



**There is no such thing as
'other people'**



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Council of Christians & Jews

..... making dialogue



make a difference

Transcripts of presentations made by

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at the

Council of Christians & Jews

Hillingdon Branch

event commemorating

Holocaust Memorial Day

Wednesday 16 January 2013

held at

Northwood United Synagogue

Northwood

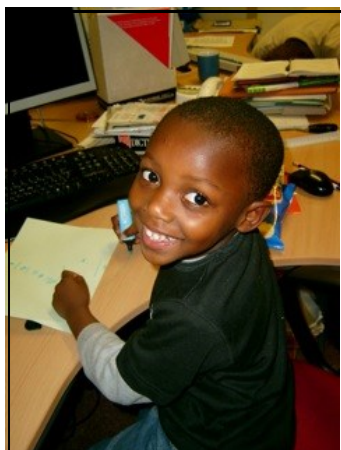
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***Being asked to speak as part of a Holocaust memorial event -
is an extraordinary experience and privilege.***

No more direct connection

The reality we face now is that as the years pass, living memories of the Holocaust are slipping away. Maybe that's good? But as it slips from living memory, will it slip from the consciousness of those who come next? The next generation will have no personal experience, no direct connection with the Holocaust and its victims and survivors. Will the next generation care? Will they act to prevent such horrors? Will they act to protect and support those who have suffered: Who are suffering?

For me, as I grew up, the Holocaust was 30 years ago; for my children it is 65, 70, years ago. How do we, how do I, get them to care and act?



Kareem, Nigeria absolutely loves football (Arsenal)

So I'm going to take me as a case,

Myself, I'm not Christian, I'm not Jewish, nor am I a believer of any kind. I'm not a refugee, not the child of refugees, I'm not married to a refugee. I'm English, English parents, grandparents, great grandparents, some little Scot/Welsh.

In summary, I have no personal or direct connection with the Holocaust or with refugees in any other way. And people do ask me, why do I work with refugees? So I thought it might be useful to think about that and perhaps we can draw some useful lessons from my case to help us work out how to make sure the next generation will care, will act.

There are several incidents, significant people, memories that stand out as moments when I realised something, when I started to care a bit more and a bit more. It's because of who I've met and what I've learned from them.

Because I feel a tiny bit of the pain and it's absolutely horrible

Probably the first significant experience was from Bronowski, his television series 'The Ascent of Man', in the early 70's. I must have been fairly young because I remember sitting on the carpet in front of the telly, my Dad was watching too. I remember seeing this man in smart clothes and shoes step forwards and walk up to his ankles into a filthy pond. And I remember being shocked, that a grown up would knowingly get his socks and smart shoes so wet and dirty, as if he just didn't care about them¹. And suddenly, young or not, I understood something I hadn't understood at all before.

I already at that age knew of the Holocaust. I had heard of Auschwitz. But I had never understood the sheer horror, the annihilating scale of suffering that can make – at least for other people - everything else utterly insignificant. That glimpse of suffering and the shock of understanding something of what suffering means has been part of what drives me to work at REAP.

One woman I've met through REAP I know as a fairly unsmiling, strong – even tough person from a Balkan country. Once we were at a late evening meeting together: she was representing her group, I was representing REAP. We'd been listening to some drivel from someone or other for a while, as they droned out about asylum seekers coming to Britain 'cos it was a 'soft touch' country and other such rubbish. She turned to me, her eyes drilling into mine, and said oh so quietly "I walked away you know. I walked away with my son as they burned down my house, and they said if I stopped, if I even looked back, they would kill me".

I remember also one awful afternoon in the office, when a Burmese man turned up in the office completely unknown. I think we'd had a phone call from his social worker asking about training. He stood there, and he talked, wildly, non stop for half an hour about what he had seen done to his family in front of his eyes. Then he left.

So these experiences are one reason I care. Because I've felt a tiny bit of that pain and it is absolutely horrible.

The suffering is inflicted on ordinary people, real people, people I know,

Other things have moved me and changed me at other times, perhaps we can learn from these too.

I knew this lovely lovely man, called Jalil. We were students in the same department long before I worked for REAP, maybe 20 years ago. He was just someone I knew, liked, a good bit older, family man, respected by the other students. We shared a coffee in the common room, or went for lunch in a group; we agonised over abstracts, library opening hours, relationships with supervisors. One time he invited me and my mother to Eid celebrations with his whole family, and we went and had a very nice afternoon. Lovely man, if he's still in the UK, I'll bet he's in his local Inter-Faith Network.

One day – I can't remember why - he told me how he came to the UK. He was at home one day, in the Sudan, his brother's wife rang, and said: "Jalil, they have taken your brother and they are coming for you". He escaped in the night, neighbours hid him, they found out later that night that his brother had been killed. They got him to Khartoum, and eventually he was given refuge in UK.

And there he was; a very kind, sometimes funny, nice man, a fellow student, just someone I knew, a real person. Sometimes you discover a story you had no idea about, just sitting next to you at lunch..

I learned from knowing him that suffering is inflicted on ordinary people, not other people, not special or strange people - real people, people I know

These people I'm talking about - the woman, the Burmese man, Jalil – they aren't made up, I didn't copy them out of books. These are real stories about people I know, I have met, I have been friends with.

The pain doesn't stop



Ayman, Palestine - a journalist and interpreter 'knowledge is the most valuable thing'

I've learned more, of course, while at REAP.

In 2010, at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue, I met people who spoke with me and others about their experiences of the Kindertransport, and how the pain doesn't stop. There is Serkov – with an irreparable leg. I don't know what happened.

And also Manima, used to interpret for REAP. After four years of largely voluntary work, we managed to get her a free place on a course costing £600. But half way through she dropped out – I was hopping mad.

What we didn't know at the time was that the rifle butt that had cracked her skull when she was younger meant she was permanently medicated. The medication meant she couldn't concentrate, read or look at a computer screen for more than a few minutes at a time. She tried, she had really tried, but she couldn't cope.

Suffering is sometimes added to after people arrive in the UK

And unfortunately, I've also learned that people's suffering is sometimes added to after they arrive in the UK. There are agonising, stressful waits for decisions about whether some will be allowed refuge here, these waits can last for years, (Fardhi 6 year and still waiting, 'K' and family 11 years). During the UKBA asylum decision and appeal processes people find themselves ridiculed, belittled, disbelieved, undermined. Even when allowed to work, they are often unable to work, their qualifications and experience rejected, disrespected. They see themselves reviled in the press.

Pain doesn't stop but it isn't the end

All this suffering, pain, dismay - it could so easily be overwhelming. And the problem is, if you overwhelm people you don't make them care, you don't inspire them to act which is what we want to do. It is more likely to disempower them, to make them lose hope and quit. And so it also really matters that I have

learned, fortunately, that although the pain doesn't stop, the pain doesn't stop life either.

Jalil had his family, his studies, his Eid party.

And there is Razil whom I last saw just a couple of months ago. Razil is a sweet if sometimes rather irritating young woman, always late. Lovely shoes – always bright colours and patterns. She's from Ethiopia, and in 1998 or thereabouts the Ethiopian state declared her and her family and thousands of other



Fatima

Afghanistan - Fatima left her University course and walked over the mountains to safety. She retrained as a florist and is now training as a bi-lingual counsellor for women who have experienced domestic violence.

Ethiopians to be 'Eritrean' and therefore 'aliens': not entitled to residency or to own property, disenfranchised, abused, exiled - thousands lost everything. Fallada has indicated to me that she was treated in ways that many young 'Eritrean' Ethiopian women were treated in those years. Her family got her out and to the UK, and under Children's Law – like many 'Eritrean' children and young people in those years - she went into the care of the Local Authority until her 18th birthday, with some continuing support after that. There obvious echoes here of the Kindertransport.

But now it's 10 years on; she's just passed a very good college course. She's got a boyfriend. She's building a life.

Other moments when I understood that lives can be rebuilt?

Last year, Stephen Frank's talk to the Holocaust Memorial Event – he survived the Nazi death camps as a child, and finished his talk with a photo of his beautiful, healthy, happy family – children and grandchildren and more.

Najer, 6 months hiding in the Kurdish mountains, now a 'Corgi registered' central heating engineer – very useful to know someone like that in weather like this.

Peter, whom I only met last Saturday. A qualified civil engineer, drives a BMW, likes quad bikes. Both parents killed in Sri Lanka in 1986. He arrived in UK as a young child. I only met him because he came to have a look at our roof to see if he can fix the leak.

Fatima fled over the Afghan mountains as the Taliban advanced – she retrained as a beautician, and now is training to be bi-lingual counsellor, particularly for women who have faced violence.

So I've learned that the pain is awful, and it might not stop, but it doesn't stop life, .

There are plenty of grey areas

‘I could see the way it was going, so I left...’ ‘my family sold some land so I could pay someone to get me into the UK’.

Are they just working the system? Are they abusing the rights put there to protect?

And I have conclude, yes, some people do try to abuse the system. And you know what? So what?! I don’t care. Systems have always been ‘worked’. Just think of our MPs and the expenses scandal. The exception in practice doesn’t undermine the principle.



Pavel, Ukraine
- A musician who works for Transport for London doing transport and passenger surveys, when he isn't working to get refugees' and migrants' voices heard on London's agendas.

Why don't people care?

So I thought, as we’re looking for things that make people care, we’d better look at reasons they don’t care.

People reject the pain

People often just don’t believe or more accurately don’t want to believe such awful things are real. They believe or want to believe that it just can’t be that bad. That other people talking about, claiming these things, are just being dramatic, seeking attention – exaggerating to get asylum and get to our benefit system.

I did a presentation fairly recently and I asked ‘If the Holocaust happened here, what would you do, where would you go?’ One person answered ‘I’d sit it out’. ‘No, no’ I said, ‘I mean if the Holocaust actually happened here, what would you do?’ ‘I’d sit it out’. And I suppose in 1935, 1937, 1939 many people thought they could sit it out too, that if they kept their heads down, provoked no-one, they could sit it out and it would eventually get better.

But they were wrong.

That history of the 930 Jews on the ship, the SS St Louis? You might know it, I don’t know the history fully. They were turned back from the shores of America and most eventually died in the death camps. Why did the Americans turn them away? Was it that they just couldn’t believe it could get that bad?

And surely in 2012, now in 2013, when UKBA sends Tamils back to Sri Lanka, where there is still abuse and torture. When UKBA sends gay men back to one of the seven countries in the world where there is still a death penalty for homosexuality (let us not forget where the symbol of the pink triangle came from⁶), surely that is because the UK authorities simply don’t believe it can really be that bad. Or.....

Perhaps they are just willing to take the risk.

.....or perhaps they are just willing to take the risk.

People believe in ‘Never Again’

People know the Holocaust happened, but they don't want to believe it can happen again.

They want to believe it was just a one off, a freak incident that happened to other people; and was done by other people.

It was not done to people like us. It was not done by people like us. People really believe in ‘Never Again’.

Well, it happened again, it continues to happen, it has never stopped,



Emily
Democratic Republic of
the Congo
interprets for
Lingala and French
speaking refugees in
Health and
other appointments.

The Holocaust can happen here.

And I've realised since being at REAP, that it can happen here.

I'm often shocked when I mention I work with refugees and its astonishing what people come back at me with - not just taxi drivers, my own relatives! I'm often shocked by attitudes and ignorance within services that are meant to support vulnerable people.

I'll give you an example of what I mean. This woman approached us, she was the mother of a disabled child, and she was feeling isolated and in need of more family contacts and support in her borough. So I found out about this charity in a borough beginning with H....., that was set up to support parents and families with children who have disabilities, and I rang them up...

‘Hello, I'm Sarah from REAP, I'm ringing on behalf of a woman who is the mother of a disabled child living in your borough who would really like some more family support and a chance to meet other families.’
And they answered.....?

‘We don't do refugees’

The fact she was a mother, of a disabled child, looking for family contacts and support in their borough, exactly the person they existed to help, didn't matter to them. The only thing they could see was that she was different to them. Not ‘like them’. Another kind of person, a refugee, someone who doesn't really belong and her needs as a mother, a parent? Irrelevant.

Incidents

I've other small but significant memories that I know have influenced me in a creeping realization that 'it can happen here', in the UK.

I remember waiting for half an hour or so at a Civic Centre reception (another borough starting with 'H'), watching the receptionists treat people like me better than people who didn't speak good English.

I remember sitting in a café window in Swansea, watching white drivers stopped at a zebra crossing outside each time a white person wanted to cross, and white drivers not stopping when Asian people wanted to cross.

I remember wearing a head scarf one very cold Christmas Eve along the Uxbridge Road, and a lad coming up behind me saying something abusive and threatening. Well I was stunned and I turned round and looked at him and he saw I was white, and do you know what he said? 'Oh! sorry love, I didn't realise.'

I know several REAP members don't like going out in West Drayton at night. That's where REAP is based and we have a lot of our activities and events. I used to think they were being a bit daft. I'm not so sure now.

When, where, how did the Holocaust start? There is intolerance and discrimination in the UK. And people use ethnicity and identity as ways to rally folk to their cause. And we know where that can end.

I don't want to find out if I am brave enough to really stand up for other people, I don't want to find out if I am really brave enough to stand up for other people, who are being discriminated against and persecuted. I don't want to find out if I am brave enough to hide them in my house, like amazing people in 'the kindness of strangers' that Alison Wood spoke about 2 years ago at this event. I don't know if I'm strong enough to give people all my money so they can get to safety in another country. I do know, I don't want it to happen here.

I've learned from REAP that I can do something about it

One of the best things that I have started to believe at REAP - something that does definitely keep me coming into the office on a Monday morning - is that if you believe you can do something, and if you believe you are the kind of person who does something, and if you know about something you could do, then you are much more likely to do something.

So here are some things you can do:

Be Informed

First, be informed – read that article, watch that documentary about the situations of persecution and discrimination in other countries, about refuge and immigration practices in UK, in other 'host' countries where you have an interest – EU? America? Israel? about issues and services in the UK, in London.

Ask questions, speak out, break taboos.
Question your own views, analyse your assumptions.
Don't be put off by grey areas and exceptional cases
Look people in the eye, hold their gaze, believe them.

Practical contributions



Selvi
Sri Lanka - This photo of Selvi shows her backstage at a community fashion show she helped organised.

There is plenty you can do in practical ways: English groups – volunteers are needed to help people learn English, from the grass roots upwards, REAP's training volunteers now offer to mentor through one of several schemes around at the moment; donate clothes, food, baby food - churches and synagogues are already very active in these areas; foster a child? I've considered it, I haven't done it, at least consider it.

And other things you can do: can you help with your professional skills? accountancy? IT? planning? Become a trustee? A bit of cash always helps – there's Hillingdon Refugee Support Group that provides welfare, befriending, activities for young people like Razil. There is REAP of course. Or Freedom from Torture⁷ and the Helen Bamber foundation – who work with some of the most traumatised refugees. You are more than welcome to join REAP as a Member or just as a friend on our mailing list.

One other thing you need to do: protect the right to refuge

And third, there is something very important:

People who are suffering in other countries need a way to escape to safety; they need others to provide a sanctuary; they need us to give them refuge. But the right to refuge is being whittled away, it really is. For example, 'Refugee Status' used to protect you for life: now you get 5 years and have to apply again. I have no doubt that the threat will increase in the coming years. We, you, I, must do what we can to protect the right to refuge.

So let me conclude: Feel pain

If new generations are to continue to care about the Holocaust, to be driven to act, then they must feel something of the pain, the suffering, the horror of the Holocaust. I'm not sure I really want my children to understand that pain, but you know, it's part of growing up. It's part of finding out who you are and what your place and role is going to be in society.



Suad - Somalia
Suad left Somalia as a child and is now a child care worker in South Hillingdon.

Feel fear

Those new generations need to feel something of the fear engendered by seeing a society become terrifying self-destructive, as Germany did in the 30's, and seeing communities that became vicious, breaking out into utter brutality. This vision of 'society' and 'community' is very far from the sentimental, ideological, sloppy notions of 'society' and 'community' that are promoted in policy and practice at present.

It is about us

In order to care, we have to make sure new generations realise that the horror that was the Holocaust continues to happen to real people, all around the world, today; and we are not immune here either. These things happen to people like us, to people we know and people close to us, the people who do these things are the same as us

There is no such thing as 'other people'

Sarah Crowther

Individual's names have been changed

1. Dr. Jacob Bronowski created a ground breaking television series 'The Ascent of Man' on BBC in the early 1970. The scene remembered here was of Bronowski at Auschwitz. The pond he walks into was the pond that the ashes of the thousands of murdered Jews and other victims of the Nazis were washed into. Several clips are on You Tube, search for 'Bronowski' 'Ascent of Man'. This scene is in the episode called 'Absolute Knowledge'.

2. Refugees in Effective and Active Partnership (REAP) is an independent, refugee-led organisation in West London that campaigns for refugees and aims to empower refugees and asylum-seekers to live as valuable and valued members of British society. We believe that it is essential to protect the right to refuge so people can escape danger and suffering caused by persecution, and that one implication of giving refuge is that there must also be reasonable level of effective and equitable support for people as they recover and rebuild.

We work towards our aim through practical and policy-oriented activities in partnership with others: through improving communication, enhancing the voices and building capability of those individuals who have sought refuge in the UK, and their communities; by promoting equality and equitable treatment for refugees in all their diversity; by facilitating organisations and individual activists and professionals that support refugees to rebuild their lives. REAP campaigns on policy issues identified in its work and responds proactively to policy developments, aiming to get the needs of refugees considered at all levels.

3. UKBA United Kingdom Borders Agency, the part of the Home Office that makes decisions on entry, visas/residency/permission or 'leave' to remain and deportations to and from the UK.
4. The Kindertransport was the arrangement that got unaccompanied Jewish children out of Germany and brought them to refuge in countries including the UK. The children were 'sponsored' and some were looked after by British families.
5. Corgi-registered – an industry standard approving the quality of someone's work.
6. The Nazis made Jewish people wear a yellow star, and homosexual men wear a pink triangle.
7. Freedom from Torture, previously known as 'Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture'.

Visit the REAP website for further information
www.reap.org.uk

*To donate £5 to support REAP's work
please send the text
" REAP05 £5 " to
70070*





Brief history of the 1951 Refugee Convention

In response to the large-scale refugee movement and atrocities committed during the Second World War, the 1951 Refugee Convention was drafted by the United Nations to

protect those who fled as a result of the Holocaust and other forms of persecution during the war. In the light of these atrocities committed during that period, governments were determined to ensure that people would never again find themselves unable to escape persecution. The Convention was the first international agreement to guarantee protection to refugees, and its principles are applied worldwide.

The Convention reinforces the fundamental human right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution by defining who can enjoy such a right and by guaranteeing certain equal rights to those recognised as refugees.

The United Kingdom was one of the first countries that signed the Refugee Convention and provided protection to some of the refugees who fled from the war and persecution in Europe. At the same time, the Refugee Council was set up to support these refugees and to influence the United Kingdom's policy on asylum and refugee issues.

As a Human Rights charity the REFUGEE COUNCIL is very committed to the 1951 Refugee Convention because

even today 62 years later, this Convention remains the only international instrument, which defines the duty of states towards those who fear persecution and, which sets out minimum standards for their treatment. However, we are very concerned that states, including the UK are not meeting their obligation under the Refugee Convention of 1951.

This is due to many changes to Immigration and Asylum legislation in this country and other European states in the last 20 years. For example, since 1992, Immigration and Asylum legislation has been changed eight times.

Each time government changes its policy on immigration asylum seekers are further deprived of their liberty and dignity. Many of their rights and entitlements are either denied or restricted, including rights to legal advice and appeals, access to mainstream welfare benefit, education, training, employment and health.



These changes are:

Interception measures aimed at strengthening border control, including increased information sharing between border agencies, visa sanctions, increased airline liaison officers, and fines against carriers.

Asylum determination procedures, including finger printing, access to legal advice, interview process, and limited appeal rights for refused asylum seekers, and lack of country information.

Asylum support: since 1999 asylum seekers have no access to mainstream benefits, instead they are entitled to asylum support which is equivalent to 70% of welfare benefit, they are also dispersed to regions outside London, where there is lack of legal advice and community support in some regions.

Lack of access to mainstream services, including misunderstanding about access to healthcare, lack of access to education and training.

Employment rights – asylum seekers are not allowed to work, as a result some of them become destitute because they don't have access to welfare benefits either.

Detention and removal - asylum seekers are detained for long time. Detention condition is very bad, and some of them are removed to the country they fled from.

As a Human Rights charity, we want to ensure that the UK remains a safe haven for refugees fleeing violence, torture and persecution. To achieve this, the UK must continue to welcome refugees, and have an asylum system that gives people a fair hearing, makes good quality decisions first time, and helps refugees who are allowed to stay to fully integrate into British society.

Underpinning this principle is the need for politicians to provide accurate information on the plight of refugees. Public concern on this issue is fuelled by misinformation and misunderstanding. What the country need is a rational debate that is grounded, in reality, and in which myths are challenged, rather than reinforced.

The Refugee Council's position is:

Restate its commitment to protecting refugees. The right to asylum in Britain must be upheld, and refugees must be able to get here safely to make a claim. It cannot be right that people who need protection in the UK are being stopped from getting to this country.

Concentrate on producing fair decisions on asylum claims. Poor initial decisions add to the length and expense of the system because they are often successfully challenged. An efficient system means people allowed to stay can quickly rebuild their lives and people whose claims fail can be returned to their countries of origin.

Avoid detention unless in extreme circumstances. Asylum seekers have willingly made themselves known to the authorities and are not criminals, so they should not be treated as such. Locking someone up is a serious and expensive step and should only be considered where there is incontrovertible and overwhelming evidence that it is necessary.

Support and help refugees with integration into their local community. It is in the interests of everyone that refugees are helped to quickly and successfully rebuild their lives given a chance; refugees contribute enormously to British society, but they need a little help to start with - whether it is help with finding housing, a job, or learning English. Refugees have suffered terrible ordeals and should be helped to come to terms with their trauma and to build a new life and a future here in the UK.

Asylum seekers should be allowed to work while their asylum claim is being assessed. Asylum seekers do not want to be on state hand outs, but they have no choice because the government will not let them work. Being able to work would restore pride and self-respect for asylum seekers and allow them to contribute to the economy and society.

Fazil Kawani



Visit the REFUGEE COUNCIL
website for further information

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

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