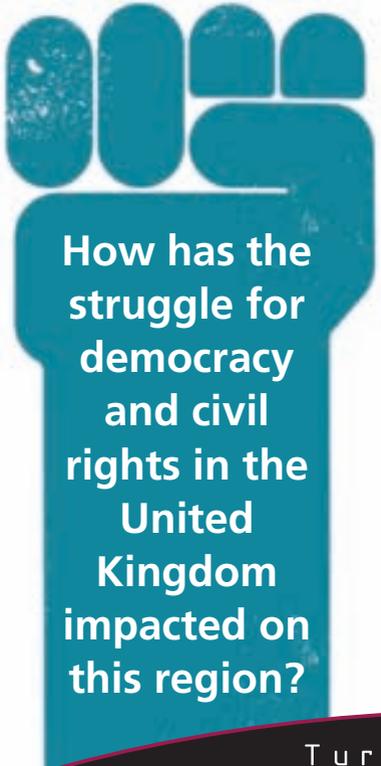




Taking Liberties

in the North East



How has the
struggle for
democracy
and civil
rights in the
United
Kingdom
impacted on
this region?

Life and liberty
Personal testimony
from the Taking Liberties
Project



Turn a new page



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Taking Liberties in the North East

The aim of the Taking Liberties Project was to build on the Heritage Lottery funded exhibition, Taking Liberties in the North East, which ran in Newcastle City Library between 24 November 2010 and 30 January 2011.

The exhibition, which was presented in partnership with the British Library, focused on the 900 year struggle for democracy in the United Kingdom, and paid particular attention to the North East's contribution to the fight for civil liberties and democracy. It featured the 1832 Representation of the People Act, lent to the City from the Parliamentary Archives, and explored themes of struggle, protest, values, rights, liberties and what it means to be British.

As part of the exhibition, visitors were given an opportunity to see and hear the personal stories of those involved in the Taking Liberties Project. This Heritage Lottery funded project provided an opportunity for refugees and asylum-seekers from a range of countries to find out more about the history of rights and civil liberties in Britain. Participation in a series of workshops enabled group members to explore issues of human rights and values and learn about each other's journeys to the UK.

In the course of these workshops, people recounted their experiences in their native countries and related how they came to be resident in the North East. They spoke of human rights violations they had suffered and the frustrations of dealing with bureaucracy when settling in the UK. Their accounts provided a valuable contemporary addition to the historical material constituting the bulk of the exhibition and seemed worth preserving.



In order to make more people aware of these culturally valuable stories, it was therefore decided to collate the narratives of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrant workers in the area, enabling their testimony to reach a wider audience. This led to the creation of the pamphlet you are now reading.

Testimony was largely provided by local ESOL students. Contributors were drawn from Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, Iran, Turkey, Poland and India. We hope that their stories will lead to greater understanding of asylum-seekers, migrant workers and refugees and emphasize the major contribution these groups make to the life of the region.

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Nasera (Bangladesh)

I am writing about my dad coming to England. My dad came to England sixty years ago. He has been in England a long time.

The first time, he lived in London. He worked in a factory. He made lots of money. He didn't work in Bangladesh because Bangladesh didn't have any money.

My dad applied for my big brother to join him the first time he was here. He was successful.

The second time my dad was here, he lived in Leicester with my brother. He applied for me and my family to join him and he was successful. Now my dad is dead.

My name is Nasera. I come from Bangladesh. I came to England 10 years ago. My dad came to England with me. The first time, I lived for three years in Leicester. Now I have lived in Newcastle for seven years. I am very happy because I can be free.

Anonymous (Turkey)

I had big problems when I was a child. I went to a school where the teachers didn't like my people because they, the teachers, were Turkish.

I lived in the east of Turkey. Some people were Kurdish and some Turkish. My town and area were all Kurdish and spoke the Kurdish language. Our denomination and creed were different. We didn't go to mosque or wear the hijab [headscarf worn by Moslem women]. When I went to school, though, me and the rest of my people didn't speak Kurdish because our teachers became angry.

Sometimes, our teacher would find children speaking Kurdish. We were told that, if after class, some children spoke Kurdish, we were to come and tell him. Because we were never to speak Kurdish, we were taught Turkish instead. I completed 5 years of education before the government closed the school. Then my school changed into a barracks.

I came to England because of politics, because I had many problems in my country. England has human rights. I live here with my family and am very happy. England is safe for me and my family.



Fahmida (Bangladesh)

I am writing about freedom. In my country, a long time ago, my mum told me that the government said short blouses were not allowed for women. Now everything is okay and people have freedom.

When I got married, I came to the UK. I lived in my mother-in-law's house. She knew I couldn't speak English. My mother-in-law therefore spoke to you [ESOL] saying I needed to study English. She applied for me to join the ESOL class.

My husband has given me a lot of freedom. I have learned to drive in the UK. I sew clothes in my house, making dresses, burkajs and blouses. My family has a great deal of freedom in this country. I am really happy with my teacher, Joan. She is very kind and helpful and friendly.

A workshop in progress



Jusna (Bangladesh)

My father first came to the UK because he was poor in Bangladesh. Our country was very poor and had lots of human rights' violations. I didn't see this. But my father said that was why he came to the UK and he is a very reliable person. Our country is not free, but freedom is a good idea, I think. He has supported his family.

Anonymous (Hong Kong)

I am writing about my country, Hong Kong. It is a peaceful and beautiful place. It has lots of model buildings and restaurants from different countries. Many different people work and live in Hong Kong. It was free.

I came here with my husband. His family came to England to live a long time ago. It was very difficult for the Chinese people to live there then. The English people didn't like the Chinese people. Some English people fought the Chinese people. The Chinese people were working very hard. A long time ago, the Chinese people didn't know how to speak English.

Now most English people like Chinese people, because most can speak English. They talk together and work together.

In the UK, there is freedom and it is a very peaceful place. Every year, you can take part in elections and choose to vote for people and do the right thing.



Discussing life stories
in the workshop



Anonymous (China)

I am writing a letter about my country's violation of freedom.

In 1989, in the capital, Beijing, university students organised to protest to the government against official bribery and corruption. In a few days, this spread to students from all national universities. The government sent out the army to suppress the students. They opened fire with guns and killed some students. This is a true story.



Anonymous (Bangladesh)

My father-in-law came first to the UK. He lived in London. He worked in a restaurant. Then a few years later, my husband came to London. My husband stayed in London 10 years. He came to Newcastle 21 years ago. Then he went to Bangladesh. He married me in 1995, then I came to Newcastle in 1996. I stayed with my husband's family 6 years, then I moved to a different house, now me and my husband and child have our own house.

6 years ago I didn't have freedom. Now I have a lot of freedom. My husband is very good, he tells me I can get a job, I can go to the gym, I can learn English.

England is good for me. I go out on my own. I am not scared.



Anonymous (Poland)

I come from Poland. I came to the UK because, in my country, it is really difficult to get a job. I have been here 4 years and I started my first job after doing free days when I came to the UK. I have got a part-time job because I am still learning English. Also I have to pass my driving test to get a driving license. That will really help me to get a better job.

I feel really free in the UK, more than in my country. You ask why? There's only one reason – the job.

Parisa (Iran)

My name is Parisa. I am from Iran. I am going to write about civil liberties in my country. In Iran, women's rights are very low. Women can't wear light colours, red, green etc, for their clothes. When they are working, even when they just go outside, they must wear a hijab. If your clothes aren't correct, they can send you to prison or fine you.

I have a degree in psychology from Iran. I finished my studies and searched for a job for 2 years. Finally, I found a job in a school. I had to pass two oral exams and then they sent someone to make a thorough investigation of me and my family. In the end, this was more important than my qualification.

I had several interviews about religion, attitudes to government and how I dressed when I went to work or outside. I had to cover my body with three layers of clothes – even my fingers – to work in school. That was terrible because I couldn't move freely. My salary was very low. I couldn't continue this way for more than a year.

In Iran, people haven't the right to choose their clothes and how they use makeup and do their hair. This is the very first right for human beings. But in other countries people have this minimum right, they can choose their clothes.

The Taking Liberties group



Ubaida (Bangladesh)

My father-in-law came to England sixty years ago. He lived in Bradford. Now he lives in Newcastle. He worked in a factory. Now he is a pensioner. My husband came to England thirty years ago. He worked in a restaurant. Now he works in a taxi.

In my country, the law is not very good. Sometimes it is terrible. Some of the people managed to live by the rules. Some of the people didn't care for the rules. Before, in my country, crime was very common. Now, it's not so common.

In England, law-enforcement is very good. In England, everything comes on time. The government rules everyone with respect. In this country, hijacking and stealing are rare. In my country, hijacking and stealing and murder were very common, but are not now.

My husband is ok. I have lots of freedom when I go out. My husband is not a problem. I like the free life. I do not like the un-free life.

At home in Newcastle





Khaled (Iran)

I came to the UK seven years ago. During the first three months when I was in the UK, immigration found my fingerprints in the previous place I was in, Germany. Immigration made the decision to send me back to Germany. I was in an immigration hostel in London and I had to leave the immigration hostel so that the police could safely transfer me to Germany.

I didn't know what I could do or what I couldn't do to stop them deporting me to Germany.

But I'd made my decision to stay in the UK. How to change Immigration's decision was the problem. It was very difficult for me - the most difficult thing ever in my life. What was I to do?

When the Immigration Officer took me to the airport, I was very calm within myself. I didn't panic much. The first few minutes when I was in the airport, I made the airport full of police and Immigration officers - I broke a window and cut both my hands and chest and stomach with glass. I told the police that one step closer to me and I would cut my neck with glass - only the interpreter was near me.

After a few hours with the glass to my neck, I decided to give up because Immigration sent a fax to me, telling me that if I stopped, they would not deport me.

A few years ago, one of my friends, called Teha, was waiting for the Home Office decision for five years. He didn't hear anything that last five years and he became very angry and too sad.

One day he woke up from bed, took a piece of a tree and walked to the police station and started breaking the glass of the front door. The police arrested him and asked what he was doing breaking the glass of the windows and door. He just said, "I've been waiting for Immigration for a long time, I didn't hear anything from them, I left my wife and family for over 5 years and Immigration still keep me waiting. I've tried by solicitor and local MP to hear anything, but haven't heard any decision. I am mad and angry. I want the police to do something with me because I can't wait any longer."



Paoul (India)

My name is Paoul Patel. I am from India in Gujarat. I am writing about my country - democracy, the system of government, human rights violations and breaking the rules and regulations.

In my country, people who break the law are punished. The country has many kinds of rules, like no alcohol when you drive a car. Authorization or a permit is needed or you can't sell alcohol. Any people who hide or have a secret place making alcohol are punished and may be arrested. Police arrest them and they must pay a fine to the government – and the court can decide to take them to the jail for punishment (3 or 6 months).

Many kinds of people break the law. They are not allowed to drink or eat or smoke cigarettes on the bus, but sometimes they smoke on the bus and its ok because the police do nothing. Some government police take money to allow this and some people like bad behaviour. They hate poor people.

When I was in India, I was once travelling by bus. It was overcrowded in the bus and people couldn't sit down and had to stand up. One man was very bad, using bad language. I was very angry and talked to the conductor about the man. That time I had a very bad experience, the man argued and shouted with me. Ridiculous man.

Acknowledgments

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