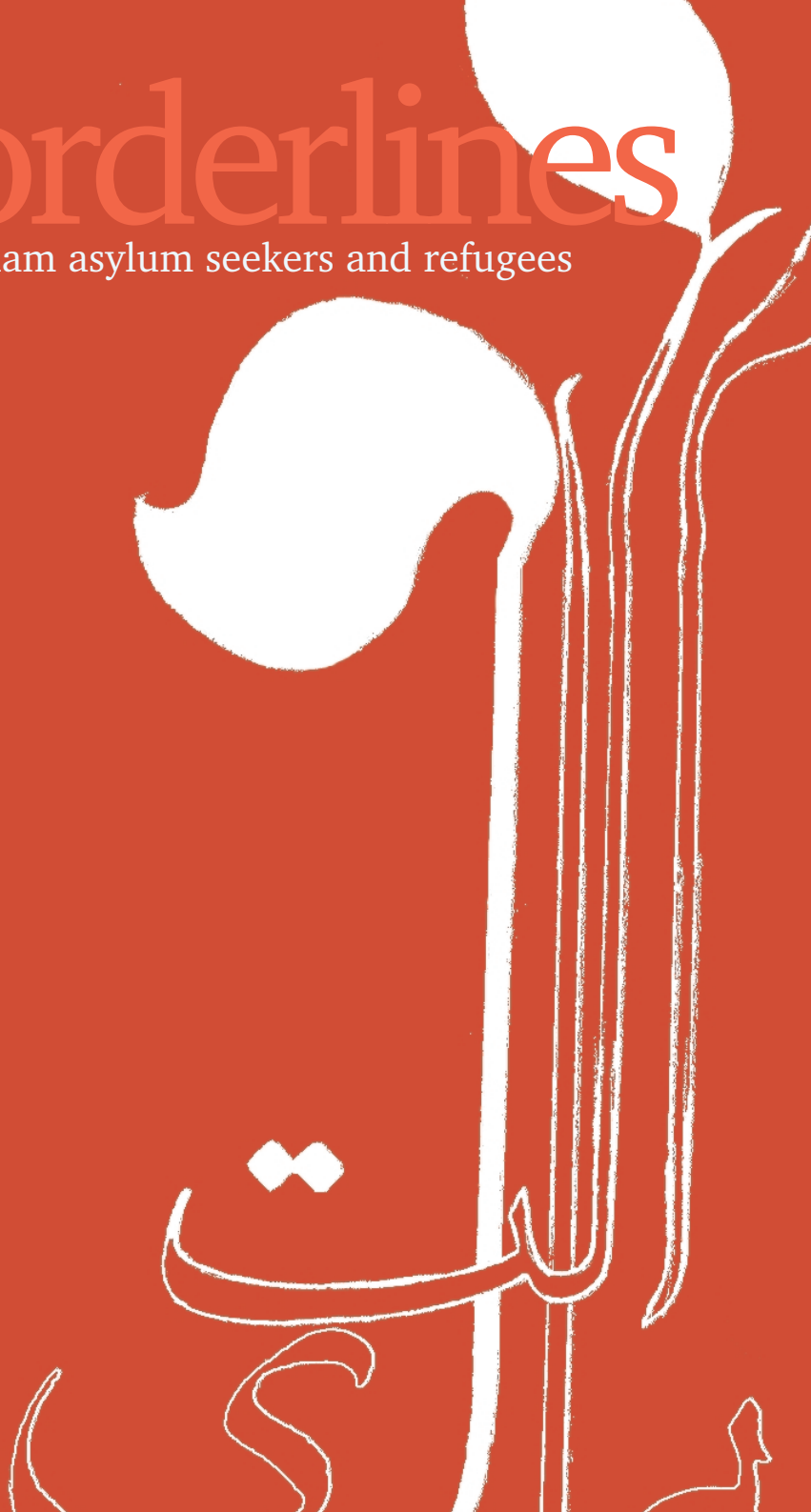


Borderlines

Birmingham asylum seekers and refugees

June 2005





This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 License

Front cover illustration (Justice for Refugees) by Iranian artist Mojtaba Abedini

Newsletter Contents

Editorial	5
The Asylum Process: "In, Out, Off You Go!"	7
Diary: A week of an Asylum Seeker's life in the UK	11
Receipts: illustration	13
Forgotten Questions about Asylum and Immigration	14
Refugees for Refugees	20
Working it Out - Asylum Seekers and Work	24
Resistance in Exile	27
My Grandfather's Story	33



resistance & celebration



Editorial

Borderlines, divisions, the places where we choose to draw them, the manner in which we choose to erect them, they are perhaps now, as they have always been, of crucial import to the society in which we find ourselves. The decisions we make, seemingly without thought, as if by default, their impact resonating far beyond the specific localities in which they originate. And yet, in our haste to build such frontiers and boundaries, we often forget that at times, in places, we police them with such a severity and cruelty, while at other times, in other places, where it is convenient, we adopt a more lenient, flexible, attitude.

In raising such ideas, it is perhaps appropriate to consider how such border posts, such control points, shape the society in which we live. They are the places where human society attempts to regulate the flows that traverse it: flows of information, flows of goods, of money and megabytes, the movement of food stuffs, of workers, oil, weapons, languages. Yet, these flows are vast; they go beyond us, they

escape us at the very same time as we attempt to control them. And given this, it seems pertinent to ask: to what extent are these divisions worth the effort and the sacrifice that we invest in them?

In an attempt to erode such arbitrary barriers, *Borderlines* has grown from a series of workshops with asylum seekers and refugees. The aim of these workshops has been to share the skills needed to produce such a publication within an open environment, where all have an equal voice. An essential part of this approach has been the fact that the computer software we have utilised is 'open source' software, which can be downloaded and installed from the Internet, freely and legally.

Open source software is developed by communities of programmers who freely share the computer code that they work with. The ethos that lies behind open source software is one of community and a belief that if information and resources are freely shared it is to the benefit of all. Whereas companies such as Microsoft

keep their computer code secret, as this is the essence of the 'product' they sell, the open source community freely gives its code away in a manner that is counter-intuitive to the logic of the market.

The two open source software packages used in the construction of this publication were Scribus and The Gimp. Scribus is a professional quality desktop publishing package which is starting to make inroads within the publishing industry (www.scribus.org.uk). The Gimp is a piece of image editing software, which enables users to digitally manipulate photographs and to produce high quality graphics (www.gimp.org).

The collaborative model provided by open source software has also proved instructive for the manner in which *Borderlines* itself was developed. The majority of articles were written through collaborative processes, typically involving the merging of identities and the erasure of borders. In this sense, the aim of *Borderlines* has been to provide a platform for asylum seekers and refugees to express their experiences, while also

debunking the stereotypical clichés propagated by politicians and the media alike. To achieve this double task, the work herein ranges from journalistic investigation and analysis to simple illustrations of the problems of everyday life, from visual images, sketches and photography, to graphic design.

Given such a range of issues, a publication of this size is certainly not enough; there is much more that one could, and should, talk about. However, we hope that, to some extent, and on some level, *Borderlines* will contribute and inspire the erasure, the continual and gradual dissolution of the divisions that presently keep us separated from each other, from ourselves, and from a future where movement, the never-ending rush of life is able to evade and overrun the paranoid legislature of our divided societies.

Borderlines Editorial Collective



The Asylum Process: "In, Out, Off You Go!"

On 4 April 2005, new asylum procedures were introduced. Among others, we interviewed Accredited Supervisor and Solicitor Gazala Rashid from Sultan Lloyd Solicitors in Birmingham, who specialises in asylum and immigration cases, to tell us about these new procedures.

Asylum interview(s)

The first stage of the asylum process is when people present themselves to an Immigration Office claiming asylum. Unaware that this is the procedure, many asylum seekers end up reporting to the police, who seem to be increasingly 'frustrated' by asylum seekers just arriving in the country. Many of them have

reportedly been left on their own to get to the Immigration Office, never mind they don't speak the language or don't have any money. "We're not a taxi service", a police officer told an asylum seeker in one case.

After taking their photos, finger prints and the like, people would be screened about the way they came and entered the country. Based on how convincing they are, emergency accommodation is provided. People are then given extensive forms (called Self Evidence Form) to fill in with the help of a solicitor. SEF forms are also being phased out and applicants are directly being interviewed by the Home Office.

Having completed and sent off the Form to the Home Office, an appointment is made for the main Asylum Interview, usually in Liverpool or Croydon. It is

basically a screening process through which an immigration officer goes, in detail, through the claimant's story so as to determine whether he or she is qualified for asylum (failing which consideration is given to the possible granting of humanitarian protection or discretionary leave).

Up to 99% of asylum claims are almost automatically dismissed at this stage. In some cases, reasons for refusal are quite arbitrary and contradictory. For, example, two people from the same country claimed, separately, they were members of a banned political organisation back home. Both got refused, one for failing to prove he was a member (producing some application form), the other, who did produce a membership application form, because it was suspected a banned organisation, operating in secret, would be able to produce such forms!

Appeal(s)

If an asylum claim is refused by the Home Secretary, the claimant is given 10 working days to appeal against the decision to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT). Approximately 10 working days after the appeal is lodged, there is then a Case Review Management Hearing (CRMH). Although this hearing is a matter of basic

housekeeping, previously more or less dealt with by way of written correspondence under the old First hearings, a representative must now attend. This is seen by some as "a waste of time".

Further, approximately 10 working days after the CRMH, there is

the full hearing before an immigration judge (what used to be called Adjudicator). "This means solicitors have only 3 weeks to compile the case after an appeal has been lodged", explains Ms Rashid. "Much of the work that needs to be done includes gathering medical reports, (further) witness statements and possible expert reports. It used to be 2 months or so before cases were listed, which allowed us to prepare cases properly. It is so fast now. There is very little room for manoeuvre in the new system. The system is being pushed to a halt."

If the adjudicator dismissed the case, there would be 5 working days in which to request a review



(by senior immigration judges) at the AIT itself. However, under these new rules solicitors can only recover their costs if they win or were close to winning. Otherwise, if the case is lost, solicitors don't get paid for their work.

If the review is refused, a further application to the High Court could be lodged, but with a £400 fee. So, asylum seekers are deterred from pursuing this avenue as, in practice, they are unable to pay this fee, given asylum seekers are prohibited from working. This fee can only be waived if the solicitor is doing the appeal on a 'no win no fee' basis, or for free.

"The new system is trying to take solicitors' costs away, trying to dissuade solicitors from taking cases on or, at least, making it very difficult to do so," said Ms Rashid. "The number of appeals had dramatically reduced as compared to the old system. I'm sorry to say that but it seems the primary motive is to discourage people from coming here."

Accreditation

Under the new system, solicitors now need to be accredited in order to work within immigration. This has led to many firms being forced to close their departments, not

only because of being unable to achieve accreditation but because continuing with the practice of asylum is simply not cost effective. Legal aid firms who were already Quality marked (franchised firms) are regularly audited at least once a year. "It is like regulating the regulated," Ms Rashid adds. "If the aim of accreditation process was to ensure quality advice, I believe this could have been achieved differently as many quality advisors are unable to pass the exams, not for lack of knowledge, but due to the fact that many practitioners have become unfamiliar with sitting exams."

Funding

In April 2004 funding was severely reduced for immigration and asylum work. Before this, in asylum cases, for example, the costs limit under Legal Help was £2000, and £1500 for Controlled Legal Representation (CLR). After 4 April 2004, the limit for Legal Help was reduced to £262.75, equating to 5 hours' work in Birmingham, with an extra £250 for disbursements, while the CLR limit was reduced to £1200 (this limit currently stands at £1600). Any extensions to these limits would need prior approval by the LSC. This, again, increased the burden of administrative work for many solicitors, deterring many

practitioners from continuing with this area of law as it is simply not cost effective.

Conventions

It appears that the significant changes that have been made to the immigration and asylum system have targeted the most vulnerable. Those who manage to reach our borders, many of whom have fled their countries for fear of persecution and death, hope to find a 'safe haven' in the UK.

The reality, however, is that people are increasingly deterred from entering the UK to claim asylum. It seems fair to ask whether the UK is in breach of its obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1950 European Convention. The number of asylum applications continues to fall, thanks to the new procedures introduced by the Labour government, such as British immigration officers operating, in a preventative manner, on French soil.

"It really makes you wonder what the future holds for asylum, says Ms Rashid. "Although the UK government has not pulled out of the Geneva Convention, the dramatic cuts, regulations and changes to the system are the next best thing. Immigration and asylum, it seems, are under constant attack compared to any other area of law.

We shall have to wait and see what the future holds for us all."

Latest Asylum Statistics

* There were 7,015 applications in Q1 2005, 17 per cent lower than in Q4 2004 (8,465) and 22 per cent lower than the corresponding Q1 2004 (8,940).

* The top nationalities were Iran (850), Iraq (525) and Somalia (495).

* 8,045 initial decisions were in first quarter.

* 4 out of every 5 new claims are decided in two months.

* The number of cases awaiting an initial decision has continued to fall- 8,700 cases at the end of March 2005, compared to 17,500 at the end of March 2004, and the lowest level for a decade.

* Six per cent of initial decisions in Q1 were granted asylum, slightly higher than Q4 2004 (four per cent). The proportion granted humanitarian protection or discretionary leave decreased from twelve per cent to ten per cent. Eighty four per cent of initial decisions were refusals, slightly lower than in Q4 2004 (85 per cent).

* 3,000 principal asylum applicants were removed in the last quarter, four per cent more than the previous quarter (2895), ten per cent less than in Q1 2004.

Diary: A week of an asylum seeker's life in the UK

Alaa is a lawyer from a Middle Eastern country. He fled his country a couple of months ago fearing for his life and safety from a repressive regime. He applied for asylum in the UK and is still waiting for his fate to be determined by the Home Office. Here are some pages from his diary, translated from Arabic.

Monday, 16 May, 2005

I got up early this morning. It is, after all, the most important day of the week, the day on which I usually collect my great weekly allowance. As usual, I walked all the way from Brierly Hill to Stourbridge [where he collects his money at the post office], for it would be an unnecessary luxury to catch the bus. Thank Goodness the weather was nice.

I spent most of the day doing the weekly shopping, touring around this shop and that. Well, it was just to kill time, really, because I know

exactly what to buy and what you could get for 30 quid. It's not enough for s**t!

Tuesday, 17 May

I had an appointment with my GP at 10 AM today. I got in at almost 11, though. Everything in this country seems to require endless waiting. Where did that "English punctuality" myth come from? I complained about my stomach problem and the doctor, unsurprisingly, advised that I should stop smoking. I have, indeed, cut down since I got here, but not for health considerations, of course.

I got to know to a new neighbour on the way back. We had a little chat about languages and cultures and stuff like that. I don't really know how we understood each other, given my brilliant English. A very nice guy!

Wednesday, 18 May

It is the Library's holiday today, so no Internet or news. I went for a walk and re-discovered, for the thousand time, the small town and markets, where there isn't anything to discover, really.

Sometimes I think that prohibiting asylum seekers from work isn't all about money and economics; it is probably meant to be some sort of psychological torture. Once you are fed up with worrying about your case, there is nothing there but emptiness.

Thursday, 19 May

The landlady paid us a visit today. I couldn't help wondering, while she was checking the flat, how much money they make from us. NASS people haven't paid us a visit for quite a time. Not that I wish them to do so, of course. Can you imagine an appointment from 9 AM to 5 PM?

Some Iraqi friends also called in the evening. Lots of people for one day! I've come to sort of hate their visits, though. All they talk about is asylum and asylum seekers.

Friday, 20 May

I tried a new recipe of my own invention today. I screwed up everything -- a complete waste of money.

Friday, evening

Just finished watching a nice film.

Well, I didn't really understand everything, but it was very moving. I wish I knew English better. There wouldn't be any f***ing courses available before next September, and I can't, apparently, afford going to Birmingham everyday. I heard some colleges provide students with bus passes, but haven't managed to find one yet.

Saturday, 21 May

Cleaning up and housework.

In the evening, I went out for a walk. It was nice watching people clubbing and having fun. I don't drink myself, but it would be nice to go out some time in the near future.

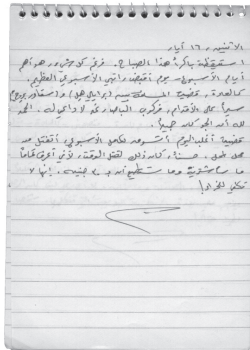
Sunday, 22 May

I had a bad dream yesterday. Can't remember it, but it was

definitely horrible.

I hate Sundays. They remind me of our Fridays [the Islamic weekend]: nothingness. Well, days aren't that different now/here, but still...

PS. Every week, almost the same events and words are repeated. There isn't that much, really, for an asylum seeker to expect until (s)he is either granted asylum or, God forbid, deported back home.



B o r d e r l i n e s

ASDA Price
Always LOW PRICES

ASDA STORES LTD.
100 ASDA CTR
MANCHESTER M14 6RN
TELEPHONE 0161-2751111

ST 4187 CP 00000019 12 12 TR 00063
ASDA MILK 000002032616 £1.110
ASDA MILK 000002032616 £1.110
ASDA MILK 000002032616 £1.110
ASDA MILK 000002032616 £1.110
ASDA MILK 000002032616 £1.110
ASDA MILK 000002111360 £0.33V
ASDA MILK 000002111360 £0.33V
MULLIBUY MAY 04800999240XL £0.09
PEL 00108010001 £0.980

NEW POTATOES 00000201579K £1.640
NEW POTATOES 00000201579K £1.350
LIDS 8 00000201579K £1.350
HP BEANS 500008415082 £1.350
HP BEANS 500008415082 £1.350
MULLIBUY MAY 600011506324 £0.590
SOUP 600011506324 £0.590
LEMONADE 600011254196 £2.00V
ORANGE JUICE 000002104745 £1.04V
SARDINES SP 000002108246 £0.180
ANCHOR 601013701500 £1.540
ANCHOR 601013701500 £1.540
WEATHERBURY 601004000025 £0.830
LARGE WHITE 023996000008 £0.680
LARGE WHITE 023996000008 £0.680
MULLIBUY MAY 04800999240XL £0.16
Coke BELL 000002123636 £0.860
YORK PUB 000002123636 £0.790
YORK PUB 000002123636 £0.790
SP 171333 000002117778 £1.20V
PILLOWCASE 601080100003 £0.490
HP KIP PETS 000002100333 £1.040
BLACK BACON 000002049912 £1.380
BLACK BACON 000002049912 £1.380
LEJUNE 000011808397 £1.440
HEIN TER 000002112891 £0.300
S/P PANCAKES 000002030883 £0.350
CHIPS 600023892836 £1.98V
CHOC CHIPS 603460050854 £1.32V
BACCOLI 000002038764 £1.120
ICE CREAM 172270000896 £1.78V
ICE CREAM 172270000896 £1.78V
ICE CREAM 172270000896 £1.78V
MULLIBUY MAY 04800999240XL £0.56
SOUP 600011506324 £0.590
NEW POTATOES 00000214890 £0.110
MICH PERS 000002100042 £0.220
M/FRT PERS 000002114892 £0.130
S PRICES LAND 000002178402 £0.350
PENGUIN 600016808513 £1.68V
PENGUIN 600016808513 £1.68V
MULLIBUY MAY 04800999240XL £1.16
M/FRT PERS 000002114892 £0.130
SOUP 600011506324 £0.590
NEW POTATOES 00000214890 £0.110
YOGURT 000002746023 £0.600
YOGURT 000002746041 £0.190
YOGURT 000002728912 £0.190
YOGURT 000002728912 £0.190
YOGURT 000002728912 £0.190
YOGURT 000002746041 £0.190
YOGURT 000002746041 £0.190
PETITORE COM 600016602305 £1.98V
LAUNDRY PWR 000002739306 £1.54V
SPRIGITTY 500015700687 £0.410
SARDINES SP 000002108246 £0.180
OK SLICES 600002100290 £1.040
MULLIBUY MAY 04800999240XL £0.48
SLICES 600002100330 £1.030
ANGEL SLICES 600002100888 £1.040
MULLIBUY MAY 04800999240XL £1.40
S'NARD 601147600021 £1.40
SUGAR 601006732660 £1.40
SCOTCH WHISK 000002744371 £6.84V
SUPERCHUNKS 303764601027 £0.69V
SUPERCHUNKS 303764601025 £0.69V
SUPERCHUNKS 303764601025 £0.69V
BLOOMER BOSS 023002000062 £0.520
S/PRICE EGGS 000002040846 £1.160
S/PRICE EGGS 000002040846 £1.160

TOTAL £64.80
CHRG £30.00
TOTAL CFS £30.00

EPS NO 8226
RIB 0000000003010
RIP EFFECTIVE DATE 09/02/05
CT:40 CU:451290S667061A

CONNECT DEBIT *Signature Verified 0 1
S/C No *** *** ** 5105
EXPIRY DATE FROM 05/08
AUTHORISATION No. 008884

Notified terms and conditions apply
MAGAZINE 9771765530 £1.80
MAGAZINE 977135646306 £2.00

TOTAL £68.65
CHRG £40.00
CHANGE DUE £1.35

YOU SAVED £4.80
PLEASE KEEP THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS

No. ITEMS SOLD 74
TCP 4208 9029 7071 2230 8437

RIGHT MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES
AVAILABLE AT ASDA STORES APPLY WITHIN
04/06/05 15:51:43

Figure 1 - A typical shopping receipt.

LTD.
BALDWIN HEATH
VAT NO. 81478000
www.11d.co.uk

Med White Loaf 0.10 A
Cilantro Flr 0.09 B
Pean Coll 0.09 B
Tomatoes Chopped 0.11 A
Tomatoes Chopped 0.11 A
Tomatoes Chopped 0.11 A
Spring water 0.09 A
Walshes Leaf 0.09 A
Lettuce 0.09 A
RED ONION 0.09 A
Garlic 0.09 A
Lup. Graftflower 0.46 A
Gala Apple 0.09 A
Carter Bag 0.09 A
Carter Bag 0.09 A
Salted Butter 0.09 A
Salted Butter 0.09 A
Cucumber 0.24 A

TOTAL 22 Pcs: £4.40
CASH GIVEN £0.00
CHANGE £4.40

VAT 8 0.00 0.00 0.00
B 17 0.00 0.00 2.42
LTD. W. ORCH. MARIA PARK
LUTTERWORTH, LE17 4EN
CHRG www.11d.co.uk 31.09.02 08:30

Figure 2 - A typical asylum seeker's shopping receipt.

RECIPIENT RECEIPT

DATE: 31/05/2005 TIME: 10:27

TRANSACTION ID:
3105200510272510000517

Stourbridge P.O.,
61 High Street
Stourbridge
West Midlands
DY8 1DJ

PAYMENT AUTHORIZED:

Amount: £31.15

CARD NO.: 0000 0000 0003 4609
HELPLINE: 0945 6000 914

Post Office will be closed on
Monday 30th May.

Figure 3 - The amount of money a typical asylum seeker receives per week.

Forgotten Questions about Asylum and Immigration

It is unfortunate that all talk concerning immigration and asylum in the tabloid media tends to focus only upon taxpayers' money and conceptions of 'legal' and 'illegal' asylum seekers, ignoring or concealing the deeper and more important questions behind these historical phenomena.

A more 'humane' approach would, perhaps, ask why 'these people come here' in the first place. For it must, indeed, be compelling reasons that would drive someone to leaving their home, family and community, in short of all the social and economic networks upon which people generally depend for surviving.

It seems fair to suggest that such compelling reasons are, at root, involved with a lack of human security, which, in essence, means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of

reference, rather than focusing exclusively on territorial or government security.

The range of potential threats to human security should not be narrowly conceived. While the safety of people is obviously at grave risk in situations of armed conflict, a human security approach is not simply synonymous with humanitarian action. It highlights the need to address the root causes of insecurity and to help ensure people's future safety. It would then be reasonable to ask who is responsible for these insecure situations people are forced into.

Poverty/global economy

A myth often propagated with regard to globalisation, is that it is inevitable and uncontrollable, that the best we can hope to do is play by its rules. Given the network of international treaties that govern the workings of the global economy, as well as the activities of the G8, the IMF, the WTO and their corporate lobby groups, with the continual rewriting and reworking of these treaties, the

impression that our economic system is, in some way, autonomous and self-managing is absurd. It is, however, an absurdity that works to the advantage of those who are held by the draw of power.

Another myth that has long surrounded globalisation goes that it is unique in its ability to raise the living standard of everyone on earth. However, in reality, the extent of poverty, in rich and poor countries alike, is on the rise, and so is the gap between those countries at the top of the wealth ladder and those at the bottom. Moreover, the chances that this extensive poverty could be eliminated seem to be very low, given that this poverty coincides with large and growing inequality of both income and wealth, inequalities ingrained in the laws of motion of capitalism.

Although there is great poverty and inequality in the richest country, this cannot compare to the levels of both of these to be found in the vast majority of the world's economies, which are both capitalist and poor. The World Bank estimates the number of persons in different countries and in the world as a whole who subsist on less than \$1 and \$2 per day. In Nigeria, for example, in the

early 1990s, 90.8% of the population lived on \$2 per day or less; in India the figure was 86.2% in 1997. In a world population of some 6 billion persons, the World Bank estimates that 2.8 billion survive on \$2 per day or less (about 45%); 1.2 billion lived on \$1 (about 20%) per day or less.

Mainstream economists have argued that the poor nations are simply on a low rung of a 'development ladder', and that over time, especially if they adopt 'free market' principles (basically the elimination of all barriers to the freedom of employers to try to make money, such as protective trade barriers, protective labour laws, subsidies to the poor, public enterprises, and limitations on the sale of land), they will become rich countries too. This hypothesis is difficult to demonstrate. While a very few formerly poor nations, mostly in Asia, have become relatively rich ones (South Korea, for example), most have remained poor.

Given all of this, it is difficult not to conclude that inequality, both within and among nations, must be endemic to capitalism. It is not very hard to see why. Wealth in a capitalist economy is unevenly divided by definition: Capitalism is an economic system in which

the non-human means of production (what mainstream economists call 'capital') are owned by a small minority of all persons. Wealth inequality in a market economy must, again as a consequence of the nature of the system, generate income inequality.

Armed conflicts/arms industry

It is a well known fact that the so-called First World countries are responsible for the majority of weapons production – a highly profitable, heavily subsidised and under-regulated business. The G8 (US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada & Russia) account for around 85% of the global arms trade and, between 1997 and 2001, at least two thirds of the world's arms deals came from just five G8 countries. Yet, these countries are the least affected by the use of arms. Of the 150 wars fought between 1945 and the mid 1990s, more than 9 out of 10 were in the 'developing' world. The overwhelming majority of people killed or injured by weapons are poor.

Unlike almost every other industry, the arms trade is not subject to any independent monitoring – scarcely believable

given the heavy regulations on food and medical drugs. That is, basically, because weapons production and government are often deeply intermeshed. In many G8 countries, there is a 'military-industrial complex' where state subsidies support arms companies and arms companies exercise excessive political influence. In the UK, 600 civil servants work for the arms trade, paid for by the government, through the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), a sector of the MoD whose objective is to help the arms industry sell overseas.

One of the biggest corporations in the UK is BAE Systems plc, a global arms company with interests also in civilian avionics and engineering. The company, directly employing over 100,000 people, is present in five continents, with customers in 129 countries, and its order book at the end of the year 2000 totalled £41 billion. Its biggest rivals are the US companies Lockheed Martin and Boeing, as well as the European syndicate EADS Inc, which formed when BAE acquired GEC.

BAE Systems has committed an impressive amount of 'corporate crimes' (for details see

www.corporatewatch.org.uk). Its arms sales to Indonesia, which was ruled by the vicious US-backed Suharto regime and is still governed by a corrupt and undemocratic system, in which the military retains a large portion of power. These arms -particularly Hawk jets- have been repeatedly used in internal repression since 1978, especially in East Timor.

The UK sold £84 million worth of arms to Turkey in 1998, most of which came directly from the BAE Systems. The orders for that year, which was largely typical, included tank turrets, military components and torpedoes. The problem, of course, is that Turkey is an oppressive regime with an appalling human rights record. It routinely uses its military equipment to oppress and kill Kurds and other ethnic minorities.

Britain and Russia are both accused of supplying weaponry and technology to Sudan during the recent conflict in the southern part of the country. France has been supplying, through the French oil giant Elf, weapons to both main parties in the conflict in the Congo.

Arms purchases do not merely waste scarce resources, but also aggravate international tensions, generating mutual suspicion and

hostility. The essence of this traffic is the alliance between Western arms companies and local military interests, which repeatedly show that they can manipulate even democratic politicians into needless extravagances.

Repressive regimes/the West's interests

Tony Blair claims to be prioritising Africa's problems and climate change at the upcoming G8 summit in Scotland. It is hard to see how he, and his fellow leaders, can do this without addressing the significant links in many African countries between the demand for natural resources, such as oil and gas, and the supply of weapons. As we said, all G8 countries are guilty of supplying weapons, small arms or torture equipment to the African countries they depend on for supplies of fossil fuels and other raw materials.

British Petroleum (BP) is one of the barometer companies of the British economy. More than 70% of the company's profits are generated in Europe and the United States, but the company is also pressing ahead with new exploration and production operations in Africa, South America, Asia and the Caspian sea.

BP has interests in China as well, with both its oil and chemicals divisions operating in the country. Keen to capture a slice of the growing Chinese energy market, it has invested \$580 million in Petrochina, China's largest oil company, a subsidiary of the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation. Petrochina is accused of profiting from human rights abuses in Tibet and Sudan. Since 1998, China has been the largest supplier of weapons to the Sudanese Regime in Khartoum. The war against the local populations of Southern Sudan has been fought with the goal of depopulating the oil regions. Innumerable people have already been killed and tens of thousands have fled or are fleeing because of the 'burnt-earth politics' practised by the government.

Another good example is Libya. After Tony Blair's 'historic' visit to the previously 'rogue' country on 25 March, 2004, Libya was welcomed back into the international community after long years of international isolation. The UN Security Council had voted in September, 2003, to lift the economic sanctions, which were imposed in 1992 in an effort to force Libya to hand over the famous Lockerbie bombing suspects.

All of a sudden, all that previous rhetoric about human rights violations and supporting terrorism was forgotten, and Libyan asylum seekers are now more likely to be refused and deported back home as the regime is not 'rogue' any more! Libya has even been 'commissioned' by the EU to process asylum applications, from other African countries, on its soil instead of 'bothering with them here', never mind the grave concerns international human rights organisations have raised.

It is known that as the Prime Minister and the Colonel shook hands, it was announced that Anglo-Dutch oil giant Shell had signed a deal worth up to £550m for gas exploration rights off the Libyan coast. In addition to Shell, other British firms have already begun tapping the opportunities in Libya, including defence contractor BAE Systems, which declared it was in talks over aviation projects. Needless to say, Libya's first auction of oil and gas exploration licences, in January 2005, heralded the return of US energy companies for the first time in more than 20 years.

Asylum Politics

On 22 July 2004, the most recent piece of British asylum and

immigration legislation received royal assent, further extending the legal framework that regulates immigrants and asylum seekers in the UK. As an area of British law, immigration and asylum has received an almost unprecedented amount of legislation recently, the latest Act being the fifth in only eleven years. This 'legislative incontinence' reflects the great interest and political importance made of the immigration and asylum issue. It is an area that has seen not only incredible domestic focus but also much attention at EU level where there are moves towards increased European co-operation and management.

to a greater or lesser extent, upon the exploitation and impoverishment of the majority of people. It is a system that is intrinsically caught up in and dependent upon militarisation. As a result, people are systematically denied the ability to support themselves, and are placed into positions of insecurity, where they are unable to enjoy the conditions under which they are free from fear and want. Is it merely an irony that the corporate media prefer to turn on these already dispossessed people, to scapegoat, stereotype and blame them for the problems that this same economic and political system causes?

Governments have increasingly tightened border controls and, within a context of highly politicised and media-fuelled moral panic and fear, designed increasingly punitive and draconian regulations against migrants. And despite these increasingly tight immigration controls, the numbers of migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, has remained roughly constant over the past 20 years.

The global economic and political system within which we live is a system that concentrates economic power in the hands of small elites, who are conversely, bound to rely,



Refugees for Refugees

This article focuses on the invaluable work of voluntary refugee and asylum seeker groups. The need for these groups highlights gaping areas where support from the already overworked funded organisations is not available.

Like many other community organisations, Cite Celeste was set up to pick up the pieces left from the government's asylum policy and help provide integration and support for the French-speaking community. Here is the history and motivations of Cite Celeste in their words:

Before it was set up, we did a survey about the needs of the Francophone community, because language is a big barrier for people that speak French to integrate into British society. After the survey it became clear that it was necessary to create an organisation to help the Francophone community, and so Cite Celeste was formed on 4th October 2001, with the aim is to provide advice and raise awareness of issues facing new arrivals in the UK.

Cite Celeste provides advice on immigration, health, housing, employment, education and training. We also organise culture events and promoting business for our community.

The logo is a butterfly, because a butterfly changes state from being a Caterpillar. A Caterpillar is fragile; it is vulnerable, much like when a person first arrives from afar and faces problems applying for asylum. We help people become free, to become butterflies.



The name Cite Celeste means 'heavenly city' or Celeste city. We hope that people who seek refuge would find a plenty of love and compassion from those who 'host' them, because if what such people need most is to be considered as human beings and have their human rights respected.

Marie's story

Marie had just arrived in the country from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) without knowing anyone. We found her at Digbeth Coach Station in the evening. She was lucky we spoke French.

We found her a bed for the night. In the morning we took her to the Immigration Office in Solihull and helped explain her situation to the Immigration Officer. Other asylum seekers have to do this without support, often walking to Solihull from Birmingham if they don't have money for the bus.

We gave her our phone number and, after 2 days, she phoned us saying she'd been sent to a hostel in Edgbaston. We visited her there to find her even more scared. She showed us her Self Evidence Form and other asylum papers. We then took her to the Cite Celeste office and provided help finding a solicitor and an interpreter.

Her case was being processed and would take quite a while. So, meanwhile, we provided support by helping her enrol at City College to learn English. She also became part of our community, La Gloire, which is a church group.

After 6 months, her claim was

refused. Her first solicitor was unwilling to carry on with her appeal. A second solicitor was found and she was eventually granted leave to stay. Paradoxically, a successful claim could sometimes result in a vulnerable situation. For example, she was given only 14 days to evacuate the NASS accommodation and find another room.

Marie had a friend who was able to assist her in this difficult time. Other asylum seekers are not so lucky. Some people can be stuck as a caterpillar for 3 years before becoming butterflies.



Committee members of Cite Celeste at Refugee Week 2004

Henri's Story

I came to this country in December 2002, fleeing the political regime in DRC. I claimed asylum once I arrived in Birmingham, and was helped by Cite Celeste. They found me a solicitor and took me to Solihull to the Immigration Office.

On 8 January 2003, a new law came into force removing support from asylum seekers who don't claim asylum immediately upon arrival. I went to the solicitors, but they were fully booked and told me to come back in January. I went to the Refugee Council and was accommodated in a hostel in Moseley. They didn't give us any cash but food was provided. I had no papers either so couldn't enrol with college. On 7th January I had an appointment with the solicitor and my asylum papers had not been sent off yet. They were sent on 8th January, just in time. I was very lucky, one of the last ones before the new law came into force.

After 4 months I was sent to Liverpool for the interview. The owner of the hostel took me. I didn't have an interpreter but back in my country I learned basic English so was able to get through the interview. After a month or so, I received a letter at the hostel. My claim was refused. I had been arrested and detained in DRC, so my case was pretty strong. My solicitor was surprised that it was refused and lodged an appeal on my behalf. Today, in June 2005, I am still 'hoping' to hear back whether my appeal was accepted or not. I haven't been sent any letter or received a phone call. I

called the Home Office and they said the appeal is still pending.

What if they say I have no right to stay in this country? My family are dispersed. even if I went back, where would I go?

You would expect a decision within 2 years, wouldn't you? It is a long time to be left in the dark. I still live on NASS emergency support. To give an example of the insecurity we asylum seekers face, I got a letter from NASS in May 2004 saying that I should go and live in Stoke-on-Trent. I've been living in Birmingham for two years and a half. I got married in 2003 and had children, and was studying Music Technology. There was no way I was going to leave all this behind so I told them "Never!"

They said that if I don't move then I will have nowhere to live. I protested about this to the Refugee Council and they encouraged me to move to Stoke. I was concerned that my studies would be affected if this happened, but they suggested that I start my course again in Stoke.

I protested at both the hostel where I was living and at the Refugee Council. My college supported me with letters pointing

out the disruption that moving would cause. The pressure paid off and NASS relented.

In the meantime, I volunteered with Cite Celeste, helping new arrivals. I now take people to Liverpool, where I once needed help, interpreting for them and offering help and advice

After completing my course, I gained a Diploma in Music Technology and, with the skills gained, I have made a Gospel music CD, which I am hoping to release soon.



Picnic organised by Cite Celeste in summer 2002

Voluntary groups: vital service, no recognition

We receive no support from the Home Office or Councils. We provide a vital service similar to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), except that we don't get any funding. We do it because we want to help people. When they arrive they are on their own Island even within a community.

(Cite Celeste address and contact numbers: Wardlow Road Centre, Wardlow Road, Nechells, Birmingham B7 4JH, Email: citeceleste@hotmail.com, Tel: 0121 464 3557/3558, Fax: 0121 464 2998)

Working it Out: Asylum Seekers and Work

It is widely accepted that 'economic migration' occurs in response to labour demand in richer countries. Europe and North America do need foreign labour to do jobs that the natives have ceased to be willing to do.

The myth that immigrants "steal our jobs" is totally unfounded. In fact, immigrants and refugees to Britain have historically shored up crumbling and under-staffed infrastructure, particularly the transport and health sectors.

On the other hand, immigrants' remittances (money sent to home country) form one of the largest flows of resources in the world today. The amounts involved are difficult to estimate because remittances are often made through unofficial channels and not recorded in the statistics. However, the World Bank official figure for remittances is higher than the figures for foreign aid.

Although not perfect, remittances have several benefits. They are not the result of any 'charity' from rich countries, but are the product of the migrants themselves. They are

unconditional, unlike aid from the World Bank and IMF, and do not have to be repaid. In the current unequal state of the world, remittances are possibly one of the best mechanisms currently available for redistributing the world's income in favour of poorer countries.

Since July 2002, however, asylum seekers coming into Britain are not allowed to work. Asylum seekers receive the equivalent of just 70% of the basic Income Support rates, regarded by the Government itself as the minimum required to live on. That means they are forced to live up to 30% below the poverty line.

Given all this, is it so strange that many asylum seekers seek to work in the black market to feed themselves?

Paul, 33, came from the Ivory Coast 3 years ago, fleeing persecution and ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities. All this time, he wasn't called for an asylum interview until recently. After 3 years, however, he had his interview but his asylum claim was refused. His solicitor then refused to take on the case as "it was too old and there was no evidence."

His NASS benefits were cut off and he had to leave his accommodation. Luckily, he managed to find another solicitor to appeal for him but needed to pay the £800 fees. Having been here for 3 years, he has built up a network of support and was able to obtain fake papers that allowed him to work. He took a job in a factory with a good wage and was soon able to pay the solicitor and live a reasonably decent life.

However, this is quite rare; most people are forced into illegal underground economy, at the mercy of unscrupulous employers and employment agencies. In fact, entire sectors, such as fruit picking and food packing, are completely dependent on illegal workers.

Muhannad, an Iraqi failed asylum seeker, has been working in fruit and vegetable picking in the Birmingham area for almost a year now. "I've worked in many many farms, he says, apples, peas, onions.. everything!" "It's pretty hard in winter," he adds, "And, of course, there's no work on rainy days."

We ask him if the employers know they are prohibited from work, and he says: "of course they do! Most of the people who work in these farms are asylum seekers. There are a few who are immigrants as

well, especially Pakistani."

The work would normally start at 6 or 7 in the morning, then non-stop till the sun sets. Sometimes they get less than £3 per hour. "With peas, for example, explains Muhannad, you get 4 quid per basket, which could sometimes take more than 2 hours to fill, depending on the size of the pea." Out of that £20 or £30 they make a day, they have to pay £5 each to the 'driver', who is usually the person who takes them to work in his van and arranges everything with the employer.

This cheap labour in farms, as well as that in food processing plants, is one of the reasons why UK supermarkets are able to offer such low food prices. All over the country, food companies are employing illegal workers alongside native workers. In fact, the managers of these companies prefer to hire illegal workers as these, being so desperate for work, would accept to be paid much less, not to mention the advantage of getting away with welfare contributions and other non-wage costs.

Husham, a Sudanese failed asylum seeker, works at a food processing and packing agency in the Midlands area. He travels 70-75 miles every day to get there from

where he lives. His job is to carry the boxes from the end of the production line to the pallets where the boxes are stacked. He complains of a slight back pain, but still finds the £30 he gets per day worth the suffering. "I wouldn't be able to survive otherwise, he adds, now that my asylum claim has been refused and my benefits cut off."

Another miserable 'profession', which is almost exclusive to asylum seekers and refugees, is hand car wash. Everywhere in the country, car washes are employing illegal workers, off the record, for the lowest wages one could get (£20-30 a day). Muhammad, a Kurdish asylum seeker, complains about the hardship of his job, showing his scared hands: "it's not worth it." "they are exploiting us because they know we're illegal and would accept any pay."

Although they are making some money, and are relatively better off than their fellow asylum seekers who aren't working, none of the people we met was happy with their situation. It seems the advantages of the underground economy are mostly on the side of the employer and the national economy. Hence, it seems fair to ask: why is such panic being fueled with regard to 'illegal' workers?

And further, where do the Government's priorities lie, given that these policies, on the one hand, benefit the UK economy, but on the other, result in exploitation and misery for asylum seekers?

A Possible Solution: LETS

Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS) are non-profit clubs, in which local people exchange goods and services with each other without money being involved. There are groups all around the world. Birmingham's group is called BrumLETS.

Services are exchanged for LETS tokens. In Birmingham these are known as Hearts. In this way, one can obtain services, ranging from dog walking to painting and decorating, from any other member within the group.

BrumLETS encourages refugees and asylum seekers to join, although, for the latter, this, too, would be illegal. According to the law, asylum seekers are prohibited from paid and unpaid work alike!

Tel: 0121 685 1155

BrumLETS 54 – 57 Allison Street,
Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 5TH

Email: info@brumlets.org.uk

Website: www.wmlets.org.uk

Resistance in Exile

One of the myths the tabloid media have managed to create over the years is that refugees come here for money, the quick conclusion being “they don’t have anything else to worry about”.

The fact, however, is that most refugees are highly politicised, not least because they have virtually fled their countries of origin to escape some sort of persecution, often of a political nature. They generally tend to keep strong relationships with their home countries through a wide range of activities, from social and cultural gatherings, web sites and publications, to purely political protests concerning hot issues back home.

See you at the embassy!

Occasionally, certain quiet, luxurious areas in London become crowded with unusual ‘tourists’. It wouldn’t take you a minute to realise there is some sort of protest, although you might not be able to recognise the ‘strange’ flags or read the ‘exotic’ signs.

Last March, Syrian Kurds travelled twice (on the 12th and 14th) to

London from all over England to demonstrate at the Syrian Embassy in Belgrave Square. It was to commemorate the victims of last year’s Qamishli incidents and demand the release of those still detained by the Syrian authorities. According to an Amnesty International report, several people were killed by Syrian security and police forces during the 12 March 2004 disturbances that followed a soccer match between Arabic and Kurdish teams. The following days witnessed widespread riots in the northern, Kurdish-populated parts of the country, in what has come to be known as the Qamishli Uprising, resulting in the killing of 36 people, mostly Kurds, and more than 100 wounded. According to the same report, more than 2,000 people were arrested. About 100 are still detained to date.

Last year’s demonstration was, of course, much bigger as the stuff was still hot, says Beiwar Deriki, from the Kurdish Unity Party in Syria (Yekiti). “It was a rather modest one, though, compared to those organised in Berlin and Brussels, for example, where larger Kurdish communities exist.”

Like many of the protesters, Mr Deriki, who has just been granted

indefinite leave to stay in the UK, used to be what is known as a “stateless Kurd”. In 1962, the Syrian government carried out an exceptional census in the Hasakeh province, where most Syrian Kurds reside, whereby 120,000 people were stripped off their nationality. 300 villages were evacuated from their Kurdish inhabitants and replaced by Arabs, in an organised scheme to ‘arabise’ the fertile and oil-rich region. Ever since then, Kurds have suffered persistent discrimination and persecution at the hands of the Ba’th regime. As recently as 10 May, 2005, a prominent Islamic figure and outspoken member of the Kurdish community was abducted, allegedly by the Syrian military intelligence, and subsequently found dead with apparent torture marks. The incident followed the arrest of a number of activists in the capital Damascus, in what some observers described as a sudden increase in the harassment and ill-treatment of human rights defenders.

Like their Syrian counterparts, Libyans have long suffered a repressive, authoritarian regime that is famous for its poor human rights record. They, too, find their embassy the only ‘target’ where they could demonstrate on such occasions as the annual anniversary of the coup that

brought President Muammar Gaddafi to power in 1969. Another famous occasion is the annual anniversary of the declaration of the so-called People’s Power (effectively martial law) in 1977, when the country’s official name was changed to the Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriyah.



Kurdish demonstration at the Syrian Embassy, March 2004.

On June 27, like every year since 1996, Libyan activists will be organising a stay-in at the Libyan People’s Bureau (embassy) in London to commemorate the horrible Bu-Slim massacre, where 1,200 prisoners were executed inside the Bu-Slim prison, one of the worst in the world. This year, the protest will be following a general meeting of Libyan opposition parties, the first of its kind in decades. “God knows what’ll happen,” says Suleiman Bar’asi, a Libyan independent activist. “After all, it’s the same people who opened fire at protesters in 1984, only to kill a

British policewoman who was policing the demonstration.”

The shot that killed Wpc Yvonne Fletcher was fired from inside the embassy, and Scotland Yard has long suspected that Libya knows the identity of the killer, but he is thought to have been smuggled out of Britain after the shooting, claiming diplomatic immunity. The famous incident then resulted in the UK's breaking off diplomatic relations with Libya until they were restored in July 1999, after Libya accepted 'general responsibility' for Wpc Fletcher's murder.



Libyan demonstration at Libyan People's Bureau, June 2004

Mr Bar'asi complains that only tens would usually turn up to the protests while there are thousands of Libyans living in the UK. He attributes that to the Embassy's surveillance cameras, not to mention disguised government agents among the protesters.

“People are still afraid, even this faraway, of the repressive regime,” he adds. “If not for themselves, then there is always the fear of jeopardising you family back home. There have been many incidents in the past where someone has been arrested and ill-treated for his son's or brother's activities abroad.”

One should not also forget that many people, being unemployed refugees and asylum seekers, cannot afford travelling to London every now and then, on their own expense, only to participate in a protest, adds another Libyan guy who was present at the meeting in Birmingham.

What's the point?

It seems a reasonable question since such regimes are often not democratically elected and would not, therefore, worry about the electorate or public opinion. They would not even bother sending out an embassy official to whom protesters could hand over their letter or petition.

Yet, argues Mr Deriki, this kind of activity has historically proven to be quite beneficial in the long run. “The Kurdish cause has come to the international community's attention only through the relentless protests of the Kurdish

community in Europe,” he adds. “Then the political pressure on such regimes could, sometimes, bring about some change, as was the case with releasing many Syrian high-profile prisoners upon the demand of the European Parliament. The recent ‘reforms’ by the Assad administration have certainly something to do with the increasing pressure from the West, particularly the US.”

Less to the point, perhaps, Zaher Abdul-Karim, a Syrian failed asylum seeker, argues that such protests could also raise awareness of the situation within the asylum system, and hence bigger chances for genuine asylum seekers to be granted asylum. Paradoxically, Mr Abdul-Karim himself has been refused asylum, although the immigration judge accepted he has been quite politically active here and that the Syrian authorities may well be aware of that, which could apparently put him at risk if returned to Syria.

No embassy, no fuss

Arash Shakib from the Political Association of Iranian Refugees, which was set up 4 years ago after a successful protest at the Midlands Refugee Council. 104 Iranian families had been dispersed to Birmingham, under a Hackney Council (London) scheme, then

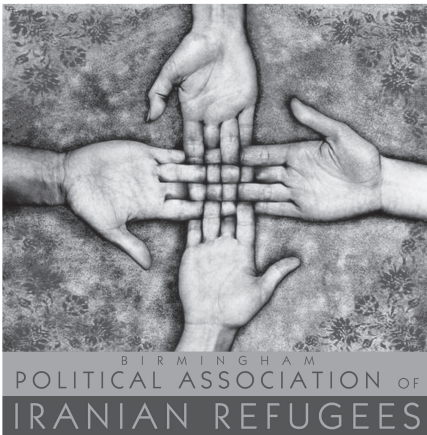
after 8 months, the HO decided to send them back to where they had originally come from in the UK. After the authorities ignored attempts to use other avenues of negotiation, they decided to ‘occupy’ the Refugee Council in Birmingham. This lasted for a couple of hours and resulted in the Police arresting 2 organisers. Within days, 93 families were allowed to stay in Brum, with the rest choosing to return voluntarily.

The Political Association of Iranian Refugees do stuff for refugees and asylum seekers. In combination with the Anti-Racist Campaign, the Association organised an overnight sleep-out on 14 June, 2004, to highlight the problems of destitution, homelessness, and lack of access to legal support that asylum seekers face as a result of the government’s asylum policy. Participants spent the entire night in the grounds of Birmingham Cathedral, together with supporters and friends, including parishioners from the Cathedral. There will be a similar sleep-out this year on the 22nd June.

Their other main activities focus on countering pro-regime propaganda and events. For example, the pro-regime people (mainly wealthy or government sponsored students) celebrate every 11 Feb as the

anniversary of the Islamic revolution, which Arash describes as a 'counter-revolution'.

In 1979, Iran became the centre of world attention when the monarchy was overthrown, following widespread riots, strikes and mass demonstrations (since September 1978) in protest at the Western-backed Shah's policies of authoritarian rule and martial law. Following this truly democratic Peoples Revolution, religious clerics, headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, seized control and declared an Islamic Republic. This new regime soon began to eliminate its own political opponents through systematic repression (executions, arbitrary arrests etc.) forcing those who escaped to seek refuge abroad, especially in Canada, the US and UK.



Meanwhile, Arash contends that the British government are themselves playing a dirty game, attempting to accommodate the Islamic regime, while also supporting the US's fanciful axis of evil. Both of these strategies ultimately serve to undermine the strong and vibrant movements that are currently pushing for democracy from within Iran itself. An ironic situation given the commitment that the US and UK governments claim to hold for democracy.

Freedom and Democracy?

The mainstream media's coverage is also complicit with such contradictory positions, as all of the people we interviewed seemed to agree. Media coverage, if any, of such activities is often biased and tends only to identify with official narratives. A simple comparison with the great efforts both the government and the mainstream media made to secure and cover the participation of UK's 30,000 Iraqi community in the Iraqi elections, last January, should be quite telling. It would be very naive, we think, to assume that this was merely out of caring for the democratic project in Iraq.

As such, both the UK Government and the mainstream media continue to occupy contradictory

positions; on the one hand, they plan and pander for watered down versions of democracy, delivered on the backs of B-52 bombers, while, on the other, they ignore real grass roots movements, which struggle for concrete and truly democratic social change from within repressive regimes. Given such contradictions, it is hardly surprising that asylum seekers and refugees who have been forced to flee from repressive regimes continue to organise demonstrations, protests and celebrations of often persecuted cultural traditions. If, therefore, you happen to find yourself in a luxurious area of London, or perhaps in front of Birmingham Council House, and are faced with such a demonstration, the most fitting response may well be to take a minute in which to consider the tenacity of the human spirit in the face of state terrorism.

My Grandfather's Story

By Jon Korvin

In 1939, people in eastern Poland found themselves in a crisis precipitated by the German invasion from the west. The Soviet Union took the opportunity to invade Poland from the east, ostensibly to protect the Union from the German advance as well as to spread Stalinism. Accounts of the suffering can be read on the Internet. My grandfather's family were amongst those who suffered.

I had always known my grandfather came to Britain as a refugee, but he was a quiet man who never told me his story. He chose to 'integrate', as the current jargon has it; he tried to become British. It's only recently that it has reached my ears, told to me over a cup of tea by the Englishwoman he married, his widow, my grandmother.

He was born Wladiswau Longin Malaczynski in 1919. His family were quite privileged, having been given a large plot of land by the Polish government as payment for his father's military service. 1939 ended this relative wealth. Deported to, and abandoned in Russia, my grandfather, his brother, three sisters and mother were forced to survive through raiding

parties, cattle stealing, building shelter and, eventually, finding work logging and baking. As refugees, ignored by the government, they were able to survive in freezing, harsh conditions using their own ingenuity, organisation and labour.

Under pressure from the Polish exiled government, and the British government, the Soviet Union decided to round up the Poles they had displaced and concentrate them in refugee camps with a view to bringing them into the war as fighters. Typhoid killed Wladiswau's mother and one of his sisters, the two sisters being deported to India, while the two brothers travelled to the Middle East to join the allies. Shipped out from there by the British authorities, who, of course, had a major colonial presence in the region, Wladiswau had the limited freedom to decide which part of the allied war effort he wished to join. Initially interested in the air force, he changed his mind at the eleventh hour and instead joined the navy. This decision saved his life as the first flight of displaced Poles, including his friends who had joined the air force, a flight he would have been on, was lost.

Wladiswau was demobilised in 1946, and the 27-year old refugee was placed in a resettlement camp in Devon, south-west England. Here he was able to take courses in electrical engineering and, with no Polish home to return to, he asked to stay in Britain as a worker. He was taken on by the manager of a West Midlands gas company who was touring the refugee camps looking for labour, and Wladiswau was employed stoking furnaces.

In the heart of industrial post-war Britain, his daily food during this period, provided by his landlady, consisted of a tiny bottle of milk, some bread and some fat. He married and, soon, my mother was born. During the 1960's he found work at the Longbridge car factory, where he worked until diagnosed with cancer in 1984. He died a year later.

Looking over the story now, it's striking that, as a refugee, his life was shaped by the whims of various governments, whether German, Soviet, Polish or British. His time in northern Russia after the initial displacement was possibly the harshest and most dangerous time. But, although risking instant execution from the indigenous people he was stealing from, he was good enough and organised enough to escape that

fate. Free to live off the land, having the knowledge to avoid poison while gathering the fruits of nature, free to build and to grow as a human being beyond what he could have imagined. It's only when government steps in, concentrating refugees for political benefits, that the conditions become worse. Yet, at least in Devon, while placed in a government camp, he had the freedom of education and work. Perhaps that is why he chose to 'become British'. After all, no other government had valued his potential and labour in the same way. As a car worker, he inspected and worked in the factory churning out Mini Coopers (a well-known symbol of Britishness) and did not seek links with the Polish community in the West Midlands of England. His active ties with central Europe were familial, not national. This was his choice. But it was a choice only enabled by the opportunity to work.

The comfortable life he lived until the age of 20 is perhaps a reminder that anyone can become a refugee, no matter who they are. Human beings have always been migrants and always will. But becoming a refugee only happens thanks to the meddling into our lives of those who seek to rule.

Celebrating Sanctuary Birmingham is a registered charity working with refugees and asylum seekers. We believe that sanctuary is a human right. We aim to provide a platform for refugees and asylum seekers living in the West Midlands to share their different cultural identities. We attempt to challenge some of the misleading information from the media and some politicians by providing opportunities for everyone to interact with refugees and asylum seekers. We provide a framework for local organisations and schools to organise activities aimed at improving public awareness about refugees and asylum seekers.

The views expressed in this publication represent those of the authors and are not necessarily representative of the views of Celebrating Sanctuary

