I got there, it



was chaos. There were people all over the floor, 15 people died and many injured. I saw the people dead, everything. Then I saw my friend in amongst all the people. He had been volunteering for Red Crescent. I'd seen him a few days previously and he said, laughing and joking, 'I will see you in the afterlife.'

I carried him to the hospital to try and save him, but the doctors said he was already dead. That is the worst thing I've seen. I've seen many other things, including many injured people, but carrying my dying friend was the worst thing.

Everyone knows the only way ISIS can come through Syria is through Turkey. They cannot come through Lebanon, because Hezbollah controls the borders, or the Syrian forces. They may be able to slip in one or two, but not the numbers that came through to attack Kobani.

They used to come from Telabi, until the YPG (People's Protection Units) took this area. And once YPG took this area, Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, started saying we will not tolerate YPG advancing in this area. He ignored it for two years when ISIS controlled Telabi, but when YPG took it from them, within two days he was saying, 'We won't allow a terrorist organization like YPG, backed up by PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party), to take control of Telabi'.

You will see the same tactics in the ways that ISIS attacked the Kurds and the towns and cities, it's exactly the same way Turkey attacks the Kurdish areas in Turkey and in northern Kurdistan.



What did you do after the attack on the Kurdish Centre?

I left after that. I couldn't go back to Aleppo, where I'd been studying, prior to the war. I went back up to Istanbul and stayed for a couple of months there, I was with my best friend (I call him my brother). I didn't feel good being in Istanbul, whilst a battle was going on in Kobani. My friend felt the same and he went back down to Kobani to fight ISIS. He joined the YPG, and on one mission he had killed five members of ISIS. But he was warned by his comrades to move. That if he had stayed in the same position too long it was dangerous. But he had his eye on one particular ISIS guy and tried to shoot

him, but was killed himself. He stood up to shoot him but was shot first, right through the neck. He was my best friend. I was so upset I wanted to go out and kill all the ISIS. But my friends kept me in a room for four days and wouldn't let me leave. They don't really want people who go wild like that. Plus I was not well enough, I had had a serious stomach operation, and had also had my appendix removed. It was a terrible time for me. Then I met another friend, who told me about his friend who had gone to Europe.

I never wanted to go to Europe, it never appealed to me. If anywhere I planned to go to the Ukraine, my brother was there, I knew nothing about UK, in fact I wasn't

“ Women who have been raped, seen all their family killed and have just arrived here, are treated like criminals ”

interested in Europe. I still wanted to go and fight but they wouldn't let me.

During my time in Istanbul I was approached by many traffickers. In April 2015 I made my plan to go to the UK. People tell me it's really stressful, but I travelled by plane from Istanbul. I arrived in London. I went into the queue, which said Non-EU, and just showed them my Syrian ID. They took me away, fingerprinted me. They kept me for about three days. Then they took me to a church and said we are going to take you to Liverpool. They took me to a number of places where there were many asylum seekers.

Here in the UK the refugee situation is not good. I mean you have people coming from war, who have seen and experienced terrible things, women who have been raped, seen all their family killed and they have just arrived here, are treated like criminals and they have no support for people.

Most Syrians go to Germany. They keep hearing Great Britain 'is great', 'they support you', 'teach you English', etc. But in Germany they get a lot more support. When they give you your Refugee papers in Britain (leave to remain) they just tell you to 'go'. But you don't know anything, any type of support is gone. They say 'Go and find a job', 'go and find accommodation', etc. Can you imagine, you don't speak the language, you are traumatized. I was twenty-years-old. They sent me to the Jobcentre. They don't know how to help you. Refugees need a



lot of support. Yes, they have the status, but they don't know the ways. They just say 'Go here', but there is no-one there to help you with forms or the language, etc. I was lucky, I suppose, because I knew Kurdish guys, and they helped me get a job. Because I came from war, I got status in 29 days.

But I have a friend here who has been waiting for six years. He can't work, can't plan his future, and always afraid he might get sent back. I was involved in politics in Syria and music, so I already had people to connect to here. I met a lot of Kurdish people who don't want to be involved in politics. But being Kurdish means you are political. In September 2015 I went on a demonstration in Liverpool. I knew the organizers. So this was good. I knew a few of them, so this was also good. We did a number of demonstrations and charity fundraisers.

What is the situation in Rojava at the moment?

In Rojava now they are discussing a federal system in the whole of Syria, not just Rojava. The Syrian Government of Assad and the opposition say the Kurdish people want separation. This is not true anymore, and we just want self-determination. We want a federal system. We want to control our towns and cities by ourselves. We have been living under dictators for centuries, in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, always oppressed and controlled by other people.

Basically the system we propose is all about people having control of their own areas and regions, real democracy. It's about equality - women and men are equal. In the military, in the civil society, women and men work together. We already run a system based on the ideas of Abdullah Ocalan. We call it democratic federalism, and we believe this is how the whole of the Middle East could work, and create real democracy between Arabs, Kurds and Christians.

The full version of this interview and the ideas promoted by the YPG can be read on the Nerve website at www.catalystmedia.org.uk



ROMA OR GIPSY?

Alexandra B wants to take YOU the reader into her history and ask you to consider your views when you discriminate against someone like her and her people - the Roma.

Over the last few years I have had a verbal and moral fight with people who don't understand that the meaning of one simple word can change the people, and the facts and how you view these people. I am a Roma woman and I would like to bring you my point of view. I want to take YOU the reader into my history and ask YOU to meditate more when YOU discriminate against someone like me and my people - the Roma.

The word "Roma" comes from the Romani language that is an international language and the meaning is "human being". Roma doesn't have anything in common with the word "Romania". We choose this word because we need to receive respect. The words Gipsy, tzigania and tigan mean 'the people you don't touch', or don't want to touch. In Romanian dictionary the word "tigan" is a person who has anti social manners and is black.

We will begin in 1385 when the first arrivals of the Roma appear in Romania. They became goods and property of many Christian monasteries. This was the start of 500 years of slavery for the Roma. They had no rights and were used like animals.

After we gained "freedom" there was a period of integration into society, until the Nazis identified us as 'Undesirables'. In August 1944, 14,000 Roma were gassed and incinerated at Auschwitz-Birkenau in one mass action.

And between the summer of 1942 and the spring of 1944, the Antonescu Romanian government deported more than 25,000 Romanian citizens of Roma origin to Transnistria, forcing them to make the journey on foot or in wagons. Approximately 11,000 Roma lost their lives, due to the terrible living conditions, starvation or disease, many of them children and throughout Europe, camps were built for my people

to be exterminated.

DIKH HE NA BISTER (organized by ternYpe) mobilizes young Roma and non-Roma to remember the Roma Genocide and to commemorate on 2 August, the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day.

A quick fast forward. The countries across Europe quickly forget the facts from history and the Roma persecution continues to this day.

In the eastern part of Hungary a shocking series of KKK style murders happened to Roma people in 2008. For a long time, the Hungarian authorities showed little enthusiasm in

“ **The countries across Europe quickly forget the facts from history and the Roma persecution continues to this day** ”

investigating the murders.

In 2010, 76 Roma families were forcibly evicted without adequate notice by the local authorities from Coastei Street in the centre of the city of Cluj-Napoca, in North-Western Romania, and 40 families were moved to the outskirts of the city, near the city rubbish and chemical waste dump. The others were offered no alternative accommodation. No consultation with the affected

families took place prior to the eviction and no feasible alternatives to the eviction were explored. Those evicted were not given any written or detailed notification with sufficient notice, nor the opportunity to challenge the eviction decision.

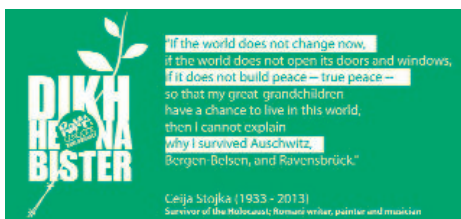
THE ROMA WALLS

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, new walls have been erected in many countries across Europe. In Slovakia 14 walls were built and still exist to separate Roma from their non-Roma neighbours. Also in Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, France and other European countries, local governments have built walls to hide the Roma from others - arguing that they are doing this to protect the safety of children.

In fact, many mayors have won votes on an anti-Roma agenda and complying with the anti-Roma requests to prevent the Roma from entering streets that everyone else has access to.

People say the Roma are ill educated, yes it is true, but its no coincidence that in the countries we come from - Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary - Roma children are segregated in schools and in many cases sent to 'Special Schools', or as we say 'Container Schools', where they are completely cut off, not just from their peers, but from almost anybody from the non-Roma population. Thus confining us to our own settlements, separate classrooms and schools and many other separate services continues to compound our isolation.

The majority of Roma people in these segregated areas have no formal employment so have no reason to leave apart from taking their children to school or occasionally visiting doctors. The government in each of these states fully understands that inclusion of the Roma in social and economic life is the



solution, but they deliberately choose to exclude people because it suits their political purpose. They can then blame all of society's ills on us, the Roma people.

I ask you this question: if YOUR children were excluded, like ours, from education, from employment – would you stay around? Would you accept this system in these countries?

Today, here in the UK, we have more choices, we can choose which direction our future will take and we all want a better future for ourselves (if we can) but more so for our children and our families. We the Roma people have not had the time to develop ourselves, because all our efforts have gone into surviving and striving for freedom. After 500 years of slavery, the Holocaust, 45 years under state communism, and then continual discrimination and segregation, at last we feel now we have the freedom to choose our way and for the first time we have real access to education and a health system.

We don't want to be stereotyped, demonised or to be judged. The non-Roma people also need to be educated and to learn more about our culture and history.



The world's largest Roma Genocide Remembrance Event which took place at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, with more than 400 young people from 20 countries.

If you have this history and this persecution how would YOU build your future in this country?

A lot of us have chosen to make a new life here in the UK. We have managed to find jobs, our children go to schools without persecution and discrimination. When you are Roma and you hear that in the UK you can give your children a new opportunity, you can find work, people will not judge you, you don't need to tolerate what your parents accepted, anymore, it does not take much thinking to make that decision and come here.

But the British people think that all the Roma sell is 'The Big Issue'. Wrong!!! The most visible Roma are the Roma that sell 'The Big Issue'. Why? Because they are the poor Roma. They dress more traditionally and, because of their lack of basic education, they cannot find anything else to do.

The main barrier is the language. For

them selling 'The Big Issue' is a job and a responsibility. It is a new start, and an attempt to try and make a new life. The majority of Roma here in Liverpool and the UK are invisible. YOU cannot see them, maybe YOU don't want to see them. Why? Because they are integrating. Some of them have good jobs (after two or three years of struggles) and they pay taxes. They can be your neighbour or your child's class mate.

The Roma you don't see start work on low wages on temporary contracts, often organised by gang masters and recruitment agencies. Their vulnerable situation is often exploited. Many live in sub-standard accommodation, shared with other families. After some years they can save some money and they rent a house to stay only with their family.

Hate crimes have increased since Brexit and many think that it is time for us to leave this country. But do you realise that there are Roma families who've been living here ten years or more? This is their home now, they have nothing to go back to. They have the ability to change their thinking and to adapt in this country and work for a better future and to develop

themselves. The UK is home.

Now what would YOU do? All the progress we have made you cannot delete with one click. We are born struggling and we know how to face our struggles. I believe YOU can find this in our DNA.

We don't take your jobs because all the jobs were available when we came here. We want to work, be it cleaning, warehouses (all those jobs that YOU don't like to do) and after, if our children finish their education here in the UK, a new door opens to them.

Push the hate aside and learn more about us, about our beautiful culture and traditions. <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture>
In Spain flamenco is the heart of Romani culture, it is also a mixture of Indian, Persian, Greek, Moorish, and Arabic elements.
<https://youtu.be/P-qC2XnOLVg>

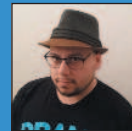
We are Roma



Gabi Lunca is a Romani singer of urban lautareasca music from Romania
https://youtu.be/B8Bd_kh_EqU



The best singer from Romania is Roma. His name is **Connect-R** and he is proud that a Roma win the best singer each year.
<https://youtu.be/3CJ2J0UMEw4>



Vicente Rodrigues Fernandes, a Roma from Spain, is one of Forbes Magazine's Most Influential People under 30. He is also a human rights activist, cartoonist, screenwriter, and founder of the Roma youth network, YAG-BARI-TERNYPE-International.

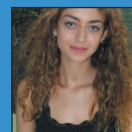


Anna Mirga is a Roma activist from Poland, a PhD student at the Autonomus University of Barcelona.

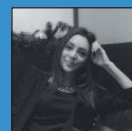


Robert Popescu a Roma doctor from Romania
<https://youtu.be/BjnY2R-ZbGQ>

There are more young people that have the opportunity to study or to travel and to make there one research and to be a model for their community. This kind of example can be also in the future here in UK. For example:



Perla (Roma from Romania), she has started her studies at The University of Birmingham.



Aurelia (Roma from Romania) she studies Law and Practice at Coventry University.

Don't judge if you don't know us and our history, don't generalize and put in your front the stereotypes that you know about us. Be human YOU = ME

MULTICULTURALSINGTON – THE SAD AND HAPPY TALE OF L7

If you did not know Kensington and Fairfield, based in Liverpool, as an area or community very well then don't believe everything you hear or read. It's probably a load of bollocks, so please carry on reading anyway.

By Steve Faragher

Just to set the scene, I've lived and worked in this area since the early 1990s so I hope what I write can be considered a reliable and accurate source.

What I think I would like to write about is that everything in the garden is rosy, United Colours of Kensington, MultiCulturalSington, but it isn't that, well not yet.

A SHORT CATCHUP AND RECENT HISTORY LESSON

After the Labour Government designated the area a 'New Deal for Communities' and sunk £62.5 million into the area from 2000 to 2010 you would have thought it might be better, but it isn't. With all this money sloshing around the area you might be mystified why I feel there hasn't been any tangible regeneration or real change.

If we go back before the money arrived it's worth saying that for many years the area had become run down, poor and disadvantaged and had become a dumping ground for some of the city's problems, consequently there occurred high levels of hard drug addiction, loss of several big industries and a consequent loss of aspirations.

Another thing you need to know is the area was a monoculture, almost exclusively white too, with only 5% BME population. One of the other big factors was that the housing was cheap, it had shifted from an area where the aspirational (younger) people got on the housing ladder, people bought their first home making enough money on this first home to buy a house in a more prosperous suburb. But the cheap houses made it somewhere that private and social landlords could buy cheap houses, rent them out and make a quick buck. Added to this, drug related criminality was on the rise too. People usually ended up here through poverty not choice. With that as the starting point, the New Deal money was supposed to solve these problems. Nice idea on paper.

THE HISTORY LESSON CONTINUES.....

So what happened next came as a shock to a lot of people from the area; the redistribution of migrants and changes in Housing Benefit laws meant that many landlords found it far more profitable to have refugees and asylum seekers as tenants, rather than indigenous people.

In a very short time the BME population rose to 25% and the area began to become more culturally diverse and mixed. One of the first effects of this change was that the area started to look and feel different. I felt it began to feel safer (to me at least).

A part of the New Deal money was ploughed into developing this diversity under the banner "United Colours of Kensington". It was a typical white middle class response, primarily by people who themselves weren't from and did not live in the area. I feel this had a big effect on some of the negative response to the new communities in Kensington and Fairfield. I also blame the Labour Government at the time for not communicating about the redistribution of people to places like Kensington. This 'Information



Photographs by Steve Lamb of shops in Kensington, The Onya Bike Scheme and LCR, Liverpool Community Radio

Vacuum' and the belief that anyone asking questions about influxes of strangers was in some way racist (remember the 2010 overheard Gordon Brown conversation in the General Election).

Some of the negativity generated was the result of keeping people in the dark about the factors affecting the changes. Some of it was down to plain ignorance and some to new thinking that spending money on multicultural events, festivals and the like would turn us all into hugging Guardian reading liberals.

“ Many landlords found it far more profitable to have refugees and asylum seekers as tenants, rather than indigenous people ”

The opposite happened. It created a whole pile of resentment and intolerance, sometimes aimed at migrants, whereas it should have been aimed at the powers that be.

So the money ended in 2010, the New Deal Circus left town and the good people of K&F have been left to their own devices, licking our collective wounds and sorting out the mess left by people who were handsomely paid and who should have known better.

END OF HISTORY LESSON

It should be in a fucking mess, but for some strange reason it isn't. The main reason it isn't is going to sound either obvious or too simplistic. The area is getting better due to the resilience of the people who live here, the desire of people to get on with each other and make things better.

I have heard some very scurrilous things said about the migrants in the area (The Great Romanian Crime Wave for example) and I have had many arguments with people with these views, but in fact the majority of this negativity comes via mainstream media and not people's personal experiences.

All of the new things in the area (the L7 supermarket is a great example) have all been the result of personal commitment and private funding. They are organic things, they are special and they involve everyone. 'Special' exclusively multicultural initiatives (Afro Festival, Chinese Festival, etc) were very provocative but ultimately had very little long term positive effects on the people.

The key to any long term success and change has got to be left to the people to sort out amongst themselves. Communities are an organic entity and they need to be encouraged and supported but not led by the nose or bribed to be one thing rather than another.

So to end on a positive note, as a local activist who organises and runs projects for PEOPLE, we managed to build and maintain strong community bonds between everyone. Everyone eats so we have a community cafe, people want cheap bikes so we run a community cycle project, people like listening to radio so we run Liverpool's only community radio station and (foreign) people need and want to learn English and British/Scouse culture so we have an ESOL group doing precisely this, supported by fantastic local volunteers.

We do all this on less than a shoestring and once Kensington New Deal is a far distant memory "things can and will only get better." Oh hang on, that's probably the wrong lyric to quote.

Steve Faragher is a Director of Kensington Vision and several other community initiatives, and has the best job in the world.

LIVERPOOL: A RICH TAPESTRY OF MIGRATION

Jill Summers works for the Liverpool City Council-based Safer & Stronger Community Team, which co-ordinates work around asylum seekers and refugees.

Meet the council members and officers working to welcome refugees... The council has an important leadership role to play in welcoming newcomers to the city, in helping them understand their rights and responsibilities as new citizens of Liverpool and helping them fulfil their potential.

Whilst we are proud to be participating in the latest national scheme to help support refugees from Syria, it's important to remember that Liverpool City Council has been welcoming and resettling refugees for many years. The history of the city is built on a rich tapestry of migration.

The Mayor himself has been very vocal in making swift commitments to take refugees in the wake of the 2015 migrant crisis, but also in calling for all local authorities to step up and play their part. The council also worked with communities in the wake of the Brexit vote to try to mitigate any negative impacts of that result.

We are well supported by our elected members who champion our work on a regular basis, advocating for movements such as City of Sanctuary and School of Sanctuary and supporting training and awareness sessions.

The council team, which co-ordinates work around asylum seekers and refugees, is called the Safer & Stronger Communities team. Officers are involved in many aspects of a refugee's journey, from checking whether the type and location of accommodation is suitable, to funding community cohesion events and establishing and supporting supplementary schools for different communities.

The team also has to deal with situations where things aren't working out, for example, where newcomers are experiencing hate crime or where the services being provided to them are falling short. Importantly, it also brings together key agencies to highlight issues and try to influence the national agenda.

But it's not just us, there are colleagues in the Housing Options, Benefits, Legal Services and many more. From officers in our Communications team who ensure that fact and not fiction is in the public domain, to those in Children's Services who look after unaccompanied asylum seeker children and those in School Improvement and Adult Learning Services who help those who arrive with little or no English; there are many dedicated officers doing their bit.

The current uncertainty around council and public sector funding in general, means that dedicating resources to these issues remains a challenge and we are constantly working with local groups to try to access funding and support.

Testing times are ahead with the changes in the Immigration Bill during 2017, but we remain positive as we hear stories of people embracing their new lives in the city, starting new businesses, making friends, putting down roots and becoming adopted Scousers.

“ Testing times are ahead with the changes in the Immigration Bill during 2017 ”



IRANIAN RAPPER FARHOOD JAFARI

By Colin Serjent Photograph by Bryn Davies

Farhood Jafari, who specialises in rap music, was forced to flee Iran due to political reasons. "I had no option due to my political activities," he said, before arriving in Liverpool in 2011.

He grew up in Tehran where he was going to study mathematics and architecture at a university there.

When he arrived in Liverpool he was imprisoned in Lancaster for four months because he did not possess the required asylum documents. He also suffered spells of homelessness and unemployment before moving to South Liverpool where he shared a house with Afghan asylum seekers.

"These experiences have only strengthened my resolve as a rapper," he remarked.

Farhood now has the right to remain in the UK until 2020.

During 2016 he worked for Liverpool Arts Biennial as a mediator, during which time he worked with young people on art projects, dealt with artist funding and also supervised the running of venues during the festival.

He also ran public programmes, for example, staging film screenings about migrants and music events, held at the independent art space 24 Kitchen Street based in the Baltic Triangle.

"24 Kitchen Street has been very supportive of me in regard to playing live gigs," commented Farhood. "I want to get more attention from the media in regard to my music."

His debut EP 'Tike Tike', which means Part Part, Reminder Reminder, Recall Recall, relates to someone sacrificing themselves. The lyrics, delivered in Farsi, relate to gay people who are taken to hospital in Iran, with surgery performed on them to make them look like a woman, for example, attaching breasts and a vagina to their bodies.

"Homosexuals and lesbians have always been discriminated against in Iran," said Farhood. "They are constantly made fun of."

The EP also speaks out about the LGBT movement in general and womens rights in the Middle East.

Tike Tike was produced by Liverpool experimental artists Kepla and Ling.

Speaking about the difference between the approach and attitudes of Iranian rappers and those in the West, Farhood strongly believes those from his home country are more political than Western rappers, who strongly oppose Iranian culture and the current political system.

"I have worked with an Iranian rapper in Birmingham", he said, "and am going to work together again. I am looking forward to this."

Farhood has also collaborated with a Kurdish rock musician based in Liverpool, who plays violin.

He is aiming to get more involved in producing music and magazines. In regard to magazines he contributes written articles and music on behalf of the publication 'Between The Borders', given this title because Europe is closing more and more borders. For example, he has penned articles on the UK deportation policies and has had his poetry published.

Farhood's future plans include running a record label called Manteq (Iranian for logic) in Liverpool, specialising in Persian rap.

"I have found Liverpool very hospitable and have made many friends here. I love people more than myself.

"If I see injustice I will speak out about it. Fighting for justice is part of me. I have done it here and in Iran. I will fight for my rights and other people's rights.

"When refused the right to seek asylum here mainly the only jobs you could find are fast food or takeaway outlets and car wash places. They are mainly run by other asylum seekers. When employed by them you often only get half the minimum wage, about £5 an hour.

"Often experienced professional people, who came to the UK from their native country, end up in low ranking jobs here.

"It is difficult to assimilate as an asylum seeker. It is hard to survive. There is a large divide between asylum seekers and the British community. It can create hate and misunderstandings."

Farhood concluded my meeting with him by stating that, "A major problem in life is a lack of communication in many regards between migrants and the native community they are now based in."

Alhussein Ahmed is a freelance translator and Sudanese refugee, and he assists Liverpool's asylum community.
Interview by Ashley McGovern

DEFENDER OF THE RIGHTS OF ASYLUM

I met with Alhussein at the beginning of a hectic week of political activism. On the Tuesday he was heading to the Houses of Parliament to speak with local MPs at the annual Sanctuary in Parliament event, and on the Thursday he was giving a presentation at a secondary school on the Wirral. Both events would involve his usual passionate defence of the rights of asylum seekers, and a moving personal narrative of his own journey from North West Sudan. He fled from his native country in 2008.

Alhussein travelled through Libya and Europe and finally settled in Liverpool at the end of 2010. Since he was granted refugee status, he has worked for Merseyside Refugee Support Network and Asylum Link Liverpool, two of the major asylum seeker support service charities in the region, as a full-time care support officer and voluntary translator.

He told me about his love for the hospitable nature of Liverpool and how he is a loyal supporter of the local charities that first taught him English and gave him generous work experience. For example, shortly after he arrived in Liverpool, he helped to maintain Asylum Link's award-winning allotment. He assists Liverpool's asylum community with full sympathy, saying "I know being a refugee or an asylum seeker costs you personally, physically or mentally and it's very difficult to rebuild your life in a different country." Alhussein is well aware of the common feelings of homesickness and trauma shared by asylum seekers.

However, the grassroots embrace of suffering asylum seekers is a different world to that of the UK Border Agency. He explained that "there are two UKs, the official and the community. The official, the government is not welcoming, whereas the community and the people are very welcoming." He cited the negative examples of the unbearably long and distressing asylum interview process and the Immigration Removal Centres for those whose applications are ultimately rejected, which in 2015 was 65%.

He also argued that the media are a significant force in framing the current so-

called 'migrant crisis'. In his view, the largest share of press attention has fallen on the Syrian Civil War and the diplomatic troubles of the EU in dealing with over a million refugees on mainland Europe. However, there are more stories than Syria, from countries all across the Middle East and Africa.

As he explained his own journey of refuge he continually referred to the more precarious situations of his two younger brothers: Issi, aged 18, and Abdulrahman, aged 15. He is particularly worried about his 'very vulnerable' youngest brother, Abdulrahman, and his anxious manner is moving. Though they fled Khartoum, Sudan's capital city, together, they ended up in very different places. Abdulrahman is now stuck in Cairo, Egypt, a place known for its open hostility towards Sudanese refugees and one of the longest refugee processes in the world.

Unlike European Union systems, he says, in Cairo "it's more difficult than here. In Cairo, if the United Nations doesn't help, society will not help you...there is no human rights legislation." The effects of living with an unchanging 'yellow card' (the colour marking temporary asylum) is homelessness and sometimes tragic involvement in sickening trades like organ selling. As an unaccompanied minor in a



Alhussein Ahmed and Louise Ellman (Labour MP for Liverpool Riverside)



neglectful bureaucratic system, he fears greatly for Abdulrahman's safety.

The reason for the tragic separation of the Ahmed brothers is the ongoing trouble in Sudan. Since the bloodless coup of Omar al-Bashir in 1989, Sudan has been in a state of permanent, irreconcilable Civil War. President Bashir is a totalitarian leader, charged with two counts of war crimes and genocide by the ICC, and feared by the Sudanese population as a fanatical believer in an almighty Islamic State.

Alhussein detailed his nation's recent history. He explained Bashir's tactic of exploiting ethnic tensions and hosting neighbouring terrorist groups, turning the country into a 'home for criminal people'. He clearly dislikes the current regime, something he gained from his father, who is a teacher and strident member of the National Umma Party, the largest anti-government party in Sudan.

Yet Alhussein is quick to clarify that his humanitarian activism takes precedence over party politics. He is not a member of Umma Party, arguing simply that "I'm an independent person and act for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, rights of Sudanese women and children...I'm someone who wants to see his country as a good country, something I can be proud of. No war, no fighting, no conflict. I want to see democracy and freedom in our country and that's all."

He remains positive about Sudan's great natural potential: "Sudan is very rich in terms of agriculture, livestock. It's not a very industrial country, but the people have enough to eat, we have water and we have the longest river in the world – the Nile." The real problem is that Sudan has no governmental stability. Naturally, elections are rigged in Bashir's favour and proposed peace deals – like the Controlled Peace Agreement in 2005, the creation of the two independent states, Sudan and South Sudan in 2011 – have not put an end to ethnic conflict.

Alhussein's ultimate wish is to return to a reformed democratic Sudan and re-unite with his family. "I have a confidence in the Sudanese people...Sudan is a promising country." In the meantime, he will continue with his heartfelt activism and his fight to see his two brothers.

(Less than two weeks after this interview, Alhussein received a triumphant piece of news. His younger brother Issi, who had been in Calais' notorious 'Jungle', was finally brought to England to live with him.)

Immigration is a constant aspect of political debate and people seeking asylum very rarely have their say.
Report by Vicky Canning

SWARMS. CRISIS. CALAIS JUNGLE. INFLUX. OPEN DOOR BRITAIN...

Anyone reading these words is likely to have already equated them to immigration. Without even needing to use the terms 'migrant', 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker', each term has become synonymous with a foreign 'Other', and conjures up images similar to those that Nigel Farage so proudly stood in front of in 2016... Masses of non-white people intent on reaching their new lives in Britain, at whatever cost.

Despite the political focus on the potential impact of the 'refugee crisis' on the UK, the reality has been very different. In a year that saw 'unparalleled' migration into Europe since the Second World War, only around 38,000 people made it to Britain to seek asylum in 2015. In the same year, 3,771 lives were lost in the Mediterranean, all trying to reach the safer shores of Europe.

Immigration is a constant feature of political debate, and people seeking asylum face a barrage of untruths about their lives and experiences. Over the past decade, while researching the British asylum system, one stark truth stands out: that the reality of asylum in Britain is not even vaguely reflective of what it is regularly portrayed to be.

As the words opening this article suggest, not much has changed with regard to the representation of migrants

over the years, including those seeking asylum. You might already know that the 'free mobile phones' and 'travel passes' don't exist. Neither do the 'big houses' or 'fancy cars'. But more insidiously, neither does choice – choice about where you will live or whether you can work. For some, even choices about what your money can be spent on, where you can shop, or whether you can buy alcohol is limited or non-existent. All the things that are part of the everyday for most people are reduced or eroded.

The reality is that, in place of autonomy or wellbeing, is the constant spectre of social control. People seeking asylum are not permitted to work, and so are forcibly state dependent. The obvious problem this leads to is poverty: a single person is entitled to just over £36 per week – around half that of jobseeker allowance. As a GP working with refugees went as

“ For people seeking asylum the effects of poverty are often compounded by the threat of detention or deportation ”

far as to say, *'there are two systems of welfare for people in this country, one is for British people and one is for asylum seekers'*.

Women I speak with are sometimes in physical pain from having to walk miles, hungry because they are forced to choose between food, travel and the wellbeing of their children. Just over £5 per day is supposed to cover toiletries, sanitary products and warm clothes as well.

In an era of food banks and increased destitution, we well know that poverty is not confined to asylum. As more and more people face job losses, violent austerity measures and increased financial uncertainty, poverty is commonplace. For people seeking asylum, however, the effects of poverty are often compounded by the threat of detention or deportation. Even attending regular Home Office signings can evoke anxiety.

In a focus group for a previous research project, one woman told me that, *'They [Immigration Officers] speak to you, not like you should not be in the country, but like you should not be on the planet'*, while another stated that in interviews, *'You feel like you want to kill yourself. Just jump through that window'*.

At any given time, a person seeking asylum can be detained at the Home Office, or transferred to one of Britain's



eleven Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs). Here, people can be held indefinitely in prison-like conditions, facing curfews and regulated daily procedures, which include headcounts. Some women in IRC Yarl's Wood have likened their treatment to that of cattle. As women I speak with often point out, the fear of arbitrary detention adds to anxieties as the Home Office interviews approach.

Alongside detention, people are well aware of the most dangerous potential outcome: deportation to the country from which they have fled conflict, violent partners or persecution. Hawwi – a participant in oral history – was twice denied asylum despite having evidenced her own torture and abuse at the hands of her government. She concluded, *'There is no way I am going to escape the eyes of the government, and there is no means of surviving there.... Deciding to return me there is killing me'*. Most people who apply for asylum are refused, but Hawwi eventually gained the right to remain in the UK. However, the number of people who are subjected to torture or even death on return is unknown, since contact with individuals is often lost. Still, as Hawwi often stated, the fear of such a threat remains while people await the outcome of their asylum claim.

Supporting survival, or inflicting further harm?

People seeking asylum have often experienced highly traumatic events, including conflict, death, abuse in detention, to name just a few. Instead of holistic support, however, people are more often left in poverty with minimal practical provision. Some face racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, or all three. All of these have the potential to make the impacts of trauma – such as depression, sleeplessness, chronic fatigue and nightmares – much, much worse.

Over the years I have spoken with women survivors who have been raped by border guards, husbands or partners, and militia. A psychologist who had been supporting survivors of torture for 18 years told me, *'They may have been raped in conflict, raped as a method of torture. Many of the women who visit here have come from rape camps in Central Africa. They've been raped more times than I can even imagine.'*

For anyone seeking asylum, the stress and uncertainty of the system can have serious effects on people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. For women – a group commonly affected by sexual violence, domestic violence and sexual torture – the process can make the impacts of violence even worse. And yet women are routinely disbelieved, particularly in instances of sexual or



domestic violence. This is well recognised by survivors of violence, with one focus group participant arguing that, *'Women are not believed. They want to see your corpse. Until then they won't believe it.'*

The reality of people's lives in asylum is one of limbo. Women and men are left to fill time – sometimes years – with endless battles for refugee status, and limited autonomy over daily life and, like Hawwi, sometimes feeling that, *'There is no way we are coping with life, and it is very, very hard really. It's very hard.'*

As a society, our eyes are trained on asylum seekers as spongers, taking jobs from British workers and existing on benefits paid for by taxes. People can't 'steal' jobs, because they are not permitted to work. The benefits people receive *per week* amount to just under half of what it takes to detain someone in an IRC *per day* and yet more than 33,000 people were detained last year alone.

Perhaps it is time to truly challenge myths around asylum and immigration, to collectively reject negative assumptions, and not only for the wellbeing of those who are in the system. For as long as we continue to train our focus on those who

are amongst the most powerless in society, we are deflected from what is happening amongst the most powerful. While we as a society squabble with people seeking asylum over the £36 they receive a week or free NHS prescriptions, politicians and corporate executives are profiting from immigration detention and building borders.

While we continue looking down, those above our heads are facilitating a wholesale dismantlement of the very welfare systems that some of the poorest and least powerful people lean on to survive, and that includes people seeking asylum.

Victoria Canning is a feminist asylum rights activist, and Lecturer in Criminology at The Open University. She is presently researching the gendered harms of seeking asylum in Britain, Denmark and Sweden. Her latest book, *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*, has recently been published.

THE UK IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRES – ARE THERE SERIOUS FLAWS?

Are Immigration Removal Centres working?

By Ashley McGovern

It was announced in September 2016 that Dungavel, Lanarkshire, one of the UK's ten Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs), was to be closed down. The centre was often a cause of controversy and campaign groups had long signalled the damaging effects of detention – poor treatment, unduly long detention periods, and, up until 2010, the detention of children.

Despite a moment of rejoicing, the replacement scheme, to build a new 51-bed centre, right beside Glasgow Airport, has not brought about a momentous victory for asylum seeker rights campaigners.

It is highly unusual for the government to listen and implement change on the topic of immigration detention. When Home Secretary, Theresa May commissioned a six-month investigation into IRC conditions from Stephen Shaw, which concluded that many of the UK centres follow cruel practices, including sexual abuse and high-levels of self-harm due to forced depression.

He concluded that detention is ineffective and desperately in need of reform. Despite the damning findings, nothing has been done.

Asylum applications reached 32,414 in 2015 and 64% of initial decisions were refused. While this decision-making is underway, people who have travelled from the most troubled and violent places in the world (Syria, Sudan, and Afghanistan) are forced into prison-like removal centres. The common reasons for detention are: no proper documentation, the supposedly rapid DFT (Detained Fast Track procedure), cases where removal is 'imminent', and when certain individuals are not considered 'conducive to public good'.

The Shaw Report concluded that there was a "very low risk of non-compliance" amongst asylum seekers, yet the general pattern of the present asylum policy is to let anxious people fret in detention. The bureaucracy surrounding the process seems almost purposefully designed to disbelieve tales of persecution and lock people in an authorised form of exile.

The clearest case of this attitude is the DFT procedure. This supposedly time-saving idea is for those whom the Home Office consider eligible for a rapid assessment i.e. those seekers whose claim is straight-forward. Ideally, this should take two weeks; however, once detained the process can drag out.

With limited legal representation and often rapidly hurried processes that give little room for their entirely legitimate claims for refuge, they are either denied or kept in IRCs for illegal lengths of time. 90% of the initial claims are refused (lawyers having a single day to prepare the case), and though entitled to contest the decision at the Appeals Immigration Tribunal, the claimants receive no notice or legal aid to do so.

Although promised the application process takes less than a few weeks, in 2014 19% were held for more than two months, while 161 people were held for more than a year. As campaign group Liberty has pointed out, this goes directly against Article 5 of the Human Rights Act.

Furthermore, as campaign groups such as Detention Action, AVID and the Refugee

“ There is a dark and damaging shadow aspect to bureaucratic neglect: mental health problems ”

Council repeatedly highlight, there is a dark and damaging shadow aspect to bureaucratic neglect: mental health problems. Many cases of depression are documented, along with sleep deprivation, feelings of imprisonment, distress, and even more malevolent examples of



Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre in Lanarkshire



maltreatment from IRC guards.

In one BBC report, a detainee told of how fellow asylum seekers in Yarl's Wood Centre, a primarily female removal centre, are often told that they are faking illnesses. The consequences of this are eventual destitution. Asylum seekers have no right to work in the country and so are given a pitiful allowance - a single parent and one child is awarded £73.90 a week - and either indefinite prison holdings or dire temporary accommodation.

In defiance of the system there is a great amount of activism, in particular by the Refugee Council, and even clear, substantiated proposals for how the system could be changed.

A report published in 2015 by the International Detention Coalition recommended an integrative, community-focused alternative, as opposed to a detention system. They detailed in over 115 pages the benefits of immediate "community-based management" for the length of time the Home Office considers the refugee claim. As well as being ultimately cost-effective for the public purse, the true purpose of this recommendation is to support health needs, stabilize the vulnerable and previously tortured, and avoid human rights breaches.

Evidence for the proposal was lifted from genuine alternative systems operating around the globe, the most subtle and progressive model being Sweden. In that country, prospective refugees are issued an ID card and an individual caseworker to monitor progress. They are given a daily allowance, emergency medical care if needed, and a lawyer paid for by the Swedish Migration Board. On top of just representation there are also opportunities for 'motivation counselling' and eventual incentives for repatriation if the result should come back negative.

The current Conservative government in the UK is insulted by Europe, not embarrassed by it. There is little chance of a progressive approach inspiring officials. The answer to the murky network of removal centres most likely resides in harnessing the charitable resources already in action across the country.

If spending was poured into a partnership with community charities, and a community-managed holding procedure introduced, the rights of asylum seekers could co-exist with fair assessment.

Has Liverpool and Britain always been a land of immigration?

IMMIGRATION AND LIVERPOOL: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Anthony McCarthy from PIPS (Philosophy In Pubs, Liverpool)

Britain has always been a land of immigration. The Iron Age Celts arrived and then the Romans. We know that, in 250 AD, a group of 'black legionnaires' stood guard on Hadrian's Wall. It must have been a culture shock for them, from the weather point of view, at least.

Next came the so-called Dark Ages (5th Century) and the Angles and Saxons arrived from what we now call Germany. The pivotal year of 1066 saw the arrival of the Normans and a wholesale change in the prevailing culture of the land of Britain. Many of these changes (law and administration) were for the better.

It is hardly necessary to mention the Vikings in the Liverpool area (c. 900 AD) because they still have a massive genome trace on the Wirral.

African drummers were in Edinburgh in 1505. The local people found their 'strange' percussive sounds fascinating. Outsiders have always contributed to art in Britain and the West in general. Rock and roll had its roots in African music, for example.

Not all ethnic groups fared well under British law: in 1562 Queen Elizabeth I passed The Egyptian Act. The latter was an attempt to control immigration of Gypsies into the country. As usual, the host country wanted to cherry-pick skills from its immigrants. Weavers from the Low Countries were a highly prized work-force in the 14th Century onwards because of the vast quantities of money to be made from textiles.

It is said that in 1440 there were 16,000 foreigners in Britain out of an estimated population of 2.5 million. This suggests that actual numbers of immigrants into this country have been historically low, but tended to be exaggerated.

The first piece of modern immigration-specific legislation in Britain was passed in 1905. It was in response to increasing numbers of Eastern Europeans landing in London, where poverty and lack of jobs were already perceived as massive problems for the locals. The Act stipulated that there was no automatic right of entry, and that would-be immigrants had to prove they could financially maintain themselves and be of previous good character.

So, as stated above, Britain has always been a land of immigration. It would be quite difficult to define, ethnically, what a Briton was because of the wide-ranging historical inputs into the population.

There were political and social milestones, too. Britain's first non-white MP appeared in 1892 (an Indian called Dadabhai Naoroji); and the first non-white professional footballer, Arthur Wharton, played in an FA Cup Final for Preston North End in 1887.

Liverpool played a big role in welcoming the French Huguenots into Britain. The Huguenots were fleeing religious persecution. There is a record in St. Nicholas Church, Liverpool, of one of its rectors (William Atherton: 1657-1706) organizing fundraising events to help the newcomers. By the way, Atherton had been a curate in Kirkby (now in Knowsley).

Here are two Liverpool immigrants. They should be much better known, both locally and nationally. They arrived in Liverpool after political struggle, adding a lot to the educational and artistic development of Liverpool.

In 1823 Anthony Panizzi (1797-1879) appeared in Liverpool. Panizzi had fled Italy as a political refugee. He settled in Liverpool and worked as a teacher of Italian until 1828. His innovations in language teaching were very popular in the city. He made language learning much more active and accessible for all levels of ability.



Photo of Roscoe Gardens, the burial place of Joseph White, by Steve Lamb

Panizzi moved to London in 1828 and worked as Professor of Italian in University College until 1831.

He wrote a grammar of Italian during his time there. In 1831 he became a librarian in the British Museum. In 1859 Oxford University awarded him a DCL (Doctor of Civil Law). Panizzi is not as well-known as he should be. He did a lot to promote education in Liverpool. He arrived in the city with nothing but went on to find fame and some fortune through his own efforts.

Joseph Blanco White (1775-1841) is another man who should be much better known in Liverpool. He was a political journalist and arrived here from Spain c. 1808, seeking asylum from Napoleonic invaders. Actually, Blanco had an English father but had lived in Spain most of his life. He was active as a poet in Liverpool and wrote his most famous piece in 1828, *Night and Day*. He was very active in the church in Liverpool (Unitarian) and was involved in useful charity work. Thousands of Liverpudlians pass his grave every day without a clue that they are doing so. He is buried in Roscoe Gardens at the foot of Mount Pleasant.

I would like to finish this article by mentioning another great 'refugee'- the ancient Greek philosopher, Diogenes of Sinope (412 BC-323 BC). When landing in a foreign place, he was asked what his nationality was. He answered famously: "I am a citizen of the world." He saw 'nationality' as a legal fiction, a piece of paper. He felt the whole world belonged to everyone, equally.

A similar thing happened to Captain James Cook in Australia (1728-1779). One day Cook was busy drawing a map. A group of Aborigines looked at his map and then exclaimed: "We have never seen lines on the ground before."

The Aborigines saw the map as an artificial thing; it had no counterpart in nature.

Centuries later an Aborigine elder came to Britain. He went to the beach in Brighton. He planted an aboriginal flag into the sand, to the astonishment of the people on the beach, and said: "I claim this land for the Aboriginal peoples of Australia."

Everybody laughed. He gave them a serious look and said: "This is all you did in Australia."

The last word goes back to a paraphrase of the idea of Diogenes: birds migrate without let or hindrance. The world is for everyone.

FACT

By Refugee Support Network

Arriving in the UK can be confusing for asylum seekers, with many of them unaware of the complex asylum process. A large number of asylum seekers are imprisoned because they do not understand the system.

NOT FICTION

asylum (*noun*) haven, sanctuary, refuge, shelter, retreat, safety.

In 1951 the Geneva Convention put guidelines into place for governments dealing with asylum seekers and potential refugees. Under this convention a refugee is a person with

"a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion..." (Article 1A(2)).

All signatory states have an obligation to provide asylum for those who fit the above description, and to allow them to resettle and create new lives.

What is an asylum seeker?

In the UK an asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum with the Border & Immigration Agency of the Home Office (BIA), and who is waiting for a decision. If an asylum seeker receives a positive decision they become a refugee with full rights to access employment, healthcare, education and benefits.

Why do people flee their own countries?

The majority of asylum seekers and refugees feel that their safety, or that of their families, is at risk in their home country. This can be due to oppressive regimes, civil war, international conflicts, or many other factors that lead to persecution against individuals or groups. One important point is that these people are unable to ask their own government for protection. Some come from countries where there is no government to ask, and where lawlessness rules. Some examples of countries from which asylum seekers are currently coming are: Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Somalia.

Why choose the UK?

For those few who have a say in their destination the main factors in choosing a country are:-

- The presence of friends or relatives
- Belief that the UK is safe, tolerant and democratic
- Historical links between their country

“ My message to you is: if you are given just enough time and just enough money to live in peace, then be thankful and live that time to the full. I also hope that you are always safe and that you always have friends. I hope that nobody looks at you and calls you bad names for no reason other than that you are different. ”

Young Asylum Seeker,
A Place of Sanctuary

REFUGEE

So I have a new name – refugee
Strange that a name should take away from me
My past, my personality and hope
Strange refuge this.
So many seem to share this name – refugee
Yet we share so many differences

I find no comfort in my new name
I long to share my past, restore my pride,
To show, I too, in time, will offer more
Than I have borrowed.
For now the comfort that I seek
Resides in the old yet new name
I would choose – friend.

Written by Ruvimbo Bungwe, Zimbabwe

“ You don’t have to be from any particular background to become a Refugee. You don’t have to be educated or rich or poor or any particular thing. You just have to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It can happen to anyone. ”

Asylum Seeker, Liverpool

of origin and the UK

- Ability to speak English or a desire to learn

People make positive decisions in order to secure the best future for themselves and their families. Research carried out by the Home Office

(www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r172.pdf) concluded that asylum seekers have very little prior knowledge of UK immigration procedures and the benefits system. This point can be easily illustrated by logging onto www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk and seeing if you can figure out what will be expected of you, and what you will receive (also note that this information is only available in English and Welsh). Most asylum seekers expect to have to support themselves only to find that they are not allowed to work and are made to rely on state benefits.

Getting Here

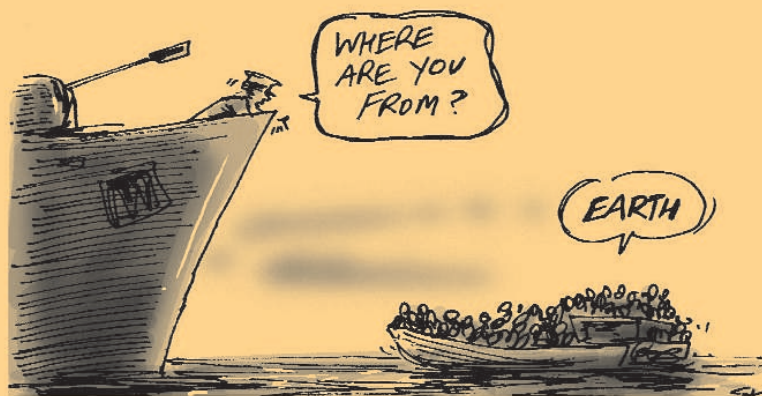
Due to the situations they are leaving, asylum seekers often use false documents to escape their countries. This fact is recognised in the Geneva Convention –

“States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees...” (Geneva Convention Article 31)

This destroys the myth of the “illegal” asylum seeker...there is no such thing! ALL people have a right to request asylum in a country other than their own. The more fortunate may have enough money to choose where they go and how to travel while the less fortunate may be packed into the back of a lorry with their families, unaware of their destination.

Arriving in the UK

Arriving in the UK can be very confusing for asylum seekers. New arrivals are unlikely to be familiar with the asylum process: forms to fill in; interviews to attend; fingerprints taken, and all in a foreign language. Many asylum seekers are imprisoned simply because they do not understand the system or are completely unaware of it. People must apply for asylum at the port of entry or the UKVI offices in Croydon.



What Next?

Most applicants will be provided with accommodation and subsistence funds. Asylum seekers must accept the accommodation offered regardless of location or state of repair. Some are held in detention centres. Asylum seekers sometimes choose England due to the presence of family/friends or an established community from their home country, but find that they are unable to be near these people to access support (moral or material) without jeopardising their benefits or accommodation. Asylum seekers are the only people in this country who, despite committing no criminal offences, can be detained indefinitely with no legal representation.

A Waiting Game

Asylum applications can take anything upwards of four weeks to process. Many people wait years for a decision. Not knowing whether your application will be accepted and, therefore, whether your family will be moved on can be extremely stressful, and is often made worse by the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder. During this period of uncertainty many try hard to re-build their lives: doing voluntary work; sending their children to local schools; becoming involved with local church groups, mother and toddler groups and communities and learning English and 'citizenship' skills.

A refusal...what happens now?

Only some of those who are refused asylum are entitled to a court appeal, and only some of those entitled to appeal will get legal representation. As a result, many asylum seekers represent themselves at appeal. In 2015 35% of cases that were initially refused were won at appeal, testament to the difficulties and frustration of the decision making process. That 35% equates to 3,234 individuals/families across the UK whose initial negative decision was judged to have been unfair. The Government's Firmer Fairer Faster programme certainly speeded decision making, but the fact that 35% of appeals still succeed makes nonsense of the 'fairer' aspect. Speed is no substitute for accuracy.

Once a final negative decision has been made the next step is to deport people back to their country of origin. Despite this there are cases where asylum has

been refused, but there is no safe route of return due to war or oppression, eg. Zimbabwe and Afghanistan. In these cases people must apply for new types of support through NASS and 'Section 4'. Entitlement to support may be jeopardised if a family is not taking active steps to return to their country voluntarily, even where the government acknowledges there is no safe route of return. People on Section 4 support receive £35 a week in vouchers, which they can only spend in certain shops. Sometimes they are only able to buy food, but other essentials, for example, toothpaste, nappies and sanitary products cannot be purchased. We have lobbied hard to end this degrading system.

In severe cases where families feel unable to sign up for voluntary return, Section 9 legislation allows for the separation of families, with parents being denied all support and children being taken into care by local authorities. Despite our government's criticism of regimes like Zimbabwe and Sudan, it continues to attempt to return refused asylum seekers to those regimes.

Refugee status...what happens now?

Once a positive decision has been made refugees have 28 days to move out of NASS accommodation. The fact that refugees have not been allowed to work (ie. earn) can create difficulties in finding private or other rented accommodation. The change in rights can be confusing, and is often ill explained. The government recently announced a new scheme which allocates all new refugees a caseworker for one month to help them access housing, employment or education. This has been criticised by many refugee support agencies, who believe that the process of preparing people should begin before a claim is decided.

People granted refugee status have full access to education, health and other services provided by the state. Under new legislation, even recognised refugees will be granted only five years or less to stay in the UK, before a further review. This causes uncertainty and is a hindrance to meaningful resettlement and integration. Why should people engage with society, buy a home, contribute to the economy, push ahead with their children's education or even learn the language, if they are to be sent back at the end of five years?

No Right to Work

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and are therefore unable to support themselves. Home Office research found that most expected to be self-sufficient during the application process but the reality leaves all asylum seekers to be supported by the state. Like UK residents, asylum seekers must send their children to school and have access to primary NHS healthcare. Stories hinting that asylum seekers steal jobs and get free mobile phones are simply that...stories. Many asylum seekers volunteer for support agencies like the CAB, Asylum Link Merseyside or Refugee Action and more volunteer in areas such as education or research. Recent changes also mean that asylum seekers are no longer able to access English classes until they have been in the UK for more than six months, making it harder to look after the basics such as buying milk and getting on the bus.

Individuals surviving on £5.28 a day...could you?

Most asylum seekers are eligible to apply to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for living support. Adults receive 51% of UK income support (just £36.95 a week) to cover all living expenses. The accommodation provided varies from self-contained homes to hostel style accommodation. Families often have difficulty meeting basic needs such as clothes, school books, furniture, sanitary products, or extras such as mobile phones to allow them to keep in touch with family in their country of origin. Voluntary organisations often step in, providing second hand clothing, food and other necessities.

Merseyside Refugee Support

Network (MRSN) works in partnerships across Merseyside to raise awareness of issues faced by asylum seekers, and to support refugees and asylum seekers in accessing services in the region. In particular this includes supporting refugees on the journey towards employment, providing information, signposting and bespoke services to individuals where possible.

For further information contact Seana, Margaret or Karen on 0151 709 7557

Information Sources: 'Asylum Statistics 4th Quarter 2006 United Kingdom' www.rds.homeoffice.gov.uk
The Geneva Convention 1951,
Asylum Aid, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, The Home Office,
Refugee Council/Oxfam
www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

MIGRANT ARTISTS AND MUTUAL AID

Rob Harrison interviewed Jen Verson about her role with MaMa, who actively campaign for justice in the migration system.

This autumn is the fifth anniversary of Migrant Artists Mutual Aid (MaMa), a cross national network of women, mothers, migrants, artists, academics and activists who work together to support members of our group who are seeking sanctuary, and campaign for justice in the migration system. From the beginning they have held events to raise legal fighting funds for women and children seeking sanctuary. In 2012 MaMa participated in V-Day, an International movement to end violence against women and girls in which people around the world perform Eve Ensler's play *The Vagina Monologues* to raise money for grassroots groups. It was a great opportunity for all those people mentioned above to work together. 'we came together to support a friend who needed a specialist solicitor for her asylum struggle to protect her daughter from female genital mutilation. By 2014, when we decided to perform it again, MaMa had started holding weekly drop-in sessions, which were regularly attended by twenty women from around the world, most of whom were in the asylum

process. The above is all from the bluecoat blog <http://www.thebluecoat.org.uk/blog/view/w-ho-is-blogging/267>

What cross section of people does it represent?

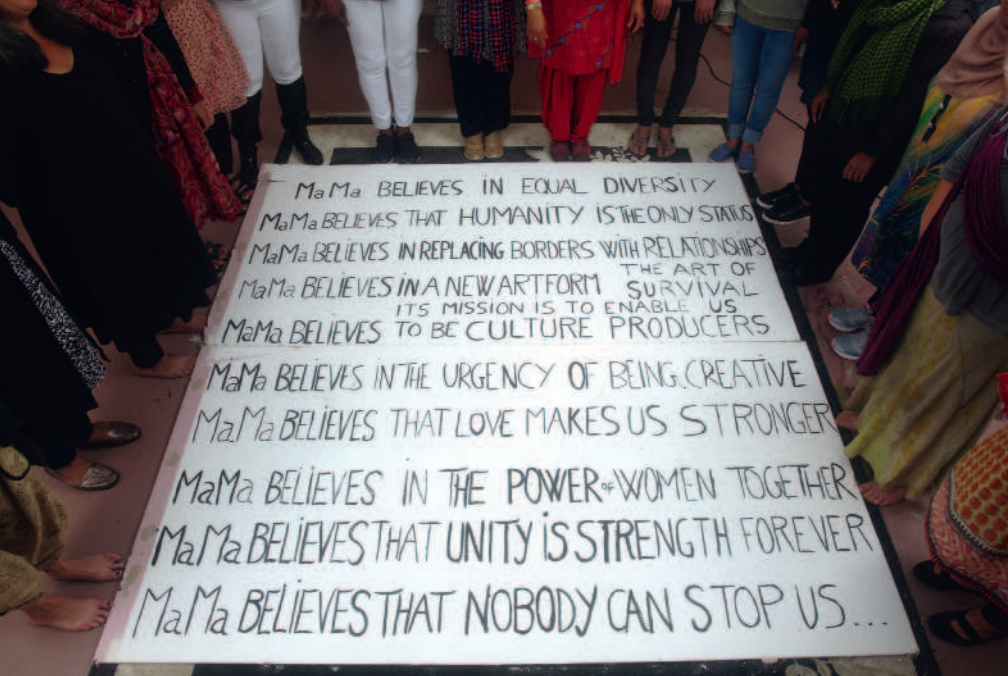
We use the term migrant to embrace all people who move, whether it's from North Liverpool to South Liverpool or the Democratic Republic of Congo. The letters MaMa stand for migrant artists and mutual aid, but also reflect our origin of mothers working together.

What problems have you encountered in campaigning for justice in the migration system?

One would say that in the five years that we have been going, there has been a major change in people campaigning for justice. When we first started doing anti-deportation campaigns, it was common for community groups to petition the Home Office on compassionate grounds. In 2013 there was a massive campaign for Isa Muaza, a Nigerian hunger striker. But

Theresa May, as Home Secretary at the time, didn't respond to any pleas on compassionate grounds. Likewise the campaign for Yashika Bageerathi, an A-level student, whose classmates mounted a campaign for her to stay and finish her exams. We try to focus on evidence relating to Geneva Convention protections rather than appealing for compassion, as there appears to be very little compassion. I call it post compassion campaigning. You can't rely on the Home Office or the government to make decisions on grounds of common humanity. We need to rely on international agreements to make sure that women and children are protected under the Geneva Convention. It feels like the strategy of the Home Office under Theresa May was to shuffle difficult cases to the bottom of the pile. Most of the people in our group waited for a very, very long time for a decision. What has happened while the cases were at the bottom of the pile is that access to legal aid has been limited, so now when people get refused they can't get legal aid for judicial reviews. We now run into the





perfect storm of no access to justice and refusals that are not in line with international law. There has been another development in that the Liverpool council has decided to limit the procurement of new asylum properties, so the support that people had with the resources in Liverpool has been minimized, limiting people's ability to advocate for themselves. We don't underestimate the Home Office. There has recently been a change in the procedures for forced removals. Instead of a fixed forced removal date for the asylum seeker or refugee to be put onto a plane, there is now a 'removal window'. One of our members has had this done to them recently. You can't relax as you could go at any moment. This is also a strategy to discourage any form of effective campaign to get airlines to refuse to carry people against their will. As campaigners get better at fighting removals the Home Office changes its processes in order to keep one step ahead of the campaigners.

“ You can't rely on the Home Office or the UK government to make decisions on grounds of common humanity ”

It sounds like mental torture for someone?

Well, they have also 'changed' the definition of torture in September 2016 www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS07_2016.pdf. Past experience has shown that the community is integral to encourage people to talk about their sometimes horrific situations in a safe and comfortable environment, especially for survivors of gender-based violence. This sense of safety is essential in order to

finally speak about their experience.

What type of events have you staged to raise legal funds for women and children seeking sanctuary in the UK?

Well the things mentioned previously and in 2014. We started singing as a way to include the whole group. Our creative focus has been the choir since then. The work of the choir is based on a 'repertoire' constructed around the idea that songs, like people, migrate. We come together with lots of different women with lots of different songs, and our songs become our stories. When we sing each other's songs the choir and the audience enter into a temporary autonomous zone, a place where we are at home. We have also just finished a big photography and performance project but raising legal funds is a difficult issue. When we started six hundred pounds would solve a problem, but now you are looking at sixteen hundred just to get a solicitor for an appeal for one member, and there are twenty people who come to the group every week. You can't raise that with a hotpot dinner, so we are having to look at new strategies. The UK government presently is reluctant to recognize legally that states are either directly persecuting or condoning the persecution of women just because they are women. Asylum seekers fleeing gender-based violence, if they are supported properly, will become global voices for equality and justice. Instead we are locking people up in detention centres, and pushing them into poverty and destitution. If we empower women who are standing up to violence, instead of persecuting them through a hostile asylum system, we will be sowing the seeds for a better future.

The full article can be found on the Nerve website www.catalystmedia.org.uk

'EVERYONE AT LEAST SHOULD HAVE SOMEWHERE TO GO'

Mikyla Jane Durkan, director of Potentially Brilliant Productions, describes the drama workshops they run on socially related topics, particularly in regard to the 'Refugee' play staged at the Casa during April 2017.

We have as a group, over a 12 week period, examined some of the astonishing and disgraceful facts about the refugee situation incorporating the current crisis, the blurred definitions and use of language to confuse and demean, the political and economic causes and historical treatment and attitudes concerning refugees.

Fundamentally we have tried to explore and empathise by using drama and theatre to understand [or imagine the unimaginable] how it must feel to be forced to leave your family and home.

We have used the stylistic principles of Greek Theatre combined with individual's stories from the group (whose experience vary from first hand experience of the 'Jungle' in Calais to volunteering with Refugee groups). Other participants had no prior knowledge or experience of refugees but came along to learn and explore.



Theatre can't change the world but it can be a place to question, empathise and hold a mirror up to look at ourselves and society and we hope, at the very least, make an audience more aware and able to question our understanding and treatment of refugees, as a society.

'PB challenges, its theatre that gives people a voice, theatre that aims to raise awareness about issues that effect all our lives'.

LGBT AND THE ASYLUM AND REFUGEE COMMUNITY

By MIMOZA GASHI

The UK has a long standing history of offering sanctuary and protection to some of the most vulnerable groups of people in the world. The horrific atrocities of the Second World War unfortunately were an awakening call to the UK and the rest of the international world to make sure history did not repeat itself.

As a result of this the UK played a significant role in drafting the UN Convention, alongside 48 countries, in order to protect individuals from brutal dictatorships and offer those citizens a symbol of hope. However, offering hope and protection is one that the UK is continuously failing in its policy. What is written on paper and what is actually put into practice are significantly two separate procedures. Decision makers are interpreting policies to their own accord, meaning each case is dealt with differently with no consistency.

The most vulnerable individuals who do not satisfy the cultural norm within their communities, within their country of origin, due to their distinct characteristics, are shunned by their peers, violated, abused, imprisoned and murdered.

Five years ago the UK government promised to offer sanctuary and protection to those who are fleeing persecution because of their gender and sexual identity. The UK may be the friendliest LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) country in Europe. However, it's saddening to say it is still failing to stand by its promise.

The LGBT asylum and refugee community is up against a system put in place to challenge and inappropriately question one's identity, with no consideration given to the high risk of exposure in the individual's country of origin and the lack of state protection for the individual if returned.

In 2010, UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (UKLGIG) exposed that 98-99% of gay and lesbian asylum seekers had been refused asylum and told to go back, often to violently homophobic countries like Iran and Uganda. It has become very evident and apparent from decisions we have read, appeal hearings and Home Office interviews we have attended, the harshness of a very unsympathetic asylum system.

Individuals were (and continue to be) forcibly removed from the UK and told to go back and live "discreetly" and conceal their sexual and gender identity. In 2014, Theresa May, the then Home Secretary,

commissioned the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to conduct an investigation into the treatment of gay, lesbian and bi people claiming asylum. The investigation found a fifth of asylum interviews contained stereotyping and a tenth contained inappropriate questions likely to elicit a sexual response.

Many Hands One Heart members (LGBT asylum and refugee support group in Liverpool) have reported that, although the investigation may have influenced change on paper and decision makers have been trained, inappropriate and explicit questions are still being asked to establish one's identity.

Hearing members' experience in the asylum system has highlighted concerns that cases are not being treated with respect and dignity, and more needs to be done in order for the Home Office to improve their practices to create a fairer system.

In order to address the above issues and influence change, in January 2014 an agreement was drawn up between the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Liverpool and Sahir House for a research project specifically focusing on LGBT people's experience in the UK's Asylum Application process.

Sahir House has a long standing history in supporting and advocating for individuals from the LGBT community. The organisation recognised a need to explore and evidence the unique experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) asylum seekers and refugees in the asylum process and how their support needs differ as they go through the different stages of the process.

The research was able to identify social, structural and personal barriers individuals faced during the asylum process and the detrimental effect on their mental and

“ What is written on paper and what is actually put into practice are significantly two separate procedures ”

physical health. Individuals were not emotionally or mentally ready to disclose due to the fear of being ostracised by their peers and community. The research called for a safe, confidential and secure space for LGBT asylum and refugee support groups where the above fears and concerns could be addressed by providing



support and information from key professionals i.e. legal representatives, etc.

In 2016, in partnership with the third sector and voluntary organisations, Sahir House launched the first LGBT asylum and refugee support group Many Hands One Heart. The group was able to establish its main aims, which were collated via a number of questions put forward to members in order to achieve the group's objectives. Through a number of meetings and workshops the group members expressed a real need for creating and establishing a space which felt safe, confidential, and non-judgmental and where individuals felt supported.

As a result of creating new partnerships, through the group and already established networks, we have been able to provide advice, support and information to members in the support meetings. The meetings are held on a fortnightly basis and each session is tailored to meet members' needs.

In order to increase the profile of the group and address concerns and issues expressed by members in regard to challenging homophobic abuse, the merciless asylum process and the lack of service provision, individuals have eagerly stood on platforms to openly share their stories.

This has led the group to be invited to LGBT celebration events, such as Liverpool and Manchester Pride, as well as others, to celebrate and stand in solidarity with the LGBT community, nationally and internationally.

The group continues to rapidly grow with at least three to four new referrals a month from external partners, as well as receiving self referrals.

A UNITED FRONT FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Liverpool-based Red Cross, Asylum Link Merseyside and the Liverpool branch of Refugee Action have united together to run a project which offers support in numerous ways to asylum seekers and refugees.

By Colin Serjent

A project which has the aim of providing a high quality support service to asylum seekers who are at risk of, or experiencing destitution, was set up by the Liverpool-based British Red Cross in 2013 in association with Asylum Link Merseyside and the Liverpool branch of Refugee Action.

Titled the Liverpool Asylum Outreach And Support Project (LAOASP), the three agencies work together to meet the needs of service users through various ways, including one-to-one complex casework support, group information sessions and help with providing food and clothing.

"Many of our trained volunteers are refugees themselves," said a Red Cross spokeswoman. "They are able to speak a wide range of languages and can offer essential support and advice.

"From new arrivals to failed asylum seekers, thousands each year find themselves cut off from Home Office support or welfare benefits. We respond to this by giving them expert advice on

accessing whatever limited resources are available to them.

"Women refugees overwhelmingly come from countries where their rights have been severely restricted. The Red Cross Women In Crisis projects provide one-to-one social and emotional support, helping women access their basic rights and help to rebuild their lives."

One of the prime goals of Asylum Link Merseyside is to provide high intensity one-to-one casework to help prevent or reduce

“ Many of our trained volunteers are refugees themselves ”

the effects of destitution on asylum seekers and refer individuals to organisations where they may qualify for support.

They also liaise with doctors and MPs on behalf of asylum seekers.

Refugee Action assist people who have recently arrived in Liverpool, who are



awaiting their asylum decision or going through an appeals process.

Their aims are to help service users prepare for the possibility that they may become destitute; help individuals make decisions to prevent destitution; and help reduce the effects of destitution, if service users encounter it.

"By using Refugee Action's 'empowerment through knowledge' principle, we help beneficiaries select the right option or options," stated a spokesperson for them.

The Liverpool branch of the Red Cross is based at Bradbury House, Tower Street, Brunswick Business Park.

Asylum Link Merseyside is located at St. Anne's Centre in Overbury Street. Refugee Action Liverpool is based at 64 Mount Pleasant.

ARMS AND REFUGEES

Refugees fleeing countries we are arming, meeting border guards we are funding

The UK is at the forefront of selling a whole host of military machinery and weapons to tyrants and governments to use it on their own people. Whilst at the same time companies operating border surveillance are receiving lucrative government funding, to stop the flow of people fleeing these governments. And often both the arms suppliers and the border control agencies are the same companies. According to a recent research report titled Border Wars II produced by the Transnational Institute: "They are the military and security companies that provide the equipment to border guards, the surveillance technology to monitor frontiers, and the IT infrastructure to track population movements. Most perverse of all, it shows that some of the beneficiaries of border security contracts are some of the biggest arms sellers to the Middle East and North African region, fuelling the conflicts that are the cause of many of the refugees." "In other words, the companies creating the crisis are then profiting from it. Moreover they have been vetted by European states who have granted the licences to export arms and have then granted them border security contracts to deal with the consequences." The total value of the sales of the British arms industry is £65 Billion. The UK Government's 2014-15 Human Rights and Democracy Report identified 28 "countries

of concern". In 2014, the UK approved arms export licences to 18 of these including Israel, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Despite its well documented repression and human rights abuses, Saudi Arabia has been a "priority market" for UK arms sales for over 30 years. Below is a list of refugees coming to the UK, followed by a list of the countries the UK government supplies arms to. It doesn't take much work to see the link.

	Q3 2015	Q3 2016	% change
Iran	858	770	-10%
Pakistan	755	700	-7%
Afghanistan	754	631	-16%
Iraq	645	573	-11%
Bangladesh	295	487	+65%
India	295	374	+27%
Albania	385	334	-13%
Sudan	1516	329	-78%
Syria	776	315	-59%
Eritrea	1378	272	-80%

Arms sales between 2008 and 2016	
Saudi Arabia	£9,446,809,258
Iran	£1,849,443,809
Turkey	£909,603,959
Libya	£361,436,793
Pakistan	£302,389,251
Qatar	£285,368,321
Egypt	£281,503,345
Iraq	£272,866,125

Figures from the Refugee Council

MIGRATION WATCH?

Bill supports UKIP and follows nearly all the dailies. The Mail and the Express and occasionally the Telegraph. He doesn't read much of the Sun or Star. He says immigration is the biggest issue today. I follow Migration Watch – they tell us what is really going on. They are a non party political, independent think tank.

But Migration Watch are far from being independent and non party political. Its co-founder David Coleman was special adviser to former Tory ministers Leon Brittan and William Waldegrave. Sir Andrew Green the former ambassador to Saudi Arabia was one of the Tories favourite diplomats and a close friend of former minister Jonathan Aitken who sits with Green and Baroness Caroline Cox on the Board of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). CSW's former president Baroness Cox, who was then replaced by Jonathan Aitken, was even thrown out of the Tory party for openly supporting UKIP which is notorious for its hard-line anti-immigration stance.

David Coleman's right-wing credentials are even more impressive than his co-founder; he has been described by the BNP as their "friend at the immigration-reform think tank Migration Watch" and "a very distinguished demographer whom we trust."

Being praised by the BNP of course is not in itself an indication of his political objectives; David Coleman has been a long-standing member of the Galton Institute which was formally known as the Eugenics Society.

BAGS OF LOVE PROJECT

Genna Rourke has a full-time job and two young children and Nadine Clarke is a part-time teacher and mother of three, who, in 2015, witnessed the horrendous living conditions of migrants in Calais and together established 'MerseyAid'. Interview by Darren Guy

When the media published the picture of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish beach, in amongst the massive outpouring of sympathy, there was also a barrage of abuse and cynicism from the 'Charity begins at home' brigade, 'why don't you help the homeless in this country?'

Eventually those who work with refugees and homeless people, realized they don't actually know anyone they work with who holds these views. It would appear that those who go on about 'helping their own' actually help no one.

Genna Rourke has a full-time job and two young children and Nadine Clarke is a part-time teacher and mother of three, who, in 2015, witnessed the horrendous living conditions of migrants in Calais and together established 'MerseyAid'.

Along with 'a lovely bunch of volunteers' they have taken MerseyAid from the initial human response of wanting to help those in need, to distributing millions of tons of supplies to those in need.

MerseyAid now have bases in Wallasey and Huyton. Their aim is not only to provide medical aid, supplies, food and clothing to Syrian refugees, but also to support people in need here, in particular homeless people.

When I first spoke to Genna she was arranging for the shipment of two containers going to hospitals in Syria desperate for supplies. MerseyAid have just started their 'bags of love' project. "It is two fold," Genna explained. "It comes at the request of Syrian

understand their needs, and hope to send as much as they can via containers. As more and more hospitals are bombed less medical aid is available for helping the wounded and it is important that MerseyAid continue to support the medical professions, who are risking their lives daily to support the sick and wounded.

Since MerseyAid started in 2015 they have sent more than 5 containers of aid, including an ambulance, incubators, medical aid, clothes, food, etc. They have sent life-saving equipment to Greek boats, vans, and vans of aid to Calais and France, and have donated locally to homeless people through the Whitechapel Centre in Liverpool, to food banks, church groups, women's refuges and MRANG (Merseyside Refugee and Asylum Seekers Pre and Postnatal Support Group).

They now work closely with local councils to support refugees arriving locally with clothes, furniture, food and other basics which the local councils don't provide.

MerseyAid have recently donated to a group of young people who are collecting aid to distribute this winter to local people who need support, and a project in Toxteth that was requesting warm clothes for local kids.

"Since we started Merseyaid," said a spokesperson, "it has been at full speed. It's a 24/7 job (tricky when you have kids and a full time job) but we do it because we really want to help, we want to be on the right side of history. A lot of us are mothers and we want to spread a legacy to our kids so they grow up with compassion and care for all. We want young people to feel motivated and inspired to help all, we want and we do provide a vessel for those that want to help people but don't know how to or where to start.

"We hope we are helping people across Merseyside to be involved in an amazing movement. We work closely with other groups across the UK, proving that grassroots groups can do amazing things with no overheads. We are all volunteers, with no wage bills, just bloody hard work, love, little red tape, compassion and a willingness to just do it.

"We really are all new to this, none of us have experience. Everything is a learning curve, everything is trial and error, but we learn, we share experiences and we all work together. We have made amazing friends here on Merseyside, in the UK and across the globe - people all of like mind - care and love for all. It's truly amazing, what a thing to be a part of!!

To find out more about MerseyAid - Refugee & Homeless Support, access www.merseyaid.com



“ We work closely with other groups across the UK, proving that grassroots groups can do amazing things with no overheads ”

doctors; the aim is to provide some comfort to Syrian kids in hospital. It is a bag, which is full of goodies and treats for the kids. The bag has a logo with 'bags of love,' and will have teddies, sweets, small toy, pencils pens and paper etc. and a lovely note from the person who made it."

Genna, Nadine, and the other volunteers, worked nightly to box up the supplies. The second phase of the project is to raise money for an anesthetic workstation and medical aid which will be sent to doctors in Syria. They are working closely with the doctors to

Round-up of Recommended Reads

"They used to be mathematicians and composers, criminologists, accountants and teachers. In England, without money and papers, they must labour illegally as cleaners, dishwashers, care assistants..." Bidisha's *Asylum and Exile: The Hidden Voices of London* (Seagull £14.50) grew out of her outreach work with refugees and asylum seekers and gives an invaluable insight into the humour, vivacity, talent and will to survive, despite the precarious lives people have to leave. *A Country of Refuge: An Anthology of Writing on Asylum Seekers* ed Lucy Popescu (Unbound £8.99) is a powerful collection of short fiction, memoir, poetry and essays exploring what it really means to be a refugee: to flee from conflict, poverty and terror; to have to leave your home and family behind; and to undertake a perilous journey, only to arrive on less than welcoming shores.

The world has, of course, been built on migration. Written in 1975, the late great John Berger's *A Seventh Man* (Verso £9.99) conveys what it is to be a migrant worker, the material circumstances and the inner experience, and in doing so, reveals how the migrant is not so much on the margins of modern life, but absolutely central to it,

and yet is excluded from much of its culture.

In attempting to convey the need to flee one's homeland, journalist Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* (Rider £8.99) tells of her exile by Assad's regime, her secret return visits, the humanity that can flower amidst annihilation, and why so many Syrians are desperate to flee.

There is also a wealth of fiction which speaks to the refugee experience. Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* (Harper £8.99) is a wonderful novelisation of her own father's experience as a Somali boy travelling through Yemen, Eritrea, Sudan and Palestine during the second world war, until finally finding a home in England.

If you or anyone you know needs legal advice, there's a very useful self-help guide against detention and deportation: *For Asylum Seekers and Their Supporters* by Legal Action for Women (Crossroads £4).

Children's books are a fantastic way for new arrivals to have a story to identify with, whilst also informing the next generation. For older children, Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy* (Bloomsbury £7.99) tells the story of Alem, a child of an Ethiopian father and an Eritrean mother, forced to survive alone in England. For younger ones, Sarah Garland's *Azzi In Between* (Frances Lincoln £7.99), Mary Hoffman's *The Colour of Home* (Frances Lincoln £6.99), and Barroux's *Welcome* (Egmont £6.99) all depict youngsters arriving and adapting to their new home, whilst Shaun Tan's masterful *The Arrival* (Hodder £14.99) is a silent graphic novel, a migrant story told as a series of wordless images that might seem

to come from a long forgotten time, but convey the struggles and survivals of every migrant, every refugee, every displaced person. It is a majestic tribute to all those who have made the journey.

And if you still can't understand why people may need to migrate and seek a life far from their home, Janne Teller's little book *War: What If It Were Here?* (Simon & Schuster £5.99) depicts a Britain under dictatorship, war and the Britification police. Europe has fallen apart and the only place at peace within reach is Egypt. You are now a 14-year old refugee escaping to a life far from home...

Mandy Vere



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Over Land, Over Sea: poems for those seeking refuge

Edited by Kathleen Bell, Emma Lee and Siobhan Logan

Review by Arthur Adlen

The struggle experienced by many men, women and children seeking a safe haven where they can live their lives is captured in these 101 poems by 82 poets. For those of us who are fortunate enough never to have faced such desperation, the heroism and, all too often, tragedy we only see second hand are reflected throughout the book.

There are poems that give us a strong sense of what people are going through, like Ambrose Musiyiwa's, *The man who ran through the tunnel*:

When I heard
how he ran
across continents
over rivers
through forests
through deserts
and through tunnels,
how could I fail
to be inspired?

Another poem, *Alright, Jack* by Alan Mitchell, challenges the attitude of many British people who lack the capacity to care about refugees. He asks,

When did it become
the British thing to do
to just shrug our shoulders
and ignore the suffering
of fellow human beings?

In *The Gate of Grief* we are reminded that humans have always been migrants. The Gate of Grief: Bab-Al-Mandab, on the Red Sea, is the point where our early ancestors left Africa. Siobhan Logan writes,

When a sharp-eyed hunter spied land
over there
we began to think
how to reach this new place, how to put
ourselves into the water.

All the poems are thoughtful and challenging, and on the whole the book is inspirational. Not a read to snuggle down with while you enjoy a cup of cocoa. One



that, for anyone with a conscience and a love for humanity, will be disturbing.

Any actual enjoyment one may gain from this book comes from the appreciation of the writing, and sympathy for those people who have lived, and are living, through the experience of displacement and the search for a safer, better future.



The Prince and the Pea



Lampedusa



The Bogus Woman

Colin Serjent describes the ways theatre in the UK has portrayed asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

Amidst the most tragic humanitarian crisis since World War 2, millions of people are fleeing war-torn Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Congo, Sudan, and countless other countries to seek safe haven in Europe and the UK.

The accounts of their experiences are often appalling, with the mainstream media, notably television, seldom bringing their plight to the attention of the public.

But a number of theatre company projects and initiatives are giving a voice to these often desperate and isolated people.

These include those that have been staged in Liverpool and in other parts of the UK. The Unity Theatre, which was formed as the Merseyside Left Theatre in the 1930 and a proponent of radical theatre, has been at the forefront in giving their views a platform.

In 2016 they presented 'Rights of Passage', written by Clare Summerskill, and performed by herself with Artemis Theatre Company.

It starkly depicted the hardships of lesbians and gays who have fled to the UK.

The play questioned what happened when they got to the country they hoped would offer refuge to them: who is welcome, who is locked up, and who is deported?

As Lisa Buckby, Communications Officer at the Unity, commented about the play, "Artemis allowed the audience a glimpse into the private, undocumented and often unreported lives of those that have come to the UK to seek asylum purely on account of their sexual orientation."

Summerskill had interviewed LGBT asylum seekers as a major source of research in creating her play.

"It is the most accurate portrayal of LGBT asylum seekers we have ever watched," remarked a spokesperson from UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group.

In 2015 the Unity had staged 'The Bogus Woman', presented by Curtis Productions and Theatre By The Lake.

The production was regarded as an impressive monologue inquiring into a particular woman's bid for asylum and acceptance.

This ran as a companion piece to 'Lampedusa' by Anders Lustgarten, which spotlighted the tragic drowning of over 4000 people in 2014, in trying to cross the Mediterranean.

Since then thousands more have perished at sea in pursuit of a new place to live.

Lustgarten said, in no uncertain terms, "In the midst of all this toxic crap about immigrants and spongers, this play gives a human voice to the victims of demonisation."

At the end of 2015, instead of the usual Christmas fare theatre companies put on, the Unity presented 'The Prince and the Pea'.

Previewing the play Buckby commented that "in adapting this traditional fairy tale we want to tell an important story and in doing

so, connect audiences with something meaningful. In respect of this the production relates to the global refugee crisis."

Further afield, at the Battersea Arts Centre in London, a festival was held during November 2016, titled 'London Stories: Made By Migrants.' It was a promenade piece that connected audiences with real migrants and their true stories. The focus was specifically on migrant narratives.

It comprised 29 storytellers, who have all come to London from various countries.

The performers were not trained actors. Some read from notes while others did not need to do so.

For instance, tales were told of cross-cultural adoption and people fleeing war zones.

Posters were put up on walls to remind people the way newspaper headlines have been used to incite fear and panic about migrants with terms like 'Invasion' and 'Flood'.

As one critic suggested, "This was not theatre at all and yet in some ways it is theatre at its purest, an opened hand, an invitation to listen."

Perhaps the most intriguing of the recent stage productions illustrating the struggles faced by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants was the recent staging of a new version by David Greig of 'The Suppliant Women' by Aeschylus, the second oldest play ever written, in 463 BC.

In it the word democracy was used for the first time.

2,500 years have elapsed since it was written but it is still very contemporary, in that it recounts the story of fifty women boarding a boat in North Africa to flee across the Mediterranean, seeking asylum in Greece.

It posed similar questions to those which are asked now. Who are we, where do we belong and if all goes wrong who will take us in?

Closer to home (almost literally), In January this year, the HOME Arts Centre in Manchester presented 'The Island, The Sea, The Volunteer and The Refugee', directed by Susan Roberts.

In essence, the show was about the time performer (and writer and co-producer) Louise Wallwein spent working at a refugee centre on the Greek island of Kos.

Her testimony and poetic reflections were intercut with a selection of verbatim interviews adroitly delivered by Sushil Chudasama.

Most recently, Night Light, presented by Mandala Theatre, was staged at the Capstone Theatre in Liverpool. It was a striking portrayal of the dilemma of two young asylum seekers taking shelter in a disused warehouse in England, gravely concerned about being deported.

It was a powerful, dark and provocative piece of theatre. Mandala Theatre aptly described it as 'visceral theatre.'

ART WITH A HEART

By Colin Serjent

An art exhibition is to be staged at Liverpool Central Library during June showing the work of a number of Merseyside-based artists, to raise awareness of the refugee crisis both in the UK and abroad.

The title of the exhibition will be Any Frontier, Any Hemisphere.

Project organiser Clare Flinn said, "It was agreed that the exhibition should be based on creating a dialogue about the refugee situation, as well as raise funds during the exhibition through donations and the selling of exhibited artwork."

Possible collaborators for the exhibition will include MerseyAid, One Nation and WorldWideTribe and Merseyrail.

Some of the artists taking part include Sue Leach, Bill Fletcher, Janet Holmes, Louis Jeck-Peckridge, Clare Flinn and

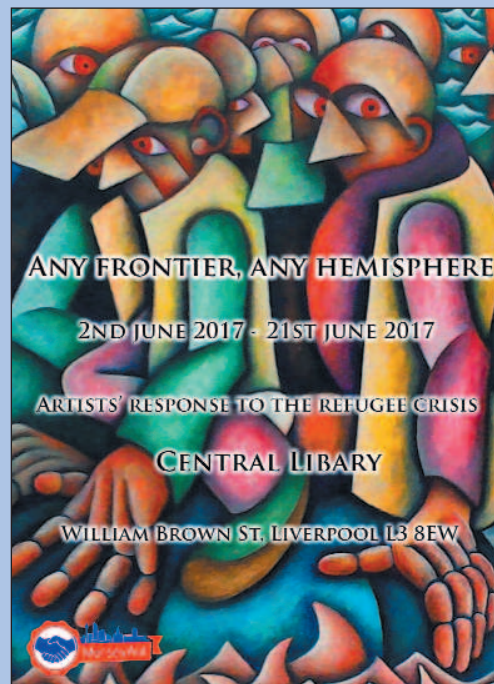
Charlie Fraiss.

These will include painters, ceramicists, poets, sculptors and printmakers.

Quotes from various artists: "My work is about the horror of leaving everything which is familiar - family, community, status, home - and about identity. I hope the exhibition opens up a dialogue about these issues for people who may not have engaged with them."

"I am planning to make a large work on paper, incorporating drawing and painting with media reports, interviews, and social media images to give the work context. Then I want to destroy it. The idea being that this work will be metaphorical for the lost innocence of the children of Aleppo."

"The artwork that I will be producing for the exhibition will try and show the comparison between home, a safe secure home and one of destruction, fear and desperation."



The exhibition runs from Friday 2nd June to Wednesday 21st June.

A PRECIOUS THING

By Dee Coombes

I hadn't been to the Merseyside Refugee & Asylum Seekers Pre & Post Natal Support Group (MRANG) for more than 10 years. Back then it was in another church hall in another part of the city, and it could be pretty chaotic – lots of mainly African women with their babies and toddlers chatting to volunteers or each other, amidst bundles of clothes and boxes of toys, and nappies and other necessities. Women speaking earnestly with volunteers, trying to sort out the tangles of housing, money for living, and medical care, and the ever-present threat of being returned to the country of origin.

I wasn't sure what to expect after all this time when I went to one of their centres. I passed a beaming woman in a headscarf on her way out, and went through the front door with another, into a room full of chatter and laughter, whoops from children and the smell of pancakes. I'd come at half-term and it was a lot busier than usual. MRANG has grown up a lot now; instead of bundles and bags of clothes, there were tables the length of the room, piled high and supervised by a former client, now a volunteer. None of them would be touched until after the lunch of pancakes, salad, fruit and cheese had been eaten. The lunch was served to the women and their children by the volunteers who'd cooked it – a courtesy that touched me.

I wandered about past volunteers sitting

at tables, helping women to navigate the forms that could make a world of difference to their living conditions, their benefits, their hospital appointments, their baby clinic appointments. Now, instead of mainly African women, there are many different nationalities and cultures represented in the group. I am told MRANG works with women from over 40 nationalities and even more dialects. This can make communication challenging but MRANG offers English classes in another session and the women find other ways to communicate within the group.

The factors which drive women to seek asylum are many and varied; amongst them, gender and honour based violence within communities and families. It takes courage to make a journey into the unknown with your small children or during pregnancy, and that can often use the last resources a woman has, leaving her in great need of support and even more help than usual in navigating the pitfalls of the asylum system. Fifteen years ago, when I worked for immigration solicitors, there was legal aid for medical assessments, psychological reports, a legal representative and your own interpreter (to check what the Home Office's interpreter was saying) at your Asylum interview, and even then, the system could fail women. Today the provision has been stripped to its bare bones despite the continuing need for legal support. The family support team at MRANG help women access what they are



entitled to; but it is an uphill struggle when provision is shrinking.

Drop-in is shaped by the women who attend and acts as a hub of peer and professional support for families at all stages of the asylum process. MRANG women can access casework and enjoy recreational activities in a female only safe space which is welcoming and child friendly. Some women will go on to become service-user volunteers, and MRANG welcomes back many of the same women every week, alongside registering an average of 40 new clients per month.

Most of the women, if it was safe, would like to go home. Many miss their extended family, their friends, their food, the weather, the smells of home, the music of their own language. Most would like to work, to be independent, and to feel respected.

MRANG is now working to bring its unique service to all women asylum seekers being dispersed across the region, providing three drop-ins per week, family support, perinatal support and education classes and is always in need of financial donations. There is a pretty shabby safety net provided by the state for women who mostly never expected or wanted to make this journey into an unknown land of strangers, but life is a precious thing, especially when it's the life of your child.



Noel Urbain

Noel was born in Burundi.

He fled the country after the 11 member band he managed, Lion's Story Reggae Family, a reggae band, sang about the injustice and corruption perpetrated by the country's government. They viewed the band as a political agitator. A number of the band members were also imprisoned. All his band members have also fled to different countries.

He was also involved in various art projects including venue and event management; art workshops; connecting artists with sponsors; and music and art promotion.

He left Burundi in 2015 and arrived in Liverpool in July of that year.

He works as a volunteer in Liverpool, including on behalf of Sola Arts in Toxteth, and the arts centre Liverpool Lighthouse in Anfield.

He has been involved in music-based work, including participating in Refugee Week staged in Kent last year. He gave talks on the difficulties and risks that musicians face in playing their music in various countries due to political reasons.

Noel has helped to set up an artist studio in Liverpool in Toxteth Town Hall, which is called All In One Studio. And he is currently developing a website of Sola Arts.

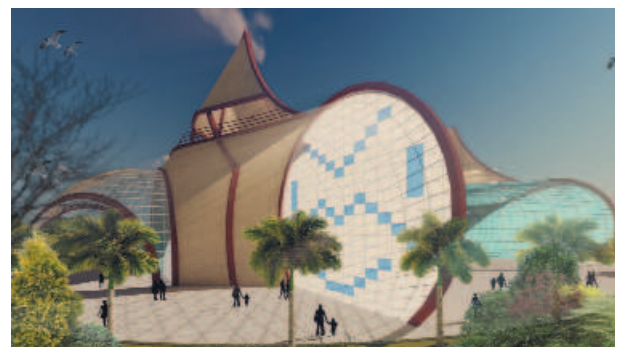
He has also taken part as a volunteer for the Institute of Community Reporters and Volunteer Action For Peace.

Noel has also managed the sound desk and IT system at the Amnesty Human Rights Centre in London.

His current project, of which Noel has already produced a prototype design, in which he wants to create a monument in a public space in Liverpool, is titled 'Harmony's Diversity'. He would gratefully appreciate any support in making this project happen.

"Diversity can either cause a problem or be beneficial to the community," he commented. "Art can illustrate harmony within diversity between people."

He added: "I believe that both art and music are indispensable tools for addressing many of the challenges which are confronted by our communities."



Images from top: Harmony's Diversity Monument, Lion Story Performing, Lion Story in different musical activities, Community Centre



Rania Khilo

Rania arrived in Liverpool in 2014 as a refugee from Syria, where her family is still based. Sadly her father was killed by ISIS at the end of 2014 because he was a Kurdish Syrian. The aim of ISIS is to wipe out the Kurds completely.

She is a qualified architect having studied for five years at a university in Syria. If the war had not occurred she would have been accepted to do a Masters Degree.

"It is difficult to practise it there now due to the conflict," she stated. "Staying alive is more important in those circumstances than to deal in architecture."

"The techniques I use are simple in a sense but I want to learn new techniques,"

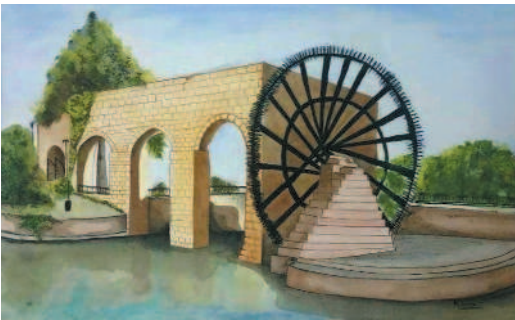
Rania added.

The current ones she uses include watercolours, gouache and the use of pencils.

Rania now works as a volunteer at G Squared Architecture in Duke Street, working on various architectural projects within Liverpool.

"I want to continue as a volunteer, it gives me a structure to my life, but obviously it would be great to get paid work as an architect."

While in Syria she captured images (as depicted here) through her art of famous buildings, which were often tourist attractions, that have since been destroyed by ISIS.



IMMIGRANTS, SOCIAL SECURITY AND URBAN MYTHS

Carol Laidlaw, an expert on welfare rights, writes about Immigrants and the Social Security system.

I have lost count of the number of times I've heard people complain that immigrants "can claim everything" as soon as they arrive in the country, or that they "take our council houses". It is a lie but an oddly persistent one. It has taken on the status of an urban myth.

After working in welfare rights for 18 years, I can definitely state that immigrants do not "get everything" as soon as they arrive in the UK. What they can claim depends on their immigration status and why they are here. Many are allowed into the UK only on condition that they "have no recourse to public funds." The rules that apply to migrants are as complex as any other part of the social security system, but in general few immigrants can access welfare benefits on the same terms as British citizens, and those from outside the EEA (European Economic Area, which includes all the EU countries plus Iceland, Sweden and Switzerland) have fewer rights than those from within it. And a distinction is

made between contributory benefits, those that are only available to people who have worked and paid national insurance contributions, and means-tested, or income-based, benefits.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are people who have applied to the Home Office for leave to remain because they are fleeing persecution in their home countries. They have no right to claim any benefits at all. They are supported out of a separate public fund administered by NASS (National Asylum Support Service). Each asylum seeker gets £35 per person per week, and if they have no relatives or friends who can accommodate them, they are given somewhere to live. This is always private, not public, accommodation and it is given on the same terms as occupying a hotel: asylum seekers can be put out at a day's notice if they break the rules. They can also be relocated at random from one part of the country to another. Imagine the State being

able to order you to move house whenever it wants?

If asylum seekers get leave to remain they become refugees and are allowed to work and can claim benefits and apply for public housing on the same terms as British citizens. They do not get any privileges, they have to meet the same criteria and jump through the same hoops as everybody else.

“ There is no such thing as 'benefit tourism' ”

People from outside the European Economic Area may have visas to come to Britain to work or study, but this is on condition that they have no recourse to public funds. They may not claim social security benefits or get council housing. However those who work and pay national

Maria Notelodigo was not born in the UK, but her husband and child where.

I STAYED UP ALL NIGHT ON JUNE 21ST

On the night of the referendum, I woke up at 5am with a bad feeling, grabbed my mobile, and there it was: "Britain has voted to leave the EU". My heart sank in. My husband and my son, both British, were sound asleep next to me, unaware of the rapid train of thoughts and news I was trying to digest, to put in order, to grasp. I, somehow, expected this result. As a social scientist, I understood the 52%. I can recognize, and almost predict the consequences of inequality, disempowerment and discontent. I was aware of what could happen after many months of fear mongering, lies, and politics of "us Vs them".

It was a clear vision: we are all suffering the consequences of many years of cuts and austerity. The EU's answer to the recession has not taken into account the views and lives of many citizens in any of the EU members; their language and arrogance,

along with their solution to one of its major crises was not welcome, not understood and nor respected; our image of the EU was that of an autocratic beast, relentless in its pursuit of power for some, at the cost of many.

However, I also understand that, even with its imperfections, the EU is better than no EU, for it also has – in principle – achieved better rights for all, better prospects for all, including the planet, and a period of peace unknown on the European continent for a long time.

If we, the many, the workers, were unhappy, we only needed to unite and find a way to improve our "marriage" with the EU. There are many ways to do this, one of them was by choosing better representatives, prepared to voice our sentiments, and fight for our rights. I do understand the plight of those who state "lack of democracy/ accountability" and "austerity politics"

coming out of EU as their main reasons to vote Leave.

Still, I also know what immediate and medium term consequences are likely to unfold after such a hateful campaign and the Brexit result.

This has led to an emotional change in the landscape for many of us who live, work and love in the UK. This change has been buttressed by a politics of fear which has not readied now the campaigning is over. We have all become sensitized to 'difference' and not in a positive way.

I am still trying to come to terms with it all, and already feeling some of the consequences at home and when out in the streets of Liverpool. I have never felt like a 'foreigner', or a 'migrant'. Like many others, I have never had to question what these terms mean – not until this corrosive campaign and its aftermath.



insurance contributions can, in practice, claim contributory benefits. Technically, these benefits count as “public funds” but officialdom imposes no penalties on foreigners who claim them. I do not know why. It could possibly be because they want to maintain the idea that such benefits are ones that people pay for through their national insurance contributions, and so they have earned them.

EEA Citizens

European Economic Area citizens can claim benefits in the UK because there are reciprocal agreements that allow them to. But there is no such thing as “benefit tourism”. People from abroad have to have lived in Britain for from one to three months to establish that they are habitually resident here before they can claim means-tested benefits. In addition, a new rule was imposed on EEA nationals in 2014. In order to retain the right to benefits, European nationals must keep their worker status. If they are out of work for more than four months, they are considered to have no reasonable prospect of finding work and all their means-tested benefits are stopped. They are left with nothing. There are very few exceptions to this rule.

In my experience, having their benefit income stopped does not cause EEA nationals to return to their home country because they still believe that they have



Photograph by Steve Lamb

more opportunity to find work in Britain. Those who stay may end up making use of charitable services for homeless people, which do not discriminate on grounds of nationality, or they may add to the demands on social services departments. Under the Children Act, social services must provide for children where their welfare would be at risk.

This can involve them giving housing, fuel and a small amount of housekeeping money to families with children who would

otherwise be street homeless. This probably costs the state as much as simply letting the family claim benefits.

Brexit

Of course, all these rules will change again when – if – the UK leaves the European Union. It is very unlikely that the social security rules will be made more generous towards immigrants.

No before all this I was ‘me’, going about my everyday business, feeling like a citizen of the world, worried about the local issues as much as a local, and the global issues, as much as I’ve always done. Since the first time I visited, in 2004, and once we decided to live here, in 2008, I considered this city as my home. I never experience racism or xenophobia and everybody I met was always welcoming. I loved chatting to locals on bus stops, supermarket queues and taxi rides, and they seemed to enjoy their chats with me.

I saw myself both through their eyes and mine, my identity being constructed as part of that intertwined perception. When my son was born, two years ago, I felt even more at home here. I speak Spanish to him, as I want him to grow up knowing the language and being able to understand his maternal family and culture. This has never been something to reflect upon.

Quite the contrary, people, both strangers and acquaintances, have told me on several occasions how lucky he was to be able to learn more than one language from the start. Being perceived as different and targeted for speaking another language is, abruptly, part of my worries now. I wonder if this will be a problem for us, and for my son. I worry about our future, his experience at school and with other kids. I worry about being seen speaking a different language in all those places and I worry about how “different” I also look. This

is new to me.

Only one day after the results, all my fears became feelings of inadequacy: “I don’t belong here”. Or rather: many don’t want me here. My identity, how I perceived myself, was rapidly morphing into something different, an undefined entity, which was rapidly being shaped by other people’s voices and

“ Even with its imperfections, the EU is better than no EU, for it has - in principle - achieved better rights for all and better prospects for all ”

perceptions. Together with my feelings, uncertainty about my citizenship status here, even in the long run, have also contributed to a rapid change in how I see and present myself, here and in the world. I am scared. Somebody shouted at me on the streets. I got a dirty look on the bus. The taxi driver seemed annoyed and blunt. He had a massive English flag inside his cab. I am watchful and agitated. I have anxiety attacks at night. I am in tears all day. I

feel dizzy and the world as I knew it is quickly vanishing in front of me. I don’t feel as if I can share these with my English friends; or my family; or my Spanish friends. I don’t want to worry anybody. They will think I am exaggerating. But how can I explain how I feel, how I am being treated and perceived, how the future is uncertain for me and my family and how terrified of this I am?

I think now that both sides have lost, as these are difficult and extremely uncertain times for all. What seems to have ‘won’, both in the UK and elsewhere, is a sense of division, an “us vs them”, the Far Right, together with racist and xenophobic sentiments, and a type of politics which resembles very much that of an early 20th century, imperialistic Europe.

This might be too negative, too early but it seems all the more important to keep our senses about us, and find what unites us: workers, middle classes, young and old, men and women, Left and Right, migrants and nationals everywhere. The truth is that we have much more in common between us.

The processes that divide us are not easy to see and with the Brexit vote they seem even more concealed than ever: concealed under a smokescreen of what for many must be an intense feeling without knowing and for others, a perhaps less dangerous, knowing without feeling.

THE INFUX OF MUSLIMS INTO LIVERPOOL

Hazel is a long-term community activist and resident in the Granby Triangle. She looks at the influence Muslims have had in Liverpool.

What influx? Liverpool had one of the earliest mosques in Britain, founded in 1887 by William Abdullah Quilliam, a lawyer who had converted to Islam. This mosque building, which was also the first in England, still exists and plans have been ongoing to re-convert the building where the mosque once stood into a museum. The mosque was built in Brougham Terrace, Tuebrook.

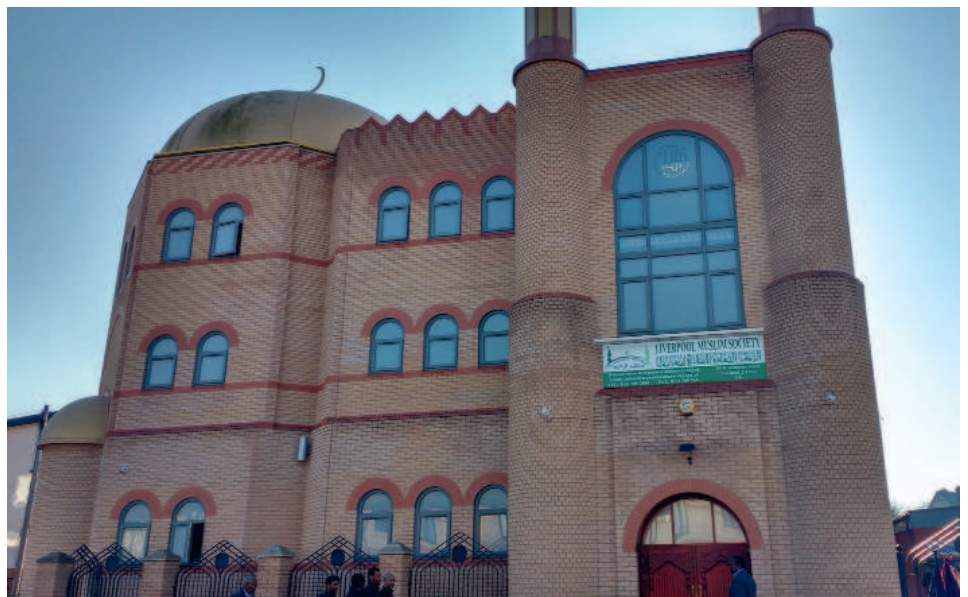
There are now three mosques in use in Liverpool: the largest and main one, Al-Rahma mosque, in the Granby Triangle, and the newest mosque to the city recently opened in Mossley Hill. The third mosque was also recently opened on Granby Street. It was the old post office, closed many years ago, left to rot by those who govern Liverpool, and brought back into use by people of the Islamic faith. Thank goodness someone had the guts to save the building and bring it back into community use.

Lodge Lane is a changed place and I put the responsibility for this firmly onto Muslim shoulders. There are food outlets, a wonderful coffee shack, a prize winning independent supermarket, some of the leanest, freshest, halal chicken I have ever bought from a long established supermarket called Spendwell. Pubs have been converted into restaurants and there is a cash machine within walking distance from my home! People are chatting and strolling along Lodge Lane into the evening and many greetings exchanged.

Gone are the empty buildings and boarded up shops that followed the uprisings of 1981, the neglected rubbish strewn street that smelled of desperation and alcohol. If this is the result of an 'influx of Muslims', bring it on.

My friend, from the Yemen, who came to Liverpool as a young wife to an Imam, set up a Muslim Prayer room in the ground floor of her house. This served the Muslims of Toxteth for years, until the Al-Rahma mosque was built. She came to Liverpool 50 years ago.

Liverpool is a port - it is the 'world in one city' as the City Council like to say, and that world has been here for at least 300 years. We have the oldest



Liverpool Central Mosque on Hatherley Street

established China Town in Europe. Sailors came on ships from China, Nigeria, and Yemen - anywhere that had a coastline and a port, from everywhere in the world. Liverpool has built its history and wealth on the labours, skills and ideas of the people who have come here.

Census figures show us that Liverpool has no 'influx', we do not

“ If this is the result of an 'influx of Muslims', bring it on ”

even have the average BME demography. We have a less diverse population here than is the UK average.

Nine tenths (90.1%) of Liverpool residents were born in the UK. This is slightly higher than is the case nationally (86.6%).

86.2% (402,200 people) of Liverpool's population are White British or Irish, while 13.8% (64,200 people) are Black and Minority Ethnic. These latest figures are from the 2011 census which is pretty up to date, I think, when it comes to changing demographics. These figures show that Liverpool's population is less ethnically diverse than the population of England and Wales as a whole.

The thousands of migrants and sailors passing through Liverpool over many decades resulted in a religious diversity that is still apparent today. This is reflected in the varied collection of religious buildings, and two Christian cathedrals.

Liverpool, like several other port cities in England and Wales has had a strong presence of Yemeni people for

centuries. Yemenis (who are most likely Liverpool's largest Arab group) alongside Somalis are the two largest Muslim groups in the city and have been here for years! Why are they being noticed now? I hope I don't smell the obnoxious gas of racism.

Liverpool, in my opinion, is a fantastic city. It has vibrancy and joy, great green spaces, trees and amazing architecture. It is a city with people full of skills and talents, who speak two or three languages at the age of five - their family language, Arabic and English. People who run family businesses that add needed facilities to an area and give employment. People who, by and large, are sober and kind. People who bring colour and music and fantastic food to share. People who bring a different way of thinking and so stretch horizons and experiences. People who arrived in Liverpool after escaping the insanity of war and famine and degradation. People who have lived here for years and raised their children and laid their parents to rest in this city.

Do not tolerate these people - a tolerant society is not so great, who wants to be tolerated? Do not even welcome them, some of them have been Scousers for longer than some of you, reading this - they will welcome you. Accept with open arms, minds and spirits the people who seek freedom and peace here and be glad that this city has been enriched by its history of 'influx' and let's hope that this continues into the future.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_Liverpool#Islam

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Quilliam
<http://liverpool.gov.uk/council/key-statistics-and-data/census/census-summary/>

PUSH-BACKS ON THE BALKAN ROUTE

The illegal push-backs that are taking place on the Balkan route are largely undocumented in the mass media. With enough pressure Michelle believes we could stop illegal push-backs and make peoples passage easier.

By Michelle

"A push-back occurs when you are expelled from a country without having the possibility to explain your personal circumstances and without the possibility to claim asylum. Push-backs are illegal and prohibited under international human rights law. These expulsions can take different forms. It can happen that you are returned to a state border to the country you came from without having the possibility to claim asylum.

"It can also happen that you have stayed in a country for a while and are later on expelled to the country you travelled through earlier, without any legal procedure".

There is a lot more information here...<https://live.w2eu.info/en/push-backs-and-expulsions/>

There are a lot of illegal push-backs and violence towards people from the authorities on the the Balkan route.

"A lot of people have already documented these rights abuses from different borders along the Balkan route: from Bulgaria to Turkey, from Macedonia to



Some of the injuries received by people going to the border. Photographs by No Borders Serbia



Photo of the camp in Belgrade by Gastiaso Photography

Greece, from Serbia to Macedonia, from Serbia to Bulgaria, from Croatia to Serbia, from Croatia to Bosnia, from Hungary to Serbia, as well as from Slovenia to Croatia."

Both quotes are from 'Live-Feed of Welcome to Europe: Information for refugees travelling from Greece to Northern Europe.'

One friend told me he was at an official refugee camp in Serbia, and one night a government bus came and took 50 of them to the border with no warning and pushed them back illegally to Macedonia. This is one of the reasons many people are afraid to stay in official camps on Serbia and choose to live in unofficial camps in Belgrade, many of who are left to sleep out in the open at temperatures reaching -15C.

Other reasons people don't stay in official camps is that there is no educational resources for children, some are closed camps with no access in or out, bad food, no access to local shops or community (one that houses 1000 people is next to a motorway petrol station) and violence from guards. Many people are reaching Croatia and Hungary and are not allowed their legal rights under Article 19 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Art 4 Prot 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to seek asylum. They are instead set on by police dogs, stripped naked in the snow and often forced to walk back to the country they came from with no shoes.

Men are regularly coming back to Belgrade with serious injuries and find it hard to access the right medical treatment, and the poor living conditions in Belgrade often make it hard for people to recover. Also many people are arriving in Serbia

from camps in Bulgaria where violence and border violence is even worse. A teenage boy arrived with his friends from an official camp on Bulgaria paralysed and another blind. People are being forced to travel across borders illegally, as the once more relaxed border between Serbia and Hungary into Europe now only lets ten people, according to official figures, pass legally every day here, <https://live.w2eu.info/en/hungary/>.

You are not allowed any legal assistance for your asylum application once you enter the transit zone into Hungary, men are held for up to 28 day in a shipping container and often sent back. Even if people apply for asylum in Serbia they might get pushed back illegally so people are being forced into more dangerous illegal routes. One friend around 17-years-old was crossing the border last week and the ice on the river cracked, the boy fell in and died. This journey is killing people. It is also important to mention the positives of this story and the amazing people I have met. There is true spirit, braveness and kindness in this situation. Older boys are looking after unaccompanied minors like big brothers, people are active and finding places to live, ways to cook, heat and wash and they share this. And they are mostly positive and kind. They are often well educated and have exciting plans for a better life than what they are leaving, none of which mention the benefit system or free health care as their reason to travel.

Their stories and journeys are all different and very important and we can learn a lot from them. It is important for us to not to offer the hand of charity and pity but instead to work in solidarity together to open the borders that are killing people.

FROM SANANDAJ TO SMITHDOWN

Katy Brown talks to a local musician about his long journey from Iran to Liverpool.

Tell me a bit about where you're from and what it was like growing up there?

I'm Kurdish and was born in Iran, from a city called Sanandaj. I lived with my family, I'm from a big family and we all lived together and looked after each other. I used to look after family, my Mum in particular, that was my job. The extended family is an important part of our culture. I have nice memories of being with my Mum, brother, friends. I have a lot of good memories, I was young but I had a long time there with many good things.

Was your family politically active in the Kurdish struggle?

My Mum and Dad were both politically active in the Kurdish struggle and were fighters, against religion and for communism and a Kurdish nation with its own land, flag etc. My Dad was killed by the government when I was 8 years old, I was young, but as I grew older I believed in the same thing.

When and why did you leave?

I left 8 years ago in 2009, I'm 24 now, I was 16 when I left the country. I helped with a protest as the government tried killing Kurdish people on the streets with the same ideas as me and my parents. We pushed the police back as they were charging at people and hitting them with batons. My friend was arrested and interrogated, he passed on details about me to the police so my life was in danger. My family decided it was best that I leave.

How did you make it out of the country?

My family paid money to traffickers to cross the border into Turkey and I made it country by country to the UK. I didn't plan to come to the UK but my family decided it would be the safest place for me. They paid half of the total fee to the traffickers, that's how it works, with the full amount paid if and when you arrive safely.

Tell me about your journey...

There were dangerous moments, particularly crossing from Iran into Turkey, the Turkish army shoots people on the border thinking they're Kurdish fighters. The possibility of being arrested and sent back is another danger. Many people die on the way due to the cold, the lack of food, clothing and sleep. Many die trying to get from Turkey to Greece by water on boats. I managed to get through and on into Greece. I travelled from Greece to Italy by lorry, in a secret compartment in a private vehicle, I didn't know the route, only the traffickers knew the route. From Italy to France I travelled for 45 hours under a lorry.

How did you manage to do that?

You have to get on the axle with your rucksack against the axle, with that supporting your weight, then you have to grip tightly above to keep yourself balanced and try not to be thrown off. If the lorry goes along a bumpy bit of road you can lose your grip, many people die this way. Some people get above the spare tyre and many people

have been crushed by the spare tyre when it bounces upwards if the lorry goes over a bump. You can't go to the toilet and can't have any food. There are some stops where you can have a quick pee and maybe a small biscuit. You are gambling with your life. A young man from Iran who I met in the Jungle (the refugee camp at Calais) and became friends with was killed under a lorry, I had spent 5-6 months with him. He was just 15 years old.

That's awful, such a waste of a young life, so sad. Is it really worth taking the risks?

The prospect of deportation is more dangerous than the lorry trip. As then no-one can help you, you can either be shot or arrested and deported.

So is the Jungle where you ended up next? What was it like?

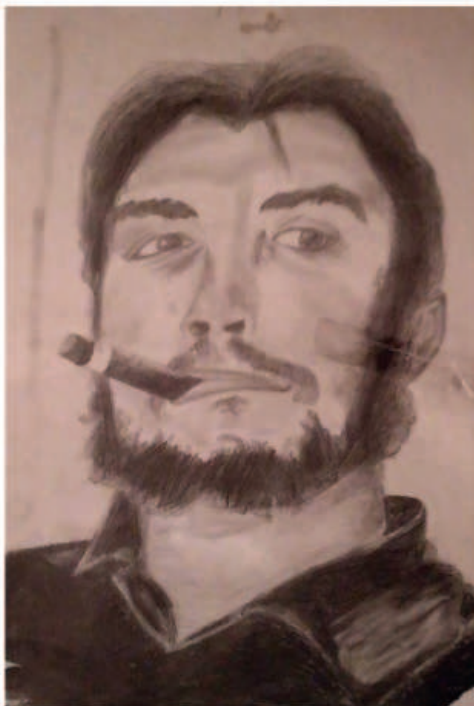
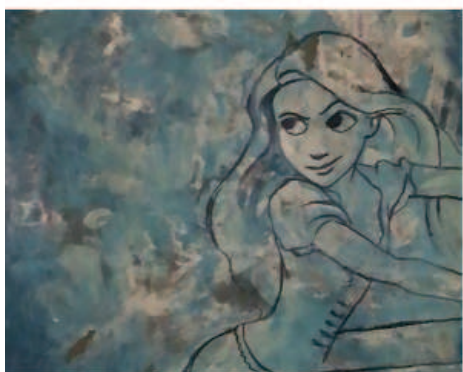
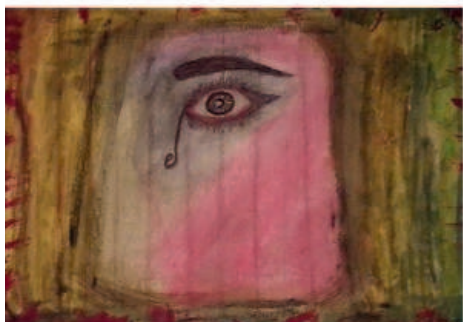
Yes, I made it to the Jungle. I lived off potato and onion for 5 months, there was not enough food. Sometimes Christians would bring food and clothes. Every now and again you would get nice stuff but this wasn't consistent. It didn't feel safe. It was cold, you had to sleep on the floor, you'd have to sleep in the wet if it was raining. I couldn't take a shower for 6 months, or brush my teeth. I was very weak from not getting enough food. There was no Doctor, you have to look after yourself.

Why did you stay if the conditions were so bad?

Every day at night time I'd try to get on the axle of a lorry and gamble with my life without immigration control finding you. It's a gamble where you go as you don't know where the lorry you are getting on is going to end up. I made a few journeys from Calais to other countries and back again as I arrived somewhere other than the UK, I didn't know at the time but most of these were to Holland. I heard of 22 people who died in a fridge in a lorry, they were put there by traffickers, they said the lorry was going to England, a short journey, but it was going elsewhere on a 5-6 hour journey and they couldn't withstand the cold of the fridge for that length of time.

So, how do you feel about traffickers?

The way I see it it's like alcohol, it isn't good but when you need it sometimes you have no choice, or like cigarettes. Traffickers are horrible, they're not good, they're dangerous and nasty people. In Turkey I was in one room for





3 months, I wasn't able to leave and they didn't feed me properly though they were telling my family I was being treated very well. The traffickers rape women when they feel like it, and hit people, you can't tell your family and you definitely can't tell the police because you are being trafficked so you would be deported. There is a lot of violence from them and they carry weapons and slap people around and don't give you proper food. But they think they are helping us by giving us a chance and they do help, but it would be nice if they treated people better. My family paid £5,000 but it was more as they took the money from me I was carrying, my phone, they took everything from me. They are evil, but at the same time I'm happy with them and I smiled and thanked the person who trafficked me, as he helped me. So I feel conflicted about them.

When did you arrive in the UK?

I made it to the UK in July 2010, I first arrived in Derby and immigration brought me to Liverpool where I received accommodation and benefits. I was put in a shared house on Smithdown Road with many people from many countries. It was a dirty horrible house, no-one looked after it, I felt safe as I'd finally arrived, but also scared because I didn't know the language. Shopping, talking to people, finding friends, company, community was really hard to do because of the language barrier.

Where did you go to get help and what did you do with your time?

I went to Asylum Link and Refugee Action. Someone at Asylum Link introduced me to Liverpool String Orchestra where I played for a while. I applied to study music at the Community College and studied for

four years for a diploma in music as well as maths and English. I also worked as a volunteer at Tate Gallery, at FACT and Sola Arts doing drawing and painting.

And you gradually made friends and became part of the community?

Yes, and things got easier. I met a girl and we were together for 2-3 years but she developed throat cancer and passed away last Christmas, December 2016. I looked after her for 1-2 years. For 8 months she couldn't eat and was fed by a tube.

“ My life was in danger. My family decided it was best that I leave ”

I'm so sorry, but she was lucky to have you to look after her, that must have been really tough especially being still so vulnerable yourself.

Yes, for 7 years I had no visa. I got 3 years of support from a social worker once I arrived, after that immigration refused to give me a visa and my social worker refused me housing and benefits. When I was homeless I stayed with friends here and there for a couple of years. I had finished college but couldn't go to uni as I had no visa. So I also couldn't find work. I couldn't travel to see my family as I had no visa, I had no bank account, no driving licence, I couldn't get or do anything. You can't even go to a club or to the gym with no id. I went to Salford uni to study music but was kicked out when they found I had no visa. I'd already lost my girlfriend, when I lost my place on the course I'd lost everything.

How did you survive through these hard times?

I am a musician in churches and the cathedral, every Sunday I play 3 times and translate Persian and Kurdish to English. People have supported me with money for food and instruments, Church people or Kurdish people have let me stay with them, I have helped teach music and dance in exchange for small amounts of money or food, 5 or 6 meals. I had no benefits but people supported me and so I was able to survive.

Despite the difficulties you've been going through, whenever I've seen you since we met in 2011 you have always had a smile on your face, in fact seeing you always cheers me up...

Ah yes, people have commented on this, a businessman who owns a restaurant who has lots of money and family has told me he is jealous of me, he says he has everything but is always miserable and that I have nothing but am always happy.

Hopefully you will be able to see your family again soon though as you recently got some very good news didn't you?

Yes, 15 days ago I got my visa, after 7 years. I'm waiting for my ID card, I'm going to start uni, get a house and get a job and in the summer I will go and see my family for the first time in 10 years.

I'm so pleased for you, you must be so glad after all this time and all you've been through?

Now I've got my visa I am happy and excited for the summer and going to see my family and going back to university to complete my degree after losing it.

The full version of this interview can be read on the Nerve website.

THE THINGS PEOPLE SAY

I'M NOT ALLOWED TO WORK
I LIVE ON £35 A WEEK

SPEAK ENGLISH
SCUM



NO ENGLISH CLASSES

I WAS
IMPRISONED FOR
FLEEING TORTURE

ARRESTED FOR NOT
HAVING THE RIGHT PAPERS



COMING HERE
TAKING OUR JOBS
NOT MIXING



I HAVE NO HOME ANYMORE

LIVING
IN LUXURY

GO HOME

