

“A Living Death”:

**Zimbabwean Migrants in the UK Who are Forced
Apart from their Children**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, especially my father, Chief Chikava-Shumba-Chekai who is so proud of being a father to highly educated children.

Also in memory of my brother Godfrey Chikava (baba Raw) who tragically did not live long enough to see the completion of this work.

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the lived experience of nineteen Zimbabwean migrants I interviewed in the UK who were forced apart from their children for a lengthy period of time by the UK immigration system. It explores the processes through which these migrants were rendered rightless in their country of birth where their government directly threatened their physical lives and how they were forced to migrate to the UK without their children in search of human rights and protection. However, upon arrival in the UK, these migrants' rightlessness was reinforced as the UK immigration and asylum law affords only the most minimal of rights to asylum seekers and other categories of forced migrants.

The thesis attempts to uncover the extent to which the Zimbabwean migrants were denied full access to human rights, especially the rights to legally remain, work and to be reunited with their children in the UK. It also seeks to show how, over a period of time, these migrant parents' selves fell apart; they lost total control of their own lives in the UK and witnessed the disintegration of the connections they had to their children, partners, parents, friends and other kin left behind. The thesis argues that to be afforded partial rights, that is, the right to continue to live and breathe (bare life) but not the right to legally belong and/or to exercise personal autonomy is to be condemned to a living death. By exploring the sufferings and dehumanization processes of the Zimbabwean migrants, the thesis seeks to reveal the gap between the UK's rhetorical commitments with regards to promoting and protecting human rights, and the actual practice of its immigration regime.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and an Outline of the Thesis' Theoretical Foundation

Introduction

When I was victimized by war veterans in Zimbabwe I thought this was the worst experience of human rights abuse... but living as an asylum seeker in this country is a death sentence... I cannot make any claims that I am still living...humanity has been lost over the years... I have been disarmed... reduced to nothing... made useless and vulnerable... you are as good as a dead person...when you are no longer in control of your own life ... those of your children... and all other important issues of your life ... when your existence is not even recognised by those around you... when your presence is taken as a problem...It is a death sentence to live in a country that professes democracy and human rights but that excludes you and undermines your humanity on the basis that you are an asylum seeker... the reality is that you cannot do anything about it... but this reality is hard to come to terms with... it is a death sentence... it simply means you are as good as dead... you are non-existent... (Rute, female aged 49)

The quote above is an introduction to the plight of migrants who were denied full access to legal, social, political and economic rights and were excluded to different degrees and experienced a particular kind of suffering and dehumanization in the UK as asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers or undocumented migrants. This is therefore a good place to start engaging with immigration and asylum issues in the UK.

Few issues have generated more debate in the UK within the last few decades than that of the remarkable increase in the number of foreigners arriving in the country (Bloch, 2000a). This perceived influx of immigrants has political and media concerns regarding the increasing number of people seeking asylum in the UK

(Greenslade, 2005). As asylum debates continue to dominate political and media spaces, media coverage has helped to incite a 'moral panic' (Welch and Schuster, 2005a). This has reinforced the public perception that migrants in general, and asylum seekers in particular, are a threat to British society (Goodman and Speer, 2007, Sales, 2002) and therefore are an 'unwelcome burden' (Welch and Schuster, 2005b, Finny and Robinson, 2008) and a 'serious social problem' (Lynn and Lea, 2003). These perceptions have also attracted a policy response in the form of draconian incremental asylum and immigration policies by successive UK governments in order to deter forced migrants from gaining entry and restrict the social and economic rights and entitlement of those who manage to make it beyond the borders (Bloch, 2002). In particular, the Labour government's first policy document, *Fairer, Faster and Firmer – a modern approach to immigration and asylum* of 1998 became the first legal instrument to confirm the public's 'moral panic' over this huge problem of 'bogus' asylum seekers and promised that "the real issue is how to run an asylum system which serves the British people's wish to support genuine refugees whilst deterring abusive claimants". This 'rhetorical separation' of 'genuine' and 'bogus' asylum seekers (Goodman, 2008) was premised on the argument that the UK's welfare system was being unfairly exploited by economic migrants and consequently, genuine asylum seekers were poorly served. In theory, it is the 'bogus' asylum seekers who were constructed as the target for draconian legislation in order to allow the 'genuine' ones to enjoy refugee rights and protection. Meanwhile in practice, the separation processes involve harsh treatment of all those who form the asylum category as the assumption is that all asylum seekers are potentially bogus (Goodman, 2008:111).

Vulnerabilities, rights violations and harsh treatment of forced migrants especially asylum seekers normally begin with their involvement with immigration officials on arrival and continue throughout the different stages of the asylum determination processes. These have increasingly become the subject of much criticism from academics, researchers, aid and civil agencies working with forced migrants and other practitioners with first-hand information on the realities of leading a life as an asylum seeker in the UK. The growing body of literature on the experiences of forced migrants in the UK has shown concern regarding how these groups of migrants are increasingly criminalized for seeking legal protection (Welch and Schuster, 2005b, Clayton, 2010, Clements, 2007) and are socially excluded through policy (Bosworth, 2008, Schuster, 2004, Fletcher, 2008). They also experience poverty induced life of limbo (Goodman and Speer, 2007) as well as leading everyday lives of hopelessness (Zetter, 2007, O'Nions, 2006).

However, this literature has not yet paid much attention to the situations of those forced migrants who are also separated from their children by immigration law. Such research as does exist on this topic tends to concentrate on the experiences of those migrants who leave their children behind "within an ideology of return" (Nicholson, 2006:15). Therefore leaving children behind is regarded as only a temporary measure employed to improve the economic position of the family (see Pottinger, 2005; Parrenas, 2005). The double calamity of being a forced migrant and enduring separation from children is a critical issue, but one which has thus far received little attention in forced migration studies. This thesis therefore seeks to address this gap in knowledge.

The thesis is concerned with the lived experience of nineteen Zimbabwean migrants who have been forced apart from their children for a lengthy period of time by the UK immigration system. It explores not merely the causes of their suffering but what suffering *does* to them (Wilkinson, 2005), in particular, the ways in which it strips them of personal identity or 'personhood' and leaves them with the sense that they are biologically alive, but socially dead. In presenting original qualitative data on this topic, the thesis seeks to make two contributions to the existing literature:

- 1) To add to the literature that *documents* the experience of migrants who are forced apart from their children. The thesis recognises that migrants are people with emotional links to their country of origin through their parental relationships, and these emotional links are a continuing source of trauma. As the thesis identifies, in the existing literature, separation from children tends to be regarded as part of the migratory process rather than imposed through immigration controls. Indeed, the role of immigration controls in forcing families apart, whether through asylum legislation or immigration rules more generally, has received remarkably little attention.
- 2) To add to the literature that *analyses* the suffering of forced migrants by exploring their experience as a process of dehumanization. In particular, it aims to highlight parallels between the condition and experience of Zimbabwean migrants who have been forced apart from their children and that of the stateless (especially as theorized by Arendt), the institutionalized (especially as theorized by Goffman) and the enslaved (especially as theorized by Patterson). It seeks to shed light on the question of what it is to be human by showing how, over a period of time, interviewees were gradually stripped of all, that in their eyes, and in the eyes of wider society, made them a person. They were reduced to what they described as 'a living

death'; a condition that resembles that of 'bare life' as theorized by Agamben.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of this study have been drawn from the work of Hannah Arendt, Erving Goffman and Orlando Patterson. These three theorists' writings differ in many varied ways. However, a critical dialogue with their work reveals that they each provide us with unique insights, although in slightly different ways, into understanding how people can be stripped of self and what makes a person human. Together, these writings uniquely illuminate personhood as distinct from mere biological existence through critical arguments which are grounded in the lived experience of the stateless, the institutionalized, and the enslaved. This is not to say, the situations of the stateless, the institutionalized and the enslaved are identical to those of my interviewees. My interviewees cannot be equalled to the Jews who were gassed and murdered in Nazi extermination camps, neither are their situations similar to the conditions of mental health patients in total institutions and/or to "those Africans who between 15th and 19th Centuries were seized, manacled, shipped across the world, sold as chattels, branded, and forced to labour under threat of torture or death..." (O'Connell-Davidson, 2008a:8). Instead, it is the processes through which the stateless, the institutionalized and enslaved persons were stripped of personhood which can be compared with the dehumanization processes lived through by my interviewees. Indeed, the situation of my interviewees represents what they described as a 'living death', which, although not identical, suggests parallels to Agamben's 'bare life' inmates in modern concentration camps.

1.1.1 The Stateless

In *'The Origins of Totalitarianism'*, Arendt discusses the plight of stateless people, analysing their struggles in trying to exercise rights and legal protection, first in their country of birth and second in exile where they moved as displaced people. These discussions are made drawing examples from the Holocaust experience, the refugee crisis and the mass displacements which took place during and after World War II. In this work, Arendt makes an attempt to demonstrate the elusiveness and powerlessness of human rights mechanisms to guarantee protection to the most vulnerable populations.

To begin with, Arendt observes that the condition of rightlessness among individuals who found themselves stateless emerged when these persons found themselves deprived of rights and legal protection within their own countries of birth. Stretching the analogy of rightlessness further, Arendt provides a critical appraisal of the calamities faced by stateless persons as they moved across borders in search of a place where they could establish new homes. Drawing on examples from the different nationalities of the displaced, Arendt draws attention to the ways in which people struggled to be recognized as authentic refugees. As Schaap, (2011) (forthcoming) sums it up, here Arendt tries to demonstrate that the rights prescribed in human rights treaties proved to be both 'unenforceable' and 'inaccessible' "when those deprived of their homes and legal status in one state found themselves in concentration camps in the states to which they fled, including in states which sought their legitimacy in a commitment to the rights of man" (Schaap, 2011:5).

Arendt dwells on the practices of categorization and differentiation of refugees showing how pre-conditions for human recognition were set to single out those who had the right to claim refugee rights and those who did not have rights. When this phenomenon is compared to modern-day immigration practices, it becomes clear

that Arendt's work has enduring relevance for the analysis of the present immigration control mechanisms and asylum determination processes in Europe as a whole (Rancère, 2004).

In this study, I show the continuing relevance of Arendt's work by discussing the experiences of the Zimbabwean migrants in the UK as one example which shows that rightlessness is still a surviving feature of the human condition in modern societies despite the existence of numerous international human rights treaties which give western states legitimacy as democratic societies. My intention is to strengthen the argument that the restrictive immigration policies and refugee determination processes serve as constraints for migrants to gain recognition as full human beings with rights to legal status, rights to reunification with children and other kinds of protection afforded to people with stable status. Here, the contradictions between international human rights mechanisms and some of the UK's immigration policies are spelt out.

Arendt's analysis of rightlessness extends beyond the receiving states' categorical machinery or framework to look at the very painful consequences of rightlessness, especially for those who could not be assimilated into the communities of the receiving states. It is in this context that Arendt claims that once people have been forcibly removed from their place of birth, rarely do they find a place they call, 'home'. This thesis applies Arendt's insights to explore the consequences of rightlessness and question what makes a person socially alive or socially dead. It aims to demonstrate that Zimbabweans' lack of legal recognition, or exclusion from political community as Arendt puts it, which is the primary right, leaves them undeserving of other secondary rights, including the right to work, access to health services or to family reunification. I intend to demonstrate that leading a life without access to some of these basic human rights rendered my interviewees helpless and

powerless to exercise control over their lives in the UK and the ones of the children left behind. I aim to show how and to what extent life ceased to have any meaning as migrants increasingly regarded themselves as socially dead.

1.1.2 *The Institutionalized*

In *'Asylums'*, Goffman (1961) analyses the lived experiences of people placed in what he calls 'total institutions', which he defines as places that put a barrier between the people that dwell in them and the outside world. Among the institutions enlisted by Goffman are mental hospitals, military organizations, prisons and many others. Instead of concentrating on the physical components of these institutions, Goffman opts to interpret the experiences of the people who inhabit them as well as analysing the actions of the staff who work in them especially their day to day interactions with the service users. In particular, Goffman analyses what he calls the 'moral career' of mental health patients and suggests the different stages through which mental health patients' personal conception of self is often altered or mortified once they become institutionalized.

To begin with, Goffman observes that inmates often come to the institution with a certain perception of self which will go through processes of being stripped off once they get institutionalized. Goffman calls this process, 'mortification', which represents ways in which an individual's identity and rights are taken away. Goffman further describes how the self is mortified through direct confrontation with the institution's apparatus. Giving examples of the numerous forms of harassment and degradation that inmates experience from the staff, Goffman argues that staff members' communication styles are always hostile as characterized by the harsh tone of voices. In some cases staff could even,

...go out of their way to give the recruit a clear notion of his plight. As part of this rite of passage he may be called by the term such as 'fish' or 'swab' which tells him that he is merely an inmate, and, what is more, that he has a special low status even in this low group (Goffman, 1961:26).

Given the unprecedented levels of degradation and stigmatization, Goffman concludes that some institutions primarily exist to serve the purposes of the wider systems as opposed to providing meaningful services to the people who often enter them hoping for assistance. Thus, Goffman likens some of the institutions to a 'dead sea' or to be 'mere storage dumps', even though they are frequently represented as centres which provide answers to people's problems. There are some powerful parallels between the experiences of the institutionalized as described by Goffman and those of my interviewees following their engagement with the UK asylum admission processes which are explored in the thesis.

1.1.3 *The Enslaved*

In the preface of *'Slavery and Social Death'*, Orlando Patterson (1982) states that his main objective for writing this book was to define and to explore the inner dynamics of slavery as opposed to providing a general historical account of slavery as many other writers in this area have sought to do. Indeed, in the first chapter Patterson explores what he terms 'the internal relations of slavery', which is a discussion that centres on issues of power, alienation, authority, honour and degradation of slaves; all tackled and knitted together in ways which portray slavery as the ultimate form of rightlessness. In this analysis, Patterson employs the term 'social death' to illuminate the social and political marginalization of the slave in slaveholding societies. Patterson, (1982) goes further to discuss what I see as critical elements of social death which include the representation of the enslaved as a person alienated from family and community, the slave as a person who could not

be the subject of property and the slave as a person without honour. My intention is to draw from Patterson's insights in my exploration of the extent to which the Zimbabwean migrants' rightlessness and marginal position in the UK inflicted a feeling that they were socially dead persons. I also aim to explore the extent to which immigration and asylum policies constructed these migrants as people who could not be the subjects of property, especially with regards to their rightlessness position to sell their labour power. At the same time, I intend to show how my interviewees were reduced to persons without honour, in terms of both being stripped of rights and dignity in exile, as well as being dishonoured in relation to home, especially with regards to the expectations of family and children left behind. These issues are discussed in chapters seven and eight of this study.

1.1.4 The Concentration Camp Inmates

In *'Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life'*, Giorgio Agamben (1998) discusses the condition of concentration camp inmates which he terms 'bare life' meaning "human subjects reduced to a naked depoliticized state without official status and juridical rights" (Lee, 2010:61). Agamben describes the camp as a zone of 'indistinction between 'outside' and 'inside', 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' whose "inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation" (Agamben, 1998:110). Agamben's examples of the camps included "zones where illegal migrants are parked by national authorities", such as, "the stadium in Bari where Italian police rounded up illegal Albanian immigrants in 1991 before returning them to their country" (Downey, 2009:115). Also, Lee (2010) notes that Agamben's 'bare life' best describes the situations of refugees and undocumented migrants whose lives are caught up in 'a space of illegality' or 'space of non-existence', as 'subjects

who are neither citizens nor strangers'. These migrants "are reduced to the state of *homo sacer*, a nakedness of sheer life without official status to demand juridical protection of citizenship or human rights" (Lee, 2010:62). These are some of the issues which although not identical, present a powerful parallel between Agamben's concentration camp inmates and my own interviewees who were leading a life in legal limbo in the UK as asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers or undocumented migrants who could not exercise the right to family reunion and other rights which make life worth living because of their irregular status.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This Thesis is divided into 8 Chapters.

Chapter one provides the general introduction to the study. Chapter two presents a discussion of the methodology adopted for the study including reflections on my own position as researcher; how this impacted on the decision-making as regards methodology. Chapter three offers a discussion of how the migrants I interviewed arrived at the decision to migrate. Here, I draw from the migrants' narratives to show the interplay of the forces that rendered migrants rightless and how they arrived at the decision to leave home. By showing the interconnectedness of social, economic and political events, I intend to argue that while some rights discourses might assume that decisions to migrate are either voluntary/forced and/or economical/political, the Zimbabwean situation shows that for many, migration was undertaken as a result of more complex issues and therefore reflects mixed motivations which incorporate issues of gender, class and tribe. Chapter four looks at the practical and political challenges of leaving home, exploring how migrants arrived at the decision to leave children behind and how childcare arrangements were made; processes which appear to have been influenced by various challenging factors. Here, I intend to show that arranging to leave home should be looked at as

a process and not an event, as there are a number of intervening factors that migrants frequently have to negotiate before embarking on the actual migration journey. Chapter five focuses on the migrant parents' arrival in the UK. Here, discussions centre on the aspects of trying to gain recognition, which saw many engaging themselves with asylum seeking processes at the different stages of their stay in the UK. I set out to describe how these migrants were stripped of their personhood through subjection to bureaucratic processes, and also their discovery of rightlessness to bring their children over to the UK. Chapter six focuses on issues surrounding migrants' life of limbo in the UK. The chapter highlights some of the ways in which the UK immigration regime constructs and re-enforces the rightlessness and vulnerabilities of migrants. Chapter seven discusses how the migrants' lives fell apart, looking at the consequences of rightlessness, including disintegration of the migrants' identities and marriages. Chapter eight explores issues of living death and 'bare life' (Agamben, 1998) discussing the consequences of living in a country without one's full existence being recognized. Here I also highlight issues of loss which occurred in the migrants' lives over a long period of time. Last but not least is the conclusion to the study.

While the term 'forced' migrants has been adopted in this thesis to refer to Zimbabwean migrants of varying immigration statuses, it is clear that the data presented point to the difficulty in distinguishing between forced and voluntary migration. What is important in this thesis is not the state imposed distinction between forced and voluntary, but a categorization that is unrecognized by the state, which is a migrant forced apart from dependents, especially children.

In the main, this thesis argues that being denied full rights to belong or legal recognition as full human beings with dependents implies a 'living death' as some

have argued that lives lived on the margins of social, political and economic borders are lives that are half lived (Downey, 2009:109). By exploring the sufferings and dehumanization processes of the Zimbabwean migrant parents in the UK, the thesis seeks to contribute to the struggles to change policy and practices that confine migrants to a state of legal limbo so as to force parents to endure lengthy periods of alienation from their children. Also, by dissecting these migrants' private lived experience in the public realm of this thesis, it is hoped that it might in some small way restore to my interviewees some acknowledgment of their worth as human beings.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods

Introduction

The data presented in this thesis come from the fieldwork I conducted between October 2008 and January 2010, exploring the lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the UK who are forced apart from their children. In this chapter, I set out to describe and discuss the methods used to gain data, processes of gaining access to respondents, negotiation of informed consent and the methodological and ethical concerns which emerged during the course of fieldwork. I first provide a chronological account of how I arrived at carrying out research on this topic.

2.1 Choice of Research Topic

When I started my PhD in September 2007, I initially intended to explore and examine the caring support systems in place for children who are themselves carers for parents and relatives living with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe, and rural Zimbabwe was the originally planned empirical focus for this study. However, a change of focus and research location became necessary along the way owing to the political situation of Zimbabwe which continued to deteriorate throughout 2007, suggesting that it would be very unsafe for me to conduct fieldwork on this sensitive topic, especially coming from the UK, which the Zimbabwean ruling party had long characterized as its political opponent. Also, logically, it did not seem the appropriate time to explore issues of child protection, vulnerability, poverty and economic deprivation in a country where welfare support systems seemed to be no longer in existence. Given the high levels of human rights violations in the country, the entire population of Zimbabwe appear to be living in fear as the government of the day increasingly directs punishment against those perceived to be in opposition

to or critical of, its systems. It was therefore most unlikely that people would feel comfortable about discussing this sensitive issue, or in making any negative comments regarding the way children are left to assume adult roles or commenting on the extent to which children's welfare concerns seem to be no longer a priority in the government's agenda.

I have therefore tried to explore issues of children's rights and protection among Zimbabwean children who have migrated with their parents to the UK. I have taken this initiative with the hope that the sample would include children whose parents have different immigration statuses in order to be able to explore and compare the impact of immigration status on children's ability to access rights and protection in the UK. With this in mind, three pilot interviews were conducted with Zimbabwean migrant parents. The pilot interviews actually suggested that a slightly different area of inquiry would be more fruitful, as they revealed a pattern of chain migration among Zimbabweans whereby parents, for one reason or another, increasingly are unable to migrate with their children at the outset, so are forced to leave children behind and make arrangements for them to follow at a later stage. The focus of my research then shifted towards the issue of leaving children behind and the consequences it has for parents' capacity to protect and care for them.

I conducted two further pilot interviews with Zimbabwean migrant parents, who happened to be refused asylum seekers who were separated from their children. In addition to generating interesting themes, these interviews echoed some of my own painful experiences of leaving children behind the first time I moved to the UK, which, I believe, are worth revisiting here.

2.2 My Own Experience of Leaving Children Behind

Here I provide a snapshot of how I came to take the decision to leave my children behind in Zimbabwe and the experience of being separated from them. I happened to be one of the very lucky Zimbabwean women to get the opportunity to study abroad following my success in securing a place and a scholarship to study towards a Masters of Arts degree in Social Policy and Administration at the University of Nottingham. I was meant to come to the UK to commence my studies in September 2005, and my plans were initially to migrate together with my husband and two children at the very outset. Unfortunately, things did not go according to plan as I encountered problems with regards to securing a UK visa. My application for a student visa was denied, so I had to immediately appeal against the decision on the grounds that, as far as I was concerned, I had satisfied all the immigration requirements. Although my appeal eventually turned out to be successful, it took a long time for the decision to be made and I was only issued with a visa in December 2005 meaning that by then I had already missed the first semester of my studies. Moreover, the visa issue was not adequately addressed as I further discovered that the visa issued to me only allowed me to remain in the UK for 9 months, despite the fact that I had specified and provided evidence that the proposed study was a one year programme. However, I was very fortunate in the sense that although I had missed the first semester, the School of Sociology and Social Policy of the University of Nottingham had made provisions for me to commence my studies in January 2006, even though before they had never enrolled students for this programme at this time of the year. At this point, I was forced to make a choice between leaving my husband and two children (who were 7 and 3 years old by then) behind and missing my chance and my opportunity to study. I opted for the latter and the plan was therefore I would come over first, have my visa amended, and afterwards make arrangements for my family to join me.

However, when I arrived in the UK, things did not turn out to be what I had hoped. The visa extension process took longer than expected, which in turn complicated the plans of being reunited with my family, resulting in us being forced apart for over one year. During this period of separation, the worst experiences were those of not being in a position to explain to the children why we could not be together because when I left them, I had made the promise that they were going to join me in the UK within a very short time. Although I, with the support of my husband, tried to give the children hope and re-assurance, in many different ways, I found myself powerless to exercise control over the circumstances that forced us to remain separated and also powerless more generally in relation to my children's lives.

In order to maintain and manage a sense of family, I made it a point to call my family regularly, but what troubled me most was the fact that every time I called, my daughter, who was 7 years old by then, would say to me: "Mum I miss you badly; when are we coming over to be with you?" Frequently, I stumbled at these words, as I was not in a position to give her a definite answer. Usually, I would end the conversation by assuring her that they would join me very soon. We got to a point where one day, my daughter said to me: "Mum can you please give me the exact date we are coming over, you have been saying to me very soon, and it seems very soon will never come. Please don't fail me mum..., otherwise I will never trust you again". These words really pierced my heart as I strongly believe that the worst thing any mother would ever want to happen in life is for her children to lose their trust in her. Yet, in my case, as much as I did not want this to happen, I was powerless and helpless to give her the security and confidence she was asking for. As further proof that my daughter was unsettled, my husband started noticing signs of withdrawal, and her performance at school deteriorated very significantly. Also,

my daughter started having experiences of breaking down in public, especially at gatherings that involved church, family and friends. In particular, there was one evening when my husband informed me that our daughter turned out to be very upset at a church gathering and emotionally said, 'all the children here are together with their parents – but for us, we are not a family anymore because my mother is not here with us'. I felt guilty and increasingly I blamed myself for being 'selfish' in the sense that I was here pursuing my own educational goals while my children were going through traumatic experiences brought about by this separation.

To make matters worse, this happened to be the time when Zimbabwe's crisis situation had peaked, characterized by food shortages and the general deterioration in living standards. Routinely, my husband would describe to me how hard the situation was getting, narrating his daily struggles in trying to provide the children with a decent meal, sometimes citing circumstances like: 'We have gone for over a week now without bread or milk'. Given the stark contrast between what my husband and children were suffering in Zimbabwe and my own situation in the UK where life appeared to be completely the opposite, especially in terms of well-stocked supermarkets, affordability of basic commodities and the general living conditions, I found it hard to cope with life to the extent that shopping in general ceased to be a joy. I recall that on two occasions I abandoned a trolley of groceries in the middle of shopping and walked out of the supermarket at the thought that my children were suffering while I was feasting. At the same time, the knowledge that my children were suffering also stressed the importance of striving to bring them over, regardless of my powerless position to make this happen. Eventually, I was reunited with my family after I had successfully managed to secure a scholarship and place to pursue PhD studies. Only then was I categorized as deserving the right to family reunification, supposing that my position as a student with a family

initially did not give me 'a simultaneous ability' to exercise the right to be reunited with my family until the time this position was guaranteed by the Home Office (see Schuftan, 2010).

Having been reminded of these painful experiences, I became even more curious to know more about this subject, especially the extent to which issues of separation from children have been studied by others.

2.3 The Need to Fill in the Gaps in Literature

The two pilot interviews resonated with my own experiences. However, when I looked at the literature on the topic of children left behind (for example, Cramford-Brown and Rattay, 2002, Glasgow and Ghouse-Shees, 1995, Suarez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie, 2002, Pottinger and Williams-Brown, 2006). I observed that a great deal of these studies are framed by a broader concern with the feminisation of labour migration, raising debates on the situation of mothers who voluntarily choose to leave children at home as a temporary measure in order to improve the welfare status of their families. These studies have also sought to bring to light the stigma attached to this form of migration. Collectively, this literature alerted me to the significant gaps in what is known about the situation of parents and children who endure separation. Largely missing is empirical evidence on the situation of children who are left behind when parents are 'forced' to migrate as a result of persecution or by economic circumstances that are so extreme that they threaten day-to-day survival. This oversight raises great concern, given the phenomenon that global migration pressures are on the increase, as evidenced by the increase in the number of people who are forced by circumstances beyond their control to leave their homes. Also, frequently on arrival in host countries these people are

increasingly met with immigration regimes which prioritise state sovereignty over their humanitarian obligations. I found very little research and analysis on the ways in which immigration regimes in 'host' societies construct and/or reinforce parents' and children's human rights violations especially the right to reunification.

Therefore, my own personal experience, together with the need to fill in the gaps in literature motivated me to carry out research on the topic of being forced apart from children. Initially, I anticipated that the study would concentrate on the barriers to family reunification. However, in the course of fieldwork, I once again had to make the decision to broaden my approach to this topic as new and important themes continued to emerge which pointed to a much wider range of human rights violations. In particular, judging from the different ways my interviewees routinely re-conceptualized their migration processes and experiences of leaving children behind, I became aware that I needed to allow for a broader exploration of these migrants' migration experience in its entirety. This called for me to go beyond the confines of leaving children behind to encompass the complexities of these migrants' migration trajectories. This course of action allowed for the generation and development of important themes which tell a story about the Zimbabwean migrants' migration processes, positioning issues of rightlessness and suffering at the different stages of their migration processes as a central concern, of which being forced apart from children is just one of the issues. These key themes eventually led to the generation of six data chapters which reflect: i) The factors that forced individuals to make the decision to migrate, ii) How individuals arrived at the hard decision of leaving their children behind, and how childcare arrangements were made, iii) Migrants' arrival in the UK, their engagement with the UK immigration and asylum systems, and the complexities of making refugee claims iv) Leading a life of limbo - which is a discussion of the processes by which individuals discovered their

rightlessness and how they led their lives as temporary migrants v) 'Things fall apart', which is a discussion of the very painful consequences that rightlessness and separation have, both for the parents and the children left behind and vi) The concluding chapter on bare life and social death.

In the sections below, I provide a detailed account of the actual research process, describing the methods used and some of the ethical issues that emerged in the course of this study.

2.4 Qualitative Methods

The decision to carry out a qualitative study was determined by the exploratory nature of the inquiry and by the nature of my research questions (see Bryman, 2001). Although 'there is no methodology of forced migration research' (Bloch, 2007:230) a lot has been written with regards to what could be appropriate when researching forced migrants. Some (for example, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, Mackenzie et al, 2007) have observed that forced migrants are among the most hidden and vulnerable social groups of people whose experience can also remain hidden unless appropriate research methods are employed by those who seek to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. Others (for example Hynes, 2003) have offered the suggestion that forced migrants should be considered the only experts we can rely on if we sincerely desire to gain a deeper understanding of their individual migration experience and proposes qualitative methods as the ideal tools of investigating into these matters. On making this suggestion, Hynes (2003:13) puts across the arguments that the information that forced migrants provide in relation to their experiences must not be used as a weapon to oppress them. Rather, an ontological position that these migrants'

knowledge, understandings and experiences are meaningful, should be adopted in order to inform an epistemological position that by interviewing forced migrants directly; this will be a legitimate way in which to generate data that reflects their experiences.

Prompted by this need to give individuals the opportunity to relate their experience and to interpret the situations they found themselves in, in their own words in order to allow their voices to be heard, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nineteen Zimbabwean mothers and fathers who were living in the UK without their children. In taking this approach, I intended to gain an in-depth understanding of these migrants' lived experiences of being separated from children and most crucially, the human rights violations they suffered, both as citizens (the time they were still in Zimbabwe) and as asylum seekers and undocumented migrants when they moved to the UK. I also sought to gain an understanding of how their new identities in the UK further complicated their own lives and those of the children left behind. Semi-structured interviews in the form of a structured question guide, but one that allows the researcher an opportunity to probe, clarify, or tackle critical issues and follow up on emerging themes pertinent to the research (Taylor and Dogdan 1998, Bryman, 2004) were considered most appropriate for this study. Also, semi-structured interviews were considered most appropriate because of the flexibility they offer when similar questions have to be asked in a range of different settings (Bryman, 2001, Babbie, 2007). The flexibility of this technique was also strengthened through the use of a repeat interview.

Repeat interviewing is a technique that has received little attention in the methods literature, and the few studies which have mentioned the use of this technique, (for example La Rooy, et al, 2008), (with the exception of Murray and Shapiro, 1956)

seem to have been mainly concerned with its use in researching crime, especially its application in soliciting information from children who are involved in crime. In this study, I decided to use this approach due to the sensitivity of the issues of inquiry. Also, as I was dealing with individuals who had suffered traumatic experiences over a very long period of time and who seemed not to trust anyone else, I realized that these migrants needed time to reflect on some of their experiences as well as time to decide on the experiences they felt appropriate to discuss with someone in the position of a researcher¹. Thus, under such circumstances, a one-off interview would have been a 'hit and run' (Wax and Shapiro, 1956) exercise which obviously would not have managed to penetrate the depth of the migrant parents' experiences. Also, owing to the constraints encountered in negotiating access (discussed below), and the traumatic effects of listening to migrant's painful experiences again and again, I had to make the decision to settle on a small sample, even though I had anticipated interviewing between 20 and 25 migrants. I decided that, instead of conducting many 'hit and run' interviews on a 'superficial level' with a large number of this hard-to-reach population, and trying to quickly solicit information 'to leave, never to return', I would instead, conduct repeated interviews, 'more intimately' with a small number of respondents in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences (see Wax and Murray, 1956:215-216).

Repeated interviews were also necessary because of the particular problems presented by working with migrant parents separated from their children. Most of the interviews I conducted in the first-round were extremely emotionally charged and because respondents were people who had waited long for the opportunity to pour out their burdens and pains they had privately harboured for many years, I found

¹ One interesting thing to note here is that while the relationship between the researcher and the researched played a major role in determining the kind of experiences respondents were willing to discuss; this relationship was not a static one as it constantly changed with time and level of interaction to becoming more intimate as trust increased, meaning that even the very experiences originally considered too personal, could be discussed eventually.

some of the interviews very difficult to moderate. Most critically, respondents displayed the need to be listened to more than anything else and would go on and on narrating what they suffered from the time they were in Zimbabwe and how some of their sufferings were being replicated in exile. However, it is important to note that most interviews carried out in the first-round took between 1½ to 2 hours, except in two cases where interviews went for almost 3 hours as respondents emotionally narrated the painful experiences which appeared to have been disenfranchised for many years.

Therefore, repeated interviewing became an important technique in that the follow-up rounds of interviews were mainly designed to follow up on issues and themes that were touched upon in the first interview and also to get an update on some of the on-going issues. Indeed, most respondents seemed more settled and at ease during follow-up interviews, and could therefore clarify issues as well as discuss on-going experiences in a calmer way than they initially could do. Thus, through multi-interactions, intimate relationships were developed and nurtured to a level where respondents came to trust me as their confidant, and could discuss intimate experiences openly, which in turn also enabled me to approach personal matters in a friendly but straightforward manner (see, Wax and Murray, 1956). However, although this was taken as an advantage, there is a negative to it especially when taken from the perspective that interviewees could have said certain things in order to please me. I have provided below a discussion of the characteristics of migrants as well as a schedule which shows when interviews were conducted with migrant parents.

2.5 Characteristics of Migrant Parents

Table 1 below provides a summary of the profiles of the migrant parents I interviewed for this study. As shown, my respondents fell in the three categories of: (1) Refused asylum seekers, (63%) (2) Immigrants with pending decisions, (16%) (3) Immigrants with some form of leave to remain (21%). The majority of these migrants were middle-class professionals as evidenced by the types of jobs they used to occupy while still in Zimbabwe, and their age range fell between 27 and 52 years. It is also significant that the greater number, (74%) of my interviewees were females, which in the absence of statistics on the total number of Zimbabwean migrants who are living apart from children makes it difficult to interpret whether this implies that women constitute the greater number of this population or not. These findings could also have been influenced by cultural expectations whereby women are perceived as the main carers of children, suggesting that some men could have seen no need to participate in this research if children were left with wives. Significantly, almost all my interviewees migrated without their spouses except in two situations; 'Jonasi' and 'Shami' were migrants moved to the UK with their spouses. The number of children left behind ranged between 1 and 5 with their ages suggesting that the youngest child was left behind at the age of 18 months and the oldest when 17 years old. As shown by the table, most parents left their children in the care of immediate relatives, mainly their parents, wives or husbands, but in two cases children were left with the maids. As the table below shows, migrant parents had been forced apart from children for a period of between 2 and 10 years. Only in two cases, (Noma and Shami) migrants realized reunion with some of their children in the UK.

2.5.1 Table 1: Profiles of Migrant Parents

Name	Sex	Age	Status	Zimbabwe	Yr of migration	No of chn left	Age of child when left	Substitute Carer
Chenai	Female	45	Refused	Interior designer	2001	5	18 mths, 11, 13, 15, 16+	Husband
Chiedza	Female	35	Refused	(Secretary)	2004	1	5	Mother
Chipo	Female	27	Refused	Unemployed	2002	1	2½	Sister
Farai	Male	37	Decision pending	IT	1999	1	1	Wife
Jonasi	Male	39	Refused	Salesman	2000	1	4	Mother-in-law
Mary	Female	37	5 yrs EU Stay	Unspecified	2004	3	5, 10, 12	Maid
Mutsa	Female	32	Refused	Housewife	2001	1	5	Mother
Natsai	Female	29	Refused	Secretary	2003	1	4	Husband
Noma	Female	49	Indefinite	Teacher	2005	5	7,10,15,15,17	Two with husband 3 alone
Nyasha	Male	46	Refused	Cricket coach	2003	2	15, 17	Wife
Rudo	Female	39	Refused	Teacher	2001	1	12	Husband (subsequently died)
Rute	Female	49	Humanitarian	Teacher	2003	3	6, 9, 11	Husband
Shami	Female	46	5 years refugee	Teacher	2006	4	17,16,12,12	boarding school guardianship of mother & brother
Simba	Male	52	Decision pending	Printer	2004	2	15, 17	Wife (who subsequently died)
Sukai	Female	39	Refused	Teacher	2002	1	10 years subsequently died at 16	Maid
Tafara	Male	45	Refused	Teacher	2001	2	5 and 9	Parents
Tendai	Female	45	Refused	Teacher	2001	3	10, 12, 14	Husband
Tsitsi	Female	27	Decision pending	IT	2007	1	8	Mother
Voni	Female	49	Refused	Teacher	2002	3	3, 6, 9	Mother

While it could be true that the degree to which a sample can be said to be representative of a population depends on “pre-existing knowledge of that population’s social and demographic profiles” (Bloch, 2007:234), in this study, it is clear that the sample size was fairly small suggesting that the findings cannot be taken to be representative of the experiences of all Zimbabweans in the UK who are forced apart from their children; meaning the findings cannot be generalized. Studies which have raised methodological concerns (for example, Landau and Jacobsen, 2003) have also specifically problematized issues around non-representativeness of the research sample. However, I argue that the importance of this study lies in its explorative nature as it seeks to gain insights into the experiences and narratives of this hidden and marginalized population so as to add empirical evidence to existing literature. Also, because of the methods used to access the sample, the problems of gaining access and the sensitivity of the issues of inquiry, it is possible that the study could have failed to reach the most marginalized people who might even desire to remain hidden because of unstable immigration status.

Below is table 2 which shows how many interviews were conducted with the Zimbabwean migrant parents

2.5.2 Table 2: Interviews with the Zimbabwean Migrant Parents

Name	1 st interview	2 nd interview	3 rd interview	4 th interview	5 th interview	6 th interview	7 th interview	8 th interview	9 th interview
Chenai	31/03/09	05/04/09	10/06/09	12/09/09	13/12/09	09/01/10			
Chiedza	15/10/09	10/11/09	29/12/09	07/01/10					
Chipo	10/11/08	03/04/09	10/10/09	05/01/10					
Farai	13/03/09	28/07/09	14/10/09	06/01/10					
Jonasi	28/10/09	17/11/09	21/12/09	19/01/10					
Mary	24/11/08	19/02/09	11/04/09	11/06/09	5/08/09	23/10/09	04/12/09	21/12/09	18/01/10
Mutsa	16/11/09	05/12/09	27/12/09	08/01/10					
Natsai	28/11/09	08/12/09	28/12/09	29/01/10					
Noma	09/09/09	12/10/09	25/11/09	13/01/10					
Nyasha	29/10/09	04/11/09	12/12/09	17/01/10					
Rudo	14/01/09	17/04/09	13/06/09	19/09/09	16/12/09	21/01/10			
Rute	06/08/09	22/01/10							
Shami	20/08/09	12/09/09	11/11/09	18/12/09	09/01/10				
Simba	14/05/09	18/08/09	15/10/09	27/12/09	25/01/10				
Sukai	29/05/09	06/06/09	13/08/09	15/19/09	14/10/09	18/12/09	15/01/10		
Tafara	10/01/09	11/02/09	15/04/09	12/07/09	06/11/09	04/01/10			
Tendai	29/01/09	12/03/09	14/06/09	12/09/09	17/12/09	12/01/10			
Tsitsi	22/09/08	08/12/08	11/03/09	1/06/09	02/09/09	12/12/09			
Voni	05/07/09	11/09/09	14/11/09	19/12/09	03/01/10				

A total number of ninety-five interviews were conducted with Zimbabwean migrants. However, as the above table shows, I conducted more interviews with some and few with others. Unlike the traditional longitudinal study which strictly seeks to understand the changes which have taken place in people's lives overtime, my study sought to explore migrants' experiences from the time they left Zimbabwe and their circumstances in the UK. As such my approach was more relaxed in that interviewees were free to get in touch with me whenever they felt they had issues they wanted us to discuss. As my study involved interviewing people who were suffering, most interviewees felt comfortable to discuss their experiences in phases except in one case (that of Rute) where after our second interview meeting the interviewee asked me not to get in touch with her again. This is what she told me: "I have never shared my experiences with anyone before... I am happy that you are

doing this study and that, at least I managed to open up to someone whom I don't know... and whom I don't think I will ever see again. ...I now feel better... It is a subject which I don't want to continue talking about... Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my life experience... Please don't look for me again..."

This suggests that some interviewees did not want to stay in touch with the researcher.

2.6 Negotiating Access to Migrant Parents

The difficulties of gaining access to some groups of forced migrants especially those who do not reside within refugee camps and detention centres and those who are undocumented or are illegally present have already been documented (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, Hynes, 2003). Besides being among the most hard to reach categories of socially excluded persons (Hunt, 2008) some forced migrants are also persons whose lives have been fashioned by complex traumatic experiences which often transform them into people who can no longer trust others, including members of their own communities (Hynes, 2003). This adds to the complications of gaining access to research this population.

Certainly, I personally experienced difficulties with regards to gaining access to my research population, especially at the initial stages of the research process. Due to absence of statistics on the number of Zimbabweans in the UK or those who are in the UK without their children, purposive sampling was considered the ideal technique, and I resolved not to concentrate on any specific region but rather to secure interviewees from any region possible. Initially, I aimed to gain access to this population through informal networks. As a starting point, a Zimbabwean female friend introduced me to her friend who was a refused asylum seeker, who in turn

made considerable efforts to link me with friends and relatives whose situations matched my research interests. Despite all her efforts, I faced resistance from most of the potential respondents, and from what I later discovered, the main problem was that of mistrust. This echoes the work of others in the field, in particular that of Hynes (2003) who discusses issues of 'trust' and mistrust' in his study with the Burmese refugees in the UK. Hynes (2003) suggests that mistrust among forced migrants can be a result of many factors most of which are directly embedded in the forced migrants' experiences of both pre and post migration. I find such insights very useful here to help to understand what I believe to be some of the reasons why I was mistrusted by my fellow Zimbabweans in a foreign land.

Firstly, most of the Zimbabwean migrants in the UK who fall into the categories of asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and refugees are people who suffered human rights violations of massive proportions under Mugabe's tyrannical regime within the wider contexts of tribalism, gender and partisanship. It seems as though this background had an influence on the potential respondents' perception of me. Although I approached individuals as a researcher, people routinely expressed anxiety to know who exactly I was, my tribe, where I used to live and work in Zimbabwe and most critically, my political affiliation, lest I was one of Mugabe's Central Intelligence Officers (CIOs). Interviewees subsequently told me; "It is now common knowledge that quite a number of Mugabe's CIOs have been granted asylum here... *zvavakunetsa izvi, hatichazive kuti researcher chaiye ndiyani* (It is now confusing we cannot tell who exactly is a genuine researcher)". Prospective respondents wanted this blurry issue of identity to be clarified to their satisfaction before they would commit themselves to take part in my study.

Secondly, migrants wanted to know more about my own social networks in the UK as I never used to attend Zimbabwean social events and also I did not belong to any Zimbabwean community network, including local Zimbabwean churches. Perhaps, due to the stigma attached to asylum seeking, individuals wanted assurance that sharing their intimate life stories with me would not have any negative social bearing on them.

Thirdly, people wanted to know why the research was being conducted and for who, especially whether I had any connections with the Home Office or not. Perhaps, due to speculations that the Home Office increasingly engage researchers in their hunt for illegal migrants or those involved in illegal activities (Pasura, 2006), potential respondents suspected that I could be masquerading as a researcher whilst working as a Home Office watch-dog. Thus, as pointed out by Hynes (2003:5), there is 'a boundless universe of mistrust' that often arises when trying to gain access to research forced migrants. This calls for researchers to firstly engage in a process of trust building, which Hynes warns can take time as well as considerable effort and patience to establish.

As a step towards building trust, I resolved to maintain close contacts with potential respondents who had been referred to me, but on a more social basis. This involved keeping a diary and calling individuals at least once a week. I worked hard to establish rapport by engaging individuals in more general discussions and allowing them to know more about me by giving them time and space to ask any questions they had, be they directly about me as a person or the proposed research. Often, we exchanged general experiences of how we coped with life in Zimbabwe, especially in relation to the economic and political hardships which characterised the country from the mid-1990s. Some of the popular discussions also related to the difficulties of living in a foreign land especially the extent to which people

experienced racism and discrimination. In some cases people would disclose how they longed to be with their families and other important relations. Scott, (1999) found some of these topics very popular when she carried out research with her Caribbean counterparts in the UK. Where discussions led to that, I would increasingly discuss my own experiences of leaving children behind in order to identify with prospective respondents.

In order to show that I was genuine and trustworthy, I provided my home and mobile telephone numbers and encouraged people to call whenever they felt they wanted to talk to me (see Robinson and Segrott, 2002 on this issue). I also provided my supervisors' names and contact details in case individuals wanted to verify my identity or the purpose of the proposed study. With time, this approach yielded results, as potential respondents increasingly took the initiative to call or text asking if I was available for a chat. In one situation, a female potential respondent called me and openly acknowledged that she found it very useful to talk to someone from home in a non-judgmental manner. She then proceeded to talk about her children, especially how she longed to be with them. We then agreed to meet for the first time to discuss these issues in-depth. By the time we actually met for the interview we were already familiar to each other which helped to facilitate the interview process. She later gave me her friend's contacts, and urged me to get in touch with her as soon as possible as she felt this friend needed to talk to somebody like me. With time this became the pattern, which is also one of the reasons which made repeated interviewing the most convenient and most appropriate method of exploring the migrants' experiences.

In order to avoid 'over-dependence' on social networks I considered the use of 'multiple networking approaches' as advised by Bloch (2007). I knew of a Zimbabwean Community Network in Nottingham and decided to start attending their meetings, which gave me the opportunity to meet with the leadership and to share my research with them. Although they expressed an interest in 'assisting', they, in a diplomatic way, denied me the platform to make a public announcement about my research in their meetings, which to me suggests some of the contradictions between refugee advocacy and academia (Hynes, 2003, Bloch, 2007). At a later stage, the leadership agreed to post the details of my research on their website, which generated interest and as a result four people contacted me and expressed an interest in participating in my study. Although I also had to go through a process of establishing trust and rapport with these potential respondents, there was less resistance, perhaps because I was operating under the auspices of a trusted organisation.

I also heard of an African women's organisation in Nottingham founded and run by African women who are asylum seekers and refugees. I rang the leader (gatekeeper), who happened to be a Zimbabwean woman in the hope that I might gain access to members whose identities matched my research population. Initially, this woman advised me that there were quite a number of Zimbabwean women within the group who were forced apart from their children and said if I wanted to gain access to them I needed to firstly pay her money. I then requested an appointment hoping to discuss the conditions with her in person, but she would not give me one. Instead, she kept telling me that she was extremely busy, giving the impression of somebody working on many other important projects. This echoes Keval's (2009) insights that those who hold the position of the 'gatekeeper' often exercise protective power in authorizing or denying access. However, I kept on

trying for almost six months. In taking this course of action I was informed by reading Cassel (1988) who, in discussing the problems of negotiating 'closed access', suggests that:

...among the characteristics needed to penetrate a closed access group are brute persistence and blind compulsivity. One has to keep on pushing, and trying, and hoping, and smiling, and pushing some more. For this, a researcher needs a thick skin and a certain imperviousness to rejection (Cassel as cited by Arber, 1993:54)

Indeed, in my case, breakthrough was eventually reached when I discussed the problems I was facing in trying to gain access to this group with one of my Zimbabwean friends who happens to be a professional counsellor. Interestingly, she informed me that she knew the lady in-charge of the group in person and that lady had requested her to assist some of the group members on a voluntary basis. Eventually, this friend managed to negotiate access on my behalf. In this way, trust and rapport was easily established, suggesting the importance of dealing with 'gatekeepers' who are themselves trusted by potential respondents (see Hynes, 2003 for a detailed discussion on this issue). I later learned that the woman who tried to deny me access was herself a refused asylum seeker who had been separated from her children for almost 8 years. She later consented to take part in my study and actually became one of my key interviewees.

Arber (2003) suggests that having penetrated a closed access, the researcher needs to be highly socially sensitive to the culture and practices of the group. She once again invokes Cassel (1988) to demonstrate this:

One must fit in... One must dress acceptably, speak acceptably...adopt a role or identity that meshes with the values and behaviour of the group being studied, without seriously compromising the researcher's own values and behaviour (Cassel cited in Arber, 1993:54).

Such insights are relevant here in that the first time I visited this organisation to meet with my prospective respondents I found them busy painting and the situation compelled me to join in. For the next six months that I frequented this place, I made it a point to dress mostly in African attire and tried as much as possible to identify with the members of this group, but without compromising my own values, behaviour or position as a researcher. I also made a decision to take part in many of the group's activities, including fundraising and seminars, as well as helping to put their office in shape and assisting with administration work. This helped to build trust and rapport to the extent that the interviews I had with some of the members of the group towards the end of my fieldwork were fairly spontaneous. However, in the sections that follow I discuss some of the ethical issues that emerged during the course of fieldwork.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are always central concerns which need to be addressed appropriately when carrying out research that involves human subjects (see Seale et al, 2007). Also, having being forewarned by others (Hynes, 2003, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003, Robinson, 2002) that forced migrants especially those who lack the legal rights to remain, may increasingly feel vulnerable and powerless in the process of being researched, I took the necessary steps to satisfy the basic principles of informed consent, confidentiality and harm minimization in research settings.

2.7.1 Informed Consent

The need to obtain informed consent from research participants was considered paramount during fieldwork. Indeed, respondents who had agreed to participate in this study were presented with a consent form; a process which meets one of the requirements of the University of Nottingham ethical guidelines and also seems to be the traditional universal procedure of obtaining consent from research participants (Czymoniewicz-Klippel et al, 2010, Gillam and Guillemin, 2004). Perhaps due to reasons associated with the individuals' unstable immigration status, almost all my respondents gave verbal consent and did not wish to commit themselves in writing. However, as my research involved multi-interactions with these participants, it became important to re-enforce the notion of informed consent by consistently reminding respondents at the different stages of the research process that they were not under any compulsion to participate and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without having to give any reasons. In principle, I can argue that all my interviewees fully consented to take part in the research and that none of them chose to withdraw their participation at any stage of the research process. At the same time, on making this claim, I am also aware of studies (for example Mackenzie et al, 2007, O'Connell-Davidson, 2008b, Czymoniewicz-Klippel et al, 2010, Stevenson, 2009) which argue that there are ethical concerns which often emerge once a researcher and research subjects engage into a lengthy intimate research relationship.

In her article on 'consenting to research intimacies' O'Connell-Davidson, (2008b) provides invaluable insights into understanding the complexities of consent. In this work, O'Connell-Davidson reflects on her own experience of the time she embarked on a piece of research on prostitution and the sex trade, and specifically delves into

her intimate research relationship and later development into friendship with one of her key informants (Desiree). Here, she provides a critical analysis of how this relationship allowed her access into the research subject's private sphere, and how it subsequently enabled her to acquire very personal information and knowledge regarding Desiree's personal life and work practices. This was subsequently disseminated in the public sphere in the form of academic writings including journal articles, research reports and books; which although all were approved by Desiree before publication, were framed in ways which conveyed the author's own academic concerns.

My intention is to draw from O'Connell-Davidson's insights in my discussion of the limitations of informed consent in relation to my own research subjects. Having said that all my research participants fully consented to take part in the research, I also call to mind that throughout the research process, there was an expectation from the research subjects that the research would somehow bring practical solutions to their situations. This on its own raises the question of whether it is ethical to do research with people who expect to be helped. Looked at from this perspective, this phenomenon could be interpreted to suggest that consenting to take part, to some extent, could have been influenced by the need and desire to benefit from, as opposed to having a genuine interest in contributing to the research. In this context, O'Connell-Davidson's (2008b:51) questions become relevant:

...if someone does give informed consent to a lengthy period of participation in research that closely interrogates and then publicly dissects the intimate details of her life, experience and emotions, should we accept that 'Yes' means 'Yes'? ... Is it possible for anyone to genuinely consent to being objectified through the research process? (O'Connell-Davidson, 2008b:51).

Here, I am reminded of the scenarios and expressions of marginality, vulnerability, suffering, helplessness, powerlessness, victimhood, guilt and shame which repeatedly characterized my respondents' narratives at different levels and throughout the research process. These were a reflection of these migrants' private day to day lives and experiences, which I have in turn scrutinized in the public realm of this thesis so as to give these research subjects an 'identity' and 'existence' (O'Connell-Davidson, 2008b) as a category of people who have been stripped of self to the extent of qualifying them as socially dead persons or individuals who seem to be no longer fully human subjects. This resonates with O'Connell-Davidson's argument that the process of writing up research increasingly entails objectifying the research subjects, which she has illustrated as follows:

When I wrote up data from my research with Desiree, I turned her into a prostitute on the pages of the academic books and journals to which I contributed. Even though I always attempted to portray her respectfully as a subject and agent, she does not appear in these texts as a whole person, of interest and worth in her own right. She appears as a 'prostitute' or 'sex worker', a foil against which to discuss and evaluate theories of prostitution (O'Connell-Davidson, 2008b:56).

With regards to my research, asking whether my respondents 'genuinely consented to being objectified', or questioning, 'Should we accept that 'yes' means 'yes'?', becomes an issue which raises the following ethical questions: Can we really agree that people who are suffering have the power to consent? Is not the whole objective of giving them a voice because they are disenfranchised and hence powerless? To what extent then can it be said that victims are completely in control of their decisions and actions? It would therefore seem that, for my respondents, consenting to take part in research was because they were powerless to the extent of wanting their experiences to be known to somebody they perceived as having the

power to campaign on the issues which characterized their lives of suffering. Perhaps as an illustration of this, in one setting, a woman respondent sobbing bitterly, insisted that, "I want my experiences of seeking asylum in this country to be documented and my sufferings to be made known to the public... I want it to be known that this is the cruelty we suffer in this country when we come here to be protected" (Tendai). In other many cases, comments like "thank you for giving your people a voice in a foreign land" were repeatedly echoed by respondents, who at the same time asked desperate questions as to the extent to which the research would help alleviate their sufferings. In other settings, assumptions were made that I was an immigration advisor, and as a result, questions closely related to seeking asylum and how to engage efficient solicitors were routinely asked. Stevenson, (2009) experienced a similar situation when she conducted research with refugees and prison inmates, and discusses how being asked for practical help as a researcher can be very unsettling not only because one would be ill-equipped to assume the role, but mainly because it intensifies awareness of the extent to which marginalized individuals lack support, as well as making it so uncomfortable to "be yet another person who was either unwilling or unable to help" (Stevenson, 2009:4). All these issues point to some of the expectations that respondents have when they consent to participate in research which increasingly are issues which are at odds with the researcher's objectives.

It could therefore be said that respondents' expectations emerged as a complex ethical issue which could have compromised the voluntariness of consenting to take part in research. It is an issue which also points at some of the problems of conducting research which lacks practical intervention. Evans and Becker (2009:81) concur that: "Long-term academic goals of building knowledge about previously

hidden, marginalized groups, which may help to improve the circumstances of others in future, are difficult to reconcile with the immediate practical needs...”.

In my case, an opportunity arose to get involved in a campaign during the course of my fieldwork through links with a women’s advocacy group which at the time was working towards petitioning the government to re-consider its immigration policies which deny parents the right to family reunion under different circumstances. My school generously supported this cause by providing financial and human resources to facilitate some of the meetings and helping to draft and put the different strategies of the petition together, as well as sponsoring some of my interviewees to attend these meetings. However, I could not commit myself to fully participate in this initiative due to competing interests and conflicting priorities between academia and advocacy. There appeared to be incompatible interests between the advocacy group’s focus and approach and the course I had anticipated the campaign would take, such that getting fully involved would have meant taking time off my PhD work which, of course, I could not afford to do as I considered my studies to be my first priority.

Thus, helping in the way that my interviewees would have expected me to proved to be something beyond the scope and limitation of my research, a situation which reflects my own powerless position as a researcher. Repeatedly, I had to explain to my respondents the limit of the study as well as making it clear to them that it was purely an academic piece of work which had the potential to contribute to what is already known in academic debates, as I hope to translate different findings into publications and general articles. I also made the promise to forward to respondents any publications which may result from the research, which has already partly been fulfilled in that I disseminated copies of the article I recently published. However,

O'Connell-Davidson (2008b) offers critical insights that researchers do not always remain in contact with research subjects following fieldwork and therefore, might not ever get to know about the changes which might later take place in the individuals' lives. Yet the publication of the research leaves a permanent record of their consent and identity; "there is no going back to renegotiate what is now in print and so in the public domain" (O'Connell-Davidson, 2008b:59-61). The same can be said regarding my relationship with my research subjects, a number of whom I have already lost contact with. There is a possibility that some of them will one day acquire legal status in the UK, realize reunification with their children and become happy families again, yet, a record about their marginalized lives will still remain. To use O'Connell-Davidson's words:

...they may now look back with regret on the fact that they ever confided the intimate details of their lives to a researcher. Indeed, the data I hold might now appear to them – if and when they remember the interview – as a permanent record of a period in their life they would rather deny or forget, in rather the same way that people talk about children who have been sexually abused in the production of pornography feeling distressed by the idea that the photos of their abuse are still circulating 'out there' (O'Connell-Davidson, 2008b:60).

Overall, all the different dimensions of the research subjects' involvement in research I have discussed in this section sought to demonstrate that informed consent is not as straightforward a process as we sometimes may assume.

2.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality was also one of the guiding principles during the research process. Necessary steps were taken to protect the anonymity of all the respondents who took part in my study. It is important to note here, that respondents themselves, at each stage of the interviewing process, increasingly wanted assurance that

immigration officials would not be able to identify them through reports, academic presentations and other published documents. In addition to giving respondents verbal assurance, I also took practical steps and made sure there were no names and addresses written on the interview schedules or tapes. Instead, pseudonyms were used to ensure that no interviewee's name appear in the thesis or any publications that may arise from the study. In order to keep respondents' stories private and confidential in many other ways, necessary steps were taken at each level of the research process. Some of these steps are highlighted in my discussion of the interview process.

2.7.3 Minimizing Harm and the Interview Process

The need to minimise distress or to avoid harm to participants in the course of interviewing seems to be one of the critical concerns in forced migration studies (Mackenzie et al, 2007, Jacobsen and Landau, 2003). Hynes (2003) observes that what makes this issue a complex one is the fact that asylum/refugee claims are made on the grounds that one must have suffered persecution in their country of origin, which on its own raises questions whether it is ethically appropriate to ask and probe individuals to remember and verbalise traumatic events and other horrific experiences which often, though unintentional, have the potential to re-open healed wounds. While the assumption seems to be that forced migrants get wounded in the countries of emigration and/or during the migration process and supposedly these wounds immediately get healed once they arrive in the country of exile, my research was not just about old wounds, but also an exploration of the living, real and very intensive suffering of people who were being wounded every day of their lives, which raises the question whether it harms people to speak of their pain? With these contradictory views in mind, I found it very difficult to strike a balance between soliciting important information on the one hand and minimizing harm on

the other. What I can stress here is that while the need to avoid harm was a major concern throughout the research process, I also had to respect participants' capacity to consent and I greatly endeavoured to take important precautions when discussing sensitive issues relating to individuals' experiences of limbo and consequences of leaving children behind, especially what migrants perceived to be the experiences of their children during the time of separation from them. Different approaches were employed in different settings depending on the situation to try and put respondents at ease, and this is one of the reasons why repeated interviewing emerged as the most convenient way of interacting with respondents.

Once I successfully obtained confirmation from prospective respondents, I made arrangements to meet with them and made the effort to ensure that interviews were conducted at convenient places and times; all tailor-made to suit the respondents' preferences. This is reflected by the different locations in which interviews were conducted². While a greater number of interviews were conducted in people's homes during the absence of other housemates, in two settings, interviews had to be interrupted after respondents had expressed anxiety that they did not feel confident to discuss certain circumstances within the home environment. We had to go out, and we continued with the interview discussion in my car. What I gathered in both circumstances was that respondents were being looked after by relatives and friends whom they did not want to know about certain intimate experiences regarded as sensitive and confidential. Some interviews were conducted in offices especially in the case of six respondents I contacted through an organisation. Most of these interviews took place between 6pm and 10pm, as these were the times when other organisation members had left the premises; which gave my respondents the

² Initial interviews were the ones in which most respondents expressed their traumatic experiences in very emotional ways. It was therefore important to make sure that interviews were conducted in places where respondents felt comfortable and confident to relate their experiences without fear that other people would overhear them.

opportunity to discuss their experiences in private. In the other two settings, respondents preferred to have interviews carried out in the park as they did not want their housemates to overhear discussions of the experiences they had never shared before. One respondent also offered to come to my place on two occasions as he did not want his housemates to know of some of his experiences of seeking asylum which he said were really bothering him. I felt that the location of the interview had an influence on how people discussed their traumatic experiences.

In order to minimize distress, I routinely encouraged respondents to discuss only the issues they felt comfortable to share each time we met, and this approach gave people the chance to discuss their issues in phases without feeling they were being pressurized to do so. Increasingly, respondents would email, text or phone whenever they felt they wanted to discuss something. I also used these follow-up interview sessions to clarify certain issues, including those mentioned in previous meetings and also to follow up on emerging themes. I constantly reminded individuals that they were in control and that they were free to interrupt and/or excuse themselves from answering certain questions, especially those which had the potential to upset them. In situations where I felt individuals were finding it difficult to verbalize certain experiences, I would quickly remind them that they were not under any obligation to disclose these experiences if they felt they were not yet ready to do so, or I would simply divert their attention to something else. Repeatedly, where appropriate, I would share my own experiences of leaving children behind to put respondents at ease and also to encourage them that of the possibility that one day they may be re-united with their own children. This approach helped in many settings to counter and diffuse feelings of guilt and shame emanating from the thought of leaving children behind.

By this, I am not trying to escape from the fact that I encountered distressing moments. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the first-round of interviews was emotionally charged and draining. In particular, interview discussions with mostly women respondents were heavily characterized by the shedding of tears, with some sobbing uncontrollably, particularly when discussing issues surrounding the abuses and exploitations their children were suffering in Zimbabwe for the first time in their lives. In these situations, respondents were asked if they wanted to stop the interview completely or if they were willing to change the topic of discussion. However, in all cases, respondents expressed the desire to continue narrating their painful experiences, driven by the desire to be heard. The opportunity to share these painful stories, I believe, was increasingly taken as a 'healing process'. In one situation, a woman whose child died in Zimbabwe while she was trying to have her asylum settled in the UK said she had waited for this opportunity for a very long time, and said 'at last God has answered my prayer', suggesting a healing process and the desire to be heard by others.

Given the emotionally charged research environment I have described above, it becomes apparent that carrying out this research was not an emotion-free process. Among other things, the most emotionally challenging aspect of the research has been that of routinely listening to the interviewees' narratives of shame, powerlessness, hopelessness and desperation as they echoed and re-echoed their never-ending stories of separation from their children, which in some cases was permanent and final. For me, it was almost impossible to listen to these horrendous experiences without 'feeling'. Some have correctly argued that qualitative researchers are not simply "spectators who are only documenting the narratives of others and reporting on them, but they are aware that the way in which they experience reality is captured through different lenses, whereby one of them is the

emotions of the researcher him or herself" (Nutove and Hazzan, 2011:21). Others have also correctly noted that rapport is mutually cultivated between individuals who can sympathize with each other (see Watts, 2008). Moreover, in my case, what made the whole research process an emotional one was the fact that interviewees had high expectations to be helped in a practical way, yet the only thing I could readily give was reassurance. Thus, because of my powerlessness to help, I frequently felt deeply distressed and disappointed following an interview session. I call to mind that in one situation, a mother whose son had died at home while she was trying to get her asylum settled in the UK, wept miserably while she reiterated her horrific experiences of how immigration control can separate families; in this case separation was permanent. Under such circumstances, I could not resist being both a 'listening and feeling agent' (Watts, 2008). Indeed, the interview session was extremely stressful and painful to the extent that I was almost tempted to quit fieldwork.

It was after this experience that my supervisors had to come to my rescue, which echoes Nutov and Hazzan's (2011) advice that doctoral students must select supervisors who will 'accompany' them throughout the doctoral research journey. In fact, these authors further note that, "the supervisor acts as a role model in the imparting of acceptable behaviour, standards, norms within the academic unit, as an agent of the knowledge discipline, and as the primary agent of the entire study process" (Nutov and Hazzan, 2011:24). Indeed, all these important attributes were displayed by my supervisors during the course of my study. Throughout the remainder of the research process, for the majority of the time, I depended so much on the support of my supervisors, mainly through having planned sessions of 'emptying out' following an interview session. These precious moments also equipped me with the necessary skills to be in a position to exercise 'emotional

balance', which according to Watts, (2008) "involves... taking care to be close, but not too close, to participants, ensuring that I can retain the filtering and distilling functions that are core to the agency of the qualitative researcher *after listening to the stories of participants*" (*emphasis added*). I also benefited immensely from the emotional support of friends and family.

2.7.4 Researcher/Researched Relationship

Although some feminist models of research (for example Fanow and Cook 1991) argue for non-hierarchical relationships in research which are perceived to be ethically desirable in the sense that they seem to address the case of unequal power relations, it should also be realized that once in the field, a researcher assumes multiple identities which in some cases are 'fluid and constantly shifting' (Scott, 1999:90) which on its own has the potential to settle the issue of unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched. In particular, Scott, (1999:90) questions the appropriateness of some of these models, and suggests a situation where the researcher and the researched, find themselves acquainted in very significant ways by an assumed shared experience, so as to attain intimate levels of interactions which as a result can arguably be considered as non-hierarchical. She goes further to discuss her own interaction experiences with her Caribbean counterparts in the UK noting that:

The relative ease with which Caribbean interviewees engaged with me apparently on the basis of our shared ethnicity seemed to diminish or at least mask any need on my part to re-address any power imbalances that could be viewed to exist based on our differing class or educational backgrounds (Scott, 1999:90).

Whilst I do not seek to use this example to completely rule out the issue of power imbalances with regards to my own interaction processes with respondents during fieldwork, I wish to use this background to describe the kind of mutual interactions I had with my own Zimbabwean counterparts in the UK. Notwithstanding the problems of negotiating access which I have discussed above, I generally found my interviewees quite happy, free and open to discuss their intimate stories with me once trust had been gained. I observed that respondents took me as an 'insider', which in this context, meant assumptions are made that my identity of being a 'black' Zimbabwean woman could have offered me 'a distinct advantage' (see Scott, 1999). This assumption is made in relation to the experience that, once trust had been established with respondents, there was a strong sense of familiarity derived from us being 'black' Zimbabweans and this was reinforced through conversing in our native languages and other cultural gestures like shaking of hands. Also, the idea that I could recognise, affirm and agree with individuals whenever past national events or tragedies, (for example, the clean up campaign launched by the government of Zimbabwe in 2005) were recalled, naturally brought about the feeling that we were people with historically shared experiences (see Keval, 2009). Besides identifying through culture, language and history, my own experiences of leaving children behind the first time when I moved to the UK also created a convincing image of somebody in a non-judgmental position, who was very sympathetic, understanding and supportive of respondents in their predicament of being forced apart from their children. Individuals could therefore share their experiences openly, especially when discussing the various ways in which separation brought suffering in the lives of their children, as well as expressing their anger and negative perceptions of the UK immigration and asylum systems which, I believe, would not have been the case had they been interviewed by a British researcher.

However, some (for example Young, 2004) have argued that being taken as an 'insider' in some cases, has the dangers of hampering meaningful conversations as respondents increasingly work on assumptions that the researcher is aware of certain things, especially events and experiences which have their social, political and cultural contexts embedded in the country of origin. Indeed, in the researcher position, I experienced this dilemma as interviewees routinely provided answers like "being Zimbabwean or being a Zimbabwean woman 'you' should know what I mean by this". To reconcile my roles, I had to blame my supervisors all the time by telling respondents that although I seemed to be aware of certain issues, there was still need for them to explain issues further and even deeper for the benefit of my British supervisors who knew absolutely nothing about Zimbabwe or its problems. This strategy worked perfectly well as respondents felt compelled to expand and clarify their experiences without taking any offence, but for the benefit of this important audience.

Having said this, it becomes important here to draw attention to the ways in which my interviewees validated their experiences as my interviews also involved asking the migrants for retrospective accounts of what made them to decide to leave Zimbabwe, arrangements for children, experiences of arrival and their leading a life in limbo. It is not surprising that the migrants' accounts were undoubtedly marred by the subsequent guilt and shame originating from their contemplation and reflection of how things were at the time they decided to leave, the extent to which they knew things to have changed for their children in comparison to the time they left, what they were and what they hoped their lives would become in contrast to what their lives eventually turned out to be, in the UK. Indeed, individuals' narratives clearly demonstrated their concern, helplessness, desperation and enduring struggles suggesting a life of intensive suffering which resonates with Jefferson's (2010) work

with the Liberians refugees in Sierra Leone in which he argues that suffering can be persistent so as to become an identity. This is how he puts it:

Were we to say suffering is accumulated we would stray close to implying that it is amassed, collected over time, as if a series of discrete events combined and contributed to the current experience of suffering. True enough discrete events have featured in the lives of the refugees, but to the degree that they have been lived through and lived with they contribute not to a set of experiences of sufferings added one on top of the other but to a contemporary experience of suffering which is no less than an experience of self as sufferer. ...Suffering is not a form of life, a choice amongst many. Suffering for them is life (Jefferson, 2010:23).

In light of the respondents' marginalized positions in the UK, especially their lack of certain rights, including the rights to work, education, and family reunification, I was perceived to be a privileged 'Zimbabwean woman' in the sense that I was studying towards attaining a doctorate degree, and also that I had succeeded in bringing my family over to the UK. Such a position has been seen by others as a potential source of unequal power relations between interviewer and interviewees (see Miller and Glassner, 1998, Fanow and Cook, 1991). However, in my case, I felt that somehow I shared this privilege with my respondents who took me as a 'sister' and 'daughter' who was there to give them a voice in a foreign land, a privilege which they would not have been able to enjoy had I not been in this privileged position. In this context, I felt that the 'power' which is usually inherent in the 'traditional interviewer' (Scott, 1999:90) was masked if not shared equally.

2.8 Recording, Translation and Analysis of data

Interviews were tape recorded, except in three situations where interviewees did not wish to be recorded and I had to make as many notes as I could during and after interview discussions. However, even in settings where the tape recorder was not verbally resisted, I realized that the way I positioned the tape recorder during interviewing had an influence on the way people expressed themselves. In particular, I sensed that a feeling of uneasiness increasingly accompanied respondents when the tape-recorder was placed clearly in view, which was not the case when it was hidden from view; implying that the way the recorder was positioned had an influence on the quality of data generated. Furthermore, the issue of language also had a bearing on the data generated. Most of my interviewees (15) could speak *Shona* fluently, Zimbabwe's dominant first language, and as such some of the interviews (6), were conducted in *Shona* while a greater number of interviews, (9), involved a mixture of both *Shona* and English, and the rest, (4), were conducted in English throughout as respondents were from a *Ndebele* background, Zimbabwe's second dominant first language. Thus, the research involved translation of interview data from *Shona* to English, which demanded lots of patience as well as time in light of the fact that interview sessions were fairly long. Most interviews, (17), took between 1½ and 2 hours, whereas in 2 settings, interviews went on for almost 3 hours. Overall, translated scripts were between 7 and 15 pages. Perhaps, due to the fact that English is my second language, in some ways, this could have compromised the richness of the data following transcription especially in terms of the depth of the language used by respondents whose narratives were coloured and peppered with very deep *Shona* expressions.

However, I should say that considerable effort was put to ascertain that migrants' narratives retained their originality and also to ensure that voice construction remained authentic. However, as these interviews were conducted with people who were suffering, there is a possibility that my interviewees could have failed to put the depth of their lived experiences into words. Wilkinson, 2005) offers insights which suggest that the depth of suffering as a lived experience cannot be fully grasped by those who are not in the situation. He invoked Frank (2001) to demonstrate this:

Suffering is the unspeakable, as opposed to what can be spoken; it is what remains concealed, impossible to reveal; it remains in darkness; eluding illumination; and it is dread, beyond what is tangible even if hurtful. Suffering is loss, present or anticipated, and loss is another instance of no thing, an absence of what we fear will never be. At the core of suffering is the sense that something is irreparably wrong with our lives, and wrong is the negation of what could not have been right. Suffering resists definition because it is the reality of what is not. Anyone who suffers knows the reality of suffering, but this reality is what you cannot 'come to grips with' (Frank as cited by Wilkinson, 2009:17).

It is clear from the way I described the process by which I reached the decision to carry out research in this topic that I did not enter the field with any rigid research questions. Initially my main focus was on issues of leaving children behind. I had to allow important themes to emerge and develop from the data. This process involved transcribing each interview immediately after interviewing and carefully analysing it, by noting down important themes and other interesting issues and allowing these to develop fully through new interviews and repeat interviews (see Kvale, 1996, Taylor and Dogdan, 1998). As the themes continued to develop, I

became aware that the issue of leaving children behind could not be dealt with as an entity on itself as I had originally thought. In particular, the process of analysing data made me to realize that, though leaving children behind was one of the critical issues which occupied migrant parents' narratives, the manners in which these experiences were constructed revealed that the central concern was that of these migrants' sufferings as brought about by their lack of rights, as some have argued that "human rights are about people being in control of their own choices" (see, Schuftan, 2010). Through following these themes, the thesis centred on the migrants' rightlessness and suffering, both its causes and what it does, especially the extent to which it strips people of personhood, and leaves individuals with the feeling that they were socially dead.

Conclusion

The chapter has made an attempt to discuss the research design adopted for the study and describe how the research was conducted. Clearly, it has been noted that the process of gaining access to interviewees involved negotiating massive obstacles which all suggest potential interviewees' mistrust. Also, conducting research with people who were suffering raised a number of ethical issues. Among other things, there seemed to be a strong expectation among interviewees that the research might in one way or the other, help to alleviate their suffering, which on its own could have compromised the genuineness of consenting to take part in the research. Interviews also involved asking respondents for retrospective explanation of events, including remembering the circumstances which forced them to migrant and to leave children behind. Interviewees' narratives demonstrated that these people were leading a life of continuous suffering. Rightlessness and powerlessness characterized the identities of my interviewees and in some cases it was clear that people had been rendered helpless to the extent of becoming mere spectators of their own crumbling selves.

Chapter 3: Decision to Leave Home: Displacement Dynamics in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe

Introduction

Circumstances of mass movements of people from their places of birth in search of sanctuary and protection have always been and remain a characteristic of forced migration movements. Almost fifty years ago, Arendt (2004), observes the diverse mass movements of nationals across the globe in the aftermath of World War II, whose reasons for leaving their homes reflected lived experiences of persecution, torture and persistent suffering. In the contemporary era of globalization, the trends and patterns of migration movements seem to suggest that circumstances of mass displacements are even on the increase which perhaps is an indication that the world still remains as insecure as it was during the time of Arendt (Power, 2004). However, what seems to have changed since the time Arendt wrote her work is that there has been an expansion in the conceptual framework for managing migration movements to the extent that leaving one's place of birth has now become a human rights issue as well as a policy concern. On the one hand, there is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees people the rights to leave their countries of origin, while on other hand is the International Framework which governs the rights of people who move across international borders. However, this increasingly assumes that there are two distinct generic types of population movement; those of forced/involuntary and voluntary/economic migration (Betts and Kaytaz, 2009, Crosby, 2006). These categories are based on the assumption that people take the decision to leave home either, as a result of political instability including wars and other situations classified as political violence, or in order to fulfil economic aspirations (Crosby 2006, IOM, 1997, Castles, 2003). Subsequently, the rights and levels of protection that people get in the countries they migrate to are

increasingly determined by these categories. In legal terms, international protection is only guaranteed to those who satisfy the forced category while those regarded as voluntary migrants increasingly undergo further scrutiny. Voluntary migration is further subdivided into “legal” and “illegal”, with “legal” migrants being assumed to be protected by the receiving state and “illegal” migrants being imagined as committing a crime against the receiving state (Crosby, 2006).

However, in recent years there has been a greater recognition, mainly by academics, that migration movements are conceptualized on what others see as ‘a false dichotomy’ (Betts and Kaytaz, 2009) which neglects the wider framework, interactions and interconnections of the forces that create the context for people to move and the individuals’ actual lived experiences (Castles, 2003, Crosby, 2006, Betts and Kaytaz, 2009, Zetter, 2007). Crosby (2006) believes that in most cases, the violence of poverty and that of war are ‘intricately interlocked’ (Crosby, 2006). Castles (2003) advocates for a ‘sociology of forced migration’ and uses the term ‘asylum/migration nexus’ to demonstrate that the forces behind migration are more complex than imagined and that frequently the constructed categories of ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ overlap as there is a strong link between failing states and weak economies, meaning that in most cases, citizens are forced to flee both political conflicts and economic impoverishment. Zetter, (2007:175) elaborates on this issue stating:

embedded in the phrases ‘asylum/migration nexus’ and ‘mixed migration flows’ are two countervailing processes. On the one hand, there is the increasing complexity of determining who is a refugee, no longer contained in the south but arriving in large numbers in Europe’s borders. On the other hand, forced migrants are one category in a much larger population of migrants who are moving for a complex of social and economic reasons.

Powers (2004:xxi) summarizes it, saying:

In some countries state control is so fierce that independent voices are muzzled and marginalized, power and wealth are concentrated among elites, and injustices rule. In others war or occupation have brought such ruin and humiliation that civil society cannot flower and no amount of organizing can restore standards of human dignity.

Betts and Kaytaz (2009) suggest the situation in Zimbabwe as one such example. Here, citizens from all walks of life have borne the brunt of the economic consequences of the political system, and Betts and Kaytaz (2009:7) hold that the exodus of the Zimbabwean population “exemplifies a new concept of ‘survival migration’, which describes people who flee an existential threat to which they have no domestic remedy”. The challenge, they continue, “...is to define the threshold of what constitutes an ‘existential threat’” (Betts and Kaytaz, 2009:7). They suggest that “It would include not only the right to life but also elements of quality of life that are fundamental to human dignity” (Betts and Kaytaz, 2009:7). In this complex situation, it becomes almost impossible to differentiate between economic migrants and victims of political persecution, making it impossible to fit Zimbabwean migrants abroad into the supposedly mutually exclusive categories of voluntary/economic and involuntary/forced which are so central to national and international immigration policy and practice.

My aim in this chapter is to explore the nature and complexities of the forces behind the migration of the nineteen Zimbabwean migrant parents I interviewed in the UK. Drawing on my interview data, I intend to discuss the reasons for leaving Zimbabwe and document the experiences, perceptions and circumstances that led to these nineteen individuals making the decision to travel to the UK. In so doing, I aim to

show that the decision to leave home was undertaken in the face of intensive suffering brought about by a complex set of political and economic factors. These offered my interviewees restricted choices for both personal safety and children's survival, and so to add empirical support for the arguments discussed above.

3.1 Setting the Scene: Zimbabwe's Independence, Its Political and Economic Contexts and their Influence on the Country's Migration Trajectories

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, which shares its border with Botswana on the west, Zambia on the north, Mozambique on the east, and South Africa on the south. Zimbabwe, formerly Southern Rhodesia, is a former British colony which attained its independence in April 1980 after almost one hundred years of repressive and racial rule. What seems peculiar about Zimbabwe is that its independence did not come easily. On the one hand, it was attained following a decade of violently fought civil war between the black nationals and the governing white minority (Kadembo, 2008), and on the other hand, the route to independence involved a series of negotiations between the leadership of the warring parties over whose ideological views should shape post-colonial Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006). Independence was guaranteed following a constitutional agreement signed by both parties at Lancaster House in Britain, which is commonly known as 'The Lancaster House Agreement' of 1979. However, this constitutional agreement has left much to be desired by the Zimbabwean nationals and some commentators have even expressed deeper concerns with others arguing that the country's, "political and economic evolution, from a settler colony to a sovereign state", suggests a short change on the part of the Zimbabwean nationals, in that it has positioned 'black faces' at the 'political helm' whilst 'white faces' remained at the 'economic helm' of the post-colonial state (Ndlovu-Gatseni, 2006:8-9). This issue deserves further exploration.

3.1.1 From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: A Very Political Economy

On attaining independence in 1980, the new government of Zimbabwe under the leadership of Robert Mugabe inherited an economy that was highly racialized by the white settler government whose ideology was deeply rooted in European imperialism and British colonialism (Moyo, 2008b). During the entire century of colonial rule, the economy of the country remained a controversial issue and later became the basis upon which the war of liberation movement between the black Zimbabwean nationals and the colonial white minority was fought as justified through speeches and political party manifestos where the economy featured as a focus for political intervention aimed at redressing racial inequalities and injustices (Kagoro, 2005). Not only is the uneven ground of historical political and economic injustices a cause for concern here, but also, the Lancaster House Agreement, on which the independence's terms were founded appears to have promoted the continuation of this legacy and represents a limitation to justice³ related issues in post-colonial Zimbabwe. It placed restrictions on the nationalist government and prevented it from making radical economic reforms or significant structural changes to the existing economic institutions and protected the white minority's property rights. Significantly, for almost a decade following independence, the economy of Zimbabwe remained dominated by white businessmen who owned the country's major factories and most commercial farms. The Lancaster House Agreement, "immune from amendment for 10 years," stipulated that land would be acquired by the state at market prices and on a willing-buyer, willing-seller basis" (Worby, 2001:487). Therefore, in a country where about 50% of the black population was believed to be landless, almost three-quarters of the country's fertile and productive land continued to be privately owned by approximately 4000 white commercial farmers (Addison and Laakso, 2003). Thus, the new government's economic

³ Some commentators for example, Coltart (2009) observes that the Lancaster House Agreement was a compromised document which only aimed at halting the bloody civil war, yet it promoted and perpetuated the many aspects of white minority rule.

reforms were heavily constrained by the power of foreign capital, resulting in it taking what some have seen to be 'cosmetic approaches to economic reform' in ways which temporarily veiled the continued foreign-capital dominance (Burdette and Davies, 1987). This state of affairs is summarized by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2006) as follows:

With neo-colonial framework in place, Zimbabwe became a mere successor to the exploitative settler colonial state with no stamina to redefine the state, resource ownership patterns and citizenship. ... The reality was that the settler entered Zimbabwe with all the privileges deriving from the settler colonial establishment including protection of their often illegally acquired land. The native entered independent Zimbabwe with the reality of racial-induced poverty but hopeful that the situation was going to change for the better under a Black Nationalist government (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006:17).

Despite this ugly post-colonial foundational background, the new Zimbabwe emerged as a model of racial reconciliation as enunciated by Robert Mugabe in his independence speech in which he elaborated that:

...The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten.....it could never be correct justification that because the Whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the Blacks must oppress them today because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practiced by white against black or black against white. Our majority rule would easily turn into inhuman rule if we oppressed, persecuted or harassed those who do not look or think like the majority of us"⁴

⁴(see, R. Mugabe, 'Independence Message' in *Struggles for Independence: Documents of recent Developments of Zimbabwe 1975-1980: Volume 7*, Institute of African Studies Documentation Centre, Hamburg, December, 1979-April, 1980.

In migratory terms, the attainment of independence brought “hope for some and uncertainty for others” (see, Yap, 2002:00). On one hand, independence saw Zimbabwe becoming an attraction for migrants especially the black Zimbabweans who had gone into exile during the war of liberation. These returning migrants, like other black Zimbabweans, looked forward to enjoying a better life in a new nation led by a majority rule party which promised to offer expanded democratic spaces, where the interests and human rights of all social groups would be protected and respected (Nyamfukudza, 2004, McGregor, 2007, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006).

Yet, on the other hand, Zimbabwe’s independence also precipitated a significant outflow of people, mainly from the minority whites of British descent. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 whites left the country soon after independence, either because they could not swallow their pride and submit to the black government or they did not trust the changed political environment, although a hand of reconciliation was extended to them when both native black Zimbabweans and white settlers were rhetorically marshalled into a universal citizenship as colleagues and equals (Bloch, 2005, Pasura, 2006, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006). Theoretically, post-colonial Zimbabwe emerged as an inclusive state that was willing to provide a platform for a normal and satisfying life for all its citizens (Rancod, 2005).

In the literature, this outflow of white Zimbabweans in the 1980s is often described as the first of three main phases of Zimbabwe’s recent migration history (Pasura 2006, Bloch 2008, McGregor, 2008). However, in this thesis, I am only interested in exploring events that led to the exodus of the black Zimbabwean nationals during the second and third phases. Although the second wave of migration does not

seem to be the specific issue of concern for this thesis, I am compelled to give a snapshot of the events which forced black Zimbabwean citizens to migrate in this phase because migration from Zimbabwe has become a process and cannot be therefore analysed as a single event. Clearly, the dynamics of displacement employed by the government in the later phase, though directed towards citizens of all ethnic and to some extent racial backgrounds, they can only be clearly explained and described by linking them to the ones employed in the former phase. What this also suggests is that migration processes from Zimbabwe represent a continuation in human suffering in post-colonial Zimbabwe. In this context, the second phase of migration serves as a critical starting point for analysing the events which cumulated in the third wave of migration which is the central concern of this thesis.

3.2 The Second Wave of Migration: *Gukurahundi* - Mugabe's Reign of Terror

The second wave of migration implies the outflow of black Zimbabweans of the *Ndebele* tribe that took place a few years into independence. At the heart of Zimbabwe's independence euphoria laid the politically driven rhetoric of reconciliation⁵ with the white ethnic minority, yet the more surprising aspect of this discourse was its limited concern with the issue of unity among the black Zimbabweans themselves. The war of liberation that led to independence was fought by two major national parties which operated separately, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) of Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) as led by Joshua Nkomo. These two parties were split along tribal lines reflecting the fact that the nation of Zimbabwe is made up mainly of two ethnic groups which have a complex history of antagonism and, their rivalry

⁵ There is speculation that through his policy of reconciliation, Mugabe wanted to ensure that the Whites would not revolt against his government. Yet, to the white minority, it seems, reconciliation emerged as a relief in that it gave them assurance that their properties, accumulations and privileges were not going to be disturbed.

relationship can be traced as far back as the pre-colonial era (see, Beach, 1974, Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, Sithole, 1984). ZANU existed as a party for the *Shona* tribe which constitutes almost 80% of the entire population, whilst ZAPU represented the *Ndebele* ethnic group which makes up about 16% of the population. These ethnic groups are also divided by geographical spheres with the *Ndebele* people occupying the western parts of the country commonly known as Matabeleland and some parts of the Midlands, whereas the *Shona* occupy almost two-thirds of the country's geographical area (Eppel, 2009).

The biggest challenge facing Mugabe was that of leading a country which was divided from within, as the political realm of the new born Zimbabwe remained charged and challenging. Indeed, the first catastrophe to strike the 'post-colonial nation building venture' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006) had much to do with ethnic differences. Two years into independence, tensions escalated between ZANU and ZAPU over security problems confronting the nation. There were widespread reports of dissident military operation in some parts of the country, but mainly in Matabeleland where, coincidentally, in 1982, caches of arms were discovered at a farm believed to belong to ZAPU. In turn ZANU accused ZAPU of conspiring with dissident activity as a strategy to improve its political position in the country⁶. This dispute led to the dismissal of ZAPU cabinet ministers from government which eventually culminated to the mass killings of civilians in the Matabeleland area resulting in the second wave of out migration.

⁶ It is speculated that the intention to crush ZAPU was a longstanding one as it is believed that Mugabe entered into agreement with the Koreans almost 6 months before independence. Thus, it could be that Mugabe arose to power with the aim of extinguishing all forms of opposition in order to create a one party state (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b).

In migratory terms, the second wave followed what is commonly known as the 'Matabeleland Massacres' (1982-1987), codenamed '*Gukurahundi*'⁷ which describes the government's brutal military operation. This was devised through the deployment of the notorious '5th Brigade', a North Korean trained military outfit, into Matabeleland on the pretext of a government response to dissidents operation in the area. According to Eppel (2009) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a) the government of Zimbabwe in 1982 unleashed the 5th brigade, an army which was highly politicized and tribally aligned to the majority *Shona* group, and answerable to Mugabe himself as it operated outside the normal national military structures.

It has been widely documented that the uniquely uniformed 5th Brigade assumed a brutal and ruthless personality in Matabeleland (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, [CCJP] 2007, Alexander et al, 2000, Coltart, 2009, Phimister, 2008), with some commentators arguing that the government's intention was that of 'wiping' out the Ndebele tribe; "opposition (real or assumed) had to be eliminated", through a linear process of military intervention and the government did not even consider mediation or any other conflict resolution strategy an option or possibility (Yap, 2002:00). Clearly, these civilians were deprived of legal protection under the pretext that they were 'dissidents' and/or their supporters and became victims of *Gukurahundi* atrocities.

Indeed, men, women, and children suffered extreme levels of physical and mental torture, and some lost their lives as it is believed that more than 20 000 civilians

⁷ The army was given the name '*Gukurahundi*' by Mugabe himself. Literally, this term means, the early heavy storms which wash away the chaff which remains in the fields after a harvest, supposing that the Ndebele people were taken as the remains from the war of liberation which needed to be washed away.

were massacred (CCJP, 2007, Phimister, 2008). Like Jews, “civilians were assembled (without detention orders) and transported in truckloads to makeshift army centres in which conditions were created to induce maximum hardship” (Yap, 2002:00). Even children were forced to witness violence and death, both in their homes and during forced political rallies where beatings and killings were rife. Extreme practices of sexual abuses were instigated including scenarios where fathers were coerced to have sex with their daughters, sons forced to rape their mothers, sex forced among school children and/or between people and animals. These human rights abuses were prominently popular in torture camps where political captives including community leaders were frequently interrogated, molested and murdered while naked (see, CCJP, 2007, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2007). Overall, “survivors reported the use of electric shocks, excessive beating, rape, genital mutilation and fundamentally dehumanizing activities where ethnicity and sexuality were central” (Yap, 2002:00, CCJP, 2007). Yet, in media and government rallies, government officials increasingly reported that the 5th Brigade was out in Matabeleland to:

‘eradicate’, ‘destroy’, ‘crush’, ‘wipe out’ and kill all ‘dissidents’. The same line of argument applied to the apprehension of alleged dissent sympathisers. Mugabe reiterated that it was impossible to distinguish between dissidents and their sympathisers, and that both categories were just as guilty of dissident crimes (Yap, 2002:00).

During the brutal raids in Matabeleland, food was also used as a political weapon. Food embargos were introduced whereby stores were ordered to close while Human Rights Agencies were barred from bringing food into the region (see Phimister, 2008). As CCJP (2007) accounts, many parents were rendered helpless to the point of watching their own children starving to death. Those who survived

stayed alive by eating roots and wild fruits, but those who were found out were frequently punished for this, as the government soldiers inhumanely insisted that Zimbabwean food was not meant for 'dissidents'. Thomas, (1993) referring to the victims of the Holocaust atrocities, offers insights which seem relevant here as he notes that:

there can be no greater sign of the extent to which a people is loathed than that infants and children are made to suffer the same brutal fate as adults. This alone would suggest that the characterization of Jews as irredeemably evil accord well with the Nazi practices (Thomas, 1993:140).

Indeed, the genocides created an atmosphere of persistent suffering, fear, helplessness and desperation which instilled a strong awareness of rightlessness and exclusion into the Ndebele population (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003), thereby provoking their exodus mainly into South Africa and partly to the UK (McGregor, 2008). Yet, through the rhetoric of reconciliation, nation building, state sovereignty and democracy, Mugabe effectively managed to blind the world's eyes and continued to disguise himself as a conquering hero (Chitando, 2002). To the international world, the Matabeleland atrocities simply carried an ethnic explanation; "the Ndebele were in danger of the Shona" (Ranger, 2005:410), hence "scholars and the international community remained silent and continued to pile praises on the Zimbabwean government as a successful transition story" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006:4).

It becomes very clear here that Mugabe in his quest for power and regime security failed to break away with the authoritarian tendencies of the colonial regime, which in turn betrayed citizens' hopes for human security (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b,

Coltart, 2009, Holland, 2009). When one follows the development of political events, assumptions can be made that ZANU's military intervention in Matabeleland was mainly a strategy to enforce the subordination of other political parties in that the atrocities were halted in 1987 with the signing of a 'Unity Accord' between ZAPU and ZANU. Moreover, the 'Unity Accord' literally meant the swallowing up of ZAPU by ZANU to form the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), which saw Mugabe elevating himself to the position of an executive 'Life President' "with very wide, discretionary and arbitrary powers...the president was given unlimited powers to interfere with the electoral process and even to manipulate it to the advantage of the ruling party..." (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:119).

Looking beyond *Gukurahundi* one can easily observe a continuation of this legacy. The government has attempted to legitimize its authoritarian elements and credibility by creating a highly centralized style of government along a narrowly ideological view which centres on national liberation movement morals against which those citizens who appeared to be of a different opinion were hardly tolerated (Yap, 2002, Good, 2002). Thus, as some have alleged, (for example, Good, 2002) the country's constitution was amended several times between 1990 and 2000 as part of the extensive measures to protect the party's hegemonic position. Indeed, the general citizens remained without much influence in public and political matters, but not because of their own lack of concern; in this case "non participation was not apathy but a rational response to authoritarian power and absence of choice" (Good, 2002:11). The discussion that follows sets out to build on the issues raised in this section and explores the events which cumulated in the third phase of migration.

3.3 The Third Phase of Migration: Extended Human Sufferings at the Hands of a Dictator

In the history of Zimbabwe the period from the 1990s into the new millennium marked the beginning of considerable economic decline and hardship. As Carmody and Taylor (2003) observe 'the growth rate of the economy which Mugabe had inherited from the white settlers was not in keeping with the higher rate of government spending⁸. Zimbabwe's economy is therefore believed to have had reached a level of stagnation by 1987, and had declined considerably by the beginning of the 1990s. It was at this stage when the government is believed to have suffered a serious budget deficit, which forced it to turn to extreme borrowing. By 1990, the country was plunged into serious debt which was estimated to be at 25.8%; meaning excessive borrowing (Zeilig, 2002, Gaidzanwa, 1999).

In a bid to resuscitate the economy, but also with considerable pressure from the international money lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Bond and Saunders, 2005) the government of Zimbabwe, in 1991 adopted the neo-liberal structural adjustment policies. Although these economic reforms were targeted to restore the economy, their reforming instruments included trade liberalization, reduction in government spending and privatization of public organisations. All had adverse effects on the entire population in that they resulted in massive retrenchments of the working class, cost-recovery measures, remarkably in health, education and other social services and saw the removal of subsidies on basic commodities including food. This situation was also exacerbated by corruption at government level (see, Wilson, 2008) and a rise in other social problems like HIV/AIDS (McGregor, 2008, Sisulu, 2007, Bloch, 2006). Consequently, the value of

⁸ Zimbabwe's independence brought about some major achievements in its early stages, as witnessed by remarkable expansions of education, health care and other social services, which represent huge spending which supposedly was not in keeping with the country's economic growth.

the Zimbabwean dollar declined significantly against major currencies, which saw a drastic decline in the country's standards of living (Reeler, 2008, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2008, REDRESS, 2005).

The economic crisis generated a lot of criticism of the government. The working-class and other urban dwellers, but especially the middle-class openly criticized the government for its extensive practices of corruption and other economic mismanagement tendencies. As Gwisai, (2008) observes, there was a general realization especially by urban dwellers that the critical issues of life which the post-colonial government had promised to address appeared not to be the primary matters of concern on its agenda. Thus the end of the 1990s has been observed by many analysts (for example Good, 2002, Sachikonye, 2008, Gwisai, 2008, Bond and Saunders, 2005) as a transitional period which saw civilians revolting against the government they had had been loyal to for almost two decades. It is this development which stood as a challenge to the hegemonic position of the ruling party, whose response has been an intensification of its repressive apparatus in an effort to maintain the status quo. The effect has been an atmosphere of extreme disorder marred by violence and other human rights violations of mass proportions (see Reeler, 2008).

At the same time, some commentators argue that the country's crisis situation could have been aggravated or rather intensified by the post-colonial government's "attempt to resolve a delayed national question involving land restitution in a former settler colony" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:3). For example, Bowyer-Bower and Stoneman, (2000) suggest that the majority of citizens were disgruntled because they wanted the government to fulfil its promise of redistributing land as the war of liberation was fought over land ownership. Whilst there seems to be no question of

the importance of land redistribution in Zimbabwe, Carmody and Taylor (2003) and Moyo, (2008a) hold the view that the issue of land appeared not to be the main concern as it was only a very small percentage of the rural population which could have considered land redistribution as a solution to the deepening poverty. Moyo, (2008a) cites two surveys which reveal that for most of the citizens, the most pressing issues were linked to the deteriorating economy, high rate of unemployment, decline in healthcare, and an expectation of change of government (also see Johnson, 2000, McGregor, 2001).

As it stands, Zimbabwe's crisis situation cannot be explained satisfactorily by linking it to a single cause or event. As such, there is a growing body of literature that focuses on the different aspects of the crisis situation as writers from different backgrounds make attempts to analyse the situation from various perspectives. However, the point which I want to make here is that the decline in the country's economy became the trigger point of civilian discontentment, which unfortunately was met with government apathy. As has now come to be known to be its tendency, the hegemonic government of Robert Mugabe did not "countenance the expression of popular discontent" (Kagoro, 2005:21), and its response has always been an authoritarian stands. The government has increasingly employed political devices especially towards suppressing the disillusioned working-class, which Gwisai, (2008) believes to have been an effort to circumvent the formation of a workers' movement. Mugabe's war of liberation rhetoric has increasingly resonated, for example in his speeches "denouncing striking teachers and nurses as people with un-revolutionary minds 'who had never experienced the real hardships of the struggle for independence'" (Gwisai, 2008:9). Workers have been routinely subjected to beatings by the riot police under the order and maintenance laws which resembled the very repressive colonial legislations previously used against the black

working-class by the colonial regime. As Gwisai, (2008) sees it, the government's inhumane reaction towards the working class represents a betrayal of hope, trust and the citizens' expectations when viewed within the context that Mugabe's legitimacy as a leader, who was voted into power to serve the interests of the black majority, had to be tested "on the ability of the post-colonial state to guarantee improved working and living conditions for the black masses, as the colonial state had done for the white workers and petty bourgeoisie" (Gwisai, 2008:10). When measured against these colonial standards, Mugabe's government has increasingly been found wanting.

Moreover, the formation of a strong opposition party, The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), towards the end of 1999, saw ZANU (PF) clinging even tighter to the rhetoric of 'the liberation struggle' (Good, 2002), 'resistance against re-colonization' (Yap, 2002, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009) and decolonization through 'economic emancipation' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006) undoubtedly, for its own political survival but in ways which necessitated land invasion by the so-called landless peasant families as led by war veterans. Indeed, it seems that civilians' impetus for land became a project which was hijacked by the Mugabe regime as both its political and economic tool to gain support not only from the electorate, but within the Southern Africa Region (Meredith, 2002, Addinson and Laakso, 2003, Chan, 2005). The most important issue is the fact that in the face of the appealing discourses which garnered Mugabe much support in the region⁹, "the collapse of the rule of law, fundamental economic difficulties, and a crisis of political legitimacy framed by

⁹ Mugabe has earned himself respect within the African continent as a liberator and his rhetoric of completing the process of decolonization through taking land has been depicted as an important project undertaken at 'continental levels' in addition to being well fitted 'into the broader terrain of global politics' (see Raftopolous, 2000:2, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). In turn this rhetoric gained much support in Southern Africa, which subsequently enabled Mugabe to get away with so much for so long. Specifically, "the response of most Southern African governments and the Southern African Development Community to the catastrophe unfolding on their doorstep is best described as a state of denial or paralysis"(Coltart, 2009:9). Thus, despite the intensity of the crisis, the victims of the Mugabe regime have routinely been received unsympathetically in Southern Africa.

violence against real and perceived opposition, is the context of political existence in Zimbabwe today” (Yap, 2002:00).

Indeed, the majority of Zimbabwean citizens have lived through a time of intensified human suffering as well as experiencing untold human rights violations which have seen many finding it almost impossible to live and/or continue to work in their own native country. In migratory terms, Zimbabwe’s crisis situation generated what has come to be known as the third phase of migration from Zimbabwe which entails a massive outflow of mainly black Zimbabweans of all ethnic backgrounds and social classes. This phase appears to be the longest wave in the migratory history of post-colonial Zimbabwe as it is believed to be still on-going (see Mawadza, 2008). Indeed, the country of Zimbabwe is currently in a position where some argue that it has gone from its former fortunate position of being the ‘bread basket’ of the African continent to becoming the continent’s ‘basket case’ (Mawadza, 2008, Bond, 2008, Gandure and Marongwe, 2006), a shift that has, alongside other things, deprived it of its longer standing and unique privilege amongst African countries of being both a sending and receiving society for migration (Tevera and Zinyama, 2002, Chimanikire, 2003, 2005, Bloch, 2005). Increasingly, Zimbabwe has come to be viewed as a regional problem, producing uncontrollable floods of migrants who are sometimes described as having ‘swamped’ the region (Mawadza, 2008). Large numbers have also migrated to countries beyond the continent, especially, because of the colonial links, to the UK.

Having described this background, I intend to explore and document the experience as lived through by the nineteen migrant parents I interviewed in the UK who left Zimbabwe between 1999 and 2007. In carrying out this exploration, I aim to show what suffering does to people’s lives by discussing the extent to which rightlessness

and powerlessness came to be the major elements of my interviewees' lives (see, Arendt, 2004). Here, I also intend to document some of the dehumanizing circumstances which made it almost impossible for these migrants to ensure their own safety, children's safety and well being. Throughout these discussions, I intend to highlight the complex and varied intersections between economic and political life in Zimbabwe, and so to show why it is impossible to divide Zimbabwean out-migration into either that which is driven by political persecution or that which is driven by desire for economic betterment.

3.4 Leaving Home: A Choiceless Choice?

My interviewees who migrated to the UK without their children between 1999 and 2007 discussed lived experiences which suggest that migration was undertaken as the only possible way in which to ensure basic family survival and escape persecution and torture.

In the sections that follow I draw from the migrants' narratives which seem to demonstrate that in all situations the decision to migrate was taken under conditions of extreme rightlessness and extended periods of suffering, although these views are expressed differently depending on the individuals' experiences and perceptions of the dire circumstances in which they found themselves in from the late 1990s. I will start these discussions by looking at the lived experiences of individuals who had associations with the white community.

3.4.1 Associations with the White Community: Enemies of the Mugabe Regime

One of the key themes which emerged during my interview discussion with the Zimbabwean migrants related to the sufferings lived through as a result of being associated with the white community following the government's declaration to take

the land away from the white commercial farmers. These issues were mainly raised by the migrants who said their economic activities were closely linked to those of the white population. I will start by considering the case of Nyasha, a man aged 46 years who came to the UK in 2003. A former prominent and successful business person, Nyasha suffered the economic consequences of political campaigns from the 1990s. He said:

I was among the first black cricket coaches in the country... Obviously...my main clients were the white parents and their children, except for very few black elites who valued the sport and could afford it. Economically, I was a well established middle-class family man who could afford to send his two daughters to a private school...but my business was severely affected by Mugabe's anti-whites campaign and was finally brought to a near halt as from 2000 when war veterans started grabbing land and victimizing white farmers. As a family, our standard of living was severely altered... Meeting family needs became a struggle...(Nyasha, male aged 46 years).

Nyasha referred to the government's controversial land invasion and acquisition programmes which began in February 2000 dubbed 'land revolution' or 'third *chimurenga*', meaning liberation struggle (see Moyo, 2008a). During this period, the land revolution rhetoric turned to be the central concern in the countries' political and economic discourses. Through this, different groups of people were subjected to repression and torture while in particular the repression directed towards ordinary citizens was portrayed as a noble process of decolonization as well as a revolution against re-colonisation (see Solidarity Peace Trust, 2004). People who had any associations with the white community were subjected to gross human rights violations not to mention the economic consequences they suffered. According to Moyo, (2008a) the land re-distribution euphoria was accompanied by a decline in the government's commitment to the rule of law, human rights and democratic values, and posed serious challenges to the administration of justice.

Specifically, the ruling party's campaign movement against commercial farmers saw white people being beaten, killed and maimed with state sanction, which eventually resulted in legal population displacement as the white settlers were increasingly stripped of their Zimbabwean citizenship in order to take the land from them (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006, Richardson, 2009). In essence,

the government ordered, in June 2002, 2900 white farmers to stop working on their land and gave them 45 days to leave their property... Nearly two hundred white farmers have been arrested for defying the instruction to stop farming. The government then drafted new legislation making it easier to evict the farmers and effectively denying the protection of the courts from them...the militias extended their attacks to urban businesses, demanding money from employers under the guise of 'settling' labour disputes; many companies shut down as a result (Addison and Laakso, 2003:80).

However a closer look at the process through which legal displacements have been achieved reveals that nationalism or citizenship has not only been withdrawn from the White minority settlers. In Zimbabwe, issues of belonging have embodied more radical native binaries in ways which saw many farm workers, especially those of a foreign origin, losing their citizenship (Jafari, 2008) and the right to belong to the 'political community' (Arendt, 2000) of Zimbabwe. Also, in very significant ways, the 'narrowness of nationalism' (Arendt, 2004) has encompassed other categories of the black Zimbabweans as well. Different categories of citizens have increasingly been characterized as the 'other' in different and varied ways. Perhaps, like the victims of *Gukurahundi* who were denied protection under the pretext that they were dissidents or their sympathizers, the opposition leadership and its supporters (both real and perceived) have suffered violence and abuse under the pretext that they were enemies of the state. Specifically, their perceived relationship with the former

colonizers¹⁰ and the Western world in general who have been routinely blamed not only for the deterioration in the country's economy, but also for working against the realisation of the majority citizens' aspirations for land, stood as a clear demonstration of their being 'enemies of our revolution' (Yap, 2002, Meredith, 2002) and 'puppets' working towards the re-colonization of Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b). In more general terms, citizens who sympathized with the opposition party or those who did not demonstrate their support for ZANU (PF) have increasingly been categorized in the same way to form a general category of citizens who were 'irredeemably evil' (Thomas, 1993). Moreover, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni sees it; this discourse weakened the threads which tie citizens together. This is how he puts it:

intolerance was indicated by the use of rigid and annihilatory terms such as 'patriots' versus 'puppets', 'freedom fighters' versus 'sell-outs', as well as by officially sanctioned violence against those defined as 'puppets' and sell-outs' (Ndlovu-Gatseni 2008b:107)

These issues have been reflected through interview narratives, as among my interviewees were those who said their decision to leave home was greatly influenced by both the political and economic problems brought about by their association with the white community either as employees or business associates. One of them was Jonasi, who recollected his experiences as follows:

I was victimised by the war vets when I was on work business. I used to work for a company owned by a white tobacco dealer. My job involved buying tobacco from the white farmers for export. In 2001, I was stopped by war vets at a road block on my way from collecting tobacco from farms ... I was

¹⁰ MDC gained much support from the white community from the time of its inception. As such Mugabe has increasingly justified violence especially against the opposition party "as a struggle by Zimbabwe to gain its rightful heritage against a colonial power acting on the behalf of the white community to protect their interest" (Meredith, 2002:171).

interrogated, and intimidated for promoting white people's interests. All the tobacco I had was taken. They also took my identification card and home address. 'We will monitor you' they said... 'stop supporting the enemy', I was warned... (Jonasi, male aged 39).

Sharing similar sentiments, Farai, said that,

I was employed by an IT company owned by a white man. My employer was threatened by some government officials who wanted to take over his company. During this process I and other employees also suffered serious intimidations as we were perceived to be sympathizing with the Whites... Eventually the company closed down and I lost my job...I could not find a job elsewhere... (Farai, male aged 37).

The foregoing narratives confirm Lazarus' (2008) observations that the so-called third *Chimurenga* has had many other silent but disillusioned victims, as well as the Whites whom the government characterized as the targets. While Lazarus has given more emphasis to the plight of farm workers who were rendered jobless and destitute following the collapse in commercial agricultural production (see, Moyo, 2008, Human Rights Watch, 2002), the findings of this study clearly demonstrate that some of my interviewees who were not directly farm workers also had had their livelihoods greatly affected by wanton destruction of the White population's properties and businesses as illustrated by the following narratives:

Life got worse for me in 2002 after the war veterans had taken over the farms which belonged to the farmers who used to supply us with tobacco. My job got finished. I had a wife and child to look after. I could not afford to feed them...I was traumatized by the experiences...I was living in fear and

poverty...finally I decided to come over here hoping to start a new life..., (Jonasi, male aged 39).

I was newly married, and my wife had just had a baby. Losing my job meant that I could not support my family. I could not afford to buy food, pay rent or other bills...We had to move from where we used to rent...to my parents' place...they also could not meet our needs...(Farai, male aged 37).

Among the women I interviewed was Chenai who related her experiences which similarly confirm that violence against individuals perceived as sympathizing with the white community has been strongly embedded in Zimbabwean societies so as to become a culture:

I was an interior designer...my customers used to be the white communities in national parks, hotels and farms. My association with the white community got me into trouble... the war veterans attacked me when I was coming from delivering curtains and beddings to my white clients...they forced me to surrender the cash, cheques and the dried meat...they then burnt my car...I reported to the police...but they called me the following day and asked me to change my statement to say that I was attacked by thieves not war veterans...I refused...I later received a threatening letter for reporting this issue to the police. I was threatened with: 'we will dissolve you and your children in the Zambezi river'...,I knew they were capable of doing this...My life was in danger...(Chenai, female aged 42).

The above narratives clearly demonstrate the government's preparedness to use violence against unarmed civilians and defenceless citizens (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008), including women and children who traditionally are perceived as passive and

helpless. Here I want to draw attention to some of the factors which deprived my interviewees of state protection.

3.4.2 Some of the Factors which Left my Interviewees Unprotected

The issue of association with the white community, (both real and perceived) as the above interview extract illustrates is one issue among others that demonstrates how ordinary people in Zimbabwe often find themselves removed from the protection of state agencies. With regards to state protection in Zimbabwe, some (see, Moyo, 2008, AMANI Trust 2002) suggest that it seems possible that law enforcement officials have been ordered by the Mugabe regime not to act or intervene in cases where crimes were perpetrated against those believed to be supporters of whites, the 'enemies of the state'. As Ranger (2005) observes, the Zimbabwean situation seems to suggest that on seeking protection, victims of political violence were increasingly sent away by police on the pretext that they did not investigate politically related crimes. Thus, as Chenai's case clearly illustrates, non protection by the state agencies has two negative consequences to it; on one hand, a victim could face re-victimization and perpetrators could continue victimizing more people with impunity. Yet, on the other hand, to the victim, this situation challenges the issues of belonging and can therefore alert the victim's awareness that they no longer have a place in their community of birth.

Still, with regards to my interviewees who found themselves victims, complex negotiations also occurred within family relationships regarding decisions to migrate. While some of the married women I interviewed presented a picture of a general family agreement when asked about the decision making process regarding their

migration, Chenai's situation reveals a different picture as her decision to migrate was met with resistance, and she became the target of an onslaught of criticism from members of her husband's family:

When I suggested that I wanted to go out of the country for a while to ensure my safety one of his [husband] sisters said 'which country will accept you when you cannot even speak English'...they said I did not need any support...and that I deserved to be punished.. to them I was no longer worthy of being a married woman. I was now supposed to be sent back to my father's home which I is what I did, but within a week the war veterans got to know where I was and they started threatening me again. I did not have a passport, but I decide to get a temporary travel document and left the country to be here... (Chenai, female aged 45).

Some studies (for example, Dobson, 1998, Dobson et al, 2008, Cheater and Gaidzanwa, 1996) suggest that the decision-making process and migration logistics of Southern African women differ significantly from those of men in that, in general, men's migration is undertaken more independently than that of women¹¹. Clearly, women are most likely to be subject to the will of their husbands and/or other family members as the case of Chenai has attempted to demonstrate. This also implies that women often lack protection at both national and family levels. Often they find it almost impossible to exercise their choices or agency even in life threatening situations.

However, my interview data suggest a contradiction on this matter as there are situations which demonstrate that where migration proved to be of a forced nature,

¹¹ Cheater and Gaidzanwa (1996) offer an analysis which suggests that space and mobility have always been gendered in Southern Africa as there is a history of prohibition of and qualification to, the mobility of different social categories. In particular there has always been a sharp contrast between men's mobility and women's immobility. Due to this background, problems always arise when women try to exercise their agency as potential mobile citizens.

not all men who found themselves constrained by life threatening circumstances in one way or the other considered migration as an easy process or as their first option. For example, in the case of Nyasha, whom I cited earlier as a former cricket coach, economic deprivation made him resort to actively participate in political matters:

After my business had suffered and through discussions with friends we agreed that it was our responsibility as citizens to bring about a change of government through political contribution. Many of us hoped that our active involvement would make an impact as we were heading towards the presidential elections of 2002. To me this was the only way to ensure a better future for my two children (Nyasha, male aged 46).

As one of the opposition party's strong supporters, Nyasha had the privilege to participate as a polling agent during the 2002 presidential elections, which unfortunately did not bring the change of government as he had hoped. Instead, like any other supporter of the MDC, Nyasha found himself targeted as an enemy of the Mugabe regime:

I missed death slightly when my vehicle was involved in an accident with this dubious car which I believe belonged to the CIOs... I received two threatening letters through the post... One Saturday eve, I was harassed by two men at the gate... They told me 'we are after your life' as they tried to pull me out of my car... my dogs came to my rescue... Coming from a Ndebele background I knew what ZANU was after... I realized that I was no longer safe... I had no other choice... I knew of colleagues who had died... I left for South Africa where I boarded a plane to the UK hoping for at least to be in a non-threatening environment... but all my hope for a better future in Zimbabwe were thwarted... (Nyasha, male aged 46).

As the above interview extract seeks to illustrate, Nyasha's case demonstrates citizens' "implicit denial of agency" (Krause 2008:335) by their own government. This situation further suggests what Hynes (2003) observes to be some of the ways in which the social contract which is often believed to exist between citizens and their government can be violated. "Once this split has occurred" Hynes warns, "flight is often imminent as the refugee no longer trusts his/her own government with his/her own life" (Hynes, 2003:6). Indeed, although Nyasha had initially vowed not to migrate, more life threatening circumstances forced him to leave home when he seemed unprepared and unwilling to start a new life elsewhere.

3.4.3 Teachers as a Target Group of Zimbabwe's Political and Economic Repression

Another category of my interviewees consisted of seven individuals from the teaching profession who shared the view that their decision to migrate was to a larger extent influenced by the government's brutal attack on teachers, which some (see, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2002) believe had far reaching consequences not only for teachers, but for school children who in some cases were made to witness scenes of horrendous violence in school environments. As Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2002) notes, the attack on teachers started against the background where teachers were conceived to be a group of professionals that had significant influence in communities where they lived and worked, especially in the rural areas. Yet, as discussed earlier, from the mid-1990s the government appeared to be losing trust in teachers as they were generally among the most disgruntled groups of civil servants who waged several industrial actions in protest against the deterioration of living standards and low wages (see, Gwisai, 2008). Also, the formation of the MDC in 1999 is believed to have been overwhelmingly backed by teachers, (Gwisai, 2008) which led the government to

suspect that most of the teachers were MDC supporters. Due to its intolerance of opposition and dissent (Kagoro, 2005, Bond, 2007), attacks on teachers seemed to be the government's strategy of suppressing their political influence on communities.

While most teachers in Zimbabwe were affected by similar political events, it is not surprising that they were impacted in varied and complex ways. The way individuals conceived danger, threats and torture depended a lot on personal circumstances, geographical locations of residence and work and most importantly, on the individuals' knowledge and past experiences of violence as the discussions that follow reveal.

The first account presented here is that of Tafara, a widower who was a teacher in one of the rural schools in Zimbabwe. Tafara provided the following background to the situation which made him consider migration:

My reasons for migrating were purely political... I was a teacher for 20 years until at the time when Mugabe started targeting teachers- every teacher was to become a ZANU (PF) active member and those who were not were thought to be indoctrinating children against the government and therefore were targets.. I did not believe in ZANU policies... As I was looking at my options; where to go and what to do with my life, I went on the internet and there was a teaching job advertised in the Isle of Sheppey in Kent... I rang and spoke to the lady who was in-charge of recruitment...and she said she was interested in having an interview with me...so... I came over (Tafara, male aged 45).

Although Tafara made the claim that he was a victim of the political system, on face value, his narrative positions him as someone who did not suffer any politically induced violence, but rather, portrays him as a person who had other aspirations as well as options, and his decision to leave home could be taken as a more self-

indulgent choice which any voluntary migrant might make. However, Tafara's case can only make sense when examined within the political background provided by some commentators (for example, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2002, 2007) which suggest that every Zimbabwean teacher had reasons to consider themselves vulnerable to political attacks especially as after July 2001 when the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education had made public speeches and warnings that all teachers who did not support ZANU were considered supporters of the MDC and that all suspects were more likely to lose their jobs. More profoundly, the Minister of Education had declared that, "we cannot continue to pay our enemies. People have to know which side their bread is buttered..." (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, 2002:21). Within this same context, the Foreign Minister also threatened that "...you can even be killed for supporting the opposition and no one would guarantee you safety" (Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, 2002:21). On a normative and legal level, teachers in Zimbabwe were a distinct category of citizens who were openly declared as evil and therefore were enemies of the Mugabe regime due to their perceived political affiliation which seems to suggest their lack of rights to belong to a political party of their own choice. This position deprived teachers of legal protection, which in turn exposed them to all forms of attacks and violence with state sanction. Thomas, (1993) with reference to the Holocaust, provides views which clearly illuminate the situation which teachers in Zimbabwe found themselves confronted with and the possible consequences such a situation deserves:

Now given the assumption that a people is irredeemably evil, complete utter moral disentanglement of them is the only appropriate moral response. For by this assumption is that there is no set of acts one could perform that would improve their moral character or make some measure of moral rehabilitation possible; nor would there be any appropriate role for them to play in one's society. ... Instead one would want them entirely removed from one's moral

community. And if this could not be achieved by relocating them, their extermination would seem to be the only natural course of action. There would be no need to proceed mercifully, for how can the irredeemably evil be a suitable object of mercy? Brutal treatment is the only approach to a people that is consistent with the assumption that they are irredeemably evil (Thomas, 1993:141).

Clearly, it can be argued that the emotional and psychological trauma associated with teachers' lack of legal protection forced individuals like Tafara to consider themselves vulnerable as under such a situation a mere threat of violence and death could not be underestimated.

Indeed, as Lazarus, (2008) observes, since the beginning of 2002, the ruling party's political machinery was let loose to mete out punishment against teachers as the state's enemies and in public speeches teachers were increasingly labelled as 'traitors' and 'sell-outs'. Throughout the country, the ruling party is believed to have victimised a significant number of qualified teachers, while in some cases, trained teachers were forced to leave their jobs and their posts were immediately taken over by school leavers who, because of the high rate of unemployment in the country, were willing to compromise and work in collaboration with the war veterans and to serve as monitoring agencies for the Mugabe regime (see Lazarus, 2008).

Correspondingly, a recurring theme which threaded through the narratives of my interviewees, who said they were teachers suggests evidence of state sanctioned violence and brutality as perpetrated by the war veterans, youth militia and other state agencies. Here, I begin by giving reference to the case of Rudo who used to be a teacher in a rural setting, whose decision to leave home was constructed as follows:

I ran away from political torture...I used to be a rural school teacher and was frequently intimidated and harassed...Although I was not raped myself I saw other women being raped by the war veterans. We were being forced to attend ZANU (PF) rallies and made to shout ZANU slogans. It was a no joke situation; but it was a matter of life or death... Teaching in Zimbabwe was a job which no one would desire to do...it was all political from the classroom to the grounds...My husband who used to teach in Harare supported me to come over... I was living in fear all the time... (Rudo, female aged 40).

In a similar vein, when asked about her decision-making process, Tendai made the following claim:

I left for political reasons... I was a teacher ...due to the political situation I faced many problems...I suffered serious intimidations and threats of abuse from war veterans as I was suspected of teaching MDC... ideology at the school where I used to be a teacher. This was very serious to an extent that I received death threats... we agreed with my husband that the UK is the only country that offers Zimbabweans meaningful protection... I borrowed money from the bank. I even attached the family house as security...(Tendai, female aged 45).

For Voni who used to be a teacher in High School in a rural area, believed to be the MDC's stronghold, her experiences show evidence of the widespread of politically induced violence and disruption of education activities as learning time was increasingly devoted to political activities which were far detached from education:

The issues which forced me to come over here are politically related...the political situation affected all the teachers at this school...war veterans came to the school and dished party membership cards to everyone... Whoever

did not want to join was ordered to walk out but with heavy punishment...It was 'life with a card or death without'... At first I thought I would endure because I needed an income...but I came to a point where I felt I could not take it anymore... we were forced to drill ZANU ideology in pupils, teaching that ZANU was the only true party, instilling hatred in pupils against members of the MDC... which literally means hating their family and community members... I did not believe in this myself and I saw no reason for drilling this into other people's children. This was also complicated by forced party meetings and rallies, where we, together with children regularly shouted ZANU songs and slogans which exalted Mugabe. It was just like what it was in the liberation struggle..., (Voni, female aged 49).

Schmidt (2001), Chadya (2007) and Lazarus (2008) are among those who have documented the brutality of the war of liberation in Zimbabwe which Voni gave reference to. They observe among other things, that besides being brutalized by the Rhodesian Front for sending their children to war, civilians were also forced by guerrilla freedom fighters to attend re-education rallies where they would chant liberation songs all night. Yet people would sacrifice their all, hoping that this would bring a better future for them and their children. However, the strategies used in current times show the continuation of this legacy; schools are frequently ordered to close with both children and teachers being rounded on and headed for so-called ZANU-PF's political rallies where, under coercion, they waste what should have been learning time singing and dancing for the party officials and war veterans praising them for liberating the country (Lazarus, 2008). While the demeaning elements of these practices and the sufferings associated with them have been related by some of my interviewees, Lazarus questions the appropriateness of ZANU's dehumanizing tendencies against children, in ways which suggest that parents in Zimbabwe were rendered powerless to ensure their children's protection and well-being:

How could children be expected to get good grades at the end of the term when they spent time at political rallies singing praises for the great leader? Just what kind of politics is this that failed to realize that children were children and needed to learn things befitting children?" (Lazarus, 2008:74).

Indeed, from the way Voni further recounted her experiences, it appears as if Lazarus' concerns merely reflect the distress and discontentment of the teachers themselves:

As teachers we all came to resent this... One male teacher who openly refused his class's participation just disappeared overnight. They came and took him... I am sure they killed him because we never saw him again. The worst evil on earth was when they raped his wife and daughter...It was so traumatic...it was scary...I hated it...it made me feel vulnerable...unsafe...I had to just leave the country...(Voni, female aged 49).

Sharing the same sentiments, Rute described her circumstance and experience of suffering in ways which demonstrate the extent to which the government sought to create inhumane conditions for teachers:

... war veterans used to come to our school to address teachers...these non-professionals were now our supervisors who wanted us to teach what ZANU PF wants...This situation was so demoralising – having non-professionals telling you what to do and what not to do... To make matters worse our head teacher was asked to keep a record of teachers who didn't want to comply... Don't you think it is a serious issue of human rights abuse to force schools to belong to a certain party? Don't you think it is an act of abuse to force individuals to attend ZANU meetings against their will? What about the issue of being supervised by war veterans – people who have never been to

school who don't know anything... they don't appreciate the value of education... when I finally decided to leave I was fed up...(Rute, female aged 49).

Despite overwhelming evidence of ensuing hardships, sufferings and distress contained in Rute's narrative, all emanating from the political aspect of the country's repressive system, Rute rationalized her decisions to leave home more from the economic point of view, as she further explained that:

We were not paid enough, and because of this teachers had to strike regularly against the government system. Automatically we were labelled MDC supporters who needed to be monitored, supervised and disciplined for our misconducts...I personally did not even have any savings. It was from hand to mouth... by the time I decided to come we were earning next to nothing...As a learned person I felt I deserved a better life...For sure I ran away hoping for a better life here...(Rute, female aged 49)

The situations which my interviewees found themselves confronted with, especially those illustrated above can together be taken as clearly demonstrating Mugabe's position of dictatorship, reign of terror and tyrannical rule, about which Arendt (2004) has the following to say:

A fundamental difference between modern dictatorships and all other tyrannies of the past is that terror is no longer used as a means to exterminate and frighten opponents, but as an instrument to rule masses of people who are perfectly obedient. Terror as we know it today strikes without any preliminary provocation, its victims are innocent even from the point of view of the persecutor. This was the case in Nazi Germany when full terror was directed against Jews, i.e., against people with certain

common characteristics which were independent of their specific behaviour (Arendt, 2004:15).

One of my interviewees, Shami, who identified herself as a former secondary school teacher who used to work in Harare also recalled circumstance of adverse economic hardship and reflected on the struggles which she and her husband (who was also a teacher at one of the colleges in Harare) lived through and their efforts in trying to provide for their four children, which also led her to discuss how she had to engage in cross-border activities in order to supplement their income:

Being professionals, we struggled to meet family needs... Our salaries could not meet our basic needs...not to mention our children's school fees as they were all in boarding school. We wanted to give them a decent education. I used to go to South Africa or Botswana nearly every other Friday coming back on a Sunday so as to be at work on Monday. I used to bring soap, toothpaste, sugar and other things for sale... I would sell some of this stuff to other teachers..., (Shami, female aged 46).

Despite these economic constraints, when asked how she made the decision to leave home, Shami recounted her decision making process in more political terms, characterizing herself and her husband as victims of political repression:

Life and death problems befell us in 2006 when my husband returned from here [the UK] where his college had sent him to do a short course... My husband discussed with some of his students at the college about opportunities to join the British Navy...The next thing he was summoned by the principal of the college and was suspended for this...The next thing war veterans came home hunting for him..., (Shami, female aged 46).

As Shami further recollected her story, some of her experiences suggest what Maisva (2009) regards as some of the varied ways in which Zimbabwean women have been rendered victims of political violence:

The first time war vets came for my husband... I lied to them that he had gone *kumusha* [meaning rural home]. They went there to look for him. When they did not find him they set the whole homestead on fire... They then came back in the evening... They searched the house, claiming that my husband was recruiting the youth to be trained by Britain on behalf of the MDC... they did not find any evidence... One of them ordered me to take off my blouse... he said 'if you don't tell us where your husband is we are going to sleep with you tonight'... It was scary... I knew of women who had been raped... I have relatives who were raped during Gukurahundi... I gave them his [husband] cell number... they then said 'we are giving you another chance... when we come back tomorrow we want to find your husband here or we will take you'..., (Shami, female aged 46).

In Zimbabwe, cases of the abuse of women, as mirrored in Shami's case, have also been drawn to public attention by Maisva (2009) who explains that rape and sexual torture have always been systematic and widespread in conflict situations especially during the war of liberation where women were forced to cook and provide sexual services to the guerrilla armies. She however observes that in the current crisis situation, women have increasingly been abducted and abused in the militia camps. Indeed, those who are captured are "raped to dehumanize them and as a form of punishment for their male family members, as rape not only humiliates the person raped, but also the whole family and the community" (Maisva, 2009:2). Within this same context, Amani Trust (2002) provides horrendous accounts of sexual torture against women in the current Zimbabwean political tumult including incidents where iron rods were forced into women's genitals while they were ordered to imitate sexual positions as well as other abuses of being forced to drink and eat assailants'

urine and stools. The Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, (2002) also confirms that about 119 female teachers were raped between 2000-2002, not to mention those who were maimed, kidnapped or displaced. Such widespread torture was general knowledge in Zimbabwe, suggesting that in Shami's case, a mere threat was sufficient for her to realize that her life was in danger:

the following morning my husband who was hiding at his cousin's place left for here [UK] since his visa was still valid...the only option for me was to leave for South Africa where my brother was...later I came over here to join him [husband]..., (Shami, female aged 46).

Sukai is also another migrant who identified herself as a former teacher and one of the women interviewees who related harrowing experiences of hardships and suffering in ways which suggest the intermingling of economic life threatening problems and other social tumults which appeared to be politically induced. Together, these forces often translate into a stronger force which creates the environment for people to consider migration. Sukai's narrative below illustrates this:

So many issues contributed to my coming over here. My husband deceased, in 2001...he died of a condition which I thought was curable but could not get medical support on time as the hospital personnel were on strike...I then lost four of my immediate relatives, two were victims of political violence... two could not afford medical care....These disasters affected me badly. The deterioration in the economy affected me. Although I was a teacher I could not afford to provide for my son. I was depressed for a long time, and was off sick for a long time... The political, social and economical environment of the country affected me seriously. As a single parent, life became unbearable for me... All these issues contributed to the decision to come here, hoping that I would be in a position to start a new life and be in a position, at least to provide my son with good education and start a better life in general... (Sukai, female aged 39).

On summarizing the problems which forced her to leave Zimbabwe, Sukai firmly claimed that:

Directly, Mugabe did not do anything to me...but the consequences of his misuse of power and repressive policies brought about poverty and misery in my life— these killed my husband and relatives and also killed the ethical and integral aspects of the teaching profession, reducing it to some kind of unskilled job which made teachers' salaries meaningless...On these grounds, I was made a victim of the country's political, economic and social tumults. I left the country because of these circumstances... (Sukai, female aged 39).

The above narratives can be taken to demonstrate that, although Zimbabwe might technically be considered as a country at peace, its citizens have been exposed to extraordinary levels of political, economic and social upheavals in ways which are normally associated with war-torn societies (see Moss and Patrick, 2005). It is therefore not surprising when Zimbabweans rationalize their decision to migrate along lines of extreme suffering but in very complex ways, which make it almost impossible to disentangle the forces at work driving out migration.

3.4.4 Victims of the Government's Operation *Murambatsvina*

Among my interviews were also those who identified themselves as victims of the government's clean-up campaign of 2005 which left many civilians homeless and powerless to lead a normal life. Noma is one interviewee who made claims that her decision to migrate was influenced by the government's operation *Murambatsvina* which she said caused untold sufferings in her life. Noma said she was a cross-border trader and explained the nature of her business activities as follows:

I was retrenched in 1998...I started going to Botswana, South Africa and other places like Dubai where I would buy goods, and gadgets for re-sale... It was hard because I would spend days and days away from home...but I managed to open two grocery tuck-shops in[town]...I think I was leading a better life than those who were working formally... (Noma, female aged 49).

Indeed, cross-boarder trading activities have been well discussed especially by Zinyama, (2002), Cheater and Gaidzanwa, (1996) who observe that neo-liberal economic programmes in Zimbabwe brought about untold sufferings and hardships which saw citizens, but increasingly women, frequently moving back and forth across regional countries' borders sourcing goods and commodities that are scarce at home. However when asked about her decision to migration, Noma claimed that:

I came because of the political situation...one day when I came back from Botswana I found out that someone had left a ZANU PF membership card with my maid, but with my name written on it... I was told that the war veterans brought it and they wanted to see me...the following day two men came to my house claiming to be ZANU PF militias...they wanted me to become chairperson for a women's league in the area... I refused...I told them that I was apolitical... I had nothing to do with both ZANU and MDC... (Noma, female aged 49).

On the one hand, Noma's situation exemplifies the plight of apolitical individuals in Zimbabwe, who increasingly find themselves caught up in political matters. As I have explained earlier, the ruling party routinely believed that all those who are not ZANU members sympathize with the opposition party. On the other hand, this situation can be one example which demonstrates that human rights are not as universal as they are assumed to be in that the rights that people can enjoy mainly depend on the political environment in which they live. In Noma's case, her refusal to comply with ZANU-PF's orders rendered her homeless and as victim to the government's most controversial programme - operation *Murambatsvina*:

Two days down the line two other men came to one of my shops and demanded that I should shut it and leave the area...They were so harsh and used threatening language to intimidate me...The following day the shop was demolished...the claim being that it was not built according to plan...yet this was one of the very old buildings in the area...other similar buildings were left out... I then received an intimidating letter that what they did was only a warning...they were on their way to deal with me...they sent me this lady, a prominent ZANU supporter to threaten me... (Noma, female aged 49).

In essence, *Murambatsvina*, like anything code-named 'operation' in Zimbabwe was a military action which literally means 'clean out the chaff or dirty' (see, Human Rights NGO Forum, 2005, Bratton and Masunungure, 2006, Hammar, 2008, Solidarity Peace Trust, 2005). In this case, the chuff were the urban poor citizens who needed to be swept away by the police, youth militia, war veterans with the backing of municipal police and the national army (see Ndlovu, 2008). These military forces together demolished homes, businesses and livelihoods considered illegitimate settlements. This became one of the "most dramatic recent event or series of related events which form part of an on-going assault on the Zimbabwean people by their government (Ndlovu, 2008:217). An evaluation by the United Nations (Tibaijuka, 2005) reveals that *Murambatsvina* was typically a brutal and humanitarian crisis of catastrophic magnitude which saw between 650, 000 to 700, 000 people being "rendered homeless, without access to food, water, sanitation or health care services at the height of winter" (Sisulu et al, 2007:553). The catastrophe was therefore taken by many to be the government's strategy of punishing urban dwellers for shifting their loyalty and support to the opposition party. "These people needed to be punished, they needed to be removed and scattered as the farm worker communities had been during the farm invasions" (Ndlovu, 2008:224). Indeed, as Noma's narrative below further illustrates, it was a time of

extreme hardship and suffering for those who were rendered victims together with their children:

I was later forced to close the other shop...I could not believe it...I had worked so hard to establish myself...overnight it was all gone...all my stock was looted ...I was no longer safe...I was now living in fear all the time...I was left with nothing to provide the children with.. my children's way of life deteriorated and changed significantly, as I now had no source of income...I could not go to order some stuff...I was almost like a destitute...because of this my sister helped me to come here... (Noma, female aged 49).

As I have already noted, citizens of Zimbabwe were affected by the country's crisis situation in different and varied ways. However, threaded through my interviewees' narratives are issues of violence and abuse which appear to be gendered or gendering. These issues, I believe, deserve further exploration.

3.4.5 The Gendered Nature of Violence in Zimbabwe

There is also evidence to suggest that generally, in Zimbabwe, violence against women is so on the increase so as to become a culture. Specifically, violence against women is manifested through wanton rape which has even become rife. Yet often, many incidences go unrecorded not only because of the stigma associated with it, but mainly because many of the victims are the least powerful in society who lack the support to bring these dehumanizing tendencies to the public, especially to Human Rights Agencies (Maisva, 2009).

This element of violence is a surviving feature within my interview data as it forms a part of the narratives of many women including the case of Mary, a woman whose

decision to migrate, reflects a complex situation of poverty, and influence of horrific backgrounds of sexual abuse:

I cannot say I had any choice... I came here because I wanted to run away from poverty, because things in Zimbabwe were getting worse...money was losing value daily and it was becoming difficult for me to get enough money to look after my children, (Mary, female aged 37).

However, on discussing her experiences of poverty induced suffering, Mary struggled to open up to me that she was a victim of rape, yet she routinely gave reference to the psychological trauma she suffered in her childhood and how it impacted negatively on her adulthood. Eventually, in one of the subsequent interviews and for the first time in her life, Mary got the courage to relate the episodes of rape she suffered in her childhood:

I...I...had a very unfortunate childhood...I was raped...when I was ...about...only 8 years old... After this I had a chain of rape incidents – at 11 years I was raped again... Later on it was my cousin who came to live with us – he raped me repeatedly in the house and no one ever bothered or noticed. I did not get any support even from my own mother (Mary, female aged 37).

Although Mary, during our first interview, had given the impression that she had had a professional job in Zimbabwe before migrating to the UK, when I asked the same question during one of the subsequent interviews, Mary confessed that she had never had any stable job in Zimbabwe. Instead, she revealed that she had managed to sustain her children's livelihood through prostitution:

After all that happened to me I ended up in prostitution and commercial sex and that's how I ended up with 3 children with different fathers... This was the business I used to do...though I had a man who was sort of a stable partner..., (Mary, female aged 37).

Mary further recounted grave experiences of economic hardships after her relationship with a man she claimed was her 'regular' partner/customer ended unceremoniously. She then admitted that her decision to migrate was directly imposed upon her not only by her own circumstances but mainly by her boyfriend:

One day after a drink he [boyfriend] told me it was over... I felt devastated because I was depending on him – he used to pay school fees for my children, buy groceries, pay bills...I refused to move out of his flat and threatened to sue him because he had infected me with HIV/AIDS. ...He then said to me 'I have one option for you, take it or leave it, but don't bother me with your children anymore'. 'If you want', he said, 'I can buy you a ticket to go to the UK to work for your children'. To me it sounded a relief, I was so much relieved – there was at least light at the end of the tunnel... That's how I ended up being here... (Mary, female aged 37).

Faced with no other option, Mary considered work in the UK as the only opportunity to economically sustain her three children and so she anticipated a better future.

However, when Mary's situation is viewed together with the circumstances of other women I also interviewed for this study who related more or less similar experiences, these narratives together provide useful insights into understanding some of the complex situations in which women's humanity can be questioned, especially when the abuses and vulnerabilities they suffer at the hands of men,

either as husbands or partners are analysed. I also interviewed women who said they were married in Zimbabwe but who discussed grave circumstances of family violence, suffering and marital rape. One of them was Mutsa who explained her experiences in ways which, I believe, suggest how married women increasingly endure violence by an intimate partner:

I was married to a man...who called himself a war veteran...he was not someone of my age...we had about 17 years age difference...marrying him was not a choice at all...He got me pregnant after completing form 4 [equivalent to GSCE]. My family was very poor...my father died when I was very young...so this man took advantage of that...he used to buy me clothes and food for my family as well...I did not intend to marry him...but when I got pregnant I had no other choice...he pretended to be nice at first...but things changed along the way...when I had a baby with him...he started treating me like a slave... he would order me to cook for his war veteran friends whatever time he wished...be it midnight...I had no choice to make...restrictions were put on food...I did not have an income of my own...I could not leave him because I had nowhere to go...he used to beat me...sometimes he would beat me right in front of his friends...or force me to have sex with him...the last days were the worst... (Mutsa, female aged 32).

As Mutsa further recounted her experiences, she said her decision to leave home was then taken under what she saw as more life threatening circumstances which she described as follows:

I remember very well...about a month before I came here...he came home very drunk and he was with a group of other men...he tried to force me to have sex with him in front of his friends...I refused...and was beaten hard...he was a cruel man...I shouted for help but no one came to my rescue...in the location we lived he was a monster...he was a murderer...he had committed many crimes...Following this incident I went to the police

station...hoping to get a peace order...there at the police I was verbally assaulted by the chief police officer...they knew him...they knew about all the bad things he could do...but they said I needed to go back and sort things out with him because family issues had nothing to do with them...I went to my mother's place to hide...but he found me there...he physically assaulted me in front of my mother...he threatened to cut my private parts...my mother asked her friends who were already here to assist me...I don't know whether to call it political violence or domestic violence...but the man was cruel and abusive...the law did not offer me any protection...because he belonged to ZANU...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

Similar experiences were also narrated by Natsai:

At one point I had a good marriage...but problems started when my husband was retrenched in 2000...he could not find another job...he started abusing me...he would coerce me to surrender my salary to him every month... it was all out of poverty I know that very well because he was not always like that...eventually he joined ZANU... I recall...he would bring food home...I remember vividly...he would bring sugar...cooking oil, milk and the like...from ZANU meetings... I later on discovered that he had joined a group of ZANU supporters who were looting commodities from shops...his mother had also become a strong ZANU supporter...we used to live in the same house with her...she would also coerce me to accompany her to ZANU meetings saying that was our source of support...they used to criticize my mother for supporting MDC...I was banned from visiting my own mother...political issues translated into family politics...I was caught in between...I suffered very traumatic experiences as some of the political meetings were conducted in the house...I was threatened for my mother's sake...I became isolated in the house I lived...forced to do what I did not believe in...with the support of relatives who were already here...I finally escaped to here.... (Natsai, female aged 29).

Another migrant woman who discussed her experiences in ways which reflect the experiences cited above was Chipo:

I came here because of a mixture of everything, economic, social and marriage if there is anything like that...life just turned around for me. I and my husband started having problems because my husband was having affairs with other women. He had a grocery shop where I used to work...Divorcing him meant that I was also out my job... Eventually I and my daughter moved to live with my mother in Harare. I did not have any source of income whatsoever, so I depended on my family members who were already here... when they offered to buy me a ticket to come over here...I just came because life was hard for me..., (Chipo, female aged 27).

Literature clearly reveals that violence by an intimate partner is one of the most common forms of violence against women in Zimbabwe, yet its exact levels are not known as this kind of violence is often shrouded in secrecy, and also to a larger extent, culture treats such violence as a normal phenomenon thus, it is often unreported. According to the Zimbabwe's National Report to the Fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing 1995 (cited in Osirim, 2001), domestic violence is the most prevalent form of violence against women, and this works against a picture that a home is a safe place. Furthermore, Osirim, (2001) observes that more than 20% of married women are assaulted daily by their spouses in Zimbabwe and that domestic violence accounts for more than 60 percent of the murder cases that go through the Zimbabwean courts. To Osirim, violence in families usually starts with a slap and escalates into serious injuries and even into horrors of marital violence where wives are severely maimed or killed. Because of the cultural construction of the position of women as second-class citizens, families and communities frequently do not intervene when a husband slaps his wife. Thus, as Osirim sees it, the main problem lies with country laws which treat domestic

violence as a private concern which does not warrant any public intervention. In law domestic violence is treated as a family issue rather than a criminal problem. Increasingly, cases of wife- beating are handled under laws of common assault, which in most cases perpetrators are fined small amounts of money that certainly do not deter such crimes, casting women as people without the rights to state protection.

However, others (for example, Moyo, 2008b) argue that in Zimbabwe, violence at family level needs to be conceptualized within the context in which it unfolds. Moyo, (2008b) argues that there is a strong relationship between structural and social violence in Zimbabwe, and holds that violence in families is a direct manifestation of structural violence, but as embedded into the country's political economy which has undermined the majority of its populace's livelihoods. Moyo (2008b) observes that when family heads, especially men, lack resources, their hegemony status gets undermined and challenged and as a result they increasingly use violence to assert power. In this context, violence is therefore a tool to exhort resources from those who are perceived as having them and their targets also include their own wives. In turn this nature of violence recurs in families where everyday lives are characterized by human relations of domination, suppression and exploitation in economic, social, political and psychological terms in ways which reflect gender (Moyo, 2008b).

Within this context, Peterson and Parisi (1998) pose the question: 'Are women human?', which seems a very relevant question to ask here, not only in relation to the women migrants whose narratives I have just presented above, but also in relation to all women migrant parents whose narratives are cited in this study. By asking this searching question, Peterson and Parisi, among other things, seek to point to the "political effects of coding the human body as two mutually exclusive

and oppositional ‘types cast as male and female’ which subsequently entails “a categorical distinction between public and private spheres that privileges the former only as political, and relegates sex/affective relations to the latter” (Peterson and Parisi, 1998:133-134). In very significant ways, these masculinity and femininity binaries are also maintained and reproduced in human rights law at international levels by “upholding the distinction between public/state and private/family spheres and focusing exclusively on states as protectors and violators of individual rights” (Peterson and Parisi, 1998:134). The interview narratives by Zimbabwean women migrants I have presented in this chapter resonates with Peterson and Parisi’s argument that constructing the state as the protector of human rights is problematic for women in general, but particularly, in this instance, for these particular women from Zimbabwe where men dominate the public sphere of politics, and where the laws are designed in ways which upholds the oppression of women in both the public and private spheres of life. More than this, my interviewees’ situations also demonstrate that being denied legal protection at both state and family levels because of their being women, entails a life of persistent suffering, which eventually forced them to leave their country of birth in search of protection and a better identity in the Western world where it is believed that women have rights in both public and private spheres.

3.4.6 The Enemy Within: Violence against Supporters of the Mugabe Regime Perceived as Traitors

Although it might appear as if Zimbabwe’s crisis situation has affected only those perceived to be anti-ZANU-PF or members of the opposition party, my interview data suggest that there are also other migrants who identified themselves as ZANU-PF members or supporters whose decisions to migrate were also constructed from a

more political perspective. Simba is one individual who fits this category of migrants, who in his own words confessed that:

I have been a strong supporter of ZANU-PF... I am an ex-combatant [fought in the war of liberation] ...and I am well known...I was very influential during the war. When the war ended they expected me to join the national army as one of the commanders as I had a senior and influential position in ZANU in what they call political commissariat...but I resisted taking this position because of a medical condition... (Simba, male aged 52).

After Simba had related to me, the background of his ill-health condition which he claimed dates back to the time of the liberation struggle, he then told me that he did not want to take an active role in ZANU-PF matters because he was unfit to execute 'some of the duties' the party expected him to perform. However, during one of our subsequent interviews, Simba decided to share some of his reservations and reiterated to me that:

Although I have supported ZANU for all this time...It's an evil party... it's devilish...especially the leadership...During the war I was among those in administration...we used to keep records of all members who were on the execution list...I was at the centre of the party's dirty tricks...I used to know that someone was going to be killed whilst it was still a plot...many people died...because of this after the war, they did not want me to join civilian life. Due to my health problems... I have stayed as a government printer for a long time... That way, they were comfortable that I was still handling some of the sensitive information in that area...However when the recent challenges emerged...they expected all ex-combatants to participate and save the party against opposition...I no longer wanted to be part of ZANU's dirty mission...I hate killing innocent people...(Simba, male aged 52).

However, when asked about his decision to migrate, Simba stated that:

I was very close to some ministers who were close to Mugabe, so they just advised me to go out of the country...because they knew about the plots to execute me... I went to SA on holiday...I knew that I was being monitored...I fled to here [the UK]...don't ask me how... (Simba, male aged 52).

Indeed, the brutality and cruelty of ZANU-PF against its own members has also been documented by Human Rights Watch (2007). Among other cases reported by the Human Rights Watch is one incident involving a prominent ZANU-PF Member of Parliament who was kidnapped by state agencies in 2004 on suspicion of selling state secrets to South Africa. Testifying in court, the Member of Parliament revealed that he was detained for two weeks in an underground solitary confinement "in a completely dark vermin-infested cell...with no toilet facilities". Here he was threatened, intimidated and tortured until he suffered a stroke, but still he was denied medical attention (Human Rights Watch, 2007:12). Perhaps due to his knowledge of ZANU's cruelty and also his previous experiences of torture and death, the mere rumour of plans regarding his possible execution made Simba flee for his life.

Conclusion

For the nineteen migrants I interviewed, the decision to migrate was influenced by various factors which reflect the interaction process between economic and political forces, but in very complex ways, which suggest the diverse ways in which people may be forced to cross borders and why people frequently require protection in other states. As the narratives provided have tried to demonstrate, violence in Zimbabwe has been strongly gendered and increasingly women were forced to make the decision to leave home due to complex situations, which reflect the interplay between political and domestic violence, but also in ways which reflect women's economic deprivation. It therefore becomes apparent that "though economics and politics are analytically separable, they are inextricably intertwined in the real world, each feeding on the other, and each influencing the other" (Burdette and Davies, 1987:76). Unfortunately, these are the issues which host societies underestimate in their dealings with migrants who have been forced to flee their places of birth by complex and interlinked migratory driving forces.

By drawing attention to the situations under which my interviewees took the decision to leave home, this chapter has made an attempt to demonstrate the plight of a nation's people who were denied social, economic and legal protection by a government they had invested their trust in for many years. My interviewees were rendered rightless and powerless by their own government which denied them state protection by labelling them as enemies of the state. Eventually, the decision to leave home was undertaken as the only survival and safety options.

The practical steps taken by these migrants in their preparation to leave home are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Arranging to Leave Home: The Practical and Political Problems of Leaving Home

Introduction

The movement of people from one place to another is often taken as a natural phenomenon, as in most cases what is viewed as important is “simply the bit between ‘why people left’ and ‘how they settled elsewhere’” (Lindley, 2009:41). What is normally overlooked which, of course is critical, is that between the decision to leave and its realization lies critical matters of preparation whereby potential migrants have to negotiate different intervening factors before embarking on the actual migration journey (see, Lindley, 2009). While potential migrants might have rough ideas of where they might want to end up, often they find themselves confronted with many challenges. The access that people have to resources, especially financial, and how easily they can acquire appropriate travel documents and visas, frequently determines how quickly they can travel and the routes to be used. Without ruling out that there are situations where migrants are forced to leave home by circumstances which do not provide the chance to plan journeys, routes and destinations, in most cases, critical issues of preparation often become key factors in determining whether prospective migrants are able to migrate with dependents, especially with their children. Moreover, in situations where leaving children behind appears to be the only or best option, practical childcare arrangements have to be made before embarking on the journey, which in many cases can be a cumbersome process. It is therefore important to conceptualise arranging to leave home, not only as a simple event, but as a process which is full of challenges.

This chapter sets out to discuss some of the practical and political problems of leaving home as experienced by the nineteen Zimbabwean migrant parents I interviewed for this study who for one reason or another could not migrate with their children. The chapter is divided as follows; section 4.1 discusses the factors that shaped migrant parents' decisions to leave children behind. Section 4.2 offers an analysis of the practice of child fosterage in Zimbabwe. Section 4.3 proceeds to discuss the practicalities of making childcare arrangements and the challenges involved. Throughout these discussions, my intention is to show that the decision to either leave children behind or to leave children under the care of certain substitute carers increasingly reflects the parent's powerlessness and lack of control.

4.1 Circumstances which Forced the Migrant Parents to Leave Children Behind

Although all my interviewees failed to migrate with their children, a common aspiration shared during the interview sessions relate to the individuals' desire to do so. Indeed, migrant parents tried all they could with the hope of making their dreams come true, but as the narratives provided in this section illustrate, the desire to migrate with children was thwarted in all situations. It is also important to note that there is no single explanation as a combination of factors pushed them to make the decision to leave their children behind. In nearly all situations, migrant parents discussed issues directly linked to poverty and suffering, including financial constraints, which perhaps support the view that severe hardship and worsening poverty were at the root of Zimbabwean migration. However, looking at the ways in which these migrant parents discussed their decision-making processes, it becomes clear that there were a number of factors, and in most of the cases financial constraints were linked with other complex issues which all suggest varying degrees

of agency and compulsion for both men and women. Therefore, as reflected in the discussions below, some migrant parents made reference to more than one factor when asked how the decision was made to leave the children behind. Thus, besides financial constraints other important themes which emerged include, problems associated with visa conditions, travel documents, dependency on families and friends and migration channels. In some cases the perceptions which individuals had regarding the UK asylum process and welfare support systems also influenced the decision-making process to leave children behind. These issues are looked at individually in the proceeding section.

However, what is more striking is the observation that almost all my interviewees had high hopes for family re-unification within a short space of time which confirms other research such as Suarez-Orozco et al (2002) in the United States of America which reveals that, frequently parents who leave their children behind “often expect that the process of establishing a home in the host country will not take long and that the family will be reunited within a short period of time...” (p.632). In this study, family re-unification was discussed as high priority suggesting that in most cases childcare arrangements were made as temporary measures. The discussions below explain some of these issues in detail.

4.1.1 Problems Associated with the UK Visa Conditions and Travel Documents Acquisition

For potential migrants wishing to embark on the journey, the process of immigration especially from a developing country to a global destination offers very limited legal channels for both men and women. The migration of Zimbabweans to the UK is no exception. Although it is feasible that some lucky Zimbabwean adults get opportunities to migrate through legal channels, the UK immigration system

continues to narrow down the available channels, mainly by toughening border control measures. In recent years, as an internal measure for controlling migration, stricter licensing and monitoring procedures have been imposed on both UK employers and education institutions wishing to recruit migrants and foreign students (Clayton, 2010). At the same time, obtaining entry clearance before leaving home is mandatory for Zimbabweans of all categories. Just like any other visa nationals, Zimbabweans are required to prove that their reasons for migrating are valid¹² and that they are supported by the UK institutions and relatives they wish to join. This entails among other things, demonstrating that they have the financial capacity to adequately maintain and accommodate themselves and their families without depending on public funds before they come to the UK¹³. "In this way, visa restrictions form the frontline of immigration control and allow migration management to become detached from the physical border and to function efficiently at every stage along an individual's journey to the UK" (Reynolds and Muggeridge, 2008:25). More often than not, for Zimbabweans, obtaining entrance clearance can be a very traumatic process especially in situations where would-be migrants desire to move with their dependants as many of the requirements are almost impossible to meet at the onset.

Furthermore, visas for foreign citizens wishing to gain entry into the UK are determined on the basis of the prospective migrant's purposes of visit which increasingly determine the length of the period one can stay in the UK (Clayton, 2010). Often, individuals whose purposes of visit guarantee a short-leave to remain in the UK might find it almost impossible to justify why they might want to take their dependents with them. In this context, many of my interviewees who came to the

¹² Asylum can only be sought in the UK at the port of entry, meaning that there is no visa for victims of political persecution. Even those fleeing political persecutions are required to obtain proper travel documents.

¹³ For example, students are expected to prove that they have places in universities or other approved institutions as well as demonstrating ways of meeting fees and maintenance before coming to the UK, while those who wish to come to work must provide evidence of a job and obtain a works permit before coming (see Clayton, 2010).

UK from mid-2002, after Zimbabwe had been classified as a visa country, explained that they could only qualify for a six month visitor's visa. Some of the migrants who fall into this category cited visa conditions, among other things, as part of the reasons why they could not migrate with children. Thus, judging from the interview extracts presented below, it is clear that the migrants' engagement with the British immigration system was through seeking the right of entry, which in all situations was demonstrated to have been a complicated process. The following narratives illustrate this:

When I applied for a visa I told them I was visiting my sister...I was granted a 6 months visitor's visa...Although I had applied for children's visas as well, they were denied...I was told 'it was too short a period to come with 3 children...(Rute, female aged 49).

For Noma, the knowledge that other people were being denied visas because of dependents prevented her from applying for her children's visas:

I came on a visitor's visa...I knew two people who had been denied because they had applied to visit the UK with children...because of this, I did not even try to apply for my children's visas...because applying to come over here with 5 children would have alerted the British that I was not planning to go back to Zimbabwe...(Noma, female aged 49).

For Nyasha who used a business visa to come to the UK, conditions attached to his travel document hindered him from migrating with the children as explained below:

My business visa did not allow me to travel with my family...I needed to process UK visas for them separately...In this case I needed supporting

documents to show that I was coming for a special cricket tournament here to which I wished to bring my family along...this was not the case...I was running away from persecution...I had no time to waste...I had to leave them behind hoping to sort things for them once I arrived here safely...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

Notwithstanding the UK visas and other immigration requirements, Zimbabweans have in recent years faced considerable challenges in relation to acquiring travel documents for themselves and their dependents in the context of the prevailing repressive political and economic situation. Mawadza, (2008) explains that:

...the economic decline in Zimbabwe has had administrative repercussions, and for migration specifically it has meant a decreased supply of paper needed to make passports and fewer civil servants to process these documents. This means that it could take years to obtain travel documents (Mawadza, 2008:4).

Given the scarcity of the most needed travel documents in a country where migration emerges as the only option for both survival and safety, the government of Zimbabwe has further complicated matters by introducing exorbitant fee charges for the processing of travel documents under the guise that they could only be issued for emergency travel purposes. In turn this approach has encouraged corruption as officials in control of these sought after documents increasingly demand bribes from individuals. In a nation hard hit by inflation where foreign currency is a scarce resource, all these constraints add to the pressure that individuals faced with the need to travel urgently have to manage. One of the mothers who really wanted to migrate with her daughter explained that, "...my daughter had no passport by the time I decided to come over here..."(Chipo). When asked why she failed to obtain a travel document for her daughter, Chipo related her struggles with the Zimbabwean

passport registry system in ways which significantly demonstrate the abnormality of the Zimbabwean situation:

I tried to get the passport the normal way but I failed. I went to the passport office for the whole week, going there daily around 4am in the morning to join the queue. You join the queue around 4am and that queue won't move significantly until 5pm when they close the office. Some people will be going straight into the office because they would have paid someone. For 5 days the offices were being closed before I could get the chance to be served... In this situation I needed to pay someone to process my daughter's passport for me, and I did not have the money to do this... For one to get a passport quickly you needed to go through the back door...(Chipo, female aged 27).

Other migrant parents like Jonasi and Farai who had knowledge of the difficulties involved in obtaining travel documents did not even bother to try to engage with the cumbersome system. They shared sentiments which demonstrate how the scarcity of travel documents and the lack of financial resources to acquire them through corrupt means rendered them powerless to migrate with their sons:

My son did not have a passport by then...people were only getting these documents through links with passport officers which involved huge amounts of money...although I could easily get the links...I did not have the money...yet my situation demanded that I quickly leave to save my life...I had already borrowed money from relatives for my travel...It was painful to leave him...but I thought it was going to be easy to bring him over here, in 6 months at the most...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

I had no option at all...I did not have money for my son's passport...and for his airfare too... In fact my friend bought the air-ticket for me...In short I did not have enough resources to pay someone to process my son's passport and also to bring my family with me... I had to leave my son and wife behind.

However, I hoped to be re-united with my family within a very short time of not more than 6 months...(Farai, male aged 37).

From the quotations discussed above, it is clear that financial constraints can hardly be separated from other factors which forced these parents to leave children behind. Nonetheless, other more direct cases of financial restrictions are discussed below.

4.1.2 Migrant Parents' Financial Constraints

While it might be true in some countries (see Crawford-Brown and Rattray, 2002 and Pottinger et al, 2008 with reference to the Caribbean) that middle-class families tend to enjoy the privilege of migrating as a family unit, the Zimbabwean situation clearly demonstrates that it is almost impossible even for middle-class professionals to take their children with them when they first move to the UK. Professionals, who had job prospects in the UK just like low income individuals, were confronted with financial constraints, coupled with uncertainties of what the situation would be like in terms of securing accommodation and the work environment itself. In the case of Tafara, a widower who came to the UK with the hope of securing a teaching job, his narrative clearly demonstrates issues of financial difficulties and work-related uncertainties:

...I borrowed money from my brother and parents, bought a ticket and came over. The idea being that I was coming for an interview, secure a job... sort out accommodation...bring my children over... within a period of 6 months, I told myself...start some kind of life here which is not as threatening as in Zimbabwe...(Tafara, male aged 45).

However, some of my women interviewees, who were also teachers in Zimbabwe, were forced by circumstances to migrate to the UK even though they had no job prospects. When asked why they decided to leave their children behind, these mothers justified their decisions from a professional disadvantaged position, in a Zimbabwean context:

I don't want to lie to you that I chose to leave my children behind, but that was the only option. Being a teacher, I had no money to bring the whole family over...I borrowed money from the bank. I even attached the family house as security... (Tendai, female aged 45).

Similarly Sukai, explained that:

I did not choose to leave him [son] behind, but that was the only option I had. Being a teacher in Zimbabwe meant that the money I was earning was not even enough to pay bills... (Sukai, female aged 39).

Although Rute had cited visa problems as discussed earlier, she further explained that:

I did not choose to leave my children behind... this was the only option available...By the time I decided to leave, a teacher's salary could not even buy bread to feed the family for a week...What more to buy air-tickets for 3 children...? (Rute, female aged 49).

Moreover, for other mothers like Voni, her narrative suggests the emotional aspect that migrants frequently experience on leaving their children behind:

I did not choose to leave them [children] at all, but this was the only option available to me...They [children] were very young and I did not want to leave them at all. As a teacher I had no money to take them with me...I cried the day I boarded the plane...My heart bled when I bid them goodbye...Although my sister had assured me that victims of political violence were getting support to bring their children over without problems..., this did not comfort me because I had never dreamt of leaving my children behind in my life. ...Since the time my husband died in 1998, I had told myself that I was going to be there for them as both their father and mother... I felt bad when I found myself breaking my vow...But I was praying to God asking if he could only make them come over at least within few months...(Voni, female aged 49).

The migrant parents whose voices are heard above were all middle-class professionals who were constrained from migrating with their children by their lack of financial resources as discussed. However, what they all had were high hopes for family re-unification.

4.1.3 The Role of Family and Friendship Networks in the Decision Making

Process of Leaving Children Behind

The importance of social networks in migration has been widely acknowledged by others. Zontini, (2004) observes a pattern within Filipino families whereby migrants increasingly make arrangements for other kin to join them abroad. Similarly, McGregor (2008) and Bloch, (2008) acknowledge the importance of family and friendship networks in making the UK an attractive destination for Zimbabweans. Most of my interviewees explained how friends and relatives offered them support in one way or another to migrate to the UK. In the case of Sukai, friends helped her to register with a college which enabled her to quickly switch from a visitor's visa to a student visa. Others including Farai and Rute were assisted by relatives and friends

to buy air tickets, as discussed earlier. However, an emerging theme which seems to assume a crucial relevance to this is the extent to which family members and friends influenced the decision to leave children behind. In fact, some of my interviewees characterized leaving children behind as a corporate decision-making process with other family members and friends who migrated to the UK earlier, as opposed to individual choice. In this context, a number of migrants referred to family members and friends in ways which suggest that frequently kith and kin play a more coercive role in influencing the decision to leave children behind. One of the cases which clearly demonstrate this is that of Chipo, who was assisted to migrate by family members who were already in the UK. During our interview session, Chipo recalled how her relatives put pressure on her to leave her daughter behind:

...my father, my brother and my two sisters who were already here...just said to me we cannot give you money for your daughter. What we can do is to pay for your ticket and nothing else. If you are clever, come over first and make arrangements for your daughter later...If you are depending on other people to do things for you they don't give you enough resources for what you might want to do...(Chipo, female aged 27).

Moreover, sometimes the pressures can be so extreme that individuals are left without any other choice;

In fact one of my sisters said to me 'you don't have to think about your daughter now – if you bring her who do you think will look after your child for you? In this country, there is no time for looking after someone's child. The choice is yours to come first, work and think about your child later or stay there looking after your child and die in poverty. If you lose this chance, no one will send you money in future. Get your decisions right'. This was the situation, and I needed to come because life in Zimbabwe was getting very

hard... as soon as my airfare was paid up, I left the country (Chipo, female aged 27).

Noma is also another mother who had the potential to migrate but like Chipo she lacked the financial means to leave home. She too got help from family members which constrained her from migrating with her children:

It was not a choice actually...though it was a hard decision I think that was the only logical thing to do in my situation... since my business was destroyed I had no money at all...My sister bought the ticket for me...obviously she could not afford to buy tickets for my four children... she explained that it was not necessary to take them with me...I need to settle first...sort out many issues including my asylum application...then take them...(Noma, female aged 49).

Jonasi's decision to leave his son behind was supported by those who had offered to provide him with temporary accommodation, but was also influenced by what can be seen as perceived childcare problems in the UK:

Since I personally, did not know many people here...we were relying on my wife's friend who had agreed to give us temporary accommodation...she warned us not to bring the child because of problems with child care...we left him but hoping to bring him as soon as his passport was sorted out...hoping by then we would have sorted our own accommodation (Jonasi, male aged 39).

However, there are also situations which demonstrate that financial support to leave home was mobilized in complex ways. In some cases, prospective migrants who found themselves in more desperate situations sought financial assistance through colleagues and eventually got support, but on a commercial basis. From the way Sukai explained how she came over, it emerged that the air-ticket she used was obtained through distant professional links, which relates to why she could not migrate with her son:

A friend of mine...a colleague rather, discussed my situation with her own friend or colleague who was already here... and this friend's friend offered to buy me a ticket [which I was to pay back later] and agreed to accommodate me temporarily...under such circumstances... there was no way I would have expected this woman...or rather somebody I did not know to sponsor my son as well...(Sukai, female aged 39).

Zontini's work (2004) on Moroccan and Filipino migrants residing in Southern Europe, draws attention to a phenomenon where some migrants leave home so as to support other members of the family, or rather are 'forced' to migrate by family members or "by their own sense of duty towards their family of origin" (2004:1119). Also a study by UNICEF, (D'emilio et al, 2007) reveals that in the Caribbean and some countries of Latin America, migration is also a result of "an explicit and implicit contract among family members when families...decide which family member should migrate...how to jointly finance the journey...often by selling family assets or incurring a debt" (D'emilio et al, 2007:3). In a similar context, McGregor (2008) observes that due to Zimbabwe's economic crisis which shows no signs of abating, things have reached a stage where families are increasingly compelled to send members abroad to ensure basic survival. This observation seems to assume a crucial relevance when some situations discussed by my interviewees are taken into

consideration. Taking the case of Chiedza who related how her family members struggled to put money together so that she could come to the UK, her migration resembles a 'domestic survival strategy' (D'emilio et al, 2007). She viewed that by coming to the UK, it was anticipated that she would be a source of support for family members in Zimbabwe. As Chiedza further recalled her story, leaving her daughter behind was a family decision weighed against the backdrop that migrating with her daughter could possibly hinder her from meeting this family obligation:

...life was hard and even getting worse for everyone...myself, two sisters and brothers - we had all lost our jobs...we put resources together...I offered to come over to work...I did not need to bring my daughter with me since I intended to work hard...although I planned to have her at some later stage... perhaps after supporting 1 or 2 other family members who would take over from me...(Chiedza, female aged 35).

It is clear that the economic climate of Zimbabwe increasingly forced mothers to make the hard decision of sacrificing their children in order to ensure family economic survival.

4.1.4 Constraints Imposed by Clandestine Migration

As discussed earlier in this study, there are limited legal channels for migration for Zimbabweans wishing to migrate to the UK. As such, some of the migrants I interviewed explained how they had struggled in their effort to acquire visas in order to join family members, especially spouses and partners, who had migrated to the UK earlier, but remained in the UK without legal status. For example, Tsitsi whose husband had waited for almost 5 years for his asylum application to be settled said the only option for her was to use clandestine channels following her failure to

legally justify to the Home Office Agency in Zimbabwe why she wanted to come to the UK. In this case, Tsitsi explained that she was charged exorbitant travelling fees by the smugglers whom her husband had contracted to transport her to the UK. Therefore, in Tsitsi's situation, financial constraints and the uncertainties associated with clandestine channels of migration forced her to leave her son behind but with the hope of sending for him once they acquired legal status. This is how Tsitsi explained her situation:

I had waited for almost 5 years as my husband had applied for asylum...the decision was taking long...I tried to apply for a student visa but I was denied twice...I then decided to try other means... Yeah, I came through other means which I don't want to discuss now. ...because of this I had to leave my son at home...we could not afford to come together...we hoped to bring him over soon...(Tsitsi, female aged 27).

Also bearing in mind that most of the migrant parents I interviewed did not leave Zimbabwe out of choice, in some cases individuals found themselves faced with life-threatening circumstances which offered them little time to plan their journeys and migration routes. The overarching thrust became, that of reaching a place of safety through whatever means (see, Robinson and Segrott, 2002). One of the migrant parents whose situation mirrored this is Simba who openly confessed that his situation offered him no other choice except to use expensive clandestine means in order to reach the UK. Although Simba certainly desired to reach the UK as his final destination, the problems associated with clandestine channels are that, in some cases, migrants seem not to have overall control as the decision about destinations mostly lies with agents/smugglers (see, Gilbert and Koser, 2006). Thus, Simba perceived clandestine migration as a practice full of risks and the decision to leave children behind was taken in the context that children might not reach their intended destination:

As a person who was running away I used a South African passport. It was very expensive, so I could not afford to organise the same kind of passports for my children. Also there was no guarantee that I was going end up here or gain entrance into this country...I was not sure whether it was going to be easy for me to prove that I am Zimbabwean...due to this, it was not safe for me to bring the children with me...I intended to have them as soon as I was granted asylum...(Simba, male aged 52).

As the above illustrations demonstrate, the imposition of visas on nationals classified as refugee-producing countries while meant to block the legal migration routes, it seems to have promoted clandestine forms of migration for individuals faced with the need to enter the UK for both family re-unification and protection. Reynolds, and Muggeridge, (2008) confirm that corruption in Zimbabwe's neighbouring countries has enabled many Zimbabweans fleeing political and economic repression to acquire Malawian and South African passports in order to flee the region to western countries including the UK.

4.1.5 Individuals' Perceptions of the UK Asylum and Welfare Systems

Among my interviewees who cited financial problems as part of the reasons why they could not migrate with their children are women who also explained their situations in ways which suggest that their decision was also influenced by their own prior knowledge of the UK asylum system and the welfare support it offers to asylum seekers seeking family re-unification. As noted by Ranger, (2005) Zimbabweans escaping political violence believe that specialist protection can only be guaranteed in the UK. This belief could be originating from the knowledge that many countries in Southern African region have a low acceptance rate for asylum seekers from Zimbabwe. Take for example, South Africa, many Zimbabweans escaping politically

induced violence seem not to have confidence in seeking asylum in this country due to the perceived relationship between the two countries which has increasingly seen Zimbabweans being deported to face further victimization (see Sisulu et al, 2007). Therefore, for most Zimbabweans, the UK appears a more tolerant and democratic country. In particular, for the women migrant parents I interviewed, the perceptions they had regarding the UK asylum admission and welfare systems seem to have influenced their decision making to leave children behind:

For me...the priority was to save my life from danger first, being certain that once I get here I was going to get all the protection and support to bring my children and husband over within a very short time...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Similarly, Chenai made the following claims:

My first priority was to escape from the oppressive circumstances...Coming here was like someone who was going to heaven...I did not even bother about the children because of my picture of the UK...I perceived white people as very understanding... What I thought was once I come to the UK I would be granted asylum at the point of entry and every form of support to bring my children over (Chenai, female aged 45).

Given the above perceptions, the contradiction between migrants' prior perceptions of the UK asylum system and the reality of living through the system are issues which are discussed in chapters 5 and 6 of this study.

The section that follows focuses on issues of childcare arrangements in Zimbabwe.

4.2 Traditional Practices of Fosterage and Parenting in a Zimbabwean Context

This section provides a background discussion to the Zimbabwean traditional practices of child fostering, showing how these practices have evolved over the years as influenced by various structural factors. This also involves discussing the changes in Zimbabwean family structures and what this means for children's protection and well-being especially in the current political and economic crisis. The gendered aspect of caring and parenting norms in a Zimbabwean context will be interrogated in a bid to establish an understanding of the cultural expectations of child caring roles in families.

4.2.1 Background to Child Fosterage in Zimbabwe

Talking about the position of an African child from a traditional context, Dhemba, (2007) refers to an old Shona adage: '*Mwana ijira rinofukwa navanhu vose*' which in literal terms means a child is everyone's responsibility, echoing the African view that it takes the whole community to raise a child (Chinyangara et al, 1999). As Dhemba, (2007) further notes, this way of conceptualizing the child informs the provision of the current Zimbabwean Children's Act 2002 which, among other things, acknowledges that children have rights to family life, identity and protection. Moreover, the portrayal of a child as 'everyone's responsibility' implies that "the concept of 'parent' is wider than the man and woman who are biological parents and the idea of 'family' assumes an extended group of kin" (Chinyangara et al, 1999:15). The image of a child as belonging to an extended family system is also recognised in the present African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children 1979 (Article 31) meaning that children in an African context are still considered to belong to the entire community. With regards to the Zimbabwean traditional family system, from a more historical perspective, Chinyangara et al (1999) observe that it has been common for children to refer to a father's brother as 'father' and mother's sister as

'mother'. Also in the community they lived, the culture of fictive kinship relations was a significant feature as children were frequently socialized to refer to any male as 'grandfather', 'father' or 'brother' depending on age, and the same applied to women who were also called 'grandmother', 'mother', or 'sister' irrespective of blood ties. It was this loose construction of the family which necessitated other practices like child fosterage to shape peoples' ways of living but as valued practices even among individuals who were not biologically related.

As Bourdillion (1991) and Grier (1994) note, fosterage has been a very common practice in Zimbabwe, especially in the past among the *Shona* people. Children were frequently sent away to live with relatives including both maternal and paternal aunts, uncles and grandparents. Increasingly, aunts without children of their own would ask for brothers' daughters to come and live with them and help with domestic work. In rural areas mainly, it was a common practice for mothers to foster infants to grandmothers, mainly as a weaning mechanism.

However, children were mostly fostered to surrogate parents perceived to be people of a better social and economic standing, the belief being that children would benefit economically and socially in ways they might otherwise not have done, had they remained with biological parents. Zelizer (1994) observes similar patterns of substitute care arrangements in American societies although it now appears to be a thing of the past:

Seventeenth century parents placed their children with neighbours' relatives and sometimes even strangers to learn a skilled trade. While for some, it was an instrumental and elective indenture, for poor and dependent children it was the only way to secure a home (Zelizer 1994:171).

Thus, as Isiugo-Abanihe, (1985) sees it, the extended family mainly serves to mitigate economic hardships of less privileged households or large family size, and in so doing, kin share child rearing responsibilities.

In traditional societies of Zimbabwe, not only was the extended family involved in fostering children, but the community was also as important as the extended family as it was also a key safety net where other disadvantaged children like orphans and other vulnerable children were cared for so as to satisfy the belief that a child belongs to everyone (see Foster, 2004).

However, in recent years, some have argued (see Bourdillon, 1991, Auret, 1995, Chinyangara et al, 1999, Dhemba, 2007) that the extended family structures upon which the traditional assumptions of child fosterage are based have changed significantly. Due to urbanization and other changes associated with modernization, extended family structures in Zimbabwe seem to have lost their original shape. Also, as a result of the advent of social problems like HIV/AIDS, in Zimbabwe, like the situation in most African countries, there has been much talk about family instability and breakdown which saw the emergence of female headed households which became a significant new family structure from the 1990s. Furthermore, in recent years, the death of both parents due to HIV/AIDS has seen an increase in the number of double orphans and child headed households emerging as a new challenging family set up. This signifies the intensity of the general weakening and disruption of the community and extended family fabrics in Zimbabwe (see Foster, 2006, Wood et al, 2006).

It is within this context that Dhemba (2007) draws attention to the distressing state of Zimbabwe's children in the prevailing economic hardships which have befallen the country. Again, his assessment suggests that the current economic and political climate has further weakened the extended family bringing it to near extinction. It is now well established that few families still have the capacity to shelter, feed, protect or offer other kinds of support to any children other than their own. Today the majority of Zimbabwean families seem to be preoccupied with their own children's survival. Noticeably, children in need of support from relatives are no longer welcome. Thus, among other horrendous situations of children's sufferings discussed by Dhemba are heartbreaking circumstances of fostered children who frequently run away, or are pushed out of homes of foster carers by circumstances closely related to abuse, neglect and abandonment¹⁴. Increasingly, such children end up living in the streets especially in urban areas. In their study, 'Girls: The Less Visible Street Children of Zimbabwe', Rurevo and Bourdillon (2003) observe a trend where girl children are frequently tasked to carry out heavy domestic burdens, including caring for sick relatives in the households where they are fostered (see Robson, 2004). These children often find their situations unbearable and they escape to live on the streets, where they are highly susceptible to other serious kinds of exploitation.

Emphasizing the fact that the extended family structure is now a safety net with holes, Dhemba (2007) observes that in the current political and economic harsh climate of Zimbabwe the number of orphanages and residential homes has increased significantly to more than 80 and new ones are emerging. This development can be seen as a direct mockery of the government of Zimbabwe's

¹⁴ The main problem is that in the Zimbabwean context, care provided within the extended family and community, while perceived as a form of fostering, is rarely formalized as family elders or community leaders are just left to decide on the placement of orphans without the participation of government agencies and the placement is rarely registered (see Powell et al, 2004)

strong cultural resistance to the concept of orphanages which for a long time has been anchored on the belief that the extended family and community safety nets have a never ending capacity to care for disadvantaged children (see, the National Plan Action for Orphaned and Vulnerable Children, 2004, and Zimbabwe Children Protection Society, 2004).

Indeed, a study carried out on behalf of The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and UNICEF, entitled “Children in Residential Care – The Zimbabwean Experience” (Powell et al, 2004) suggests that as many families are sucked into poverty, it is becoming apparent that many relatives of orphaned children have come to view institutional care as a better option for orphans; the belief being that institutional care seems to meet both the physical and educational needs of these children in more satisfactory ways than what relatives could offer.

Besides the plight of orphans, Powell et al (2004) discuss the situation of other children and highlight the case of children of migrants which they perceive to be a ‘disturbing phenomenon’ in current Zimbabwe. Their analysis seem to suggests that some of the children left behind by migrants are under-protected and that in some cases orphanages increasingly provide care for children whom they perceive to belong to individuals they refer to as, “Zimbabweans who have emigrated to Western countries in search of better paid employment” (Powell et al, 2004:22). These authors further express the view that “many children are left behind in Zimbabwe so that their parents, fleeing the current economic crisis, can work unencumbered overseas...” (Powell et al, 2004:22). However, this way of conceptualizing why migrants have left children behind should be treated with caution especially when contrasted with the factors which forced many of my interviewees to make decisions to leave their children at home when they migrated to the UK as discussed earlier in this chapter. Nonetheless, critical in Powell et al’s

(2004) analysis is the observations that among the children left behind in Zimbabwe are more fortunate ones who are cared for by their extended families on a daily basis, while a considerable number are enrolled in boarding schools so that they only stay with relatives during holidays. Yet, there are also the very less fortunate ones – those who are being “admitted to orphanages, which offer “private placements” as a means of generating income...” In Powell et al’s own words, this “group of children are being unnecessarily denied a normal family life and are subjected to the same emotionally deprived environment as their orphaned colleagues” (Powell, 2004:22).

The picture painted by the discussions presented above is of a general deterioration in the ‘sentimental value’ (Zelizer, 1994) of children in Zimbabwean societies, which allows for assumptions to be made that the traditional construction of children as ‘everyone’s responsibility’ no longer echoes true in the genuine sense of the phrase; it remains the ideal only in political rhetoric and policy documents. It also seems that the community and extended family systems now appear to have become safety nets with holes; adults invested with the obligation to care and protect children increasingly, abuse them. Also, because of the on-going crisis situation, there now seems to be diversity in the groups of children who fit the disadvantaged category, which suggests that Zimbabwe’s children are more vulnerable now than ever before.

This brings us to the issue of gender expectations with regards to childcare and parenting in general in Zimbabwean societies.

4.2.2 Gender Roles and Parenting: The Zimbabwean Context

A traditional Zimbabwean family is largely viewed as patriarchal, suggesting the point that gendered role expectations are part and parcel of the daily expression of family life (see Gelfand, 1992, Chinyangara et al 1999, Kesby 1999, Guy 1987, Grier 1994, Moyo, 2008b). In essence, patriarchal practices emphasize masculine superiority by assigning men a breadwinner/provider role as well as designating them the role of decision maker in families while, simultaneously, denigrating femininity by relegating women an inferior role; one that is associated with reproductive work. While the former involves taking work outside the home for payment, the latter entails performance of duties which are not remunerated. These duties mainly revolve around the household, including taking care of domestic chores as well as caring for both the children and the sick in the family. As some (Koopman, 1995, Gordon, 1998) have argued, in most African societies, and from early childhood, children are socialized to observe this sharp distinction between *men's work* and *women's work*.

While this could be the general family picture, it is also critical to point out here that gender dynamics in Zimbabwean families have evolved significantly over the decades reflecting the fact that Zimbabwean societies have undergone three major transitional eras; those of pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial state.

In the pre-colonial era for example, patriarchal practices were distinctively pronounced as family life was hierarchically defined in terms of power and authority. A married man assumed overall charge of the entire homestead as he was the property owner, especially land which was the main means of production, but would control and benefit from the labour of his wives and children (Grier, 1994). At the same time, women were represented as housewives, who cooked, cleaned, washed and gave birth to children for men as the institution of marriage was not only

focussed on the relationship between husband and wife, but centred on their ability to produce offspring. Children were the focal point of marriage and family as fertility was the measurement of a proper marriage and the visible evidence of maturity, especially for men (Epprecht, 1998, Kesby 1999).

Within this context, the extended family had the obligation to watch closely and could intervene in case where a married couple failed to reproduce by demanding that the man divorce his wife and marry another one or take a second wife if the first appeared infertile. However, where a man was considered impotent, the extended family would arrange what was known as *kupindira*¹⁵ (*raising seed*). As Epprecht (1998) observes, the idea was that of upholding what was seen as proper outward appearance - the promotion of a man's identity at the expense of a woman and such divergence from the ideal was considered a positive social good.

Thus marriage and family life implied a man's control over a woman's reproductive and productive capacities, and through this act, men's hegemonic masculinity was portrayed as laudable and natural (Kesby, 1999).

As noted earlier, children produced from a marriage were considered as belonging to the man and his broader kinship group as well as the entire community (Guy 1987, Grier 1994, Chinyangara et al 1999). Overall, men's parenting roles were very specific as they were obligated to feed, house, clothe and to some extent discipline children, whereas, women were expected to care and nurture for children and bring them up in a way that was considered appropriate (Watts, et al 1998). Parrenas, (2005) notes similar patriarchal practices in the Philippines. Cooperation

¹⁵ *Kupindira* was a custom whereby the parents and kin would make a secret arrangement with a trusted family friend (*Sahwira*) or relative to impregnate a son's wife, sometimes with the son's knowledge or secretly. In the traditional sense, the woman would normally not be allowed to choose a lover of her choice on her own initiative; otherwise she would be accused of committing adultery.

between children and their families was attained through the teaching of good social habits, good manners and building good personality; this was the subsequent duty of the mothers with the assistance of grandmothers, other women kinship, and sometimes uncles and grandfathers in the case of older boys (Chinyangara et al 1999). Rwezarura (1998) observes that the *Shona* people of Zimbabwe encouraged the concept of *unhu*, meaning the expected good character and personality of children. Thus, according to this concept, a child who would act against the parents' instructions and teachings was considered to be rebellious and disrespectful, thus was alleged to be devoid of *unhu*. In most cases, mothers would be blamed for failing to train wayward children. Thus, in order to avoid being blamed, mothers increasingly reported children perceived to be devoid of *unhu* to the fathers for disciplining.

Therefore, in addition to being a breadwinner, a man would make major decisions on behalf of the family, meaning that women, like children were 'invisible beings' and 'minors' (Guy, 1987, Grier, 1994). Consequently, men formed the domineering class with women and children as their subordinates (Kesby 1999, Grier, 1994).

However, with the coming of colonialists around 1900, and as a result of colonial conquest and occupation, the traditional economy and social structures of Zimbabwe lost their vibrancy and some even their survival (Grier 1994, Guy 1987, Chinyangara et al 1999, Epprecht 1998). Through a range of colonial administrative and legislative mechanisms, African men were reduced to mere subordinate agents of colonial systems through, for example, forced expulsion from their land, forced taxation, forced labour on public projects and compulsory cultivation of certain cash crops for export (Moyo, 2008b, Chinyangara et al, 1999, Grier, 1994).

Whilst this development seem to suggest that colonialism could have transformed some aspects of patriarchal norms, at the same time, as will be shown, colonialism also selected and utilised some key aspects of patriarchal norms which were considered a 'necessary evil'; and these were implemented in the course of capital accumulation (see Grier, 1994).

Specifically, with regards to gender expectations and roles, on the one hand, it appears that men's hegemony position was challenged as they were routinely forced to undertake paid jobs in the domestic arena including working as cooks in white settlers' households, positions which traditionally were treated as women's work (Grier 1994, Guy 1987, Epprecht 1998). Yet, on the other hand, under the colonial regime, the domestication of women was reinforced as the system increasingly forced many able-bodied men to take up waged employment in urban areas, but largely denied their wives and children the rights to urban residence; a process which Kesby (1999) refers to as the 'relocation of gender identities and re-inscription of gendered geographies'. In the words of Bay (1982:10) "African women became victims of double discrimination through policies developed to promote first, the interests of the colonial powers and second, the interests of African men". Indeed, the labour migration of men saw women being left in rural areas taking full responsibility of the children as well as continuing with subsistence farming. At the same time, in urban areas, African men were excluded from the provision of social security as they were regarded as 'temporary urban residents' who were expected to retire to their rural homes (Kaseke, 2003:38). This further suggests that rural areas became depositories for spent-out male labour discarded from workplaces that women had to care for in the absence of social security schemes for African men (Kaseke, 2003).

Consequently, as breadwinners, men would spend considerable periods of time working and living in their urban 'temporal homes', remitting money and goods to their families and would occasionally visit their 'permanent rural homes' to be with their wives and children (Kaseke, 2003). Clearly, colonialism perpetuated some aspects of patriarchal norms in ways which continued to influence men and women's understandings of their own roles in the family.

With the attainment of independence in 1980, post-colonial Zimbabwe brought about many changes which improved life in general and family life in particular as many began to appreciate some western aspects of living as a sign of modernity. Also as a result of colonialism, urban areas were developed at the expense of rural areas, which subsequently, following independence, saw many families migrating to towns as these places were increasingly perceived as areas of expanded opportunities for both the adults and their children (Epprecht, 1998). This perception is still surviving and is clearly echoed in the narratives of some of my interviewees (see section 4.3) who emphasized the importance of leaving children with foster parents who were living in towns as opposed to the ones living in rural areas.

Also, immediately after independence, Zimbabwean females (as led by those women who had fought in the war of liberation on equal terms with men) waged campaigns to demand equality with men as well as lobbying the government to consider some of the then existing policies which promoted the subordination of women in both private and public spheres of life. Indeed, in legal terms, considerable effort was made by the post-colonial government to improve the status of women by: granting majority status at the age of 18 years for both males and females, legislating that child custody arrangements were to be decided by courts instead of automatic paternal custody, as well as granting equal opportunities and equal pay in employment, to name just a few (see Hindin, 2002). Noticeably, in

post-colonial Zimbabwe, there has been an increase in women's participation in formal employment as well as in higher education.

However, in spite of this evolution process, women are still finding it very difficult to exercise some of the rights granted to them in law. More recent studies (for example Hindin, 2002, Pasura, 2008, Francis-Chizororo, 1999, Mutambirwa et al, 1998) have suggested that the traditional family division of labour has not been altered significantly as women in Zimbabwe increasingly find themselves caught up between gender norms and the need to fulfil professional aspirations. In particular, Pasura's (2008) work suggests that women who participate in paid work as well as making considerable financial contributions towards the upkeep of their families are still expected to perform their daily gendered household duties when they get home from work without any help from their husbands, who in most cases will be relaxing, reading the newspaper. Therefore, in most cases, in order to reconcile paid work and household duties, working women, especially the middle-class, increasingly employ other women as maids. It can be seen in the section that follows that the presence of a maid in a household has featured significantly in most women's narratives in their discussions of the appropriateness of the childcare arrangements they left in place.

A particularly disturbing aspect of gender inequality in Zimbabwe has been noted by UNICEF (1994) and Justice for Children Trust (JCT, 2010) by drawing attention to a situation whereby women struggle to gain legal recognition of their guardianship status in regard to their children. They note, among other things, that female parents including those with unregistered unions with the fathers of their children and those who never had any other relationship with the fathers of their children other than sexual encounters that resulted in the birth of the children are increasingly turned away when they approach the Registrar General's office to

obtain birth certificates and/or passports for their children. Officials increasingly demand that it is only the fathers of the children who have the right to do so, meaning that mothers have to obtain permission from the children's fathers before their children could be issued with these important legal documents. In this regards, JCT (2010) questions the importance of involving fathers, particularly in the case where the father has no relationship with either the mother or the child and proceed to argue that "experience with such issues has shown that the major reasons are to do with the patriarchal nature of our society... and the society's attitude towards children generally" (JCT, 2010:3). Clearly, as JCT and UNICEF conclude, women's rights (which in most cases are closely linked to children rights) are being undermined even in cases where the law is said to be on women's side, which further reinforces the inferior position of women in the society as well as increasing the vulnerability of their children.

Also, more recently, Zimbabwean traditional notions of gender norms have become an important topic for discussion in the literature that seek to conceptualize issues of gender relations and roles among Zimbabwean Diaspora in Britain (Pasura 2008, McGregor, 2008). In McGregor's (2007) work, Zimbabwean men working in Britain's care industry described being a male carer as 'double shaming' as they considered care work to be women's work that undermined their manhood. Concurringly, Pasura (2008) observes that Britain is a place where Zimbabwean men's hegemonic position in families has been significantly challenged as most men seem to have lost the roles of breadwinner and decision maker. As Pasura further notes, many men are even constrained by their circumstances to perform household work as well as taking childcare duties. While one could take this as a major step towards gaining Zimbabwean men's participation in household maintenance activities, it is regrettable that, as Pasura notes: "most men envisage the changes as

a passing phase, believing that they will eventually return home and recover their hegemonic masculinity (Pasura, 2008:10).

While this obviously suggests a reinforcement of the stronghold of patriarchal norms, what needs to be looked into and documented is the extent to which the ongoing political, economic and social situation of Zimbabwe represents another dimension of the society's evolution process but one that has the potential to alter and influence the society's expectations and thinking with regards to gender relations and roles in the family. The fact of the matter is that the harsh economic situation of Zimbabwe has eroded many men's economic base through loss of jobs and business opportunities. Besides depriving men of their economic privileges, the catastrophe has concurrently forced many women to engage in economic activities like never before in order to ensure family survival. Moreover, in some cases, the nature of economic activities that women engage in increasingly force them to spend considerable periods of time away from their homes, thereby constraining them from performing their traditional gendered roles as would be normally expected. For example, cross-border activities are now predominantly popular as well as being overwhelmingly dominated by women (Tevera and Zinyama, 2002), especially mothers who often leave their children behind. Sometimes they spend considerable days, if not weeks, in places like Botswana and South Africa selling things like doilies, in order to be in a position to bring money and other commodities home to support their families. Also, many women, especially middle-class professionals, have been forced by their circumstances to migrate to global destinations, sometimes leaving their spouses and children behind, which somehow suggests a re-configuration of gender relations and roles in some families.

Overall, this background lays the foundation which allows for an exploration of the processes through which childcare arrangements were made by my interviewees who were both fathers and mothers as well as allowing for a discussion of their experiences of negotiating these arrangements as none could take their children with them when they moved to the UK as discussed earlier. These discussions will draw significantly from the work of Viviana Zelizer (1994) which concerns itself with 'the changing social value of children' in American societies.

4.3 Practical Situations of Making Childcare Arrangements: Pricing Migrants' Children as 'Meal Tickets'

In her book *'Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children'*, Zelizer (1994) engages readers in a critical dialogue of the changes that have taken place in American societies over the centuries with regards to the position of children and their value to the society. Among other things, Zelizer's analysis delves into the processes through which children's lives were compromised to the benefit of adults, citing the decades in which children were treated as cheap labour and the generations in which childcare initiatives and mechanisms including orphanage, adoption and fosterage increasingly involved monetary incentives. Throughout these discussions, Zelizer makes an attempt to demonstrate how the society routinely transgressed 'the sacred value of children' by pricing their lives. These are some of the issues which I intend to delve into in my discussion of the migrant parents' processes of negotiating childcare arrangements. In these discussions, I aim to demonstrate the migrant parents' powerlessness to ensure that their children would be protected during the period of separation from them. I will start these discussions by exploring the experiences of the migrant parents who left their children with relatives and family members.

4.3.1 *Negotiating Childcare Arrangements with Relatives and Family Members: Are they really still the Ideal Substitute Carers?*

My interview deliberations with the Zimbabwean migrant parents partly sought to understand how childcare arrangements were made especially following the previous discussions of the various ways in which their migration forced a separation from their children.

It emerged among some of the respondents that leaving children with certain individuals was discussed in terms of already existing childcare relationships. Voni is one mother who described her relationship with her mother in a manner which suggests this:

I left my children with my mother. Mum was a retired teacher who lived in one of the low density suburbs of Harare. She has a very big house... almost every holiday the kids would go there to spend their holidays with her. She used to spoil them...they used to enjoy being in her company... so I decided to let her have the children during my absence...(Voni, female aged 49).

Chipo who left her 4 year old daughter with her sister also said:

I left my daughter with my sister...my sister had a daughter who was of the same age with my daughter...they used to play together...although I used to live with my mother she was a sickly person...it was ok with me for my sister to have her...(Chipo, female aged 27).

Similarly, Tafara, a widower who left his two daughters (then 5 and 9 years old) under his parents' care, described the situation in ways which suggest that the arrangement was made within an existing caring relationship:

Since I had high hopes of getting a teaching job in the UK, I decided to leave my children with my parents. To me it was going to be for a short-time; 6 weeks at the most I told myself...My kids were used to my parents as they used to spend almost every school holiday with them... Because of the trust I have for my parents, they appeared the best carers during my absence...(Tafara, male aged 45).

While the issue of existing caring relationships played a major role in the selection of substitute carers, there are however cases which demonstrate that leaving children with certain relations generated conflicts among families. This issue was mentioned by many of my interviewees. I will start by discussing the case of Tsitsi who left her 8 year old son in her mother's care, a decision which she arrived at in the context that her mother had always been helping with childcare, mostly during weekends and school holidays. Although this decision was seen as the best option, Tsitsi explained that other relatives did not seem to support it as they also wanted to have custody of her son. In particular, Tsitsi's decision to leave her son under the care of her mother caused serious tension between her family and that of her husband:

My husband's family, especially my mother-in-law wanted to have my son...I was surprised because she rarely used to ask for him, and my son did not know her that much...but she did not want me to leave him with my mother...they think that my parents are getting lots of money from us...(Tsitsi, female aged 27).

As Tsitsi continued to narrate her experiences, her situation furthermore, suggests a conflict of priorities among couples. Tsitsi, on one hand, mentioned that her husband seemed to be in agreement with the decision she had made, yet on the other hand, she discussed her husband's concerns with regards to this arrangement as it had the potential to affect his relationship with his parents who also wanted to

have custody of the child. Thus, Tsitsi expressed the opinion that, given the chance, her husband would have wanted to reverse the decision she had made by moving their son to his parents' place. Yet, Tsitsi's main concern was for her son to get good care, and meaningful support with his education which she believed could only be met by her mother:

Although we kind of agree...sometimes my husband feels that perhaps we should just move our son from my parents' place to his parents' place...I think the only person whom I trust is my mother and no one else...she is a teacher, she values education and children's nutrition... she also lives in town whereas my mother-in-law lives in the rural areas...my son has never lived there and I don't want him to go there...I would rather have my mother care for him until he comes over to join us... I have to keep on convincing my husband. He knows it anyway and he admits at times that our son is looked after better where he is now, but he sometimes bows down to the parents' pressure...(Tsitsi, female aged 27).

Closely related to the above is the case of Rudo who left her 12 year old daughter with her husband who was a teacher, but who subsequently died. When asked why she thought her husband was the best carer for her daughter Rudo explained that:

Being a teacher, my husband valued education...my daughter was at a stage where she needed proper help with home work and other things relating to her education. Also I thought my husband was a very responsible and caring father...also my daughter was comfortable to stay with her father... (Rudo, female aged 39).

And yet, Rudo's natal family especially her mother and brothers, felt that they had the right to foster Rudo's daughter. Explaining the tensions involved, Rudo recollected that:

I was so surprised to discover that my natal family felt that they were the right people to take care of my daughter during my absence. When I told them about my decision, they told me that I did not need to trust a man to look after my child, because he would misuse the money I will be sending... This shocked me a lot, how could they think like this yet he was my own husband and the father of the child...we were not divorcing. I was only coming over here and he was going to follow with our daughter...it was not a permanent arrangement...they were going to join me shortly...I tried to explain this to my relatives...but they did not understand at all...(Rudo, female aged 39).

In addition to demonstrating family tensions, Rudo's case also illustrates that the feminization of migration often means a redefinition of gender and family roles as husbands are increasingly forced to take up the roles their wives used to perform in the family and in children's lives. In societies like Zimbabwe, this can be seen as a revolution which directly mocks the customary expectations of masculinity. Within this same context, this case also signifies the extent to which Zimbabwe's crisis situation has emerged as a catalyst in the dwindling of the country's historic gender migration practice which for a long time was mirrored as male-led (see, Zinyama and Tevera, 2002). Most crucially, Rudo's case suggests some of the ways in which children in Zimbabwe found themselves deprived of their mothers' care, which can be argued to have contributed to the general undermining of children's lives as relatives increasingly priced their lives in terms of material gains (see Zelizer, 1994).

Other situations also reveal that complex negotiations occurred in cases where spouses were migrating together as in some cases the process of selecting children's carers reflected a conflict of interest between spouses. Like in the case of Jonasi who migrated together with his wife (though they later divorced), the decision to leave their four year old son under his mother-in-law's care does not seem to reflect a shared desire. According to Jonasi, his ex-wife insisted to live their son with her own mother although he would have preferred to leave their son under his own relatives' custody for reasons he discussed as follows:

It was a difficult discussion to accept...although my parents were deceased by then I had sisters and brothers who were more than willing to take our son...anyway, my wife had a different view...she had already asked her mother to take our son...I thought my relatives were closer to our son than her mother as she used to live in a different town...my son was very close to my brother's children...they used to play together most of the time...we used to leave him at my sister's place quite often...they were people who were familiar to him...but my wife wanted her mother to take him...she finally did...this was not the best option I think...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

When asked what he thought were the reasons why his wife insisted on leaving their son with her mother and whether it had anything to do with remittances, Jonasi expressed the following views:

From the way I see it...I think she [ex-wife] wanted her mother to benefit...Her mother is a widow...we were helping her a lot financially...my ex-wife mentioned that it would be better to let her have our son so we won't have to send money to different people...she said it would be easier to support them while they were together [son and mother-in-law] than to do it separately...she did not think much about our son as an individual, what was good for him as a child...there were no other children to play with at her mother's...she was getting old...I thought it was going to be too much for

her...it would disadvantage our son...anyway, since we hoped to take him soon...I decided to let go...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

The position of being powerless to leave children with desired substitute carers was also reinforced by Chiedza who explained that initially, she had made arrangements to leave her 5 year old daughter with her sister for reasons which reflect aspiration for better childcare provision and the child's well-being. Unfortunately this decision was reversed by her mother whom she had been living with for over a year:

When I separated from my partner I went to live with my mother which caused a problem when I wanted my sister to take my daughter...my mother did not agree...she claimed my daughter's custody...she did not give a chance...I did not think she could look after my daughter well...she is too strict...she cannot read or write...I really wanted my sister to have her because she is a teacher...she is civilized...I admire the way she looks after her own children...my daughter also enjoyed her cousins' company...(Chiedza, female aged 35).

Chiedza further discussed what she thought were the reasons why her mother wanted to stay with her daughter in ways which reflect the substitute carers' material aspirations as illustrated below:

...She [mother] had friends who had children who were here...I think they used to show off to her...she used to talk highly of them...how they were living luxuriously...the suits and hats sent to them by their children...how they dressed like the Queen...you name it...She put so much pressure for me to come over here...she anticipated to get such things...and crafted to stay with my daughter...maybe I might be wrong...but her demands confirm it...(Chiedza, female aged 35).

While children as young as four and five year olds might not be expected to express their preferences and choices regarding their own care or their choice of kin relationships, the above narratives illustrate that the decisions taken had nothing to do with the children's welfare. Parents were rendered powerless to leave children under the care of those relatives they believed would provide children with better care during their absence. These scenarios together appear to challenge "the sacred value of children by routinely pricing their lives" (Zelizer, 1994:177).

Another complex situation which demonstrates the parent's powerless position and is closely related to the ones presented above is the case of Farai who left his one year old son in the care of his wife, but under the overall guardianship of his parents. In his effort to describe the caring relationships involved and who exactly his son's carer was, Farai explained the set up as follows:

I left my son under my wife's care...but as I have explained to you, my wife was under my parents' custody...I know my mother was overall in charge of them...my wife had suggested that it would be better for her to go to her parents' place since I was leaving...my mother objected this...she said we were not divorcing...otherwise if my wife really wanted to move away from them she was supposed to leave the child with them...he is their grandson, and culturally both my wife and son were supposed to stay with them...(Farai, female aged 37).

When asked about his personal view with regards to his mother's position, Farai explained that:

I think it had a lot to do with money...things were getting hard at home when I left...I am the first born in the family...generally my parents expected me to help...since I was coming here where everyone thinks there are pounds

which can be picked from everywhere once you set your feet on British land...it is obvious they expected to get a share...and one possible way of ensuring an income was for them to continue fostering my family...there was no way I would send money to my wife who lived with them and forget to give them something...(Farai, male aged 37).

Drawing from the interview narratives presented above, it is clear that the migrant parents' position of being powerless to exercise self-autonomy was reinforced throughout the processes of negotiating childcare arrangements as relatives increasingly fought over children's custody, not only because of their 'sentimental value', but mainly due to the perceived identity of being "sources of income" (Zelizer, 1994: 206) to the substitute carer. In her discussion of the adoption processes of children in America especially in the nineteenth century, Zelizer observes scenarios where destitute and homeless children were adopted for their labour and the cash bonus that substitute carers could possibly get. These scenarios, as Zelizer argues symbolize some of the processes by which the 'sacred' and 'sentimental value' of children was transgressed. On making this argument, Zelizer stresses the importance of taking children only when driven by an interest in the children's lives, rather than for selfish and personal reasons. "If this interest is not felt" Zelizer warns, "the child has not found a home in the true sense of the word" (Zelizer, 1994:176). When viewed from this perspective, the lives of many of my interviewees' children seem to be a cause for concern.

Also, among my interviewees were cases where a husband or wife was migrating leaving the other spouse behind. In such cases, children were automatically left under the care of their mother or father as the following narratives illustrate:

I left the children with my wife...I did not even think about making any plans for the children...she was their mother and it was just ideal...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

Similarly, Simba viewed that:

I left my two daughters [aged, 15 and 17] with their mother...although we were divorced she was still alive and she was capable of taking care of them...I saw no need to ask anyone else to take care of the children...(Simba, male aged 52).

Some of my women interviewees expressed the views that leaving children with husbands/partners was a shared family decision:

My husband agreed to take care of our son...we were living with his mother and sister, so they were going to help him during my absence...(Natsai, female aged 29).

When my husband allowed me to go he also agreed to stay with the children as we saw this as a temporary measure...the plan was for them to join me as soon as possible.. 'Once I get to the UK', I assured my husband, 'the first thing that I will do is to make arrangements for you and the kids to join me'...also there was a maid whom I believe was good with the children...we had lived with her for a long time [over 3 years]...she knew the system of the home very well...(Rute, female aged 49).

It is interesting, however, to note that male migrants considered their childcare arrangements as simply 'leaving children with wife or their mother', while most women explained that they were either 'allowed' or their husbands 'agreed' to stay

with the children, as some of the illustrations demonstrate, which perhaps explain issues of gender roles and power relations. Another issue worthy of noting relates to the observation that, in situations where women stated that husbands agreed to stay with the children, the appropriateness of this arrangement was emphasised by giving reference to the presence of other females in the households especially, maids. This concurs with D'emilio et al's observations that "when the man emigrates, he generally leaves behind a household whose reproduction is guaranteed...when a woman migrates, she is profoundly insecure because she leaves behind her family and the traditional reproductive role expected from her" (Demilio et al , 2007:8). As D'emilio et al further argue, this state of affairs signifies "rigid division of responsibilities by gender and society's different expectations from women and men" (D'emilio et al, 2007:8). Therefore to lessen the anxiety, in most cases, women prefer to leave their children in the company of other women, as this seems to guarantee some form of children's protection during their absence (D'emillio et al, 2007). Tendai's narrative clearly demonstrates this:

I was a married woman and I think I had a wonderful husband... so I never thought of taking the children anywhere – it was just normal to leave the kids in the house as my husband had agreed to continue looking after them...it was easy for me to leave them with their father and we were all happy with this arrangement... Also, we had a very good maid who was a cousin sister to me. She was part of the family...I was comfortable that things were going to work well because there was a woman in the house...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Moreover, in situations where a woman's migration was not approved by the husband or other family members, especially the husband's relatives, the decision to leave children with the husband was not taken on a level ground. Chenai's case suggests that there were no meaningful negotiations as the decision reflects the will of only one party:

...as I said to you previously, I did not get the chance to make alternative child care arrangements, due to family tensions... my husband stayed with the children...as you know in our culture, children are said to belong to a man... my husband's sisters just declared that since I had taken the decision to migrate against their will... I had no right to take the children anywhere...they [husband's sisters] were going to help him [husband] with the kids, I think...If all was well I would have wanted my mother to come to my place to stay and help with the children during my absence...I did not trust his [husband] sisters that much...but this was not permitted...(Chenai, female aged 45).

The above narrative demonstrates another facet of power relation dynamics in patriarchal Shona families. Hollenman, (1952), Weinrich, (1967) Francis-Chizororo et al, (1998) and Mester, (2008) are among those who discuss the roles mother-in-laws (*vamwene*) and aunts (husband's sister or *vatete*) play in family decision-making among the Shona people. They observe that in Shona culture a husband's sister (*vatete*) often plays an authoritative role within their natal families and in more traditional societies they even take a more patriarchal viewpoint towards their brothers' wives. Increasingly, *vatete* play a significant role at many stages in a brother's marriage starting with approving the marriage itself, and can go as far as influencing reproductive decisions. Increasingly, *vatete* is also frequently called to settle marital disputes at different stages in their brothers' marriages. In some cases, *vatete* has more authority over brothers' wives than the husbands themselves as she is often the one who gives the final word during family decision making processes. Thus, in situations where married women are looked down upon as the case of Chenai demonstrates, the decision to leave her five children with her husband was an imposed one, which also raises the question whether children's protection and well-being were really guaranteed during the mother's absence.

My interview data also reveal circumstances where migrants were forced to leave their children with non-relatives.

4.3.2 Leaving Children with Non-relatives: Divergence from the Traditional Norm?

Traditional practices of child fostering seemed to have been violated in cases where migrant parents were forced by their circumstances to leave children with maids instead of immediate relatives. This is clear in the case of Mary who said she was a single parent. Mary said she left her 3 children (daughter aged 12 and two sons aged 10 and 5) with a maid, and explained that this decision was arrived at, not because she had no immediate relatives who were willing to take her children, but was influenced by her lack of trust, especially in her own mother. Moreover, Mary's decision also reflects her aspirations for a good future for her children as illustrated by the narrative below:

When I came over I left my children with a maid in the suburb of [town] where I was renting a flat. Although my mother wanted to have them...I did not trust her...I did not think this was the best option for them [children]...They used to go to a very good school so I did not want to disturb their education since my parents live in the rural area. I wanted to give them a good future which I personally was deprived of... The arrangement was I would send money to a friend who would buy them food, pay rent and pay the maid and do other errands for them whenever there was need to do so...my children were fine with this...it was fine with my friend...(Mary, female aged 37).

Like in other situations discussed earlier, Mary's decision did not go unchallenged – her mother strongly contested this decision as she vowed that as a grandmother she had the right to foster the children. Indeed, in cultural terms, it is considered the

ideal for grandparents to foster grandchildren. Also other relatives including her young sister and sister-in-law wanted to have the children:

My mother was very upset by such a decision...it was odd to her that I trusted a maid more than her...she tried all she could but I did not let her have them before I left...also my young sister wanted to have my children...but I did not think that her place was the best for my children especially my 12 year old daughter...I did not trust her husband...I feared a situation where her husband could possibly rape my daughter...I myself was raped at the age of 12 and it affected my life... I still live with the consequences... and I did not want the same to happen to my daughter...Both my mother and sister were very disappointed...they said 'you want outsiders to enjoy your money not us...' they refused to accompany me to the airport when I left...My sister-in-law as well disagreed with this decision...(Mary, female aged 37).

Beside the case of Mary, there are other situations which reinforce the fact that single parents including widowed mothers had few available options. In one such case, leaving children with non-relatives was a decision taken against the backdrop that the people whom the migrant parent considered as immediate relatives were all deceased. This was in the situation of Sukai who left her 9 year old son with the maid and whose explanation suggests that this decision was taken under the very few available options:

All my immediate relatives were dead, so was my husband... and in-laws...leaving my son with the maid was a temporary measure since one of my friends had promised that she was going to take him within two months...I had to make arrangements of how I was going to pay her for this service...(Sukai, female aged 39).

The situations of both Mary and Sukai resonate with Zelizer's analysis of the practice of paid parenting which was one of methods which was increasingly employed in American societies in the 1930s as a way of meeting temporary care for dependent children. As these discussions suggest, this mechanism of caring for children constructed foster mothers as 'employees' which Zelizer argues to mean that mothering was transformed into a 'marketable job'. However, the tension here is that "if the foster parent is an employee, then the child can view his stay in the foster home as a business transaction, [and] himself as a source of income" (Zelizer, 1994:206). Clearly such caring relationships are bound to be problematic in the case when the parent fails to pay the substitute carer as expected, which in consequence can comprise the life of the fostered child. Some of the problems related to these issues are discussed in chapters six and seven of this study.

Moreover, when I asked Sukai whether she did not have any other blood relatives or even close fictive kin, it emerged that she had a brother and sister-in-law whom she described as follows:

I had a brother, in fact he was my only brother, and he only died last year... But his wife was not the kind of person who could look after someone's child...she is just a cruel and selfish person... because of this we were not close at all...(Sukai, female aged 39).

Again, like in other situations, Sukai had a story to tell regarding the conflict she had with her brother over her son's custody:

...It became a real issue, which in African terms is a serious one as you know. My brother demanded to know why I chose to give my son's custody to someone who was not my relative while he, my only blood relative, was

still surviving. My brother was very angry about this...he could not imagine a stranger getting money from me while he was struggling to make ends meet... To him it was a disgrace to have my child cared for by a stranger while he was there...but I just told him that I had made this decision as the mother of the child and I am allowed to decide what I believe to be the best for my son...(Sukai, female aged 39).

During one of the subsequent interviews, Sukai also recollected episodes of horrific torture as perpetrated by her late husband's family. Specifically, Sukai dwelled on her sufferings at the hand of her brother in-law, (husband's brother) who routinely hounded her over her son's custody in ways which suggest the vulnerabilities of widows in Zimbabwe's patriarchal society:

...when my husband died his brother made me suffer...after I refused to be inherited by one of his brothers they made claims that I had killed my husband... I was taken from one witch doctor to another...I was forced to drink bitter herbs under the claims that I needed to be tortured so as to confess...his brother then took away all the property we had...he also wanted to take my son, but I stood my ground...when I told him I was coming here...he tried again to have him but I refused... (Sukai, female aged 39).

The experiences related above echo what Osirim, (2001) characterizes as some of the ways in which Zimbabwean men exert control over women which is a typical reminder of the curse of gender inequality in patriarchal societies. In particular, Osirim, (2001) observes that property grabbing by male relatives of a deceased man is among other forms of economic violence against women which are even becoming rife and intense in the midst of the economic and political crises as many men find their masculinities challenged when they fail to fulfil their gender roles of providing for their families. Specifically, subjection of widows to the tradition of wife

inheritance by a male relative of the late husband is also a common phenomenon. In the worst cases women who refuse to participate in the arrangement end up having their children taken away from them. In other cases women increasingly face destitution after the death of their husbands due to their minority status (see, Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003). Thus, culturally, Sukai was not expected to deny her late husband's relatives custody of her son when they demanded to have him.

The parents' powerlessness to ensure that children would be safely protected during their absence was also reinforced during my discussions with a single parent who had many children. This was the case of Noma who was separated from her husband. The way she described her situation suggests that she made every attempt to look for a suitable surrogate carer for her five children aged, 7,10,13,15 and 17 but to no avail. Eventually, her children were separated as her ex-husband could only take two of the younger children aged 7 and 10 while the other three children, aged 13, 15 and 17 were eventually left to live on their own. When asked how she came to settle for this decision Noma explained the complexity of the situation as follows:

It was not a choice actually...I could not find anyone who was willing to foster my 5 children... I have sisters, but none of them wanted to stay with my children as they had their own families to run... I had no close friend who wanted to commit themselves to take 5 children into their homes...My husband's sister had offered but she is a prostitute...she is very unreliable...and for the safety and security of the children I did not think she was the right person to stay with them...My husband was also living with another woman...and eventually offered to take two of the younger children as he said the bigger ones were mature enough to look after themselves... Also I did not think it was going to take me long to bring the children over...So I thought they would cope like that for few months before coming over here... (Noma, female aged 49).

Similar childcare arrangements were also made in situations where the parent's migration was not properly planned, especially in those cases where both parents were forced to leave home overnight owing to fear of possible torture or persecution. Under such circumstances parents found it almost impossible to put in place proper childcare arrangements, as the case of Shami illustrates:

I did not have any time to make any child care arrangements...my four children (aged, 17, 15, 12, 12) were all in boarding school...when I was threatened by war-veterans [as discussed in Chapter 3] I left for South Africa, my husband left for here...I had to phone the school from SA...I explained our situation to the head teacher... I also phoned different relatives...my brother then offered to collect the children from school and take them to my mother's place for holidays...the arrangement was that they would stay with my mother during holidays...and spend their term time in school...(Shami, female aged 46).

Both the situations of Noma and Shami can be taken as causes for concern especially when one considers the dangers of leaving children unprotected in a country where child abuse has become rife. Also such situations are possible causes for migrant parents' emotional distress in exile once the thought of the children's possible abuse comes to mind.

Broadly, the accounts provided in this chapter allow for assumptions to be made that fostering children of a migrant in Zimbabwe appears to have an in-built support system as the children's mere presence seem to guarantee a regular income for foster parents and their households. What this further suggests is the fact that children left at home in the current economic climate of Zimbabwe are frequently taken as carrying a monetary value and are increasingly treated as 'meal-tickets'. The person entrusted with a migrant's children is guaranteed remittance which can

be easily diverted towards personal survival. When contrasted with the original traditional fosterage idea, the present scenario reflects a reversal of roles, as in the past children were habitually fostered to more affluent relatives as discussed earlier in this section. The current situation has seen those considered more prosperous (both in genuine terms and merely in the sense of going abroad), increasingly leaving children in the care of the less privileged relatives.

A critical question relates to the consequences of constructing 'children as sources of income' (Zelizer, 1994). Given that in most cases, substitute carers took in migrants' children due to the perceived material and monetary incentives they offer, what would happen to the children in the event that their parents failed to remit to the surrogate carers' expectations? The extent to which remittance would be used towards the well-being of the children left behind remains a mystery. Some of these issues form the central issues of the migrant parents' concerns as discussed in chapters six, seven and eight of this study.

Conclusion

Arranging to leave home is a process which is full of many challenges as some of the aspirations may not be fulfilled especially the desire to migrate with children due to various and often complex factors. For the Zimbabwean migrants whose decisions to migrate were shaped by extreme poverty and severe hardships, lack of financial resources emerged as one of the major factors which hindered these migrants from migrating with their children. All the migrant parents I interviewed saw the UK as an attractive destination, perhaps due to links with other Zimbabwean migrants already living in the UK and also as influenced by individuals' perceptions of the UK. In some cases, the channels of migration and visa conditions prevented parents from migrating with children, while in other cases kith and kin influenced the decision to leave children behind.

Moreover, the processes of making childcare arrangements involved complicated negotiations with relatives and family members. As the narratives provided have tried to demonstrate, most of my interviewees left their children in the care of family members and friends. However, there are also few cases where children were fostered to non-relatives like maids and in what can be seen as the worst situations, children were left without proper childcare arrangements in place. Notwithstanding that most of my interviewees' approach in selecting carers for children reflects middle class perceptions of what childhood should be, in some cases, due to pressure from spouses and other relatives, migrant parents were coerced to entrust their children's lives in the hands of surrogate carers who were not their first preference. These processes reinforced the powerlessness of the migrant parents to ensure their children's protection and well-being.

In a country hard hit by poverty and other social tumults, extended family structures appear to have changed significantly both in form and character, which makes it possible to argue that the traditional belief of children being everyone's responsibility seems to only echo true in policy documents as individualism seems to have become a significant feature in Zimbabwean communities. Also, as some of the narratives have tried to demonstrate, fostering a migrant's children now seems to have an in-built support system as evidenced by the migrant parents' experiences of relatives fighting to take possession of their children because of the economic benefit attached to them. This also serves to demonstrate issues of family relations, gender relations and power dynamics in different family set ups. All these situations raise questions of children's protection and well-being during the parent's absence. Whilst there seemed to be an indication among my interviewees that they were not satisfied with some of the childcare arrangements they left in place, especially in cases where parents were forced by circumstances beyond their control to settle for certain childcare arrangements against their will, in almost all the cases, leaving children behind was described as a temporary measure as migrant parents expressed high hopes for family re-unification once they arrived in the UK.

The next chapter offers a discussion on the migrant parents' arrival in the UK.

Chapter 5: Arrival in the UK: Zimbabwean Migrant Parents' Encounter with a Faceless Immigration and Asylum System

Introduction

This chapter sets out to discuss the arrival of Zimbabwean migrant parents in the UK. It is structured as follows: In light of the fact that most of the migrant parents I interviewed made asylum claims, but at different stages of their stay in the UK, in the first section I present a brief discussion on the UK asylum policy. In particular, are the changes that have been introduced to asylum legislation by the successive UK governments as evidenced by the existence of six major asylum policies between 1993 and 2006. This discussion sets the context to explore much broader issues relating to the knowledge and information that the Zimbabwean migrant parents had regarding asylum application processes in the UK prior to their arrival. This further helps to capture the migrant parents' lived experiences of the realities of the UK immigration and asylum systems. The second section looks at the experiences of the migrant parents who applied for asylum at the port of entry whom others perceive as 'spontaneous/acute refugees' (Day and White, 2001). The third section delves into the experiences of those migrant parents who made their asylum applications from within the UK, after gaining entry either as visitors, students, or simply, 'in-country' asylum applicants (Day and White, 2001). Within these discussions, I intend to explicitly spell out the processes through which my interviewees came to be aware of their rightlessness in terms of legally belonging and/or being reunited with children quickly, as they had anticipated when they left them behind. I will also discuss and describe the migrant parents' lived experiences of suffering as they moved through the different stages of the asylum processes. These discussions draw useful insights from Goffman's (1961) analysis of the

institutionalized, especially how the self is mortified through subjection to rigid admission procedures.

5.1 Asylum Legislation in the UK from the 1990s

The UK has a long history of hosting refugees under terms set by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its subsequent Protocol of 1967 ratified in 1954 and 1968 respectively (Ward, 2006). Immigration control concerns began to appear on the commonwealth agenda as early as 1962 as evidenced by the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigrant Act 1962. Other subsequent Immigration Acts introduced and extended restrictive border control measures meant to deter immigrants from entering the UK and/or accessing British citizenship. Nevertheless, refugees' concerns in the UK continued to be managed within the broader spectrum of the immigration policy until the 1990s (see Clayton, 2010). The end of the 1980s saw an increase in the number of people seeking asylum in the UK¹⁶, which provoked the British government along with other European governments to respond to the perceived asylum influx by adopting an asylum policy which gained popularity among successive British governments.

In the UK, asylum reforms focused primarily on deterring people from gaining entry through rigid border control measures, tightening asylum determination procedures and curtailing asylum seekers' rights to welfare support and entitlement (Crawley, 2010, Clayton, 2010). The first asylum policy to be incorporated by the Conservative government into the British domestic policy legislation was the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 whose provisions explicitly sought to limit the welfare

¹⁶ Bloch, (2000) observes that in 1989 the average number of asylum seekers had increased from 4000 to almost 11,640, reaching a peak in 1991 where about 44,840 asylum applications were lodged in Britain.

rights and accommodation entitlements of asylum seekers, as well as initiating other security measures like obligatory fingerprinting of asylum seekers. Noticeably, immigration officials were granted the power to detain asylum seekers during the asylum determination period (Clayton, 2010).

In 1996, the same government also enacted the Asylum and Immigration Act, which, as an extension to the Immigration Appeal Act 1993, further tightened access to housing and welfare support by individuals seeking asylum. The rights to housing and welfare benefits were restricted to those individuals whose asylum applications were made at the port of entry while in the country applicants were rendered ineligible; assuming that applicants who made asylum claims at the port of entry were 'genuine', while in-country applicants were perceived as 'bogus' (Bloch, 2000a, Clements, 2007). These views, as some have suggested neglect consideration of people's circumstances and lived experiences (see, Refugee Council, 1996). The 1996 Act also curtailed asylum seekers' rights to employment as the right to work was extended to only those individuals who had waited for a maximum period of six months for an asylum claim to be settled. The Act also introduced a 'white list' of safe countries, and individuals from countries considered to be safe were deemed not to be genuine asylum seekers. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapter six of this study.

New Labour came into power in 1997, and consolidated the Asylum policy trend set by its predecessor. Indeed, the weight of asylum reform found its full impact under New Labour as evidenced by the hostility of the current asylum practices. In 1999, the Labour government introduced the Immigration and Asylum Act, which totally removed asylum seekers from the mainstream social security system, thereby widening the gap between social rights enjoyed by British citizens and those

granted/afforded to citizens of non European Economic Area (Clayton, 2010). Instead, the welfare concerns of asylum seekers became the responsibility of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), which facilitated welfare support for eligible asylum seekers only through a voucher system. Those eligible for housing were subjected to a compulsory dispersal system which saw individuals being dispersed to different parts of the country on a no-choice basis (see, Refugee Council, 1999). This Act also introduced the provision of 'hard case' support to failed asylum seekers who could not go back home due to circumstances beyond their control. Yet on the other hand, asylum claims could be certified as 'manifestly unfounded' and the right to appeal against such a decision was restricted, as individuals could only appeal after they had left the country (Clements, 2007).

With the adoption of the National Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, more stringent asylum procedures were put in place with the most controversial clause being Section 55 which stipulated that asylum seekers could only be eligible for NASS support provided that they apply for asylum 'as soon as reasonably practicable' after arrival in the UK (Refugee Council, 2002). Under the same 2002 legislation, the Home Secretary was granted the power to have NASS support withdrawn from in-country applicants who could not provide a clear and detailed account of how they gained entry into the UK, and/or those who failed to give adequate information on how they were meeting their survival needs since the time of arrival. The Home Secretary also had the power to withdraw or deny NASS support from asylum seekers who fail to co-operate with authorities where further enquiries are deemed necessary. The Act also initiated other strict control measures on asylum seekers such as regular reporting to a police station or immigration centre, which depending on the situation, could be done daily, weekly or monthly. Failure to comply could lead to detention or/and loss of rights to welfare support. Such a control measure

was unique to asylum seekers as it did not apply to other groups of migrants entering the UK. Some have therefore argued that since the eleventh of September 2001 attacks in the USA, asylum legislation in the UK has to a large extent been prompted by the fear of threats of terrorism. The perceived connection between terrorism and asylum has also seen a change in the public's attitude towards asylum seekers which has become more hostile (Clements, 2007).

The subsequent Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004 introduced withdrawal of welfare support from families whose asylum claim had failed perhaps as a way of encouraging them to return voluntarily (Refugee, Council, 2004). Sections 1 to 5 of this Act also introduced new offences for those who enter the UK with forged immigration documents, or without a passport, or those who destroy travel documents. Some (for example Clements, 2007) have therefore argued that the 2004 Act was mainly directed towards asylum seekers who lodged what the government believed to be groundless appeals with the aim of delaying removals whereas those without travel documents were supposed to have lodged baseless asylum claims. However,

...the thinking behind the latter...may well have been terrorist-fear related, because the destruction of documents might lead to a suspicion, whether grounded in reality or not, that those responsible were acting in a manner incompatible with security measures in the UK and were trying to hide something in their background which the immigration authorities ought to know about (Clements, 2007:11).

Therefore the general perception in the UK increasingly became that asylum seekers pose a threat to national security, which subsequently saw asylum issues

becoming a key electoral campaigning tool for successive UK governments (Bloch and Schuster, 2002).

The Immigration, Nationality and Asylum Act 2006 became the fourth piece of asylum and immigration legislation enacted by the Labour government since it came to power. This legislation put more restrictions on illegal working by subjecting both the employers and illegal employees to heavy penalties. Clause 43 of the Act extended the provision of 'hard case' support for failed asylum seekers who were unable to go back to their home countries due to either a medical situation or fear of possible persecution. While individuals in this situation were entitled to welfare support provided in voucher form, they were firstly required to sign a statement that they were willing to return home voluntarily.

Asylum concerns also featured in other legislation including the UK Border Act 2007, Immigration and Citizenship Bill 2008 and the Border, Citizenship and Immigration Bill 2009. In addition to curtailing border entry rights, these policies have also given immigration officials increased powers of arrest and detention (Clayton, 2010).

Overall, this flood of asylum policies represents the strict measures that the successive British governments have taken over the years in an effort to deter and curtail asylum seekers. However, these policies also suggest that asylum legislation has been increasingly premised on suspicion and fear, and the media has played a major role in instigating a moral panic around asylum seekers in ways which increased fear and mistrust among both the general public and politicians (see Clayton, 2010). This is the policy context into which my interviewees migrated.

5.2 The UK Asylum Application Process

The UK asylum process involves lodging a claim either at the port of entry or in-country. Individuals who claim asylum at the port of entry are usually given a screening interview immediately in order to establish their identity, nationality, travel routes as well as travel documents used. They are also subjected to other screening procedures such as fingerprinting and photographing. In the case of in-country asylum applications, claimants are required to lodge asylum claims in person at the Asylum Screening Unit of the Home Office either in Croydon or Liverpool, where they are also required to undergo screening procedures. Following the screening exercise, both in country and port asylum claimants are given an Asylum Registration Card (ARC) which bears their picture and other personal details including their name, date of birth and nationality. Depending on the situation, some applicants are detained at this stage, particularly where the Home Office decides that a case can be fast-tracked either because the claim is considered late or opportunistic¹⁷ or where an applicant's country of origin is classified as 'safe' or where it is believed that an asylum claim should have been launched in a 'third safe country'¹⁸.

At this stage, those applicants who are not subject to detention are given Temporary Admission (TA) which allows them to remain in the UK while their application is being determined. TA is subject to certain conditions including that applicants should reside at a particular address as well as being expected to report to a designated immigration centre or police station at specified intervals (see ICAR, 2006).

¹⁷ An asylum claim can be considered late and opportunistic if it is made after an individual's leave to remain has expired or following a Home Office's refusal of an application for leave to remain.

¹⁸ As discussed in section 5.1 the introduction of the concept of a 'safe third country' implies that some asylum seekers can be detained on the basis that they should have claimed asylum in the first European country they reach or on the basis that their countries of origin are considered safe.

Following temporary admission, an applicant is required to write down a formal asylum statement on a 'Statement of Evidence Form' (SEF) clearly outlining their reasons for fleeing their country of origin including why they require protection. This can be supported by any evidence or supporting documents that the applicant might have. The SEF has to be returned to the Home Office within 10 days. The information provided on the SEF serves as the basis for a substantive asylum interview with an immigration officer or a case worker. However, the asylum process has been made very complex over the years by the fact that once an individual has attended the substantive interview, they are required to wait for their claim to be determined which depending on individual cases, can take a short or long time as this entirely depends on the Home Office. Moreover, during the period of waiting, asylum seekers are not entitled to work (unless special permission is granted by the Home Office) or claim mainstream benefits (refer to discussion on asylum legislation). In theory, asylum seekers are entitled to welfare support during the entire period of asylum application although in practice, some asylum seekers routinely find themselves declared ineligible to welfare support especially where the Home Office feels that a claim has not been lodged on time (see discussion on Asylum legislation).

The outcome of an asylum claim is determined by case workers/immigration officers. The assessment process takes into account the information provided by applicants on the (SEF), and that gathered during a substantive interview as well as any other supporting evidence/documents which the applicant would have provided. Furthermore, the credibility of an asylum claim is also checked against the applicant's country of origin guidance (see ICAR, 2006, Clayton, 2010).

An initial asylum claim has at least three possible outcomes. First, successful applicants are granted refugee status, which previously (until the 30th August, 2005) was granted as indefinite leave to remain, but has currently been reduced to 5 years limited leave to remain. Refugees have full rights to family reunion and can make arrangements for their dependents¹⁹ to join them in the UK once the right to remain has been granted. Refugees are also eligible to claim mainstream benefits in the UK (see ICAR, 2006).

Second, in some cases, asylum applicants are granted an alternative form of protection in the form of Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave to remain (DL), and this normally happens where the Home Office feels that an applicant does not qualify for refugee status, while at the same time being convinced that there is a possibility for such individuals to face a serious risk to life if returned to the country of origin. Although people who are granted this kind of stay might have access to mainstream benefits, they have no automatic right to family reunion until the time they are granted indefinite leave to remain (Clayton, 2010).

Third, not all asylum claimants are successful. Increasingly, the Home Office rejects asylum claims for various reasons. Depending on the reasons for refusal, some asylum seekers are granted an in-country right of appeal to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) (formally Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA)) following a negative asylum decision. Whereas in other cases, claimants are denied in-country right of appeal meaning that they can only appeal against the Home Office's refusal decision after they have left the UK. This is usually the case in the event that a case has been certified by the Home Office as 'manifestly unfounded' or where an

¹⁹ Children can only join their parents in the UK provided they are 18 years and below.

applicant has been classified as a third country case or where an earlier right of appeal has been missed (see ICAR, 2006, Clayton, 2010).

Asylum seekers with an in-country right of appeal are expected to make their appeal applications to the AIT within 10 days from the date of refusal and 5 days if they are detained (ICAR, 2006). The appeal hearings are usually attended by the appellant, their legal representative and the respondent, who is always a representative from the Home Office. Following the hearing, the immigration judge will be expected to pass an independent decision in writing (commonly known as a determination) either in the appellant's or Home Office's favour, which either part can appeal against by applying to have the matter reconsidered by a senior immigration judge. In the case that the senior immigration judge's decision is also deemed unsatisfactory by either part, the matter can be taken up further to be considered by higher judicial boards in the following order: initially a High Court, followed by the Court of Appeal and then the House of Lords.

While at this point, asylum seekers who would have exhausted their statutory rights of appeal usually become liable to deportation and can even be detained in removal centres in preparation for deportation, there still remains an opportunity for those who feel that their cases have not been dealt with in a fair manner to apply to the Administrative Court for a judicial review. A judicial review is particularly concerned about the process of asylum determination as opposed to the actual asylum outcome. As such, a judicial review can be moved to consider refused cases including those which the Home Office would have certified as 'manifestly unfounded' where applicants are denied an in-country right of appeal. In the same manner, the Home Office also has the right to move a judicial review where it feels that its decision has been unfairly challenged (see ICAR, 2006).

As has been shown, the UK asylum application process is not a straightforward or linear process. Increasingly, applicants find themselves caught up in a long asylum determination process, meaning that, in the case of migrants who would have left their children behind, the period of separation from them can become prolonged.

The sections that follow offer discussions on the arrival of the Zimbabwean migrant parents who sought asylum between 2000 and 2009, exploring their engagement with the UK immigration and asylum processes. I will start by discussing the experiences of those migrants whose asylum claims were lodged at the port of entry.

5.3 Experiences of Migrant Parents who Claimed Asylum at the Port of Entry

Zimbabwean migrant parents who lodged their asylum claims at the port of entry (6) consisted of individuals who left Zimbabwe before it was classified as a visa nation (effectively from the beginning of 2003) and those who came under the visa restriction immigration policy, from 2003 onwards. Interviewees who came to the UK before the introduction of visas, especially those who lodged their asylum applications on arrival collectively viewed that asylum systems were very unfriendly given the hostility of immigration officers during screening interviews. Most of my interviewees said they did not anticipate any difficulties when they left home and had thought they would be granted refugee status, if possible, at the port of entry. Overall, the experiences of being detained were described as 'dehumanizing' and led many to suggest that the UK asylum process is unsympathetic. Threaded through all the interviews were recollections of traumatic experiences which show individuals' experiences of suffering, loss of control and a collapse of expectations.

In general, most of the migrant parents' preconceptions of the UK were contradicted by the actual encounter with the system itself on arrival.

5. 4 Migrant Parents' Initial Encounter with the Asylum System

Discussions which focused on migrants' arrival and engagement with the asylum system generated different views regarding asylum seeking, specifically what people knew or expected. Interestingly, even those migrants who were sure that they were coming to the UK to seek asylum expressed views which suggest that they did not know exactly what asylum entailed. These issues will be explored below. At the same time, I want to draw attention to parallels between my interviewees' experiences as asylum claimants and those of inmates of total institutions as described by Goffman (1961), especially the processes through which the inmates' self was compromised through institutions' admission procedures. Though the UK asylum systems and total institutions are very different they have similar effects on the self of the individuals who engage themselves with them. With regards to the institutionalized, Goffman, (1961) observes that the transition process from a 'person' to a 'patient' involves very specific 'admission procedures', including photographing, fingerprinting, assigning numbers and searching, to name but a few. Goffman argues that the transition process poses a threat to the inmate's self as it seems to be tailor-made to satisfy the institution's goals rather than personal goals. Thus, Goffman characterizes admission procedures as 'taking off' and 'taking on', processes which in some situations entails a dispossession of one's property. In this sense property is not only limited to physical possessions but involved losing one's identity which, of course, signifies a great curtailment of the self. In the words of Goffman:

admission procedures might better be called 'trimming' or 'programming' because in this being squared away the new arrival allows himself to be shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations (Goffman, 1961:26).

As I discuss migrants' experiences of seeking asylum, my intention is to reveal how these processes also reduced individuals into objects that can be fed into administration machinery, 'trimming' claimants by taking away their self-autonomy. Throughout these discussions, I also intend to demonstrate the contradictions between my interviewees' expectations and their actual lived experiences which seem to suggest the rigidity and inhumanity of the asylum systems.

I will start by discussing the case of Jonasi, one migrant who said he was disappointed by the experiences of going through asylum procedures and explained what he thought asylum was on leaving home:

To me asylum was a matter of reiterating one's experiences...I did not know that it could be taken as a mere claim...which needed to be proven true by someone else...and supporting evidence...when I suffered in the hands of war veterans, no video or photos were taken...It's something I experienced on my own...this is the truth about my life...but they expected me to provide evidence... my claim was then put on paper for further verification...I had photos, fingerprints and security checks taken...from there I was completely out of control of my life ...I realized people had lied to me that my case was straightforward...no consideration was taken that I was an educated person who had even left his family home, no concern was put on the sacrifice of leaving my son behind...all was gone...this was the beginning of an on-going battle...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

Interviewees, who had visited the UK before on other business, said they had a general knowledge of the UK immigration processes, and as such, they did not anticipate asylum seeking practices and procedures to be very different from other normal immigration verification procedures. These individuals also said their assumptions were that having a good reputation of being in the UK previously would enhance their chances of securing refugee status:

... I was familiar with the UK immigration system...I had attended cricket events in the UK on a number of occasions...I never had any problems with the immigration system...I had a good record of coming into the country and leaving on time...I had never overstayed a visa...I had no criminal record...also as a renowned professional I thought they would just take my case as genuine...I did not anticipate any problems...yeah, I approached the system in a calm and confident state as usual...but this time because I had come as an asylum seeker, the immigration did not seem to be the one I had dealt with before...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

As Nyasha further reflected on his experiences of arrival, he commented on the way asylum seekers are treated in comparison to other groups of migrants, suggesting that the UK Immigration and asylum system has double standards. In actual fact, Nyasha's lived experiences demonstrate what others (for example Zetter, 2007) see as the UK government's bureaucratic processes of categorizing migrants in its bid to distinguish between asylum seekers and so-called economic migrants:

The amazing thing is that although I was the same person...I was treated differently this time...it was because of the asylum tag I think...they wanted to know more about me because I was an asylum seeker... not only why I was fleeing ...but the finest details...why I thought I was in danger...why I used my business visa...yeah, it was an intense interview...more than a job interview I would say...it was more of a criminal investigation process, I

should think so...they needed evidence...no recognition of my previous record...no acknowledgment of the fact that I had properties at home...no recognition of social status...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

It is widely believed that Britain has a proven track-record of providing sanctuary to the persecuted (see Bloch, 2000a, Clayton, 2010), which is a perception that was shared by some of my interviewees. Perceptions of the UK as a more tolerant and democratic country were prominent, especially among women escaping both domestic and countrywide violence and torture. Yet, these perceptions were discussed in contrast to individuals' lived experiences of dealing with the actual asylum processes:

...I got the shock of my life – my image of the UK was completely different...(Chenai, female aged 45).

...When you hear about the UK from home, the general picture is that of a place where the human rights of every human being are valued...yet this is not true...from the onset I was treated less than human...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

My interviewees described becoming increasingly conscious of the UK's intolerance of foreigners throughout their arrival experiences, something they had not anticipated:

...Through rumours...I had gathered that asylum seeking was just a matter of telling the British why I was running away from Zimbabwe... I did not expect what I faced here...I did not expect to argue my case... I found myself expected to defend whatever I was saying especially after mentioning that my work was part of the government initiated programmes... Also I

could not express myself clearly in English... I did not like the interpreter...He did not seem to say things the way I wanted...I wanted to give first hand information...(Chenai, female aged 45).

The above narrative also illustrates the predicament of asylum seekers with little English who frequently face a language barrier as a constraint to representing their views during asylum seeking processes (see Refugee Council, 2009). While engaging a translator is a widely acknowledged practice, some (for example Prior, 2008) have noted that this practice can be problematic as misrepresentation of individuals' cases often occur through inaccurate translation. These same commentators further question the extent to which translators can influence the outcome of asylum seekers' cases, owing to increasing claims that judges sometimes rely on translators' opinions. The implication is about the integrity of asylum seekers' cases, implying that such translation practices can allow for cases to be negatively influenced, particularly in situations where a translator happens to belong to a rival cultural and/or tribal group. Relying on the services of a translator can therefore generate anxieties, especially in the case of Chenai who said she did not trust the male translator as she could hear him interpret her story not in exactly the same way she told it.

Further discussions with female migrant parents also led them to discuss some of the traumatic experiences they suffered in Zimbabwe. Some of these experiences have had negative effects on their lives and remained sensitive issues which they found very difficult to discuss with immigration officers, especially male officials (also see Clayton, 2010 who discusses this issue). Some of these women emotionally discussed the insensitivity of immigration officers, citing situations where they were repeatedly asked to relate traumatic experiences suffered at home, during asylum assessment processes:

...when the plane landed...I thought I had escaped from torture...but this was not the case...I found myself faced with a different kind of torture...despite my state I was forced to explain why I came over...I was not ready to tell my story because I was still in a state of shock and fear... I was still confused...I had had many sleepless nights...for two weeks... It was hard to tell someone because it was still haunting me...especially a male...I was questioned about war veterans, their association, ...Zimbabwean political events...these questions were fired at me in variations...It was traumatic to go over these issues again and again...but because of fear of possible deportation...I could not tell them I was not ready...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

In a similar way, Noma explained her experiences as follows:

...from the way my sister had told me I didn't expect to be taken through such a long and tiring procedure ...a lot of questioning and threats of deportation ...it was a nightmare...the whole process was traumatic... it was confusing...he [officer] kept going back and forth asking about war veterans...as if he wanted to prove me wrong...it was hard to explain the torture I suffered in plain language...it meant flashing back...Imagining the situation again...he insisted he wanted to know why I needed protection...yet he did not seem to believe me...I had nothing to support this...I did not know how best to put it across...I wondered if this was what people call racism...(Noma, female aged 49).

It is important to note here that not all migrants professed ignorance of the asylum systems. For example, Rudo said she knew that at some point in the asylum seeking process immigration officials would expect her to discuss why she thought she deserved to be considered as a refugee. However, she also revealed asylum admission processes' hostility and inhumanity as she was among those women who had previously been subjected to torture in Zimbabwe:

Yeah, I applied for asylum at the airport when I arrived...friends had told me about the interviews...I was ready for it, I think...I had the facts why I wanted protection...but the interview environment was too hostile for someone who had already been victimised and traumatized...the threat of deportation was used repeatedly to frighten and suppress me...it reminded me of my helplessness position in Zimbabwe before the war veterans...(Rudo, female aged 39).

In particular, specific issues of gender cultural differences and expectations were discussed by migrants as one area which the UK immigration officials are not sensitive of in their dealings with women asylum seekers. Although the Home Office developed a Gender Guidance in 2004 to orient and alert immigration officials to some of the common forms of human rights abuses that women asylum seekers often suffer in their countries of origin, my interviewees' narratives echo Asylum Aid's (2006) observations that immigration officials increasingly lack full knowledge of women's lived experiences deriving from their social status in societies of emigration. In particular, the manner in which Chenai described her cultural background led her to make claims that cultural issues immensely contributed to her failure to express her views clearly to the male immigration officer who dealt with her asylum claim:

...my major problem was inferiority complex, and cultural values... I come from a cultural setting where I was taught to believe that a woman is not supposed to look a man in the eye... you know, when you have been told again and again that a woman is worthless, you tend to believe it...I had always relied on a man's sympathy... yet the British officials expected me to stand my ground and argue my case as someone with rights,...I had never done this before... I kept looking down...they did not understand why I was

doing that...I think they thought I was not telling the truth...it was unfortunate that the system did not seek to understand my background...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Again, the case of Mutsa who was routinely tortured and abused by her husband who was a war veteran which rendered her unable to get support from the Zimbabwean police officials (as discussed in chapter three) seems a good example to discuss here. Mutsa said that on arrival in the UK, some of these experiences were replicated throughout the asylum seeking processes. She reported that the male immigration officer who interviewed her sounded very authoritarian and domineering which rendered her powerless and hopeless to demonstrate that she deserved to be considered as an authentic refugee. She then commented that:

The system here does not understand the position of women in Zimbabwe...man's cruelty and brutality against women are supported and defended throughout the government hierarchy...after being tortured by my husband I failed to get support...I learnt that when you are victimized by a husband you have nowhere to report...the village head is a male, police system is secured by men, same as most of the MPs, Governors up to the President...a woman does not have any rights...women rights leaders are frequently maimed and killed by the government officials...when we come here we also find the gates and borders guarded by men who have the power to torture victims in another way...they can even send you back to the original torturers...supposing they are in agreement ...the system seems the same worldwide...no route of escape for a woman seeking protection...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

Mutsa further confessed that:

I was afraid of the immigration officers...because of my experiences with male police in Zimbabwe who threatened me... they called me a prostitute...and said I was not worth to be a married woman...because I had reported that I was being abused by my husband...when I came here...again I was not believed...I could not tell my story as it happened...I wished if my mother and neighbours were here to witness to the immigration officers it was true that I suffered...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

As the above illustrations clearly demonstrate, women who suffer traumatic experiences in their country of origin increasingly find it difficult to speak about their experiences to strangers who often happen to be males (see Amnesty International, 2006, Clayton, 2010). While some (see, Prior, 2008) have proposed that it normally takes three to six months of proper counselling for a traumatized asylum seeker to be in a position to talk about their experiences, and that in most cases, the full details of the extreme experiences of suffering and torture increasingly emerge in a therapeutic relationship with counsellors (Amnesty International, 2006) the UK asylum processes suggest a contradiction. Asylum seekers' lived experiences increasingly reveal that traumatized individuals are rarely given the support they deserve; officials have targets to be met, so in most cases, pressure is put on individuals to tell their experiences straight away on arrival, and in most cases under coercion. Thus, for my interviewees who had come to the UK with the hope of getting protection, their engagement with the UK asylum system represents a continuation of a life of suffering and a replication of experiences of powerlessness, as individuals were routinely expected to match and satisfy set criteria by suspicious, disbelieving, adversarial immigration officials.

Indeed, my interviewees were met with a faceless system which appeared to be the opposite of what they anticipated asylum systems to be. Asylum procedures were described as cumbersome, unsympathetic and undesirable, which undermined their hope of starting the new good life they had hoped for on leaving home. On the contrary many found themselves in detention centres.

5.5 Experiences of In-country Asylum Claimants

In their discussion of the UK as the location for asylum application by Bosnian and Somali refugees, Day and White (2002), suggest two scenarios which often compel individuals to seek asylum after being in the UK for a while; these are the 'anticipatory refugee' and the 'blocked return' scenarios. The former describes individuals who leave their country of origin "in an organized fashion in anticipation of a major problem or threat" (Day and White, 2002:18). In this instance, an actual asylum claim will only be made following considerable changes in the country of origin, whereas the latter suggests the case of those migrants who after spending considerable periods of time outside their country of origin, discover that circumstances in the home country have deteriorated such that it becomes almost impossible for them to return. While the 'anticipatory refugee' scenario might explain the case of some of my interviewees, it can be argued here that neither of the aforementioned scenarios fit well with the situation of most Zimbabweans, in that almost all the migrant parents who lodged in-country asylum applications came to the UK when the situation was already very bad at home. For all of these migrants, as discussed earlier in Chapter three, the need to escape political violence and politically induced economic hardships was the impetus for their migration.

Therefore, interview discussions which centred on why asylum was sought at a later stage after arrival generated four important themes. First, some migrant parents

expressed ignorance of the UK asylum policy and practice, especially the importance of lodging an asylum claim on arrival. Some of the migrants had acquired misleading information on when and where to lodge asylum claims and/or the procedures involved. Second, while Zimbabwean migrants came to the UK as a way of escaping from problems which had a political context, many had hoped that they would be in a position to secure employment on arrival, which turned out to be almost impossible as they could not obtain work permits. Third, there are also those migrants who were on student visas, who at some stage of their stay found it difficult to meet the visa requirements. Complications related to individuals' health problems and limited working hours forced migrants to consider asylum as the last resort. Fourth, some of the migrant parents delayed seeking asylum due to fear of immigration officials, especially those who used clandestine means to gain entry into the UK and others who had previous bad experiences of dealing with the immigration system. Overall, in all situations, asylum was sought at as a last resort, in the absence of other choices.

5.5.1 Misconceptions Regarding Asylum Seeking Timing

Asylum claims by in-country applicants were lodged at different stages of the migrants' stay in the UK. For example, Tendai who came to the UK in 2002 while leave to remain was still being granted at the point of entry said that on arrival, she was granted three months leave to remain in the UK as a visitor. She did not mention that her intention was that of seeking asylum for the following reasons:

...when I was still home I phoned my friend who was already here and asked her how to go about asylum issues and she warned me not to mention asylum at the point of entry... In fact she said to me she would take me to a place where I would just go and tell my political story later...where I would be granted refugees status... when I arrived the officer who interviewed me asked me 3 times if I was running away from persecution after I had

mentioned that I was a teacher. I said to him 'no I am okay'. He repeated this question 3 times and I insisted that I was safe... Instead, I lied...I told him I was coming to help my cousin who was pregnant...who was going through complications...(Tendai, female aged 45).

The other migrant parent who shared similar views was Voni:

When I came I did not apply for asylum at the port of entry because in those days people were being returned home in their volumes on arrival. My sister warned me not to mention the word asylum on arrival...So instead, I told the immigration officers that I had come to attend my sister's graduation and showed them the invitation letter and they then gave me 6 months leave to remain...(Voni, female aged 49).

Although family and friendship networks have been noted by some as reliable sources of information for asylum seekers prior to their arrival (Robinson and Segrott, 2002) the narratives presented above demonstrate contradictory views which suggest two possibilities. First, it is possible that family members or friends already in the host country may not be up-to-date with current asylum issues especially where they are not asylum seekers themselves. Second, as some of the narratives presented below suggest, it seems possible that relatives and friends may willingly choose to supply potential asylum seekers with misleading information, particularly where they do not want to reveal their own negative experiences in host countries.

Revisiting the case of Tendai who was misled by a friend as discussed above, further discussions about her arrival led her to explain that whilst her friend had promised to meet her at the airport, on arrival this friend was not there. Although

she made an effort to call, her mobile phone was turned off. Thus, she found herself in a very desperate situation in a new country as she had no other alternative place to go. Eventually, with the help of other migrants, Tendai said she was directed to an African church which offered assistance to destitute migrants where she stayed for almost three months. Tendai further recalled that during her stay, she met other Zimbabwean women who, in retrospect, she supposed were failed asylum seekers who were living in destitution. Meanwhile these women were very reluctant to advise her on asylum issues even though she had discussed her intention to seek asylum with them:

... I asked the women if they knew anything about asylum as my visa was about to expire...I was told asylum is sought at the airport...some told me that I needed not to worry because it was common for one to live without any status...one of the ladies advised me to apply for asylum immediately...but she did not want to explain to me how to go about it...she just said to me 'go and tell them you were victimised by the war veterans...since you said you were a teacher they will understand you...she talked as if once you tell your story you are granted British status... she was a refused asylum seeker I think...I am not sure...but she did not want to disclose the full information...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Linked to this phenomenon is the case of Voni who said she was living with her cousin since the time of her arrival. Voni also claimed that her cousin unnecessarily delayed giving her information about asylum seeking, and also discouraged her from looking for a job:

My cousin kept on saying to me 'don't worry, I will take you to the place where you can seek asylum...' She seemed reluctant...time was moving...I had left children and was now under pressure as they expected me to send them money... I also asked my cousin to help me look for a job...but she told

me to wait as I was not allowed to work until I had sought for asylum...she kept on postponing saying 'we will go to seek for asylum next week...' She was happy that she had someone to look after her children while she was at work... by the time I went to seek for asylum...my stay had expired...in fact two weeks after the expiry of my visa I went to seek for asylum... (Voni, female aged 49).

With the changes in asylum laws, making an in-country asylum claim had by then become problematic as the immigration system had started questioning the integrity of individuals who delayed seeking asylum as well as suspecting that they were 'bogus' (see the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002). Indeed, in 2002, on announcing the Nationality and Immigration Asylum Act, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett clearly emphasized that Britain was adopting tougher and tightly monitored systems of dealing with late and opportunistic asylum claim behaviour. He strongly warned that the UK was only a 'haven for the persecuted', 'but not a home to liars and cheats' (see Spencer, 2002). Both Tendai and Voni, who apparently, on arrival, had made claims that they were only coming to visit relatives as well as insisting that they were not victims of persecution, said they had challenging moments and very unpleasant experiences as discussions made during the time of entry were routinely brought up by immigration officials during asylum processes to contradict what they were saying:

I was perceived as a liar because they asked why I did not seek asylum when I came...I tried to express my ignorance... but was reminded of what I said when I arrived...I can vividly recall the officer who interviewed me, especially the way he talked to me as if talking to a criminal. I kept giving reference that I was a teacher thinking that there was respect for professionals...I was threatened with deportation... I was detained... (Tendai, female aged 45).

...they wanted to know why I did not claim asylum on arrival...they reminded me that I promised to go back home after my sister's graduation...I threatened to be sent home...I was saved by my sister [cousin] who engaged a solicitor... Although they later released me...I was denied accommodation so I continued to live with my cousin while I was waiting for the decision...without any access to paid work or any government support...I started leading a very painful life of dependence...I could not even provide for the children I left behind...(Voni, female aged 49).

Existing research which offers insights into understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK, (for example, Crawley, 2010, Robinson and Segrott, 2002) also discuss cases which reveal that potential migrants, in most cases while they are still in their home countries, are frequently led to believe by their relatives already in the UK that everything about asylum seeking is positive. However, in Crawley's (2010) study, these views were strong among Zimbabweans. Concurringly, some of my interviewees commented on these issues in the same manner. In particular, Tendai explained that while she was still at home, her friends and relatives who were already in the UK would only discuss the positive aspects of life in the UK:

...when you are home and you hear people talking about the UK and landing at Gatwick – they never mention anything about immigration problems or illegality issues. Even my own relatives who were here would not say anything about these issues... they were asylum seekers...People were wicked as far as I can see... They were giving the impression that life in the UK is all roses...Those who were illegal here wanted individuals to fall into the same trap of illegality... Zimbabweans are very hard hearted...they don't want to reveal important information to fellow citizens... (Tendai, female aged 45).

Neither Voni nor Tendai had sufficient evidence to convince the “bureaucratic labellers” (Zetter, 2007:178) that they were victims of persecution. Hence they were categorized as ‘illegals’ liable to detention.

5.5.2 Migrants who Claimed Asylum after Employment and Education

Opportunities had Failed

Among the respondents who lodged in-country asylum applications at a later stage after arrival were those migrants who had hoped that they would get job opportunities in the UK. While such individuals would normally be considered to be ‘economic migrants’, I argue here that for many of these migrants, the political situation of Zimbabwe had destroyed their livelihoods which forced them to leave home, as Chapter three has tried to demonstrate. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) (2009), with reference to migrants from Burma, discusses a similar situation of migrants who left Burma as ‘a self-initiated protection strategy’ which they argue to mean the initiative taken by migrants to leave home in order to ensure their families’ basic survival in the face of persistent violence and other economic abuses in the home country. As KHRG, further argues such “individuals can most accurately be understood as *livelihoods refugees*... these individuals have legitimate protection concerns...” (KHRG, 2009:8). This situation seems to illuminate that of some of my interviewees who on leaving home perceived the UK as a place they would be able to get employment in order to ensure their families’ survival.

One migrant parent whose personal account suggests this is Tafara who came to the UK with the hope of securing a teaching job as discussed in chapter three. Tafara said what gave him the incentive to come to the UK was the fact that he had been invited to attend an interview by one of the UK’s teaching recruitment

agencies. Discussing how events turned out to be when he arrived, Tafara explained that:

...I came on the 3rd of April and I went to the Isle of Sheppey in Kent, and saw the lady who was in charge of recruitment and had an interview. I was told I had passed the interview and they were willing to give me a teaching job, so I was shown around the school premises. They then said to me they were going to get a work permit for me so I had to wait...(Tafara, male aged 45).

Faced with no other option, Tafara was prepared to wait for his work permit, but for longer than originally anticipated:

...I waited for two months but I never heard anything from them...I called them on several occasions and even went there and the answer has been 'we are still waiting for the Home Office's decision regarding your work permit'...(Tafara, male aged 45).

As he waited, his 6 months temporary leave to remain lapsed, a situation which immediately turned him into an 'illegal' migrant, liable to deportation:

...On 5th of October it was my birthday...I went out to have a drink with friends and came back quite late, but on 6th October in the morning the Home Office officials knocked on my door and told me that my visa had expired and I had no right to stay. Although I tried to explain my situation to the officials, they did not believe me since I did not have my passport with me; it had gone to the Home Office. ...Late October 2001 I claimed for asylum in the sense that the situation at home was even worse and teachers were the main victims of the political brutality, it was dangerous for me to go back... But by then I was in detention in Oxford...(Tafara, a male aged 45).

It also emerged from the interviews that some of the migrants who tried to secure employment in the UK were on visitors' visas and unfortunately, as Clayton (2010) notes, this type of visa does not allow the bearers to take up employment in the UK²⁰. Interviewees who fall into this category explained the limitations presented by their possession of the restrictive legal documents:

Since I came over in 2002, I struggled to get a job, but I could not get anything meaningful...The problem has been that of papers - the immigration laws have been changing and I have not been able to get a working visa, so eventually I claimed for asylum...(Chipo, female aged 27).

When I came I managed to get a job at a nursing home...they did not mind about papers at that time...but when the management changed...I was stopped because they wanted me to show them I was permitted to work...I turned to the agencies but it was also hard...it was very difficult...I could not go home... so I had to apply for asylum...(Chiedza, female aged 35).

In this limbo and unable to work legally, some migrants openly admitted that they had to acquire fake documents and/or use other people's work permits:

I came on a visitor's visa...A friend who was already here gave me her papers to use for work. My intention was to work hard here and send my kids money so that their lives could be better and organise for them to come...(Mary, female aged 37).

When you are home people always say 'you can come and work' but they don't say anything about papers...when I came my aunt said I needed to buy working papers...when I asked how on earth that could be ... she told me...

²⁰ Visitors' visas always contain a clause which says 'no work and recourse to public funds'

'everybody does that...you see people buying houses at home this is how they get the money ...' (Natsai, female aged 29).

However, as Natsai's experiences further reveal, the use of fake documents has serious repercussions in the event of discovery:

...in my situation I was very unfortunate because after working for only 2 months the factory was raided by immigration officers...we were taken to detention...I then sought for asylum...I was nearly deported... my aunt worked hard, very hard...she saved me... she engaged a solicitor and also mobilized a powerful anti-deportation campaign since she is a strong MDC supporter...(Natsai, female aged 29).

In their bid to secure employment, some of the migrants who came to the UK on a visitor's visa said they had to switch to student visas which according to Clayton (2010) grants the bearers limited rights to work and extends the rights to family reunification to some:

When I came over I was on a visitor's visa. I dreaded to apply for asylum at that time because people were being denied...I did not want to end up without a status... so my friends helped me to register for a course with a college, so I changed to a student visa when my 6 month visitor's visa was about to expire....(Rute, female aged 49).

I came on a 6 months visitor's visa. Those days it was easy to change from visitor's visa to student's visa and that is what I did – I joined a college in (town)...(Sukai, female aged 39).

Although a student visa guarantees individuals the rights to family reunification, in most cases, these rights are not easily accessible (see my personal account provided in chapter two). Some of my interviewees discussed related complications (specifically, Sukai and Rute) when they tried to bring their children to the UK on the grounds that they were students. In both situations applications to bring children over were turned down by the Home Office:

I applied to bring my son from home...I was denied twice... the Home Office said since I was a single mother who was also a student, I would not have enough time to take care of my son...(Sukai, female aged 39).

I tried to bring my children over but I was turned down on two occasions...because my duration of study was too short for kids to join me...I used to renew my visa approximately every 6 to 8 months as I was doing short courses...I did not have enough money to enrol for a full year programme...I also needed to have time to work...but my visa was restrictive...I could only work for 20 hours per week at one place, so I had several jobs...(Rute, female aged 49).

From the way these women described their circumstances, their lives in the UK were further complicated by their inability to renew student visas in the face of immigration laws which continued to be narrowed and tightened:

In 2004 I was denied renewal of my student visa... laws had been changed...they thought I was a bogus student... I had no choice but to seek for asylum...I was treated as a liar... it was a difficult process... (Rute, female aged 49).

Sukai, who was diagnosed with a chronic illness during the period of her studentship, failed to meet the requirements for renewing her visa due to ill-health. Sukai said she made an attempt to retain her legal status through other means, which led her to discuss her struggles with the immigration system and how she ended up applying for asylum, but as a last resort:

I was on a student visa until 2004 when I was diagnosed with cancer. ...I stopped going to the college because of the cancer bouts I had, and I could not even go to work...I explained my immigration position to my doctor who strongly agreed that I should seek for a stay on health grounds...Both my college and my doctor supported my application for a stay ...My application was turned down; they did not think that my situation was convincing enough... Instead they wrote telling me to leave this country. I appealed against the decision, explaining my health condition and the health system in Zimbabwe which was on the verge of collapse and how critical it was for me to get proper medical care and this was also supported by a letter from my doctor. I was denied again...I had no other choice, but to seek for asylum...That's when my life fell to pieces...I lost total control of my own life in this country... (Sukai, female aged 39).

5.5.3 Migrants who Delayed Seeking Asylum due to Fear of Officials

Among the migrant parents I interviewed were those who expressed well-founded fear of officials. In one example, the migrant had used a South African Passport to gain entry into the UK, which according to existing immigration laws is a serious crime. Fear of officials, as the following narrative demonstrates, often prevents potential asylum seekers from making asylum claims on arrival:

When I arrived at the airport, I decided not to apply for asylum because I was afraid to face the officials...I wanted a bit of time to settle...I had a South African Passport...I then switched on to a student visa and was given 2 years...but could not continue with my studies due to financial

problems...then in 2007, I got involved in an accident...I was discovered that I had no stay...and that I was not South African...I was detained for 6 months... I had to tell the truth - why I left Zimbabwe and why I had stay in South Africa for some time... I did not lie to the Home Office... I gave them all the information regarding the position I had in ZANU PF as well as links where they can check my track record...it took them a while to believe I was not a member of Mugabe's secret CIOs...I eventually was given the opportunity to apply for asylum...(Simba, male aged 52).

On the other hand Farai who had come to the UK in 1999 said that when he came over he was given 6 months to remain at the port of entry. During that time, immigration law enforcement was still relatively relaxed, so he got a job and raised money to bring his wife over. But, it happened that Farai's wife was refused entry:

...when my wife came over, they refused her entry...in fact they detained her for almost 24 hours...They searched her bag and found my photograph... they spotted me through the cameras and asked me to come inside... They told me that they were returning my wife and since I was only left with 2 months, they wanted me to go back as well. In fact, they demanded to go with me to where I used to live. When we got there, they searched the whole house as if I was a thief. They found my passport and took it, as their intention was to send me back together with my wife. Fortunately, we got to the airport, the plane in which my wife was, was full. They wanted to detain me...but my aunt who had citizenship by then told them she would bring me back the following day...that's how I escaped until this present day...they still have my passport...(Farai, male aged 37).

Disturbing insights into issues of alleged assaults and other human rights abuses of asylum seekers mainly by immigration officials and especially those responsible for escorting migrants who are being removed from the UK, are captured by Birnberg Peirce, Medical Justice and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns,

(2008) in their combined report, entitled "Outsourcing Abuse...". The same report also notes that procedures and processes involved in repatriating foreign nationals are very complex, such that few migrants are able to seek redress where they feel their rights have been violated. Moreover, most abuses take place in private spheres, which leaves many migrants in very traumatic conditions. Often migrants live with these experiences for years, which can cause persistent fear of officials:

...the experience of watching my wife being deported and the way they threatened to deport me when they took my passport away from me made me resent the system... I am afraid of officials and am afraid to seek for asylum... I am caught up in this situation...I am undocumented for almost 10 years now...I have not been able to go home to see my family... (Farai, male aged 37).

Although Farai had chosen to remain undocumented, during one of the subsequent interviews, he discussed how circumstances eventually forced him to apply for asylum. This is what he said happened:

...the company I had worked for, for almost 9 years was raided by the immigration officials...I was on duty... I was taken into detention...My aunt quickly engaged a solicitor...I had to apply for asylum...(Farai, male aged 37).

An important theme which threaded through the discussions with both groups of asylum seekers relates to individuals' experiences of being in detention, and this deserves further consideration.

5.6 Migrant Parents' Experiences of Being in Detention

As I have described earlier in this chapter, asylum policies have been strengthened through the legitimization of detention and removal centres which make evident the predicament of asylum seekers in trying to gain acceptance as refugees. According to Clayton, (2010) immigration officers and other officials in the Home Office have been granted power to detain migrants through immigration and asylum laws. While international human rights laws are framed in ways which suggest that seeking asylum is a human right and that people should not be detained for exercising this right, "in the absence of lawful routes to enter and claim asylum, it is sometimes difficult in practice to see the difference between being detained as an illegal entrant and being detained as an asylum seeker..." (Clayton, 2010:545). Clayton further observes that an asylum seeker can be detained at different stages of the asylum seeking process including on arrival, on refusal of claim, on losing appeal, or on setting removal directions. My data suggest that my interviewees were mostly detained at the very initial stage of engagement with the asylum system, which, as discussed earlier, happened at different stages of individuals' stay in the UK. For those who sought asylum at the port of entry, detention was experienced on arrival, whereas in-country applicants were often detained at the stage when they went to sign for asylum. Alternatively, asylum was sought while in detention, especially in the cases of those individuals who were imprisoned for working without appropriate documents and/or for overstaying a visa.

Discussions of the migrants' experiences of detention clearly demonstrate that detention centres play a major role in the mortification of the self. These are places where individuals' dignity and self-worth are stripped off:

I felt undermined...reduced, humiliated... by the experiences of being in detention. My mind quickly reminded me that I was no longer the important person I was before. I did not think that I had committed a crime by either seeking work or claiming asylum as I had always thought that detention centres were for criminals. As an intellectual, I tried to explain I had been promised a teaching job... I even explained how the nature of my job compromised my safety if I were to go back to Zimbabwe... but this did not help... This was the beginning of a challenging life which I am still experiencing...since then nothing ever worked for me...(Tafara, male aged 45).

...I did not know how long my application would take to be considered...whether I was going to be granted refugee status or send back home... Time was going...as I was locked up... I could not communicate with my children... My life became a misery... I lost total control of my life, my career, and my children... All I had worked for, for many years just vanished... I found myself without control of anything...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

I was detained for almost a month ... in detention...I discovered that asylum is a one size fits all. No matter who you think you are, how convincing you might think you are, the treatment is the same you are a criminal, a liar, a cheater until you are proven innocent...(Tendai, female aged 45).

I found life in the detention centre very dehumanizing...I was humiliated everyday...taken as a liar, thief, benefit scrounger... I did not come for benefits... I was used to working for myself in Zimbabwe... What I wanted was protection... My dignity was stripped off... I was reduced from being a teacher to a beggar... Although I was later released... I was no longer the same person I used to be...(Rudo, female aged 39).

In her report, *'Narratives and Legacies of Detention'*, McGregor (2009) documents Zimbabwean asylum seekers' lived experiences of detention in the UK which demonstrate issues of degradation, stigmatization and the stripping of individuals' dignity and self-esteem in ways which echo the experiences of my interviewees. It is in this context that Goffman's analysis of the stripping of self through bureaucratic processes becomes very relevant. He observes that inmates come to the institution with what he calls a presenting 'culture' or 'character' which can be defined as a set of roles and social arrangements, or a round of activities and experiences that help individuals to construct and manage an acceptable conception of self, which unfortunately is often taken for granted until the very time one enters an institution. However, on admission the inmate goes through a "self series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self. His self is systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified" (Goffman, 1961:24).

Another dehumanizing facet of detention which is mirrored in some of the narratives relates to the extent to which detention plays a role in the stripping of self through exacerbation of trauma. This is particularly pertinent for asylum seekers who have had experiences of torture in the country of origin who find themselves in detention centres in countries where they came to hoping to be protected (see McGregor, 2009, Clayton, 2010). Others (Jackon, 2003, Hayter, 2003) have noted that unlike other prisoners convicted of criminal cases, immigration detainees are frequently locked up without trial, time limit or a formalized bail system. Moreover, officials are not expected to give reasons for detention, and this situation can cause anxiety in the absence of a guarantee that individuals would not be deported. Mutsa's case illustrates this:

I got even more confused when I was there...it's a place of stigmatization... The language used there is meant to remind you that you are a foreigner... You are told in your face that you are not wanted here... I thought about war veteran torture camps in Zimbabwe... I could not think properly... I was too worried. In detention you are told you are not a person... These words affect the mind...especially when you came trusting... (Mutsa, female aged 32).

Goffman's analysis of the relationship and interaction processes between inmates and the staff seems resonant here as he notes that "staff tend to feel superior and righteous: inmates tend, in some ways at least, to feel inferior, weak, blameworthy and guilty" (Goffman, 1961:18). It is in this context that Goffman argues that the self is further mortified by stigmatizing speeches, subjection to institutional standards and even by being equalled to other people whom individuals would have preferred to stay away from in the outside world in order to preserve and protect the native conception of self. As Weinstein, (1982) observes, the range of mortifying experiences and restrictions of freedoms which Goffman describes can have severe traumatic effects on inmates whose lives prior to institutionalization allowed for private spaces and certain levels of competency which helped them to portray a tolerable conception of self.

5.7 Asylum Determination: Migrants' Total Loss of Control of their Lives in the UK

In '*Asylums*', Goffman (1961) analyses what he calls 'the staff world' arguing that for those who work with the institutionalized, although their job involves dealing with people, it is not in a service relationship of customer and service provider. "This people work" implies that they "have objects and products to work upon, not

services, but these objects and products are people” (Goffman1961:73). He goes further to argue that:

Just as an article being processed through an industrial plant must be followed by a paper shadow showing what has been done by whom, what is to be done, and who last had responsibility for it, so a human object, moving, say, through a mental-hospital system, must be followed by a chain of informative receipts detailing what has been done to and by the patient and who had most recent responsibility for him (Goffman, 1961:71).

There are clear parallels with the way the UK asylum system functions, as immigration officials’ responsibility has increasingly become that of treating people as if they were objects. In the same manner described by Goffman, immigration officials are involved in the asylum status determination and routinely produce reports of the individual asylum seeker’s status outcome. In this study, discussions of asylum determination revealed that of the nineteen Zimbabwean migrants I interviewed, twelve said their asylum claims were refused; four said they had just been granted some form of leave to remain²¹, whereas three said they were still awaiting a decision on their asylum applications at the time of interviews. It is important to point out that the four respondents with some form of leave to remain said their initial applications were denied, and leave to remain was granted after appealing in all cases more than once. However, what is more significant about those who were granted leave to remain is that, in all the four cases, parents have not been able to bring their children over to the UK, either because of restrictions attached to the type of the stay granted or because children had already turned 18 years while parents were waiting for their asylum claims to be decided.

²¹ 1 was granted indefinite leave to remain, 1 humanitarian for 3 years, 1 refugee status for 5 years, and 1 EU stay for 5 years

Meanwhile, discussion of asylum determination outcomes generated concerns which demonstrate migrant parents' loss of control over their lives in the UK as well as thwarted dreams of being reunited with children. In particular, migrants' narratives demonstrate their negative views of the UK asylum systems. I will start with the case of Tafara who made his asylum application in 2001:

Unfortunately my asylum claim was turned down – it lacked credibility they told me. I appealed and was turned down again... they said although they are now aware that teachers are the main victims of the Mugabe government, each application is assessed on its own merit...on individual basis...I have just made a fresh application... This is now my 8th year in the UK – here I am still a refused asylum seeker who cannot go to Zimbabwe or bring my children over... (Tafara, male aged 45).

Similarly, Rudo said:

...my application was turned down... they said it was not credible, despite all the evidence... they did not believe me... I have recently resubmitted a fresh application...but my lawyer told me that it can take 3 to 4 years to be assessed because the Home Office has a huge backlog... Since my husband died I have never been able to be with my daughter ... I am still struggling. I am failing to come to terms with the truth he [husband] is no more ... My daughter is struggling alone... (Rudo, female aged 39).

Some migrants expressed hopelessness in ways which suggest the impossibility of satisfying asylum requirements:

Among other things which I did not quite understand...they said I did not support my case with evidence... Where will I get the evidence that I was victimized on the road side...? (Jonasi, male aged 39).

Chenai whose application was also refused said the Home Office supposed her to be a supporter of ZANU (PF), and that they wanted her to provide evidence for her claim:

...I was denied asylum here...they believed I have some associations with Mugabe's government since I used to be involved in the government's gender empowerment programmes at grassroots level...but I was victimised for dealing with the Whites...they did not believe me...they want evidence...They wanted me to at least to show them the correspondence from the war veterans... Also, they wanted me to produce a letter from at least one of my white clients as proof that I used to do business with them... my husband's sister wouldn't let me bring the letter from war veterans...because of the way I came, I did not have time to look for my clients ...I have asked people at home to help me...they say most of the Whites have already left the country...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Some of the migrants whose asylum claims were refused criticized the Home Office for determining asylum claims on the assumptions that all Zimbabweans who claim asylum in the UK are members of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Increasingly this misconception is reflected in refusal letters as the following narrative seems to suggest:

My first application for asylum was refused...they said ...I did not attach enough evidence that I supported the opposition party...I was not a member

of the opposition party, but my being a teacher in Zimbabwe made me to suffer intimidations and threats of abuse...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Other migrants also said they were refused asylum as the government believed they were economic migrants:

They said I was an economic migrant...I have come here for purposes of wealth accumulation...it is surprising because they know...people are dying of hunger and diseases like cholera...they know there is poverty... they know all these things...but they deny us and say we are here to gather riches...my parents are struggling at home...my daughter is suffering at home...(Chiedza, female aged 35).

They did not believe what I told them...they said I was here to work...(Chipo, female aged 27).

These data resonate with Arendt's (2000) discussion of the calamities of stateless persons who found it almost impossible to claim or enforce the rights to asylum in the countries they fled to. In a world of states, the rights to belong to a 'political community' (Arendt, 2000) are granted on terms set by the receiving states as opposed to being guaranteed by international human rights mechanisms. More profoundly here, perhaps is "Arendt's prophetic scepticism about the enforceability of international human rights" (Power, 2004:xix). Arendt observes that the more receiving states found themselves confronted with large and diverse groups of asylum seekers "the greater became the temptation to pay less attention to the deeds of the persecuting governments than to the status of the persecuted" (Arendt, 2000:35).

It is interesting to note that Arendt observes practices of categorization and differentiation of refugees fifty years ago which still survive despite more than half a century's effort to set in place international human rights legislation and enforcement mechanisms that should have ameliorated change. As in Arendt's time in which she questions 'the relevance of the Rights of man as inalienable', the human rights movement of this contemporary era suggests similar weaknesses. Indeed, the international human rights instruments which guarantee the right to seek asylum and the respect for the human rights of all persons are often framed in ways which convey the assumptions that human rights are something which naturally apply to everyone. For example, article 14 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 prescribes that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution", assuming that those fleeing their countries of origin in search for sanctuary are guaranteed protection against all actions and practices which threaten fundamental freedoms and human dignity. Yet these policies fail many in that the rights of entry into a territory, as well as the rights to be accepted as a refugee are governed by the receiving society (Fletcher, 2008). This contradiction also seems very clear in the case of Zimbabwean in the UK including my interviewees in very specific ways. It is bewildering to note that the international world including the UK Foreign Office publicly condemn Zimbabwe as an exceptionally unsafe and unruly country and have routinely called for the strengthening of sanctions, yet, the Home Office increasingly treats Zimbabwean asylum seekers as though they were 'voluntary' migrants who could voluntarily go back home. Some of my interviewees cited circumstances which clearly demonstrate this double standard:

Britain criticises Mugabe for human rights abuses...we watch on news here, people being killed in farms, mines, schools, and all over the country... You tell them you don't want to go...because you are afraid of death...because

you have been living with a murderer...They don't care...they say you can go and live safely in another town... Then you ask 'why are you criticizing Mugabe...when you are doing the same to his victims...?' They don't care...they say 'go back to your country and die...'

 (Mutsa, female aged 32).

It is also interesting to note that some of these inhumane practices have been captured by the media. For example, O'Nions, (2006) cites an article which appeared in the *Sunday Herald* of 26 December, 2004, with the heading "Home Office tells 'foolhardy' asylum seekers: It's your own fault you've been persecuted", noting that "a Zimbabwean man, beaten and tortured by agents of Mugabe's ZANU PF party had his application for asylum rejected by the Home Office on the basis that he could have expected nothing less given his opposition of the regime" (O'Nions, 2006:15). Concurringly, Ranger (2005) observes that Zimbabweans in the UK suffer a double calamity: "Zimbabwean asylum-seekers do not have too many human rights though. They are caught between the hostility of the Zimbabwean state and its press and the repudiating coldness of their reception in Britain" (Ranger, 2005:408). Thus, for those who find themselves caught up in this predicament, their circumstances suggest that, "suffering is not a part of the past; it is an enduring pervasive present. It cannot be contained; it cannot be tied down or clearly defined. It is at one with life itself" (Jefferson, 2010:23).

Conclusion

For the Zimbabwean migrants I interviewed for this study, coming to the UK was a way of escaping from their country's political and economic violence and repression, and as such, these migrants had high hopes for protection, security and a decent livelihood in the UK. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of them, prior to arrival, anticipated their coming to the UK as the beginning of a new life which offers both physical and economic protection and security, not only for themselves, but also for their families, especially the children. However, as the foregoing discussions have attempted to demonstrate, these migrant parents' experiences of arrival and engagement with the UK immigration and asylum system reveal that things did not go as they had hoped. In particular, their arrival was not very welcome. Instead, they all found themselves caught up in a cumbersome and inhospitable asylum and immigration system which created both social and institutional barriers, which represented a stripping of self to becoming non-persons. For all the migrants who sought asylum either at the port of entry or at a later stage during their stay in the UK, after employment and/or educational aspirations had failed, asylum seeking practices and processes were described as both traumatic and hostile. In particular, the experiences of being in detention were discussed in ways which demonstrate individuals' loss of identity and dignity.

After waiting for many years for their asylum and immigration status to be determined, many (12) of these migrants said their applications were refused, while in 3 cases, migrant parents said they were still in the process of waiting. Moreover, for the migrants who said they were granted some form of stay, this was, in all situations described as a recent development, and a victory which was realized after a long struggle with the immigration and asylum systems as in all cases, migrants had made several appeals against a refusal decision. However, in all four cases,

migrant parents expressed disappointment that they were not in a position to bring their children over from Zimbabwe. In two situations, conditions attached to the stays did not guarantee automatic rights to family reunification, while in two other situations, they were deemed illegible since their children had turned 18 years during the period when parents were waiting for their immigration status to be settled.

For those who discussed the reasons why their applications were refused, many characterised the Home Office as “possessing an agenda of disbelief” (Sweeney, 2009:230) in its tireless efforts to ‘craft the difference between economic and political migrants’ (Adelson, 2004) mainly by emphasizing the causes and patterns of migrants’ forced movements which apparently have become much more complex than it was in the past (Zetter, 2007).

This chapter has tried to demonstrate the plight of people who were deprived of the power to exercise control over their situations which resonates with Goffman’s (1961) description of how the institutionalized were deprived of the power to act as persons with ‘adult’ self-determination, autonomy and freedom to exercise some command over their world. “A failure to retain this kind of ‘adult’ executive competency or at least the symbols of it”, Goffman contends, often instils in people the feeling of terror that they had been radically exiled from living (Goffman, 1961:47). Like Goffman’s institutionalized, the stateless were also deprived of the power to exercise control over their lives in exile. Krause (2008) explains this position as follows:

When Arendt writes about the stateless person's 'rightlessness' she does not primarily think of the deprivation of a number of discrete rights that one could list. She notes that formulas such as life, liberty or equality before the law are terms designed to solve problems within a political community. The stateless' deprivation is more fundamental; they are deprived of the 'right to have rights' – the basic right to belong to an organized community (Krause, 2008:336).

The following chapter discusses how my interviewees led a life of legal limbo in the UK.

Chapter 6: Leading a Life of Legal Limbo: The UK Immigration Regime and Vulnerabilities of Migrant Parents and their Children

Introduction

Chapter five has tried to demonstrate how my interviewees, on arrival, found themselves confronted with a faceless system which rendered them powerless to exercise “adult executive competency” (Goffman, 1961:47) over their lives in the UK and those of the children left behind. This situation assigned them to a life of legal limbo.

The explicit connection between the temporal aspect of migrants in relation to immigration status and the specific problems they often experience in host societies has been suggested by some scholars. For instance, in his discussion of the temporariness of the Brazilian migrants in London, Cwerner (2001:27) talks of the ‘liminal times of migration which he depicts as that period in a migrant’s life in which the “future is uncertain; the present seems to be leading nowhere; and the past cannot be relied upon as a guide for action”. As temporary migrants’ daily lives continue to be shaped by liminality, Cwerner suggests, “their actions invite confusion as to their intentions and they seem to be placed outside the usual obligations of social life, at the same time as they establish and shun commitments in both the homeland and the host society”. More often than not, “indecision, confusion, incompleteness, underachievement and eternal expectation”, Cwerner contends, “are some of the emotions and mental states that accompany the liminal times of migration” (Cwerner, 2001:27). Increasingly, it is therefore this kind of life which generates ‘a temporal panic’; that is a sense of the nearing of time, often experienced as approaching faster than the migrant’s ability to attain certain aspirations/obligations (Cwerner, 2001).

In a more recent work, Ahmad (2008) discusses the temporal dimension of migration in the context of smuggled migrants of Pakistan origin living in London, with particular focus on issues of 'illegality' and 'precarity' within the UK labour processes and how this was experienced in relation to time and space. In this work, Ahmad stresses the point that the temporary nature of the smuggled migrants he studied predisposed them to take up jobs which increasingly exposed them to unfavourable working conditions including long working shifts. The main effect, as Ahmad argues was that illegality transformed smuggled migrants into 'prisoners of time' who increasingly experienced a particular psychological burden as compounded by the feeling that they were 'living off borrowed time' as their stay in the UK was temporarily defined.

The above cited work provide an important background to understanding the experiences of my Zimbabwean interviewees who were forced apart from their children, who too experienced 'a temporary panic' and carried a particular 'psychological burden' as they were too aware of time passing for their children and their relationship to them was in part temporarily defined. These are the important issues I intend to flag up in this chapter in my exploration of the Zimbabwean migrant parents' struggles to make sense of their own lives in the UK as they moved through the different stages of the UK immigration and asylum process.

Just to reflect on the different categories these migrant parents found themselves in, twelve identified themselves as failed/refused asylum seekers, who had no right to remain in the UK and therefore had no right to family reunion. Three were caught up in a lengthy asylum determination process and had no right to both paid work

and reunion with children. Four had just been granted some form of leave to remain. For most of the migrant parents I interviewed, specifically those in the first two categories, their situations were more complicated by the fact that only very few had access to welfare support. Given this background, section 6.1 charts the policy context in which asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers' welfare needs are addressed. Section 6.2 looks at the UK government's policy on Zimbabwean refused asylum seekers. Section 6.3 explores how refused asylum seekers moved on with life after a refusal decision by looking at appeal processes, and the constraints that forced individuals not to consider appealing. Section 6.4 discusses the dynamics involved in taking illegal paid work as individuals endeavoured to retain control over their own lives and those of the children left behind. My interviewees' narratives suggest that most of the women including Tendai, Chenai, Chipso, Rudo, Shami and Voni were employed in the care sector. Whereas, men including Tafara, Nyasha and Farai were involved in factory work and other jobs like sales representatives. All these migrant parents were remitting money in order to support their children. In this section, an effort is made to demonstrate how people without 'social and economic citizenship rights' (Bloch, 2000b) struggle to survive. Overall, the chapter seeks to highlight some of the dynamics and struggles involved in trying to normalize life in the UK while at the same time striving to exercise a certain degree of parenting, so as to retain control over the lives of the children left behind. Furthermore, the chapter aims to demonstrate that the migrant parents I interviewed, though caught up in slightly different kinds of limbo, their lives were similarly described as 'torn apart' mainly due to trauma caused by their emotional links and attachments to families left behind in Zimbabwe, particularly their children.

6.1 The UK Asylum Welfare Policy Context

As noted earlier in the preceding chapter, since the 1990s the British asylum system has undergone significant changes as evidenced by the existence of several pieces of legislation which, in addition to putting restrictions on border entry practices, have also, in very significant ways curtailed asylum seekers' access to the UK welfare system. For example, the Immigration and Asylum Act 1993 became the first instrument to withdraw asylum seekers' rights to local authority housing, marking the initial processes of separating asylum seekers' welfare concerns from those of the rest of the population with the same level of need (Fletcher, 2008:9-10). Further changes were also introduced under the 1996 Act which initiated the withdrawal of benefits like job seekers allowance, income support, housing benefit and eventually saw asylum seekers being completely removed from the local authority housing entitlement list. As many have suggested, legislation was employed by the government as a measure towards removing incentives for people to claim asylum deceptively (Fletcher, 2008, Bloch, 2000a, O'Nions, 2006).

The subsequent Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 represents a complete overhaul to the asylum welfare support system as it placed asylum seekers' welfare provision responsibilities with a new body, the National and Asylum Support Services (NASS), which further tightened the eligibility criteria for housing and financial support by providing support to only those whose asylum claims were lodged at the port of entry. With the introduction of the subsequent Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, accommodation and financial support could only be provided to destitute asylum seekers whose asylum applications were made "as soon as reasonably practicable" after arriving in the UK, under the dispersal scheme on a 'no choice' basis. As others have observed, the dispersal scheme increasingly alienated asylum

seekers from their existing communities while often placing them in already socially and economically deprived areas, many of which were hostile environments.

As Robinson and Reeve (2006) note, the presence of asylum seekers in deprived neighbourhoods can be a potential source of tension and hostility especially under circumstances where residents in these neighbourhoods believe that resources are being re-directed towards the needs of the newcomers rather than addressing the long-existing issues of deprivation among their own population. To illustrate this, Lynn and Lea (2003) cite an article which appeared in the *Daily Express*, of 15 August, 2001, which demonstrates that bad feelings arise when asylum seekers are housed before homeless citizens. However, concerns have also been raised by others with regards to the quality of accommodation made available to asylum seekers, as most of the houses, especially those provided by private landlords, were perceived to be of poor quality and in disrepair (Refugee Action, 2006).

Changes in the housing provision system were also complimented by a cashless system of meeting asylum seekers' basic needs. Eligible asylum seekers were entitled to financial support provided in the form of vouchers, valued at 70% of the basic income support a British citizen is entitled to, of which only £10 was redeemable in cash. Some raised concerns that if income support is calculated to ensure that no one lives below the poverty line, the provision of only 70% of this level meant that asylum seekers lived in poverty (Fletcher, 2008). Also, the voucher scheme had other highly restrictive conditions attached to it. In particular, food vouchers could only be redeemed at selected and specified shops, thereby excluding asylum seekers from shopping in places where they could purchase foodstuffs they perceived to be culturally appropriate; usually in marketplaces and other small and/or corner shops (Doyle, 2008). Also, supermarkets did not give change, meaning that asylum seekers increasingly ended up paying more than

British citizens for basic items (Doyle, 2008). Some have therefore argued that the idea that asylum seekers were entitled to use vouchers to pay for goods which the British citizens could purchase in cash was a form of stigmatization and dehumanization which saw asylum seekers routinely being humiliated by till operators and other customers. Also, the voucher scheme left asylum seekers with

a unique money management problem in a country in which they were already unfamiliar with the monetary system... This put asylum seekers in a position of vulnerability and confusion, merely serving to encourage resentment and unrest amongst the asylum seeking population (Clements, 2007:7).

Following widespread criticism mainly from organisations working with asylum seekers and also from some trade unions; the voucher system was eventually abolished which saw asylum seekers returning to the cash economy. Nevertheless, eligibility criteria for government support continued to be narrowed. In some cases support could be withdrawn if "NASS believes that the asylum seeker has other resources which he/she could use to support him/herself or if he/she has provided false or incomplete information when applying for support" (Refugee Action, 2006:24). Overall, what made the whole system complicated was "the uncertainty about the provision, the contract with landlords and the rights of those accommodated led to some asylum seekers being refused support or finding it withdrawn even when they were entitled to it" (Refugee Action, 2006: 24-25).

Successive changes in asylum legislation also saw asylum seekers' rights to paid work being gradually withdrawn. Prior to 2002, asylum seekers were eligible to apply for the right to work after waiting for 6 months for an asylum claim to be determined. In most cases, restrictions to work would be easily lifted (Refugee Action, 2006).

However, the 2002, Asylum Act completely withdrew all rights to paid work for asylum seekers, once they engage with the asylum system. While the government's justification was that asylum claims were normally determined within 6 months from the time of application, many have argued that withdrawing asylum seekers' rights to work was a deterrence measure driven by the belief that the asylum system was increasingly being abused by economic migrants to gain legal access to paid work (Clements, 2007, Bloch, 2000a, Burnett, and Chebe, 2009).

Indeed, the UK asylum determination processes have never been speedy or efficient. Instead, for a very long time, the system has been extremely slow, and asylum seekers increasingly find themselves caught up in lengthy asylum determination processes, or stuck within the system, with limited government support, if any, and absolutely no rights to paid work. Thus, some have questioned the 'belongingness' of asylum seekers arguing that "access to the welfare system is therefore not just about services, but also reflects and engenders belongingness, defining who is 'us' and who is 'them' (Fletcher, 2008:5). Thus, for many asylum seekers, "limbo begins at the point of asylum" (Kits, 2005:3).

For asylum seekers found eligible for welfare support, entitlement to accommodation and financial support only remain in place during the entire period of claim determination. These rights are immediately withdrawn once a claim has failed and/or once individuals have exhausted their appeal rights. Following refusal, individuals are normally expected to leave their accommodation within 21 days from the day of refusal, and at the same time, they cease to be eligible for any government support, and are expected to take practical steps to leave the UK, or else they face deportation (Fletcher, 2008). In essence, refused asylum seekers have no recourse to government support, unless they qualify for the 'hard cases' support provided under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Moreover, under section 4, support is highly conditional as it can only be made available to destitute refused asylum seekers who cannot leave the country immediately due to situations beyond their control (see Burnett, 2007).

Thus, to qualify, individuals should be destitute in addition to meeting one or more conditions which include proving that: they are taking reasonable steps to leave the UK, or they are unable to leave due to a blocked route of return or because of a medical condition and/or that their claim is being considered for Judicial Review or they have submitted a fresh claim, which the Home Office has accepted (see, Refugee Action, 2006, Gower, 2009 for a detailed description of these conditions). In such cases, provision of welfare support is only a temporary measure to avoid breaching individuals' human rights during their preparation to leave the country (Refugee Action, 2006). Furthermore, those eligible to receive support under section 4 are entitled to accommodation and a weekly allowance of £35 which unfortunately is payable in voucher form (see Doyle, 2008). Thus, section 4 support entails the extension of the old failed voucher system meaning that failed asylum seekers are only eligible to apply for welfare support under a system which re-enforces their stigma and lack of rights to belong in the communities they live in (Refugee Action, 2006a). Just like the old voucher system, 'hard cases' support vouchers are only redeemable in specified shops for food and other items which the Home Office classifies as 'essential', meaning that all the problems associated with this kind of welfare support system, (some of which have been highlighted above) are replicated in the lives of refused asylum seekers (Gower, 2009).

Also with effect from 1 April 2004, a new regulation which governs overseas visitors' entitlement to health care services was passed (see, Department of Health 2004) in order to curtail and prevent 'treatment tourists' from accessing free health care services in the UK. While it remained that asylum seekers were entitled to free

primary, secondary and hospital care, refused asylum seekers were only entitled to free emergency and primary care whereas those in need of secondary care, which includes drug therapy, hospital and antenatal treatment especially for those diagnosed with HIV were treated as overseas visitors liable to pay for these services (see Kelley and Stevenson, 2006). The fact that refused asylum seekers were also considered as 'treatment tourists' suggests that eligibility to healthcare in the UK began to be determined by one's legal status (see Cherfas, 2006). This change in legislation has generated confusion especially among Health Practitioners with regards to asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers' entitlement to healthcare resulting in many failing to access NHS treatment (Cherfas, 2006, Kelly and Stevenson, 2006).

Thus, engaging with the UK asylum system can be a real struggle, "one fraught with legal and procedural difficulties, and a process that leaves many in "limbo"..." (Kits, 2005:3). The section below looks at the UK government's policy with regards to Zimbabwean asylum seekers in particular.

6.2 The UK Government's Policy Regarding Zimbabwean Refused Asylum Seekers in the UK

The number of Zimbabwean nationals applying for asylum in the UK increased significantly from 2000, the year in which human rights violations in Zimbabwe became widespread and a subject of international concern (Amnesty International, 2008). Since then, the human rights situation in this country remains a cause for concern. Indeed, in 2002, the Home Office suspended removals of failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe and this policy remained in place until 2004. The end of 2004 saw the Home Office resuming forced removals of Zimbabwean refused asylum

seekers. Although this period seemed to be the time that Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis reached its peak, the Home Office claimed that non-removal of Zimbabwean nationals was an incentive which attracted more asylum seekers from this country to the UK (see Doyle, 2009).

However, the non-removal policy was eventually reinstated in 2005 following a court ruling which supported the view that deportees were in danger of facing potential victimisation and torture by the Mugabe regime (Ranger, 2005, Doyle, 2009). However, statistics on asylum claims and determination outcomes provided by the Home Office, (Home Office, 2008) seem to suggest the British government's limited commitment towards supporting Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK as very few people were recognised as refugees or were granted other forms of leave to remain between 2000 and 2007. For example, of the 13,015 asylum applications submitted between 2002 and 2004, only 3,335 were recognised as refugees, while 175 were granted humanitarian protection and/or discretionary leave to remain in the UK, whereas 9,480 applications were refused. In policy contexts, the UK government has never wanted to make a legal declaration that there is no viable route of return to Zimbabwe. Clearly, the UK government has for a long time sat on the fence, which has created a limbo in which many Zimbabweans are neither in the category of those nationals who have the legal right to remain nor the category of those liable to removal. Apparently, the Home Office has consistently required Zimbabwean refused asylum seekers to return home voluntarily rather than removing them forcibly (Doyle, 2009, Webber, 2008). To facilitate voluntary return, legal measures have been put in place through the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), whose voluntary assisted return programme for Zimbabweans saw, in 2008, those returning at the peak of the cholera outbreak being provided with additional

humanitarian assistance which included cholera assistance packages (Doyle 2009:11).

The important point to make here is that whilst it seems that refused asylum seekers from Zimbabwe could still physically remain in the UK, their situations demonstrate that they are people who have been “denied a dignified existence” (Wilkinson 2009: 46) as they are not legally entitled to receive even the meagre ‘hard cases’ support offered under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, offered to other failed asylum seekers who officially cannot return to their country of origin. Indeed, the appalling situation of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in general has been captured by Webber, (2009:4) who notes that:

Many refused asylum seekers are in an impossible situation...The Home Office has not returned anyone to Zimbabwe since 2005. But those refused asylum can't work, and are frequently refused all support. Yet even they have been jailed for using false documents to work.

This is the policy context which governed the welfare status of my interviewees in the UK. In the sections that follow, I intend to explore how my interviewees led their lives in the UK and how they managed the lives of the children left behind as they moved from one stage of the asylum process to the other.

6.3 Leading the Life of Limbo while Separated from Children: An Invisible Category of Migrants

Although the migrant parents I interviewed fell neatly into three categories of asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers and those who had been granted some form of leave to remain in the UK, discussions which centred on how they were leading their lives in the UK led some to reflect back to the time they applied for asylum. In particular, a number of women discussed how their lives had gone through a process of disintegration from the time they engaged with the asylum system. Migrant parents cited problems at home which had grave effects on children's lives which they became aware of from the time they were waiting for their initial asylum applications to be settled. In the absence of any guarantee that refugee status will be granted, this situation leaves people in a state where they cannot make any plans for the future, which is a source of particular anxiety for those desperately hoping to be quickly reunited with the children left behind. For example, Chenai, a mother who identified herself as a refused asylum seeker at the time of interview, explained that when she made her asylum application on arrival in 2000, it took almost two years of waiting before her claim was settled. She had been allocated accommodation in a shared house where she lived with 4 other women asylum seekers. Although she was receiving financial support, Chenai described her situation in ways which suggest that an asylum seeker who is also a parent has needs which go beyond accommodation and daily meals:

After all the troubles at the airport, I appreciated that finally they gave me accommodation in... [town]...but I knew no one there...I shared the house with strangers...I waited... for 1 month, 2 months, 3 months...time was going...nothing was said...although I was eating daily...my mind was always at home...in particular the children...I could phone and text...but the

messages I was getting were not very good...the reports were 'children did not have enough to eat, problems with school fees..., this and that'...also the money I was getting from the government was too little...I could not split it between me and the children...I was getting anxious by the day because when I left I had not made any long term plans for the children...but things got even worse when my application was rejected...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Similarly, another mother, Rudo also reflected on the time she was waiting for her initial asylum claim to be determined, discussing that this period marked the beginning of all the troubles and sufferings she was experiencing in the UK. She further reflected on some of the problems she said were taking place at home, discussing how things slowly got out of hand from the period she was waiting for her first asylum claim to be settled:

In detention I really suffered... when I came out they gave me accommodation...also I was getting support...sometimes cash...sometimes vouchers...it was not much...but at least I used to get something every week...but the problem was that the support was only enough for one person...yeah, I was relieved...at least I had somewhere to start from after all the troubles... as I was waiting...yeah, after about 6 months serious problems started...I received a call, I remember on a Monday... that my husband was not feeling very well...as time progressed he was in and out of hospital...he needed money for his medication...my daughter was in high school by then...she needed fees, uniforms and the like...before long my husband could not go to work... things were getting tight at home...but the Home Office was just quiet...I did not hear from them for almost a year...I could not work...I was in the house all the time...then my application was rejected...I cried because it meant I could not be with my husband and daughter soon...(Rudo, female aged 39).

In Mutsa's case, the traumatic experiences of arrival, detention and the painful experiences of living in limbo were recollected together to demonstrate her continued experiences of suffering when I asked how she was managing her life in the UK. Mutsa also linked her UK experiences to some of the problems which she said took place at home, especially the time she was in detention, explaining that some of these problems were still on-going. Mutsa's main concern was that her daughter's life could be in danger at anytime as her abusive husband routinely threatened to take her daughter away from Mutsa's mother if Mutsa did not go back:

Since the time I was in detention my cousin was in touch with my mother...from the first days I left, my husband was posing threats to harm my mother and the child...at one point he tried to take the child away...he was not sure where exactly I was...my mother did not want to disclose my whereabouts to him...I had not sent money and my mother was struggling to feed my daughter...I was in a situation where I couldn't do anything...It was hard for me, but my prayer was that if only my claim could be granted quickly, so that my daughter could come...this did not happen ...instead my claim was refused...I don't know if ever I will see her again...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

As is apparent in the above cited narratives, asylum seekers with dependents face a specific set of problems which might not be typically part of the experiences of other categories of migrants without dependents. Yet, the particularity of this group is not recognized by the state in its day to day dealings with the asylum seeking population. In the sections that follow, I seek to demonstrate how my interviewees' situations were further exacerbated by the new problems they encountered as a result of the Home Office's refusal of their initial asylum claims.

6.4 Refused Asylum Claims: The Route to Destitution and Illegality

As discussed earlier, once an asylum seeker's claim has been refused, an individual ceases to be eligible to welfare support, as well as being expected to leave their accommodation within 21 days from the date of refusal. However, as noted earlier, some asylum seekers have an in-country right of appeal following a refusal decision as well as having the right to remain in the UK while their appeal claims are being determined. Yet, in other cases, asylum seekers can only appeal after leaving the UK if their claims have been certified as 'unfounded', either because they come from a country which the Home Office supposes to be 'safe' or they are believed they could have claimed asylum in a safe third country (see Clayton, 2010). Looking at the situations of my interviewees whose asylum claims were refused, they all had an in-country right of appeal which they utilized differently, depending on the circumstances that individuals found themselves in. Interview discussions which sought to explore how individuals moved on with life following refusal of initial asylum claims generated two interesting themes which are: firstly, factors that affected people's decision to appeal or not to appeal and secondly, the practical problems of appealing against a refusal decision. However, it also emerged that the decision to appeal or not to appeal was to a large extent influenced by both the Home Office's attitude towards refused asylum seekers during appeal processes and the situations prevailing at home, especially children's circumstances.

With regards to the Home Office, most of the migrants shared views which suggest that although the Home Office had passed a ruling not to deport Zimbabweans, detention among Zimbabwean failed asylum seekers increased significantly. Individuals were detained for longer periods following appeal court hearings, and in some situations, Zimbabweans in possession of other countries' passports were increasingly sent back to those countries whose passports they were in possession

of (see, McGregor, 2007, Ranger, 2005, Fletcher, 2008 who discuss the Home Office's focus on detention and deportation between 2002 and 2004). Some migrant parents also claimed that life in detention centres was made more hostile so as to force other detainees to opt to go back home, regardless of the prevailing life threatening circumstances. Like destitution, many believed that detention increasingly became 'a tool of public policy' which the Home Office frequently used to force people to go back home voluntarily. Also, the manner in which individuals constructed their decision-making processes demonstrates that the situations prevalent at home, especially those which involved children's lives played a major role in influencing the decision-making process of whether individuals should appeal or not. Largely, the discussions raised below attempt to reveal migrants' struggles to retain control of their lives in the UK as well as those of the children left behind.

6.5 Factors which Influenced Migrant Parents' Decision as Whether to Appeal Against an Asylum Refusal Decision

As mentioned earlier, all my interviewees said they were granted an in-country right of appeal following refusal. Yet the situations in which these individuals found themselves confronted with at the time of refusal, as well as the kind of advice received from friends and relatives determined how appealing rights were perceived and/or undertaken. For example, Chenai said that on receiving a refusal letter, the first thing she did was to consult relatives and friends, some of whom were refused asylum seekers as well. Through this process, she got the advice that appealing was not the best option:

By then I was doing voluntary work at the refugee forum...the Zimbabwean Community was growing...some Zimbabweans whose claims had been

refused earlier seemed to have better knowledge about the asylum system and the British government's brutal tendencies... Most people felt it was not the right time... People were being detained after submitting appeal forms...people were talking about the people they knew who had been detained indefinitely...some were badly treated in detention centres forcing them to opt to go back...some of these people we have never heard about them once they arrived in Zimbabwe...some were being deported following court hearings...some were being sent back to South Africa and Malawi although the Home Office knew very well that they were Zimbabweans... Most people feared for their lives as the situation at home was getting worse... People were encouraging each other to look for jobs... I needed to work in order to support the kids back home... A friend who was a refugee offered me accommodation... so I left government accommodation and went to live with her...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Similarly, Voni explained her situation as follows:

...I received a rejection letter...it was a painful experience...I cried...I got depressed, but my cousin sister advised me that I needed to take practical action so as to look after the children at home... My cousin also discussed my case with other Zimbabweans... She told me everyone felt it was dangerous to appeal because it was not safe... Although the policy was that Zimbabweans were not to be deported... people were being detained and even deported following appeal hearings... People who used fake documents were the most targets... most people were going into hiding... By then I had started taking cleaning jobs... at least I was now in a position to send money home to the kids... So I did not appeal then...(Voni, female aged 49).

Although the belief that appealing would increasingly lead to detention and deportation seemed pervasive, some migrants said they were forced to appeal by family circumstances which had grave effects on children's lives. For example,

Tendai described the situation of her children at home which forced her to appeal immediately following the rejection of her asylum and said she urgently needed to be reunited with them because of their vulnerable state:

I received my refusal letter when my husband had just been caught up in a petrol bomb...when I got the opportunity to talk to him...he was so much in pain...but was still able to talk... He confessed to me that he did not think he would survive... I asked whether he thought I should go back... but he said I did not need to sacrifice my own life for his ...'I am dying anyway' ...he told me... 'but do anything you can for the sake of the children'... These were his last words to me... Although appealing did not appear the best option then, I had to do so for the sake of the children... I started looking for a job so I could support the children... I made my 2nd application [appeal] immediately after my husband had just died... I indicated that there was now no one to look after my children...but I was told 'you left your children willingly' and was asked to produce more evidence regarding my husband's death – although I submitted this a long time ago... I am still waiting for a decision to be made....(Tendai, female aged 45).

Similar views were also shared by Rudo who said when she learnt that her asylum claim was rejected and that she had the right to appeal against the Home Office's decision, she quickly submitted her appeal letter as by then her husband was critically ill at home as highlighted earlier. She further reported that by then, Zimbabwe's health system was almost on the verge of collapse, and her husband was not getting any meaningful medical attention. Rudo found herself under pressure because every time she called home she was told that her husband 'was dying slowly', and the challenge was that her husband would say to her 'can you do something...?' "He expected me to do something about his situation" (Rudo). As Rudo further reflected on these issues, she said her faith hinged on the hope that appealing was most likely to result in her being granted leave to remain as she

thought she had all the answers to the queries which formed the basis of the Home Office's refusal decision:

Yes...family issues pushed me to appeal immediately...as a teacher who was victimized, the Home Office was beginning to understand this situation... Although I could not afford to engage a solicitor to represent me...I went ahead thinking that things would work out for me...but especially for my husband ...and my daughter... I was prepared to defend my case in court as I had all the facts... Yeah...within 10 days...as required...I submitted my appeal application... (Rudo, female aged 39).

Although Rudo had hoped that her husband and daughter would join her in the UK where her husband was most likely to gain access to proper medical services, her dream did not materialize. She described this development as a betrayal of hope:

Unfortunately my appeal was rejected... It was very unfair because some people who were also teachers were being granted... The basis for refusal this time was the statements I gave as new evidence which they say were slightly different from what I said when I came... I did not know what to do... I became helpless... Yeah, my hope was lost after this... I helplessly watched life events taking their course... Eventually my husband died in 2003... This phase marked the beginning of new problems... Although I had always wanted to be straight forward – I was betrayed by the system...I was hard pressed and had to look for a job... I was frustrated...when I moved from NASS accommodation I just went under cover... Since my husband died my daughter started living with my mother... Lots of problems started at home...and they are still on-going...(Rudo, female aged 39).

Some, (for example Asylum Aid, 2007) have noted that the 'culture of disbelief' seems to dominate the asylum appeal processes. Increasingly, minor changes to the information presented on arrival are perceived as lack of consistency which often leads to a negative judgment of the claim.

For migrant parents whose asylum claims were refused while they were still in detention, appealing was the only way to escape deportation:

My asylum was rejected when I was still in detention... With the help of a solicitor, I appealed immediately... My solicitor worked hard for me to remain in the country... he also made it possible for me to be released... But the appeal hearing itself was a nightmare... My lawyer tried hard... He raised all the issues relating to how teachers were the target of the political system... But the Home Office emphasized that I came with the intention to work... My appeal failed again ... I discussed the way forward with my solicitor who surprisingly said I had reached the ceiling... I could not appeal anymore... I just found myself dumped by the system... I then started leading a life of destitution until now... I have been living with different people... moving from one place to another... sometimes getting support from refugee organisations... But its not much at all... I take paid work at times ... which of course is against the law... but like anyone else caught in this situation life no longer mean anything... I recently submitted a fresh claim following the new country guidelines... (Tafara, male aged 45).

The above narrative suggests that Tafara's case was handled under the 'one-stop' procedure of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which, subsequently was amended under the Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. Asylum seekers whose claims were considered under this procedure had only one chance of appeal after which, if unsuccessful they would automatically be liable to deportation (see, ICAR, 2007). Thus, for those who found themselves abandoned by the system at the end

of the asylum appeals process, as Tafara has mentioned, going undercover was considered the only way to avoid detention or deportation.

Tafara also made reference to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal ruling of November, 2008 (see Home Office, 2009) which lays down the existing country guidelines. The current country guidelines recognise a further deterioration in the human rights situation in Zimbabwe and acknowledge that all persons especially those returned from the UK following an unsuccessful asylum claim are likely to face persecution if they are unable to demonstrate loyalty to the Mugabe regime (also see Clayton, 2010, Refugee Council, 2008). However, the Tribunal which passed this ruling stressed that “each case will turn on its own facts” and further warns that “we do not say that most Zimbabwean claimants will be unable to demonstrate loyalty to the regime that will be necessary to avoid the persecutory ill-treatment meted out to those who cannot...this will be a question of fact to be resolved in each case” (Refugee Council, 2008:2). On the one hand, these guidelines provide a ray of hope for refused asylum seekers as it forms the basis of a fresh claim for many. Yet, on the other hand, refused asylum seekers are still expected to prove they will not be able to demonstrate loyalty to the Mugabe regime if they were to be sent back, which, of course, is not any easy thing to do, especially in cases where credibility has long been cast into doubt (see Weber, 2008).

Reflecting on his situation, Tafara described his life as ‘torn part’ as his never-ending struggle with the UK asylum system meant he had to continue enduring separation from his children. When asked whether he thought his fresh claim would yield positive results so as to necessitate reunification with children, Tafara explained that the life of limbo had left him in a situation where he had to ‘hang on to any straw’ in order to make sense of the desperation in which circumstances beyond his control

had thrown him into. At the same time, Tafara strongly felt that time was running out, “not only time as an empty category to be disposed of, but also the future. Because of such limitations, the future becomes disassociated from the present while one’s power of planning it decreases” (Cwerner, 2001:21). In particular, Tafara said living in limbo had destroyed his parental relationship with his children as he was now absolutely powerless to intervene into their situation and that it seemed almost impossible to be reunited with them in the UK:

My children have had these 8 years of loneliness; they are now 13 and 17 years...I have not been there to support them...I feel caught up between hard stones... My older daughter has gone wild and my family have also given up on her; they think that I don’t care and I don’t love them anymore... I dread phoning home - calling home has long ceased to be a joy to me. I don’t have anything to tell my children now, and equally they are no more interested... Frequently I hear my young daughter’s last words echoing in my ears ‘Bye Dad, I know you are not coming back for us’. I don’t know how she knew this would happen, but these words haunt me day and night... I have failed them, forced into living in exile due to the circumstances... If one day I were to see them, if ever such an opportunity is going to come my way ... I will sit down with them and explain how the system has prevented me from being with them for all this time... (Tafara, male aged 45).

For individuals who said their asylum claims were rejected while they lived in NASS accommodation, appealing was considered the only way to avoid destitution. For example, Nyasha who cited accounts of friends who were leading a life of destitution also said his worst fears were that he could end up being in the same situation. However, in his narrative, Nyasha also cited family problems at home in ways which suggest that his decision to appeal was influenced by the pressure exerted from home:

Being refused asylum was the most painful situation I have ever experienced in my life... I had heard many stories of friends and colleagues who were living in destitution...as illegal migrants ... I did not want to lead such a painful life...hiding from the police... Although many Zimbabweans thought appealing was a lottery ticket ...I had no other choice... I struggled to get a solicitor here because I was transferred and could not go back to London to my old solicitor... I found one through a refugee organisation...but I was not very happy with his services because he did not seem to give attention to important details about my case... I tried to look for another one but I failed... I submitted my appeal at last...by that time rumour had it that my wife was having an affair with another man... I also suspected...because she was changed...she was behaving indifferently... Some of her complaints were that I abandoned her...she was getting very impatient...this also was affecting my relationship with the children... Whenever I called I could tell that they were withdrawing slowly... Nothing seemed to be in place really... I did not want to lose my family... I wanted us to become a happy family again...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

However, when asked how his appeal proceeded, Nyasha explained that:

I was refused... The Home Office believed that I only took advantage of the fact that I had a business visa which gave me easy access...and I was trying to take advantage of the asylum system... They thought I wanted to take advantage...but of what?... I did not enjoy a life of dependence at all... I did not enjoy living in the NASS house at all... Things got completely out of hand...I had to move out of NASS accommodation...this was a blow not because I enjoyed being dependent, but at least it gave me some hope that I was still a person...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

Worth note here is the fact that the more immigration control continued to constrain migrant parents from gaining the right to legal status, the more parents increasingly experienced time as not being on their side, particularly with regards to separation

from dependents. Clearly, in Nyasha's case, not only was losing an appeal case a cause for concern, but family issues got out of hand to the extent that what Nyasha dreaded would happen to his family became a reality:

Finally life crumbled... What I feared most befell me... I lost my wife to another man...I don't blame her...even if it were me, I don't think I would have waited indefinitely... The kids started living with their step daddy...which generated lots of problems...my hands are tied...I cannot do anything about their lives for now...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

Sukai, who at the time of the initial interview was living in destitution following eviction from NASS accommodation, said her appeal was rejected:

I was refused...and I appealed against the decision, explaining my health condition and why it was not the appropriate time for me to go back to Zimbabwe. I explained that the health system in Zimbabwe had collapsed and that it was critical for me to get proper medical care and this was also supported by a letter from my doctor. I explained everything on paper as though I was telling someone who did not know anything about Zimbabwe... (Sukai, female aged 39).

However, Sukai claimed that her appeal court hearing was too demanding for someone with a health condition such as hers and also she had no legal representation:

I attended the court hearing... It was traumatic...I could not breathe properly but I had to speak out for myself...as I could not afford to engage a lawyer... The Home Office representative was very cunning... Instead of concentrating on the issues I had raised on my appeal application... He asked about the political events that took place in Zimbabwe before I left... I

did not know that I had the right to refuse to answer...I struggled... I won the case anyway because the judge wrote to me few days later saying he had recommended that I should be granted a stay... But then...the Home Office is said to have appealed against this decision, and I was not informed, perhaps because I did not have a solicitor to represent me... and I did not have the address for them to send the letter to... I was not invited to attend the court hearing... It is said the court passed a ruling in favour of the Home Office... I was not informed of all these developments... I only got to know when I received a letter of eviction...In reality I was knocked down on technical grounds...I called the Home Office and even went there... I was moved from office to office...but no one owned up to be the Home Office... I tried everything...but was told I had lost it ...it was said to be my entire fault... (Sukai, female aged 39).

The above narrative demonstrates some of the complex situations in which refused asylum seekers often face in the absence of legal support and representation. Some have therefore argued that the appeals processes do not seem to take all the necessary steps to ascertain that the rights of unrepresented asylum seekers are protected and also to make sure they are not disadvantaged by the appeals procedures. Often individuals are left with ill-feelings that their case has not been given a fair treatment (see, Gower and Liisanantti, 2007).

However, to Sukai, the issue at hand was not only that of being refused asylum, but her health was deteriorating significantly and the kind of life she was leading seemed to exacerbate her condition; as by then she had no permanent home – she used to move from one friend to another:

By then I was really poorly...I used to live with friends who were very kind to me...but I was very sensitive about my health situation...I felt like I was

being a burden and was giving other people unnecessary problems... (Sukai, female aged 39).

Although, during our initial interview Sukai had said she believed that her son (before he died) was well looked after by the woman she called her 'friend', during one of the subsequent interviews, Sukai reflected on this period and recollected that following refusal of her appeal, she could no longer work, and was therefore not in a position to financially support her son and his carer. She then went further to discuss serious issues of child neglect which she had not shared initially, but which continued to be a concern of trauma in her life:

I explained my health and financial situation to my son and his carer... Friends who are here were helping me to pay for my son's school fees and I could only afford to send at least £40 per month - £20 for his pocket money and £20 for food... I used to text this woman (my son's new mother) bible verses to encourage her whenever I could. But she said to one of my friends... 'Tell her we don't eat verses here. The verses ...cannot translate into money. What we need here are pounds'... Not only that, but there was a time when she went to visit her children for 3 weeks and left my son [he was 12 years by then] on his own... I was told by one of my friends that 'your son spent the holidays on his own, cooking, washing, and looking after himself...' I called my son to check on this...but he asked me how I got to know about this...and said he did not want me to know... He then said...'now that you have found out, please mum don't ask her. I know you are not happy about this, but asking her will make life worse for me. You don't know what she will say or do to me as you are that far away. Where will I go if she says I no longer want to live with you? Think about me first before you even consider satisfying your emotions. I don't think I am alone, God is with me. Pray for me, but don't say anything to her...' (Sukai, female aged 39).

As the above narrative suggests, children left behind frequently suffer in silence in the hands of abusive carers and frequently the fear of further repercussions often prevent them from sharing their experiences with parents.

Highlighting some of the barriers to exercising children's rights, Anderson (2010b) observes that while separated children in the UK are generally taken to be unaccompanied asylum seekers, largely unrecognized or invisible are numerous numbers of children who are separated from their parents by immigration control. Moreover, the general "response is likely to be that the parents have decided to migrate internationally. This simply requires them to be separated from their children, and however painful this may be, this is the parents' decision and the family must live with the consequences" (Anderson 2010b:7).

Yet, the sort of problems and trauma this kind of separation induce is apparent in the case of separated parents like Tafara, Tendai, Rudo, Nyasha and Sukai. As parents, being caught up in the web of immigration control generated a strong sense of alienation from children and sometimes experiences of relationships getting more and more strained became obvious. At the same time, these experiences made it apparent that their relationship with their children was increasingly becoming more and more temporarily defined, particularly as evidenced by their powerless position to intervene in the circumstances that characterized their children's day to day lives in Zimbabwe. In this context, the particularity of my interviewees lies in their being a special category of migrants, but one often overlooked by the state and invisible to the public, that of persons with dependents, but ones who could not independently exercise the right to family. Thus, in addition to giving a clear picture of the complexities of leading a life of limbo as a parent who is separated from children,

more importantly, my interviewees' experiences strengthen Anderson's argument that "immigration controls are not simply neutral, filtering out the legal from the illegal, the genuine from the bogus. They work with other processes to produce certain types of relations, between individuals, groups and the state" (Anderson, 2010b:12). In this instance, immigration control plays a significant role in separating families as well as in denying parents the right to protect their own children. Yet, this issue remains hidden as it is rarely raised in debates and other public discourses that concern themselves with separated children and those that seek to bring solutions to concerns of children's vulnerability.

One of the critical themes which threaded through almost all the narratives discussed above relates to constraints encountered by refused asylum seekers in their endeavour to access legal support and representation. The section below explores these issues in-depth.

6.5.1 Legal Aid and Access to Legal Support: A Right or Privilege for Refused Asylum Seekers?

In theory, asylum seekers who cannot pay for their legal advice and representation are entitled to publicly-funded legal advice throughout the entire asylum process. Through the Legal Services Commission (LSC), asylum seekers are signposted to government approved legal advisors. However, draconian changes to asylum welfare provision systems have also seen asylum seekers' rights to legal advice being increasingly curtailed. The legal aid amendments of 2004 changed the way in which legal advisors dealt with clients, especially those who fell in the category of refused asylum seekers. LSC expected legal advisors to firstly seek permission before taking up appeals cases. Among other things, funding for attendance and

representation at interview sessions with the Home Office was withdrawn, except in very special cases. In the absence of representation, applicants could make a request, well ahead of time to have the interview tape-recorded (see ICAR, 2007). These new developments potentially disadvantage individuals who have experienced traumatic situations in their countries of origin who might find it difficult to speak out about their experiences in an environment where they are not represented.

Additional legal cuts measures were also introduced in 2005 which saw the introduction of a financial threshold for lawyers who could only claim five hours of payment per client for the initial asylum claims, and four hours for appeals cases (Prior, 2008). Changes were also made with regards to the way legal practitioners took up cases as they were required to make retrospective decisions which involved pre-judging a case's likelihood of success in order to assess the financial value of representing certain clients (ICAR, 2007). This meant that legal practitioners were discouraged from taking up cases which were unlikely to succeed. Typically, refused asylum seekers could only access legal aid if their case was perceived by lawyers as having at least a 50% chance of being successful. Thus, "in making these cuts, the government intended to filter out weak applications by discouraging those without a significant prospect of success from appealing the Home Office's decision and therefore lowering the costs of the appeals process" (ICAR, 2007:16). Some of the effects of these changes have been reluctance among legal practitioners, with some legal firms withdrawing from taking up asylum cases, especially those which the Home Office had initially refused, resulting in many being left without legal representation (Prior, 2008, Refugee Council, 2005). Others (for example, Refugee Council, 2005) have therefore observed that many refused asylum seekers, increasingly, find themselves unfairly denied publicly funded legal support as in most cases lawyers do not openly discuss with clients why a claim was

deemed to have insufficient merit. Instead, refused asylum seekers are advised by solicitors to privately pay for legal services if they at all wish to have their cases taken up, which often push individuals to engage in illegal working (see, Refugee Council, 2005). Some of these concerns were discussed by some of the migrant parents I interviewed for this study.

Among the migrant parents who discussed difficulties in accessing legal advice and representation following refusal of an asylum claim was Mutsa who described her experiences as follows:

I really would have wanted to appeal...but no lawyer was willing to take up my case... I consulted three lawyers...who all felt that my case was complicated... The Home Office had highlighted lots of inconsistencies in my case... The first lawyer told me that my appeal needed lots of work and he did not have time... The second lawyer said he was busy... The third lawyer did not even show any interest after reading my refusal document ... No one wanted to represent me... I had no other choice but to just leave it...what could I do...? (Mutsa, female aged 32).

Since Mutsa said she was living in NASS accommodation getting alternative accommodation was not easy for her:

I struggled to get someone to live with... My friend who used to live in Birmingham finally agreed to accommodate me for a short time... I shared a room with this friend in a student shared house for about 2 months... When I started working ...she organised a room for me in the same house... At least it was a relief because I could send money to my mother... By then my husband had established that I was here...he threatened my mother even more... He would also take our daughter away from her for one week, or two weeks...(Mutsa, female aged 32).

Jonasi also explained that when he received his asylum refusal note, he became very confused as some of the issues raised by the Home Office did not seem to mirror what he thought he said during his initial asylum interview. He had to seek for advice from the nearest refugee organisation where he used to do voluntary work once a week. Although the organisation managed to link him with a solicitor, this was about five days later. Jonasi said he managed to discuss his case with the solicitor, but only to be told that the solicitor's position had changed by the time he went for his second appointment:

I only met with the solicitor once for about an hour...it was fruitful... We went through my refusal letter as he explained everything to me...we discussed the possible points of strength which I could raise in my appeal... He even suggested many avenues of addressing the case... We were to meet again in 3 days time... On the day of appointment his secretary just advised me that he was very busy...and that he was no longer in a position to continue with my case... It was shocking because the last time we met he seemed very understanding... That was it...I could not get anyone else within that short period to take my case forward... I left government accommodation into destitution... I am still living in destitution...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

It therefore appears a practical phenomenon that legal practitioners increasingly assess cases in order to ascertain the chances of success, and that where a refused case does not appear to offer much joy, clients are easily ditched without being given any meaningful explanation – a situation which leaves the future of the vulnerable individuals at stake.

Other migrant parents also shared experiences which suggest that in the absence of a clear and well established assessment standards of what constitute a sufficiently worthwhile case, refused asylum seekers often find themselves caught up in situations where they are unsure whether it is true that their case was found unworthy or whether legal practitioners simply want to make quick money out of them:

I just looked at the form...it was complicated... It needed a lawyer to explain things... I got one but he said my chances of winning the case were very slim...and that I did not qualify for a free lawyer unless I was prepared to pay... It was confusing that he did not think I was going to make it, but he wanted me to pay him money... What for then...? I told him that I had no money and he said that was entirely my own problem... I have never been able to understand these systems where some get free things while others are denied... From the onset I was denied accommodation before my case was even considered... Again I was denied the opportunity to engage the lawyer...I did not know why me... I took it as a sign that I was not valued from the beginning... I gave up completely...and decided not to keep in touch with any official organisation... I stopped voluntary work...my focus was now on working to support the family I left at home...(Natsai, female aged 29).

Looking at the situation of Chiedza who said she was already working illegally by the time her asylum claim was refused, friends advised her that since her claim was rejected on the basis that she was an economic migrant she did not qualify for publicly-funded legal aid. Thus, she privately paid a lawyer who subsequently represented her during her appeals court hearing. Reflecting on her experiences, Chiedza expressed views which suggest that the way her case was handled by the lawyer remains a cause for concern:

I never got access to legal representation when I first submitted my asylum application...as my asylum claim was refused on the basis that I was an economic migrant... I felt I needed to appeal... so I engaged a private lawyer...he represented me...but he was not very good...all the new evidence I provided was not included... I only discovered this when we were in court...yet I had paid him lots of money... about £500...but he absolutely did nothing...I am sure that's why my appeal failed...at that point, I just gave up...I concentrated on working...it's only now that I am working on a fresh claim...the lawyer I am working with right now, although many people are saying he is good...he has advised me that I can't get government funding...I am again paying him from my own pocket...(Chiedza, female aged 35).

The above quote seems to support Prior's (2008:39) claim that restrictions to legal aid have given rise to "unscrupulous solicitors, who raise expectations, charge large sums of money up front and do very little for the fee charged". This is another sense in which government policy increases, rather than lessens, already vulnerable asylum seekers' vulnerability to exploitation and abuse by powerful professionals who are gatekeepers to legal redress.

Moreover, there are also other migrant parents who noted that complying with the appeals requirements was unrealistic; pointing out that the 10 day period within which the Home Office required them to lodge their appeals elapsed before they could even establish how to go about the appeals process. In Chipso's case, negotiating access to legal support was also identified as the main reason why she failed to appeal against the Home Office's refusal decision:

I did not know where to go...I asked people, but different people said different things...the information about where to get these lawyers was not made available to me...I personally did not understand the grounds on which

to launch an appeal...and why they thought I was only here to work...I just decided to let it go...because the 10 days given to me was a very short time to put things in order such as...understanding the Home Office letter...deciding on issues that needed further consideration...looking for evidence...all these things needed time...although it was important for me to appeal because I wanted my daughter to join me...I found it hard to meet the procedures of a system which I did not know anything about...(Chipo, female aged 27).

The constraints caused by the asylum appeal processes go beyond reduction in legal aid funding, to include reductions in the amount of time within which individuals can appeal against a refused decision. Where refused asylum seekers find themselves without access to legal support, either because they have been moved from areas where they had established contacts with lawyers or they never had access to legal services from the onset. The 10 days given by the Home Office does not give individuals enough time to engage lawyers and to gather the necessary evidence. In theory, the state grants a right to appeal, but in practice, it places innumerable obstacles in the way of any individual attempting to access and exercise that right.

Although the above discussions seem to demonstrate that individuals frequently find their lives at stake following refusal of asylum claims, my interview data seem to suggest that the kind of lives led by those migrants who said they were still asylum seekers, awaiting initial asylum claims to be settled, also suggested some resemblance to those of the refused asylum seeker in many ways. For example, Farai whose asylum application was made after 10 years of being an undocumented migrant in the UK, said he was not receiving any support from the government, as he did not make his asylum claim immediately following his entry into the UK. He said he was required to report every Thursday to an Immigration Centre which was

quite far away from where he lived, meaning he needed to find bus fare every week. As a person who had claimed asylum following his detention for working illegally, Farai said his life was put on hold, and further expressed concerns that he was no longer in a position to support the son he had left behind:

When I was working I used to send at least £100 a month...but still my son used to grumble a lot about food and nutrition in general...although this was hard earned money, I felt I was doing something for him...now I can't send that much from the little money I have been putting aside...I have tried to explain to him how difficult things are now here.. but even my parents don't seem to understand the problems I am in - the way I am struggling in this country, and all the frustrations...I feel defeated...I hope things will go well for me... I hope to get an answer soon because my asylum is being considered under the new asylum model which my caseworker said is faster... (Farai, male aged 37).

Interview discussions with the migrants also revealed that even in cases where individuals were in receipt of welfare support, struggles, suffering and the need to provide for the children left behind remain evident:

I live in NASS shared accommodation and I am on welfare support now, which is not much..., only £35 per week. This money is only enough for food, I cannot buy clothes. But how does the Home Office expect someone to only eat without dressing? I have never bought any new clothes since I claimed asylum... now I have 2 girlfriends who support me...of course I cannot stretch this help to feed my children... It is hard even for them to comprehend the full picture or come to terms that I can no longer do anything for them... Their uncle (guardian) also finds it difficult...This last week my daughters were telling me that 'uncle is struggling to get food for us'... In addition, they were asking me to buy laptops, and other expensive things...(Simba, male aged 52).

Simba continued,

What pains me is that if I don't provide for these two girls, they don't get any other support from anywhere as their mother is now deceased...At least I have a few properties which give them a bit of income every month...but still I feel bad that their standard of life has deteriorated significantly... this is not the kind of life I would want my children to lead...I hate myself for this...I blame myself for not being man enough...I feel disempowered as a man – my manhood is challenged and I don't feel adequate (Simba, male aged 52).

Tsitsi also explained her situation as follows:

we are under support...it all depends with what the Home Office decides to give you... They can give you money or grocery vouchers – whatever they think is appropriate...The Home Office says if we want to buy clothes or other things like TVs and the like we should get these from charity shops and car boot sales... We cannot send anything home to support our son...This situation forces us to take paid work at times, although this is not allowed. What can we do? It's very difficult to just sit in the house the whole day when you know very well that you are not sick and you have the energy to work... (Tsitsi, female aged 27).

Denied access to the right for asylum, or appeal against refusal and kept in limbo without status that would entitle them to basic substances, another continuous theme running through the discussions raised above relates to migrant parents' participating in illegal paid work as the only means to ensure survival in the UK, as well as the only means to meet the needs of the children left behind. It therefore becomes critical to explore the dynamics involved in taking paid work as well as assessing the extent to which these migrant parents managed to retain a sense of parenthood by reflecting on their continued endeavours to be in control of the lives of the children left behind.

6.6 Illegal Working: Criminalization of Asylum Seekers who Resist Destitution

Literature on poverty suggests that people who find themselves caught up in circumstances of poverty are not always passive victims of the systems that constrain them, but can rather be agents who seek solutions to the situations they find themselves in. For instance, Lister (2004) offers an interesting analysis of poverty and its relationship to social exclusion, exploring how these two life threatening forces can lead to the 'othering' of individuals and also the creation of an 'underclass' of people in societies. Although Lister defines agency as the actions that individuals take in order to exercise some measure of control over their own lives, her work also demonstrates that agency does not operate in a vacuum as what happens in a society is both a reflection of people's actions (agency) as well as a product of the wider social, economic and political institutions and processes (structure), meaning that there is a strong link between agency and structure. Furthermore, Lister's work suggests that for people to be able to exercise self-autonomy, a lot depends on the "extent to which they are able to exercise 'generative' power to control their own lives despite their subordinate position in wider 'hierarchical' political, economic and social power relationships" (Lister, 2004:126).

Lister goes further to discuss the different forms of agency which are normally exercised by people in poverty to negotiate the different possible routes out of their circumstances of which 'getting out' is one of them. The aspect of 'getting out' of poverty employs 'mainstream models of success' whereby employment and education are normally seen as the best routes out of poverty. In 'getting out' of poverty, Lister suggests, individuals always make attempts to exercise their strategic agency, in negotiating the key routes of employment and education which

unfortunately, are forged by structural factors which on the one hand can facilitate or frustrate the exercise of agency on the other (Lister, 2004:145).

However, Lister's work can be criticized for giving more concentration to the underclass of people who are citizens by birth in the country they live, where their poverty can be alleviated through welfare support. This analysis, I argue, turns a blind eye to the existence of groups of people living below the poverty-line; in particular, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants who are frequently labelled as 'undeserving', 'scroungers' and 'malingerers' (Fletcher, 2008). Also, as Lister points out, many of the examples of 'getting out' of poverty situations are frequently drawn from mainly quantitative analysis, which as much as they offer important insights, they often fail to "provide insights into the ways in which these dynamics reflects the agency of the individuals involved or the toll that the struggle to get out of poverty can take on them" (Lister, 2004:147).

This section aims to provide more qualitative insights into these issues by exploring the dynamics employed by the Zimbabwean migrant parents as they took active steps in negotiating their way into the labour market without legal working rights, and the extent to which the UK immigration measures and employers' attitudes weakened their agency.

The dynamics of individuals' movement into paid work suggest that most of the migrant parents targeted the domestic and care industries, as these sectors of employment were routinely mentioned when individuals discussed their work experiences.

At the same time, the increase in demand for migrant workers in the European Union's informal economy including the domestic arena and the social care industry has been well documented (Anderson, 2000b, McGregor, 2007, Yeates, 2009, Newman, et al, 2008). This demand for migrant workers has been created by a combination of factors including a change in family norms and responsibilities as well as demographic changes. Welfare restructuring initiatives in western welfare states have led to the 'feminization of their labour force' (Anderson, 2000b) which in turn has placed a limit on women's ability to cope with their traditional gender roles including reproductive work (Anderson, 2000b, Daly and Lewis, 2000). At the same time, western states are faced with a crisis of an ageing population against a decrease in the population of young people to take up informal caring roles for their elderly (Anderson, 2000, Doyle and Timonen, 2009, McGregor, 2007). This is further compounded by intergenerational disconnectedness as young people increasingly become mobile and therefore no longer live closer to their parents and/or grandparents. This makes kinship caring relationships difficult to maintain or enforce (see, Anderson, 2000b). Together, these factors have given rise to the demand for migrant workers to fill in the gaps as both domestic workers and institutional care workers (McGregor, 2007, Anderson, 2000b, Doyle and Timonen, 2009).

However, there are also other explanations as to why migrants are needed to take up both domestic and care activities. Firstly, both domestic and care work are among the low waged jobs with poor working conditions, including insecure contracts and unsocial working hours (see, Anderson, 2000a, 2000b, 2010). Clearly, these jobs are not valued as 'work' by citizens but are perceived as unproductive work (Anderson, 2000a, McGregor, 2007, Cangiano et al 2009, Ruhs and Anderson, 2010). McGregor's (2007) research with Zimbabwean nationals' who were involved

in care activities in the UK demonstrates this. His findings suggest that care work in general was perceived by his interviewees as 'dirty work' (Anderson, 2000a) which is low paying and stigmatized.

Secondly, migrant workers' employment in the low waged jobs is increasingly a reflection of their lack of choice, primarily as shaped by immigration control (see Ruhs and Anderson, 2010, Anderson, 2010a). Anderson (2010a:300) observes that while immigration controls are rhetorically meant to protect migrants from exploitation, in practice, they undermine their labour protection and "help to produce 'precarious workers' over whom employers and labour users have particular mechanisms of control". Indeed, it is well-documented that migrants with irregular status (including asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants) are often forced by their circumstances to take up irregular jobs in the absence of other options (see Ruhs and Anderson, 2010, McGregor, 2007, Anderson and Rogaly, 2005, Anderson, 2010a, Doyle and Timonen, 2009).

The issues discussed above are of critical relevance to understanding my interviewees' pattern of mobility into paid work as well as understanding the extent to which their agency was constrained by structural factors.

The first case discussed here is that of Chenai who said she immediately turned to illegal working following refusal of her initial asylum claim in 2004, and mentioned that her first job was in care where she worked in a nursing home for almost 3 years. By the time she left she had risen to the position of Senior Carer:

I managed to secure a fake work permit which I used to get a job at a nursing home...I worked at this place from 2004, until end of 2006. I did NVQ 3 in social and adult care and was promoted to a Senior Carer...It was hard work as most of the clients were bed ridden. But at least I could pay for my own accommodation...send money home monthly, about £100, which was a lot of money in Zimbabwe those days... I also could afford to send children's clothes, toys and other presents...which normalized life a little bit...(Chenai, female aged 45).

However, Chenai discussed issues of forced dependence, which resonate with Ruhs and Anderson's (2010) observations that immigration status can constrain migrants from leaving their employers:

This home housed about 40 residents...and sometimes only two carers would turn up for shift... This used to happen especially on weekends... Because of this, most of the white carers did not want to work on weekends. They always called sick... Somehow, the route was altered... I ended up being the one working weekend shifts all the time... I used to do long days...8am to 8pm... Usually weekends were for migrants...With time those with papers left the place... I remained there because I was not sure whether I would be in a position to get another job... eventually I was fired when the home was placed under new management...one Zimbabwean nurse told the new manager that I was an asylum seeker... I then started working with the agency...(Chenai, female aged 45).

As observed by Anderson (2010a), illegal workers have been observed to be highly susceptible to exploitation and other kinds of abuse as employers often take advantage of their lack of legal rights to work. These forms of vulnerability were experienced by some of my interviewees.

One of the migrants who discussed issues of vulnerability was Rudo who said she was doing care work when I had my initial interview with her. Although Rudo was very negative about care work in ways which resonates with McGregor's (2007) findings, her narrative also demonstrate experiences of exploitation:

Care work is hard...The work itself is not what I would have chosen if presented with a choice... As someone who used to work in a better environment, the job I do is a constant reminder of my degradation... My skills are no longer valuable... I face exploitation and abuse everyday... I can't even raise my voice because illegal workers don't have any rights... I have never told my employers about my status...but they always find out... you can tell from the treatment they give you... if you try to resist some of their dehumanising tendencies they turn around and say 'bring your work permit tomorrow'... I have experienced this twice... on both occasions, I had to abandon the jobs to avoid detention... (Rudo, female aged 39).

During my first interview with Chipo, she reflected on her experiences of moving from one job to another, citing circumstances of exploitation and abuse:

At first I got a permanent job in a nursing home...but it was short-lived...as they quickly suspected that my papers were not right... they then started underpaying me... when I confronted them...they asked me to bring in my work permit as they had asked someone from the Home Office to come and verify it... I left immediately...(Chipo, female aged 27).

Chipo continued:

I then got this job as a live-in domestic worker and carer through the agency... Oh my God! I have never seen anything like that... this bogus agency never paid me as agreed... They pretty well knew I had nowhere to report them... Also the woman I was assisting was very racist... she used to call me names - bloody black thing... Then she would turn round and say, 'I think dementia is catching up with me... Her son was also very strict with me... He used to report silly things to the agency... it seems like he also knew that I was working illegally... I found myself caught in between... I was just like a typical slave... a double slave... I lost this job when my client alleged that I had slapped her in the face... This was unfounded. The agency did not pay me... They knew I had nowhere to report them... This job was giving better money those days and I could provide for my daughter... I used to send her clothes... But I got very disappointed when I discovered that she was not the one who was using them... (Chipo, female aged 27).

Chennai also described her experiences as follows:

My agency never used to pay me the agreed rate... one day they sent me to this home... where I was doing one-on-one care... The lady I was looking after asked me to get her a cup of tea... When I came back... I found the manager in her room... she had raised an alarm that I had slapped her on the cheek... Before I realized, they had already called the agency..., the client's family was called to come over... They wanted to make it a police case, I think... I just had to leave... I was suspended by the agency and was never paid... I am told investigations are still underway... Since then the agency has never called me for shifts... (Chennai, female aged 45).

Tendai is another migrant parent who said her first job was in care with an agency. Among other things, Tendai said working with the agency was problematic due to lack of job security, as she needed to work regularly in order to provide for her children and their carers at home. To overcome this problem, in the absence of other choices Tendai had to acquire a fake work permit, which later enabled her to secure a permanent care job with the local council in the area she lived. By the time of our first interview Tendai was still working for the council. She expressed concerns about working illegally:

At least I work 5 nights a week... It seems a better job because it pays better... I always pray on leaving home...for God to make me unseen to the eyes of the Home Office... The Home Office has put my life in a very difficult position... I am not allowed to work, we are not on benefits... yet in my situation I am the breadwinner, not only for my immediate family, but also for the whole extended family...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Furthermore, Tendai cited circumstances of exploitation and stigmatization:

The white carers I work with have the tendency of assigning me to deal with difficult clients...they always say 'you seem to get on very well with so and so...and so and so always has to be those with a challenging behaviour'... Here and there I am stigmatized... Like this lady who always asks me if I can make oats porridge as if I am someone from the jungle... I cannot challenge them... They don't even know I was a teacher...I am very literate...yet I have to take instructions from senior carers who can't even write...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Clearly asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers' lack of rights to legally participate in the labour market casts them as a category of people who fall outside the protection of laws which regulate work relation issues and are therefore vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and abuse.

Looking at other situations like that of Tafara who apparently seemed to be in a very desperate situation following what he said was an unceremonious loss of job, his case demonstrates that even the worst jobs in the UK were becoming extremely inaccessible for individuals without legal status. Tafara said it was becoming almost impossible to take up jobs expressing concerns over the Home Office's raids on asylum seekers who work illegally:

It is not safe these days to carry out such activities... Everywhere people are being seized, taken into detention and then deported... I am in a situation of forced destitution... It is hard to choose between detention and destitution... I don't want to spoil my fresh claim... (Tafara, male aged 45).

However, being caught up in a 'destitution trap' (Refugee Action, 2006) also meant that as much as individuals wanted to stop taking paid work, their circumstances increasingly forced them to do so. During one of the subsequent interviews, Tafara said he was now working 'informally' as a sales representative with a company which sold cooking utensils of a special brand and his job involved carrying out demonstrations in people's homes. What seemed disturbing though was the fact that the product he was trying to promote and get income out of seemed to be very expensive, and almost beyond the reach of the population he had access to. Explaining how desperation had forced him to take up anything that came his way Tafara said:

I have been reduced...as a man, selling pots is very abnormal...but because children need school fees...I have to take up anything... I am struggling to meet my daily needs here as well as the children's day to day needs at home... My children have been separated...I would have wanted them to live together... but my older daughter has been telling me that my parents were not looking after her very well, they were mean with the money I was sending,...My parents were saying my daughter was very difficult to control,... When I tried to reason with my parents, they told me they could not continue staying with her ... She had to go to her mother's place, but I heard her step father did not like her... So she had to move to my brother's place...but things did not work for her and she moved back again to her mother...(Tafara, male aged 45).

Nyasha who equally seemed to be in a similar situation of desperation discussed his experiences of being exploited, describing how he used to be underpaid by his former employer. Although he claimed that he left the job out of frustration, he equally confessed that he was now grounded. Also that the lawyer who was working on his fresh claim had warned him that illegal working had the potential to undermine the credibility of his fresh claim, Nyasha said it now seemed impossible for him to look for another job:

The lawyer suggested I stop all working activities... I need money, but the most important thing is for me to be legal if I could... The life of limbo has treated me rough... I am having only one meal per day...as if I am in Zimbabwe... there is no difference between me and those who are going without food at home... (Nyasha, male aged 46).

Voni is also another migrant who expressed fear in continuing to work illegally:

The atmosphere is now very tense... The home where I used to work was raided last month... Fortunately I was off that day...but two other ladies were taken by the Home Office... I never went back... I have been to a solicitor... He said he is still waiting for the Home Office to return my file so we can start working on a fresh asylum claim...(Voni, female aged 49).

The narratives cited above resonate with Ahmad's (2008:310) observations that illegal migrant workers "live a kind of ontological insecurity due to the constant possibility of being discovered and deported". While Tafara, Nyasha and Voni resolved not to take up paid work anymore in order to avoid criminalization, this concurrently meant considerable deterioration in their financial situations. As Ahmad (2008) sees it, these are some of the dilemmas which constraint illegal migrant workers from attaining upward mobility. While loss of jobs could be one of the common predicaments that often befall many illegal migrant workers in the UK, it had particularly direct negative consequences with regards to my interviewees as this also meant deterioration in the lives of the children left behind who depended on remittances. Parrenas (2005) with reference to transnational families observes that what keeps the migrant parents at peace during periods of separation from children is the ability to provide for them, which sharply contrasts with the situation of my interviewees who had no right to participate in paid work.

Nonetheless, for Tendai and Tsitsi the most dreaded thing became a reality:

One morning when I was about to finish work...the bell went...the senior asked me to go and open the door... It was the Home Office officers...they called my name and said they had come for me because they were told I

was working... Also these men said they delayed coming to get me because they could not find my file... One of them said 'we finally found it in Liverpool in one of the containers with rubbish stuff... Meanwhile I had waited for 7 years, yet my application was taken out of the system... It became important for them to look for my file when they wanted to sue me for working... Staff at the home, including the manager was also staring at me... It was planned...I think so... that's why they were all following me that morning, giving me extra duties to make sure I did not leave before the Home Office arrived... I was detained for almost 2 months...I am currently serving a sentence... I was given 60 hours of community service... I now live with my cousin brother...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Tsitsi explained her situation as follows:

The place where I was working was raided... I was taken into detention... I was sentenced to 100 hours of community service...the house we had was taken away from us ... My financial benefits were stopped... My husband was re-allocated accommodation- a very small room in a shared house... I now live with one of my distant cousins... I don't go to report...but the police come to check on me every night between 10pm and 6am ... Physically it seems I am free...but I feel like I am in chains all the time...(Tsitsi, female aged 27).

In his article 'Crusade against the undocumented', Webber, (2009) paints a picture which suggests the aggressiveness of the immigration officers, who often are accompanied by the police officers, 'frequently wearing stab-proof vests' during raid missions at workplaces. As Webber (2009) observes, on arrival at a workplace:

...they seal exits and storm in, generally at the busiest time, to demand that workers prove their right to be working there...sometimes they carry hand-held fingerprint terminals to perform instant identity checks on those they find working there. Those who can't prove their entitlement are carted off to the detention for further checks, possible prosecution and imprisonment for months, or at best, summary removal from the country (Webber, 2009:1).

Although both Tendai and Tsitsi were spared deportation, community service was given as their punishment and sentence for working illegally, supposing that asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers can only participate in activities classified as work when they are not remunerated. This situation reinforces these migrants' sense of not belonging especially when looked at from the context that the welfare to work policies introduced under the Labour government saw different groups of citizens being ushered into paid work as employment was declared as central to social inclusion and the only route for the 'underserving' to become 'deserving' (Fletcher, 2008:5).

Not only do asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers who are found working are detained and sentenced, but increasingly, their wages are confiscated as 'proceeds of crime'; the same punishment inflicted on those charged with theft and fraud (see Weber, 2009). The following narratives demonstrate this:

All my savings were frozen...as I was in detention, my husband tried to withdraw money on the ATM but the card was rejected... He couldn't get inside to ask why... I had used a fake name to open the account, so I could not face the bank to claim the money...(Tsitsi, female aged 27).

Although I was detained towards the end of the month, I was never paid for what I worked for... I don't know whether it was the Home which decided not

to pay me or my wages were paid to the Home Office... Only God knows...(Tendai, female aged 45).

As both Tendai and Tsitsi's stories testify, the criminalization of asylum seekers as illegal migrant workers casts the already traumatized vulnerable individuals as deliberate criminals. More than this, criminalization of illegal workers who are also parents has particularly grave effects on the children's lives.

My interviewees, like Arendt's stateless;

...were welcomed nowhere and could be assimilated nowhere. Once they had left their homeland they remained homeless, ... once they had been deprived of their human rights they were rightless, the scum of the earth... Those whom the prosecutor has singled out as scum of the earth...actually were received as scum of the earth everywhere; those whom persecution had called undesirable became the *indésirables* of Europe (Arendt, 2004:341-343)

However, unlike Arendt's stateless, my interviewees had minimum rights. During my final follow up round of interviews, some of the destitute migrant parents who previously noted that they had made fresh claim applications said in the absence of rights to work, the only option left for them was that of applying for welfare support under section 4 of Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. However, concerns were raised that section 4 support comes with strings attached:

Applying for section 4 is just like signing your own death sentence... Before it is approved they expect you to sign that you are willing to go home voluntarily and that you will comply with removal orders whenever the Home Office felt it was time for you to go back... I don't know what this will lead to...but what I need for now is support for the immediate ... (Nyasha, male aged 46).

...routes to paid work are guarded... Section 4 appears the only option... Its either section 4 or starvation...which is a difficult choice to make... I have tried everything... for me living with friends doesn't seem a long term option... They have their own problems and they also need their privacy... But taking section 4 is a hard decision because my lawyer said the Home Office is considering to resume removal of Zimbabweans and the first targets will be those on section 4 to ease the burden on the government...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Clearly, for my interviewees, destitution had to be survived at the cost of consenting to deportation, suggesting the choicelessness of the choice presented to them. Indeed, these migrants' lived experiences echo what Jefferson (2010:3) calls extreme experiences of sufferings where "to live is 'to suffer', that suffering is a quality of life itself rather than an aberration".

Like Arendt's stateless who were denied the right to belong to a political community, my interviewees' lived experiences demonstrate some of the processes through which the UK immigration regime constructs and reinforces the vulnerabilities of both the migrant parents and those of the children left behind.

Conclusion

As has been discussed in this chapter, the UK successive governments' draconian asylum legislative measures have not only aimed to deter people from entering the UK, but have also to a larger extent been targeted against those already in the UK as reflected through significant reduction in state welfare support for asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers.

Specifically, with regards to the Zimbabwean population in the UK, it is bewildering to note that although the UK government has suspended removal of failed asylum seekers, for almost five years now, it has never wanted to officially acknowledge that there is no safe route of return for Zimbabweans. As such, many Zimbabwean refused asylum seekers continue to lead a life of legal limbo, as they are not legally entitled to remain or to receive any government support or the 'hard case support' offered to other failed asylum seekers who cannot return to their country of origin due to circumstances which are not of their own. Clearly, this is one of the deceptive facets of the British government's foreign policy with regards to Zimbabwean nationals in the UK.

In spite of the legal aspect of things, crucial to point out here is the fact that the Zimbabwean community in the UK is not a passive group as it has increasingly been involved in political activism as a way of bringing the issues that constrain its members to public attention and also in order to engage the government in a dialogue so as to have these issues redressed. For example, in 2005 detainee Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK staged a hunger strike in protest against the British government's policy on removals of Zimbabwean failed asylum seekers which garnered them considerable public support, and consequently led to the deference of this policy. Yet what is more surprising here is the Zimbabwean

community's silence with regards to the predicament of the exceedingly traumatized separated parents who are leading hopeless lives at the mercy of the relentless immigration system. As yet, the issue of alienation from dependents remains a private concern among the Zimbabwean population as there has not been any organized political activism in demand for family reunification. Clearly, the findings of this study provide useful insights which community activists and organizers as well as the Home Office can draw important lessons from.

Chapter 7: Things Fall Apart: Rightless Migrants and the Loss of Personhood

Introduction

In 'The perplexities of the rights of man', Arendt (2000) offers an analysis of the consequences of rightlessness, arguing that being forcibly uprooted from one's place of birth often marks the beginning of a life of loss. Drawing examples from the lived experience of those who were displaced from their homes during the second world war and also her personal experiences wrought by statelessness, Arendt, (2000) argues that "the first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they had established for themselves a distinct place in the world" (Arendt, 2000:34). The overarching loss however, "is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one...there was no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be assimilated, no territory where they could found a new community..."(Arendt, 2000:34). For Arendt, the problem was of political organisation:

Nobody had been aware that mankind, for so long a time considered under the image of a family of nations, had reached the stage where whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organised closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether (Arendt, 2000:34).

Like Arendt's stateless person, the slave was stripped of rights and "ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (Patterson, 1982:6). This inability to properly belong to any social order is one of the aspects of slavery that leads Patterson to describe it as 'social death'. Other slavery scholars concur that the enslaved "lived and breathed, but they were dead in the social world of men"

(Hartman, 2007:67-68). My interviewees repeatedly used the metaphor of 'death' to describe their experience of loss and un-belonging, and in this chapter and the one that follows, I want to explore the connections between their lack of rights and their sense of being condemned to a 'living death'.

This chapter focuses on how, denied the right to work, they lost the sense of identity they once derived from employment and found it impossible to make a place for themselves or attain a sense of belonging in the UK. The inability to work further meant they lost the capacity to support their children through remittances. As time went by, they also lost control over arrangements for care of their children, and had to helplessly learn of their children's suffering, powerless to intervene to help them. Their connections to the social fabric they left began to unravel. This chapter tells the story of the disintegration of my interviewees' identities, social selves, and ties to their children and spouses.

7.1 Loss of Profession, Loss of Community, Loss of Self

To become stateless was, according to Arendt, to become a 'non-being', to be in effect expelled from humanity. The stateless are stripped of their individuality. Rather than existing as a social being, the person without rights:

becomes a human being in general – without a profession, without a citizenship,...without a deed by which to identify and specify himself – and different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance (Arendt, 2000:44).

For many of my interviewees, being denied the right to work stripped them of self-esteem and feelings of existence, and made them perceive themselves as socially dead persons. One of the migrant parents who discussed his loss in this manner was Nyasha:

...of all the things I have lost...I continue to grieve over my job... I feel like my life has been put on hold... I am 46 now... I am not getting any younger...but I can't account for anything now... All is gone... All what I was has been lost over these 6 years... This is a death sentence... I can't make any claims that I am alive... I have lost self-esteem...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

For Nyasha, who had left Zimbabwe because the right to own property had been withdrawn from him under the Mugabe regime, the inability to legally pursue a career in the UK was devastating:

I had established a cricket academy back home... I often go through the photos...imagining where I could be now had things remained normal in Zimbabwe... I came here thinking things would work... I am grieving over the loss of my profession... I cannot get over it... You cannot explain to people who you were - no one will ever believe you... No one understands what you are trying to say...or why you break down when they introduce this subject... In most cases I lock myself in my room and weep like a woman... You look at yourself deteriorating as each day passes ... You know you are not that cheap...but you cannot do anything about it... The system doesn't allow asylum seekers to work...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

Simba, who had occupied very high positions in the printing industry both in Zimbabwe and South Africa, also spoke of the loss and hopelessness that emanated from his lack of rights to participate in the labour market in the UK:

No one knows that I used to rub shoulders with some of the world's renowned people...I used to have a good job...I used to travel a lot to ...America, China...and other places of the world... I used to be numbered among great people... I raised this issue on my asylum profile... The Home Office does not value this... I go through my certificates so often... At first I had hopes that I would regain a similar position again... But now I feel the opportunity will never come... I cry every time when I look at my certificates...just to watch them rotting... It's great loss to me...(Simba, male aged 52).

Those migrants who were teachers in Zimbabwe described their situations as a double tragedy, commenting on the fact that in Zimbabwe, the political and economic crisis had reduced them to non-persons, such that even though they were middle-class professionals they, like any other ordinary citizen could not afford to meet their day to day needs, and yet escaping to the UK had not allowed them to regain their status:

It's hard to take your mind away from the truth that you are not allowed to work... You look at the certificates every time...you find tears coming out on their own... You have what it takes to lead a good life, the jobs are there..., yet you can't work because you are an asylum seeker ...Your certificates can no longer work for you ...It's a sad situation...(Rudo, female aged 39).

...my certificates remind me that I am not daft... I have been someone before...but where has this all gone...? That's what makes me grieve...(Voni, female aged 49).

Voni elaborated on the sense of powerlessness, indignity and exclusion experienced by those who are denied the right to work through reference to the biblical situation of the prodigal son:

I am just like the Prodigal son who left his country hoping to find a better life somewhere ... He became destitute ... He settled to feed the pigs, and to eat together with them...but found out he had no right even to pigs' food... I ran away thinking Zimbabwe's situation was the worst... But like the prodigal son I long to do even the worst jobs in this country but I am deprived of this opportunity. I am not entitled to anything because I am an asylum seeker – a name that is labelling, source of stigma and point of death. I am a professional teacher but my being a refused asylum seeker has made me invisible and non-existent. The name 'asylum seeker' is a tag for inhumane treatment; it means one who is liable to all kinds of abuse with the state's permission. It has turned me into something strange - half living and half dead... I thought the grass was greener on this side of the fence...only to discover its not green grass, but green carpet...which is not edible... (Voni, female aged 49).

As noted in the preceding chapter, for many refused asylum seekers, the only option left was to apply for section 4 hard case support offered under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, a scheme which forces people to sign that they are willing to voluntarily return home. In other words, they must exchange their right to escape persecution and their freedom to remain in the UK for the right to even the most minimal, bare subsistence. Even then, they receive vouchers instead of cash, stigmatizing them and marking them as different from and inferior to citizens who are full subjects of property. The interview extract below illustrates how this feels:

...I was allocated a room in a block of flats with many other strangers... The first day I went to the shops with my vouchers was a nightmare – the local people looked at me with suspicion. At the supermarket, I was served in a very cold way by the till operator when I handed her the voucher. At the same time I could hear those behind me whispering 'asylum seekers' and how they hated this group of foreigners... This was only the beginning... I wished if I could change my colour... I began to have a very low-esteem of myself... I have experienced this over and over again... I started hating myself... this started having an impact on my health... Finally it has killed me totally... (Noma, female aged 49).

Noma's narrative suggests some elements of self-hatred deriving from being treated as deviant, which Thomas, (1993) has the following to say:

Self-hatred is a deep dissatisfaction with aspects of oneself, stemming from a longing to be accepted by others. Self-hatred can be based upon membership in a group that is thought to have some moral or intellectual shortcoming, upon shame at having physical features that readily identify a person as belonging to such a group or upon the person's shame at various forms of behaviour that are thought to be characteristic of the group. ... We naturally want to distance ourselves from unjustified negative assessments of who we are or what we do. But this is difficult to do when such assessments are a pervasive aspect of the very society in which we live, and when much of our day to day life is a reminder that if we were White or... whatever, then we would not have had this or that negative experience, or at the very least we would not have to steel ourselves for the possibility of such an encounter. It is psychologically jarring to live in a society that professes rationality and good will but that excludes one on the basis of a trait irrelevant to the enterprise at hand. ... And if the trait truly gets in the way of the endeavour to live a meaningful life, it would be next to impossible, psychologically, not to experience a little self-hatred on account of having the characteristic in question (Thomas, 1993:164).

Discussing the concept of slaves' natal alienation, Van der Ross (2008) comments that it not only implies the slave had lost all links with relatives and/or could no longer trace his/her lineages two or three generations back, but more significant is the loss of:

...belonging to a network of relatives, not necessarily blood relatives in the narrow sense, but nonetheless related in the sense that they form a society bond to one another through bonds of ancestry, ..., proximity of living, interdependence for subsistence, protection, loyalties, respect and a number of factors which form a whole to which the individual belongs. It is within this network of social relationships that the slave, in his pre-slavery days, found himself and which constituted his being. It is from this network that he was ripped when he was made a slave, and without this network he became rudderless, without an anchor in life, guided by and belonging in an unfortunate way, not to a society... (Van der Ross, 2008:5).

My interviewees described a similar state of 'rudderlessness' in the face of many obstacles to developing a network of social relationships in the UK that might foster a sense of selfhood and belonging. As a result of a combination of media coverage, political campaigns, and welfare support systems restructuring, asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers have come to be represented as deviant, welfare cheats and bogus, and this has increasingly impeded their assimilation into UK society. In particular, the research literature points to the very negative consequences of the asylum dispersal policies with regards to the settlement of asylum seekers (Bloch, 2000b). Robinson and Reeve, (2006) have shown that dispersal practices frequently generate tension between new migrants and local populations, especially where asylum seekers are resettled in already socially and economically deprived locations, or in neighbourhoods with no history of minority ethnic settlement, where the 'otherness' or 'foreignness' of certain groups of migrants can easily be noticed. This was certainly the case for a number of my interviewees who had found it

impossible to integrate into the communities in which they were placed. Nyasha described the hostility he experienced and the loneliness it implies as follows:

From the time I came over I never had a community... This is one thing which makes me realize that life is no longer the same... In the first NASS house I lived...neighbours hated us... I was still used to life in Zimbabwe where you could just greet people in the street...so I used to greet the neighbours but...they would just stare at me... They would not answer... The next sign of resentment was violence - the youth used to attack us in the night...windows were smashed by stones in the night... Also if you left clothes on the line outside you would often find them smeared with eggs... We tried the police but nothing much was done... The next thing the house was set on fire in the night... Eventually we were moved to another place... I lost some of my belongings... This was a purely white community...despite the fact that the owner of the house had rented it to NASS, the locals did not want any associations with asylum seekers... You just feel that people don't think that asylum seekers are human beings as they are... This life of isolation still continues...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

In Robinson and Reeve's (2006) views, immigration policies such as those which prohibit asylum seekers from working significantly impede their integration into the community, and encourage local people to assume that asylum seekers are lazy people who only come to Britain to take advantage of welfare benefits.²² Frequently, it is the;

²² Voucher schemes have made asylum seekers more visible as a distinct group thereby reinforcing the perceptions of asylum seekers as a burden to the society (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006). In this view, Robinson and Reeve (2006) point at the contradictions that exist between immigration policies and other government policies especially those directed towards ending social exclusion. They observe that in particular, the social exclusion unit was established in order to address the marginalization of disadvantaged groups, yet on the contrary, asylum policy assigns asylum seekers to a parallel system of support that excludes and marginalises them (Robinson and Reeve (2006:22).

...‘hanging around’ of people with no jobs or leisure opportunities to fill their time...which can serve to exaggerate the perceived scale of new immigration into an area and propagate myths, peddled in certain media portrayals and political discourse, that new immigrants are contributing little to society, thereby fostering animosity among existing residents towards migrants (Robinson and Reeve, 2006:21).

Some of my interviewees’ experiences resonate closely with this:

In all the places I have lived in the UK, local people have never liked me... Everyone gets to know you are an asylum seeker because of idleness... You can’t stay in the house all day...because if you sleep all day you find it hard to sleep in the night... You start thinking about problems... But if you go out...no one wants to be associated with you... Sometimes you go window shopping...but if you keep on loitering around the place...people will think you want to steal...especially because of your skin colour... I have tried to befriend neighbours...but they don’t respond... Sometimes you can go for days without talking... Its abnormal...slowly you become abnormal to the point of talking to yourself... (Mutsa, female aged 32).

Also, Natsai said:

I appreciate a mere hand-shake more than money... It’s therapeutic to be part of a community... But sometimes you go for days without talking to anyone... Its not life at all... I long to belong...(Natsai, female aged 29).

In other cases, migrant parents experienced their isolation as a loss of personhood referring to the African concept of "*Umntu umuntu ngabantu*" which translates as 'a person is a person among others', and is a saying attributed to Desmond Tutu. Voni, for example, said:

I have been stripped off of my identity... and all rights that make a person a person...especially the right to belong... I have lost that which is core in a person's life when we think in African terms... How can a life be lived outside the shelter of community? ...But what makes a person a person...?(Voni, female aged 49).

These same sentiments were shared by Simba and the following interview extract illustrates many asylum seekers' longing to belong to the wider society in which they find themselves:

I miss our African practices which binds people together... In Africa we say you can only be a person among other people... Here lack of community alerts you that something is wrong... Community makes you feel human... It makes your existence real and valuable... I have tried different ways to fit in but it seems the more I try the more I am rejected... I used to go to community centres hoping to mix with other people... You always feel people don't like you... They do their things as if you are not there... I joined community courses at some point...but it did not work... I tried community football... One day I went to a local church...no one even greeted me... It was a white church...but things were even worse when I attended a service in one of the black churches... People can easily identify you are an asylum seeker... You cannot even afford a penny for offering...(Simba, male aged 52).

Moreover, Simba also said because of his being a war veteran at home and also his ZANU (PF) background, the Zimbabwean community in the UK regarded him as a supporter of the Mugabe regime. Thus, he experienced himself as excluded from both the local British and the black Zimbabwean community:

Because of my political background I cannot even be part of the Zimbabwean community here... I have tried to join the MDC...but I have been rejected... If I go to meetings I am taken as a traitor... People think I am one of Mugabe's Central Intelligent Officers... I spend most of my time in the house...without a radio or TV life becomes very hard to live... My relatives live far away from where I live... Few who live close by are always at work... I only get to see them during weekends... This kind of life is hard... I can't go to pubs because I don't have any money to spend...(Simba, male aged 52).

Similar experiences were discussed by Tsitsi whose husband used to be a police officer in Zimbabwe:

Most Zimbabweans don't want to be associated with us... People believe my husband is a CIO [Mugabe's Central Intelligent Officer]... Because of this, he faces so much resistance... One day he attended an MDC meeting... People just dispersed when they saw him... People did not even want to greet him... It makes you feel isolated... You are not liked by your own community in a foreign land...you can't just blame the whites...(Tsitsi, female aged 27).

Patterson (1982:79) observes that to belong to a community is to have a sense of one's position among one's fellow members, to feel a need to assert and defend that position, and to feel a sense of satisfaction if that claimed position is accepted by others, and a sense of shame if it is rejected. My interviewees were unable to

assert, defend or take satisfaction in any identity or position in UK society, but as the remainder of this chapter aims to show, they also experienced the gradual disintegration of their ties to the social fabric back home, and of everything that had previously given them an identity and position to assert, defend and take satisfaction among their own families.

7.2 Spectators of their Own Crumbling Lives?

I begin this section with the case of Tendai who had spent 8 years in the UK as a refused asylum seeker and had no right to reunion with her children. Also noted previously, Tendai's husband died in Zimbabwe during the time she was trying to get her asylum claim settled, and following the death of her husband, Tendai became responsible for supporting her 3 children even though she remained separated from them. The children were forced to move to new carers and went on to experience repeated bereavements:

...when my husband died ... my children stayed in the family house with a maid who was a close relative... She also died 6 months later. My children then moved to my mother's place...but my mother died after... 6 months. My father continued to live with them... but he also died a year later. One of my sisters took them...after 4 months she also died... My relatives then decided to stay away from my children... I am sure they viewed my children to be carrying a death bug.... My two boys [15 and 17 years old by then] started living on their own, my daughter went to live with my sister and her family in Harare... I was sending money to help with the funerals...My challenge now is that I have to send more money as I have to support two separate families at home...(Tendai, female aged 45).

For Tendai, changes in her children's carers also meant new challenges for her, and called for many adjustments, especially as these were not people she would have opted to entrust her children's lives to had she been presented with a choice. A major challenge confronting Tendai was that though she was a refused asylum seeker who had no right to participate in paid work she was also the sole breadwinner and responsible for providing for her children's daily needs. In the absence of other choices, Tendai reconciled these conflicting roles by using a fake work permit to take up paid work in the UK (see Chapter 6). For a while, this enabled Tendai to manage the lives of her children as follows:

...at first my arrangement was to pay for the boys' school fees...utility bills...I would give them pocket money each month...about £50 pounds each...also I have been sending about £100 each month to my sister and brother-in-law for food as they were staying with my daughter...and also my daughter's school fees I used to pay separately...(Tendai, female aged 45).

However, this arrangement was short-lived as new problems emerged at home which meant she had to change the way she had been sending money home:

I started to get reports that my boys were drinking... I stopped giving them money directly... I would send money to my brother-in-law who would pay for their bills...and give them cash little by little... But the boys also started complaining that he was using the money for his own purposes...and made claims he had started a business... I was torn apart – I didn't know who to believe... I reversed the order of things again... I started dealing with the boys privately... This did not please my brother-in-law either...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Although Child-Headed-Households emerged in Zimbabwe and other African countries as a new form of family structure due to HIV/AIDS which often claim the lives of parents leaving children behind to run households (see, Foster, 2006), Tendai's case demonstrates that being separated from children by immigration law also has adverse effects on children's lives. At the same time, the knowledge that children are leading lives which are equivalent to those led by orphans leaves the separated parent feeling utterly helpless and powerless, and this was evident during my interview discussion with Tendai, who almost in tears described the hopelessness of her sons' situation:

My children's world changed completely to an extent that all their Christian values were eroded by living on their own. They have turned to drinking and drugs using the money that I send them. I have completely lost them... They have dropped from college... They are both into early marriages.... They have been traumatized by circumstances since the time I left them... They are ...no longer ambitious about anything. I continue to pay the penalty and punishment... I provide for them and their children and wives... I don't want even to think about their future... I cannot sustain this.... (Tendai, female aged 45).

While it seemed that Tendai had managed to sort out her sons' lives, new concerns arose, but this time it was about her daughter, who seemed not to be in a good relationship with her carers. Yet as Tendai explained, she too felt powerless to intervene:

...but my daughter also became wild... she ran away...from home. At one time she spent school holidays at school... She told the teachers that she could not stand living with my sister... The head-teacher called me...he

wanted to understand the situation... I was confused because I knew my sister as a good person... When I confronted her regarding my daughter's concerns, she told me it was not practical for her to treat my daughter the same way she treated her small children... 'If I buy bananas, I cannot buy enough to give to all the children... At least I try to make sure that the little ones get fruits once in a while. I think you know how the situation here is like – things are very expensive...the money you send is not enough... I cannot just buy things for your daughter only...' Which I think makes sense...I started giving my daughter pocket money secretly... But up to now I don't know the truth about the situation...only God knows...(Tendai, female aged 45).

However, as a refused asylum seeker who was working illegally, Tendai was raided, detained and sentenced (as discussed in the preceding chapter). This happened at a time when she needed to work more than ever, given the many financial commitments she had entered into, in her endeavour to ensure her children's protection, survival and well-being. Indeed, this had adverse financial consequences for the children, and also for the carers, who as her daughter's case suggests, felt they could no longer continue to support her children without any financial assistance coming from their mother. This emerged during one of the follow up interview meetings I had with Tendai following her release from detention. By then Tendai was leading a life of destitution, meaning that her children's lives had also fallen to pieces:

I think it's because I could not send money...my daughter was chased away by my brother-in-law...when I was in detention.... When I later asked why...he said she was misbehaving because she went to a church conference without his permission... I then asked my sister if they would treat their own daughter in the same way... My sister just said to me... 'sisy [sister] its hard for me to express my innocence in this matter...but I personally was also affected by this development...' Also my older son

decided to go to South Africa where he sought asylum... I am grounded now... I can't do anything... I can no longer provide for the children ... I don't know if my appeal application is still valid...since I breached the law... Perhaps they might consider deportation...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Tendai's case clearly illustrates how migrants who are rendered rightless through immigration law cannot only lead a life of desperation in terms of their social and economic life in the UK but also with regards to their failure to provide for the children left behind. Their sense of powerlessness is almost overwhelming, and the issue of parents losing all control over the lives of the children left behind emerged as a recurrent theme. Many of my interviewees expressed fears that their children were being exploited by family members and carers. One such case was that of Chipso who explained the circumstances of her daughter in ways which suggest that trust between the migrant parents and carers frequently breaks down as the period of separation prolongs. Also, close relatives often communicate suspicions of child neglect or exploitations, under the guise of collective responsibility for children, which in turn puts the migrant parents in a position where they are torn apart. Often parents ask themselves 'is the person who is telling me this also interested in remittance or is it that the person who is looking after the children is really neglecting them'? In Chipso's case events unfolded as follows:

...these issues started as complaints from my mother. Whenever, I called...she would go on and on complaining how my child was being badly treated by my sister. She would say to me 'you need to let me have this child; she is not being looked after well'. At first I thought she was jealous that my sister was getting more money from me than what I was giving her. I then found out for myself that something was not going on right... One day I called my sister and after talking to her I requested to talk to my daughter. When my daughter came on the phone I asked her whether she liked the clothes I had sent her. She then said to me, 'but mama how could you buy

me only two things and yet you bought... [sister's daughter] several things. Next time could you please buy me jeans like the ones you bought...? [sister's daughter]'... I was really upset that my sister was giving my child's clothes to her own daughter. This incident pained me, and even right now I cannot explain the pain, and as I am talking to you I can still feel this pain deep down my heart ... My mother had to take her... (Chipo, female aged 27).

In another case, Rudo was very concerned about her daughter's situation. In particular, she was not very happy with the way the money she was sending home was being administered. She re-capped on how hard it was to earn money in the UK as a refused asylum seekers, characterising her money as the 'wages of fear' (see Burnett and Whyte, 2009), and yet she feared that the money she was earning was not benefiting her own child:

In my situation, the money I earn doesn't seem to offer any solutions to my problems... I don't enjoy it and neither does it benefit my daughter... Since my husband died life has never been the same for her...in addition to being deprived of the money I send...she has never had a permanent home. If she is not at boarding school, she is either with my mother or my aunt...my aunt complains that my mother mistreats her a lot... This pains me a lot...(Rudo, female aged 39).

Following a deep breath, Rudo continued:

There are times when I also strongly feel this is happening...I feel it's true that my mother is not looking after her well... I send money...but sometimes she doesn't give her... They treat her like a little kid, yet she is now 19; she needs sanitary towels, pants and other things...I feel my mother favours my young brother and he benefits a lot more than my daughter...but then it could be normal for a mother to favour her own children, maybe if it were me I would be doing the same...Another thing that worries me always is that

they blame my daughter for everything that goes wrong in the house. If I call my mother she always says “your daughter did this...she did this...she did that” – they forget that I am the mother and they don’t care how I feel. I cry my heart out after calling home most of the times...I lead a life of sorrow... (Rudo, female aged 39).

Another persistent cause of anxiety in Rudo’s case was that her relationship with her daughter seemed to have transformed significantly and she believed her daughter was no longer the same person she knew. Although she appreciated the opportunity of talking to her daughter over the phone, Rudo said it was no longer a joy as the relationship which previously existed between them as mother and child appeared not to exist anymore, which Rudo blamed to be result of the prolonged spells of alienation:

I don’t know whether to say she has matured or she is now withdrawn, but what I know is that she hardly says anything to me concerning the problems she faces. You can tell that a child is not happy...you ask again and again, but by the time she tells you something, the issue would have tormented her for a long time. Sometimes she hints that something is not right by way of suggestions. One time she said to me, ‘Mummy don’t you think it’s a good idea for you to deposit money in the account that you opened for me before you left; sometimes grandma forgets to give me enough pocket money’... She fears to tell me straight away that my mother does not give her money... I always wonder what other things she doesn’t say to me due to fear of reprisal... (Rudo, female aged 39).

The above interview extracts also raise fundamental concerns about the day to day care that children left behind get from their substitute carers. More worrying is the fact that most migrant parents discussed deep concerns of potential child abuse and exploitations, including material exploitation as children of substitute carers were

increasingly characterised as the key beneficiaries from the remittances; with other situations suggesting that children left behind were increasingly treated as unequal members in the households in which they were fostered.

In Chipo's case, despite the uncertainties about whether her daughter was being neglected by her relatives or not, she said things got worse when her ex-husband (the father of the child) called her one morning, informing her that he was taking the child away from her mother's custody; accusing her mother of neglecting the child:

...my ex-husband phoned me ...and said... he did not think it was fair to let my mother look after our child while we were still both alive. He then told me that he was taking our daughter away... He said my mother was not looking after the child well... It was difficult for me to agree to this, but what can you do when you are far away? How can you stop him when you cannot look after the child yourself...? Sometimes I feel so sad when I think that my daughter is being looked after by my ex-husband's wife. It's not easy to know that another woman is looking after your own child while you are still alive...now if I buy my daughter clothes, I also buy them for her step sister...perhaps this might help...To be honest with you I don't know if she is well looked after, and I cannot trust anyone in these issues... (Chipo, female aged 27).

In a similar vein, Mary said she suspected that her children were suffering serious neglect as well as abuse at the hands of her mother. To Mary, problems started after she had left, as her children had to move from the town where they were being cared for by the maid, with the supervision of Mary's friend to the rural areas, where she said they were currently living with her parents. Pointing out issues of deterioration in her children's life-style, Mary said the education system in the rural areas was very poor, and that her children had to walk long distances to school. Yet

the real issue of Mary's concern was that her daughter may have been raped and may be involved in prostitution. This would not be a surprise as by then, circumstances of child rape and sexual abuse were rife in Zimbabwe. For example, IRIN news online (of 11/07/07) featured the headline: "ZIMBABWE: children left at home pay the price of migration". In this news article, Elder²³, expressed concerns that "when parents leave their children behind, particularly in these difficult times where there is need to cushion families against poverty, that increases the offspring's vulnerability". Sharing the same views, Makoni²⁴, pointed out that "'the horrific trend' of parents leaving their children, in some cases newborn babies...they surrender their offspring to all sorts of people, ranging from old grandparents, sisters and brothers to untrustworthy friends and abusive spouses...this increased the vulnerability of children to such a degree that one in every ten cases of reported child abuse concerned a child whose parents had left the country" (IRIN News, 11.6.07). Also the *Guardian Newspaper* of 9/11/2009 featured the headline "Child rape epidemic in Zimbabwe: Tens of thousands of girls and boys abused as economic collapse affects family structures, child protection and policing".

On reading such news, parents always feel powerless to intervene, especially when they already suspect that something more serious than that could possibly happen to their children. As Mary explained: "I got so scared when she [daughter] said to me three months ago 'Mama, I am thinking of killing myself'...". Meanwhile, when Mary called her mother to find out what was happening, the response she got confirmed the fears she had:

²³ Elder is a UNICEF representative in Zimbabwe

²⁴ Makoni is the director of the Girl Child Network, a non-governmental organisation that advocates for the protection of girls against abuse in Zimbabwe.

... “Your daughter is always in the company of boys – she is always busy escorting boys... She dresses and behaves like a town girl... here in the village they all think she is a prostitute...she behaves like a ‘typical prostitute’” my mother said...(Mary, female aged 37).

But then, in Mary’s view, this could have been caused by the treatment her daughter was getting from her carers:

...what I definitely know is that my daughter has no one to love her. ...She is not getting the support she needs as a teenager. She is judged... She is now confused ...People who live with her are always calling her names like prostitute, worthless, disgrace....This girl needs support and I believe that it is only me the mother of the child who understands her...My mother has never been able to give children emotional support or love rather. Because of this I fear so much for my children...I am her child, her own blood child – I never got this from her. I know she cannot. She failed me in this area – what more my children? I have always wanted to give my children that which I missed – all the love (Mary, female aged 37).

However, with regards to gender, especially in African societies where childcare is strongly gendered, one would expect mainly the mothers to express anxiety over separation with children. Yet, in this study, male migrants expressed similar concerns, which perhaps could be a result of their exposure to western practices in the UK where the government has intervened significantly in family matters and has tried to encourage men’s participation in childrearing. Similar sentiments which point towards the way immigration law and asylum processes strip off people of the right to enjoy the shelter of family were raised by migrant fathers, for example, by Farai who has been separated from his son for almost 10 years. Farai said “I have lost the chance to participate and enjoy my son’s early years of growing up, which even

psychologists believe to be the most important period a parent need to be with his child” (Farai). He further noted that:

You always wish that you were there – just to see for yourself...watch him grow... My desire was to be the first one to discover that his teeth were coming out... As a father I wish if I were there for him always... to witness the key stages of growing up like starting school... to accompany him to school on his first day of schooling... and observe him learning to write... My son has never had the chance to say ‘good night dad’ and I never had the opportunity to tuck him up in bed... For all these years, other people have been telling me, ‘your son is now walking, he is doing this and that’... The worst scenarios are when I am told ‘your son is not feeling well’. I always find myself on my knees praying ‘God keep this innocent soul alive’. My daily prayer is that he won’t die before I get the chance to see him again... I feel guilt... I can’t claim that I am really a parent... I feel inadequate... I don’t measure up... Even if I were to be given the chance to be with him today, I can’t reverse some of the damages that have occurred to him...due to my absence...(Farai, male aged 37).

Also, Nyasha explained that:

Sometimes I feel as if I have gone insane... especially at the thought of my children... how they are managing without my support.. After talking to my young daughter last week...I broke down...she said her step-dad was mistreating her... But who knows...perhaps it’s sexual abuse... She said her mother doesn’t seem to believe this... Also the mother was said to be too harsh with her... I am not saying she should not be reprimanded where she is wrong ...but I fear for her life... I fear that the worst can happen to her... The way she cried over the phone made me to wish if I were there... Just to cuddle her and to assure her that I still love her... I did not desert her willingly...but the situation here does not allow that to happen... (Nyasha, male aged 46).

In the case of Sukai, what others dreaded would happen to their children became a reality:

My son passed away in 2007...It was a sudden death... I received a message that my son was vomiting and two days later I got the message that he was dead. The world just crumbled on me... I felt as if I was in a dream, a very deep bad dream and was expecting someone to just say to me 'wake up! It is only a dream...' That did not happen...It was true... It had happened... I don't have the appropriate words to capture and picture the situation...I cannot say enough... I don't have the appropriate words to describe the experience... (Sukai, female aged 39).

In his commentary on the effects of institutionalization, Goffman (1961) observes that institutionalized parents lose touch with their children and are therefore unable to fulfil important parental roles. He then remarks that whilst in some cases, the roles can be re-instated once an individual returns to the outside world, for many, the loss is irreversible: "It may not be possible to make up, at a later phase of the life cycle, the time not now spent...in rearing one's children" (Goffman, 1961:25). Certainly my interviewees were conscious that this was true in their cases, and the irreversibility of the loss was an important trigger for the very high levels of guilt and hopelessness among them.

Migrant parents who are separated from their children live daily with fears for their children's physical safety and well-being. So far as the interviewees discussed above are concerned, it often seemed to them that having their asylum claims recognised and/or their immigration status regularized in some way, was the only

way in which their suffering could be brought to an end. However, even for the small number of interviewees who were granted leave to remain, the nightmare of separation continued.

7.2.1 Being Granted the Right to Remain yet Denied the Right to Family

As discussed earlier in chapter five, asylum applicants, in some cases, are granted alternative leave to remain particularly, Humanitarian Protection (HP) or Discretionary Leave to remain (DL), which unfortunately, do not guarantee automatic right to family reunion. These are some of the legal situations which were raised by some of my interviewees as constraints to reunion with children.

One of the mothers, Rute, who said she was granted discretionary leave to remain explained the limitations imposed by her stay with regards to family reunification:

...I received a letter from the Home Office ... I read it through again and again... I could tell it contained good news, but something was missing... Not that I did not understand its contents, but I was failing to come to terms that all these years of suffering had yielded this kind of stay... The Home Office felt that I was not a refugee... I wondered how this decision was arrived at... When I told my husband he said to me 'so what have you been doing all these years...'... I have to continue living here while the kids are home... To me all the fight was for the children to have a good life... To escape from poverty... It was for me to be reunited with them here in a place where we all felt protected..., where children can experience the life that other privileged children are enjoying... I wonder if the people who make these policies have children themselves...(Rute, female aged 49).

As discussed in chapter four, Rute had left her children with her husband, yet during one of the subsequent interviews she described the family set up as follows: "my

husband is the one who oversees the affairs of the home but the person in-charge of the children is the maid..."(Rute). This implies that while Rute's husband was the main caregiver, the maid was the person who was responsible for the children's day to day care, as emphasized by the narrative below:

My husband is a typical African man who doesn't even know how to cook, wash or even sit down with children for a chat. Ever since we got married he never even tried to boil an egg. As much as I remember I have never seen him helping with domestic work...or showing concern that a child didn't seem to feel well... (Rute, female aged 49).

To Rute, this family set up was a cause for concern. She however struggled to put the situation prevalent at home into words when I asked her to explain more about her children's circumstances in relation to how they were coping:

...asking how the children are being looked after...is like opening a secret box or a wound which has gone unattended for years... The answer I can give is that my children are leading a horrible life in Zimbabwe and that they are struggling under the care of a maid who, over the years has been exalted to becoming the mother of the home or their step mother... She does all sorts of bad things to them...; all kinds of evil you might think of... Yet my husband believes she is the nicest person ever... Apparently they are doing things together as a couple... A relationship you would not expect to exist between the maid and her employer. ... Do you now see what I mean when I say I am in pain or I am dead? (Rute, female aged 49).

In the face of all the problems which Rute said her children were experiencing, it seemed like their father was not very sympathetic that the maid was abusing them, hence Rute's concerns were that nothing was being done to rescue their situation:

I tried to reason with my husband... He was mad...at me... He did not like it at all. He said I left him to take care of the children... And also I left this maid

there to help him... He even said 'this maid is yours, you are the one who brought her here and left her here with me... If you want the maid to go...take your children because I cannot look after them on my own...' Equally the maid was also very uncooperative when I talked to her... I am convinced they are having an affair and that is why the maid is so bossy with my children... I feel guilty..., guilt that I have betrayed my own children... I have also lost my marriage...(Rute, female aged 49).

In the case of Noma who had just been granted indefinite leave to remain by the time of interview, she said her family set up had slightly changed. Although she originally had left two of her younger children under the care of her ex-husband, a year later her ex-husband migrated to South Africa where he managed to link up with smugglers who eventually transported Noma's two children into the UK where they finally were re-united with their mother, supposing that family reunification is better facilitated through smuggling as opposed to be attained through legal immigration processes. Moreover, she said she was seriously concerned about her other 3 older children who continued to live on their own since the time she left home. She recalled that they were 19 (two were twins) and 21 by then. Just like in the other situations, Noma also found it very difficult to explain the kind of life her children were leading in Zimbabwe during the long spell of separation:

To be honest with you I don't know how they are managing... I communicate with them...but we don't talk that much... They have stopped telling me about their problems...or how they lead their day to day lives. They have stopped asking for money or other things the way they used to do during the first days... I send them money whenever I can... If I don't do anything for them they don't even complain. They are now leading a very private life which I do not know anything about... Last year one of my sisters visited them after a very long time...only to discover that the oldest [20 by then] was nursing a baby girl who was 6 months old by then... We don't know whether she was raped or she consented to sex... We tried to get the truth out of her but she refused to say what really happened... Even if they were to die

physically, to me that will not come as a surprise because I think death has already started having its course in them... Where is my motherhood here...? Where is their childhood here...? The Home Office does not realize the extent of the damage it has caused to families... It doesn't realize how many people it has murdered over the years... (Noma, female aged 49).

In another case, Shami said they (she and her husband) had been granted refugee status in the UK for 5 years. By the time of interview, Shami and her husband had just been re-united with two of their younger children, yet the other two could not come over to join them in the UK as they had already turned 18 during the time their parents' asylum claim was being settled. Although Shami said her two sons (aged 20 and 19) were living on their own, she emphasized that she had close relatives who were keeping an eye on them. For example, she said her brother was in-charge of their day to day affairs as the arrangement was that Shami would send money to her brother who in turn would make sure that the children's needs were met. Even though this was the situation, Shami said her worries were that:

...these kids have led lives similar to those led by orphans... Although my relatives oversee their welfare, I fear for them so much... As each day passes you always wonder what's happening to them... I know that they now drink a lot... They have girlfriends there is no doubt about that... What they don't have is someone to give them direction... My brother cannot be there to address the knitty-gritty of their lives... We need to be together as a family... each family has its own values... Also they don't seem to like him [brother] that much as they feel they are grown up enough to handle their own matters... (Shami, female aged 46).

7.2.2 The Disintegration of Marriages and Other Aspects of Identity

For most of my interviewees, home had meant relationships with spouses as well as with children. In all but one case, they had moved to the UK alone, but often – as with children, they did not originally anticipate a lengthy separation from their spouses. As time went on, the separation became more and more difficult. Many of my interviewees spoke at length about their gradual loss of capacity to live up to the gender roles and cultural expectations associated with marriage, especially in regard to the performance of what qualifies one as an ‘honourable’ wife and/or husband in Zimbabwe. Women interviewees in particular expressed feelings of inadequacy, guilt and shame as a result of this, as illustrated by the following interview extract:

People always ask me if I still regard myself as a married woman...I find it hard...I am still married in the sense that my marriage... is still registered, but in real terms, I have failed my husband because I am not performing my wifely roles and duties...I haven't been sleeping with my husband for almost 9 years now...So where is the marriage here? Let's imagine that he has a girlfriend, which is obvious - don't you think that he is now more comfortable with that woman than with me? Maybe he already has a family with another woman which he is supporting with the money that I send. If I look at it this way...I worry about my identity in society... I cannot claim that he is cheating on me because I am the one who left him for all these years... What can continue binding him to this commitment? No woman can make a claim that she was cheated under such a situation...(Chenai, female aged 45).

For Rute who strongly suspected that her husband might have been having an affair or was already married to the maid, her point of shame was that culturally, she had let her husband down:

It's a shame to share a husband with a maid...or to be replaced by the maid...I can imagine her sleeping in my bed...but then I am the one who is at fault...I left them together looking after the kids...I can't blame anyone for this...I abandoned my husband...I entrusted the maid with my duties...I can't even blame her for taking him...for how long could my husband have waited...? (Rute, female aged 49).

Male migrants also spoke of now being incapable of providing for their wives as a result of being denied the right to work in the UK, a role that they could fulfil in Zimbabwe before the country's economic and political systems collapsed and that gave them a sense of honour and self worth. This is clearly illustrated in the case of Nyasha who reported that his wife (whom he left at home) decided to divorce him and was now living with another man, who perhaps could provide for her:

We never had any serious marital problems which I can attribute to the breaking down of our marriage...I definitely believe that it was because I could not provide for her...it made her walk out of my life...I feel disabled...detached...without control...(Nyasha, male aged 46).

In the case of Jonasi, who actually migrated to the UK with his wife, the marriage subsequently broke down, he believed as a result of his inability to provide for his wife as he used to do in Zimbabwe:

We came here a happy couple...but things changed slowly...I think my wife got fed up with the situation...we found ourselves quarrelling all the time which we never used to do...there were times she would expect me to act...as I used to do back home...I could not do much at all...I think she just felt that I was no longer man enough...I don't want to speak for her...but she started going out regularly with girlfriends at first...and boyfriends later on...as I am speaking she now lives with a white man who is providing for

the child back home...it's not something nice to know that your child is being looked after by another man...but I can't change it...it's a sign of my inadequacy...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

The sense of helplessness, inadequacy and guilt was all the more terrible amongst interviewees whose spouses had died during the period of separation. Tendai whose husband died while she was trying to get her asylum settled, reflected that:

When my husband was battling for life...he was in intensive-care by then I remember... I got the opportunity to talk to my mother over the phone...she told me that 'you are a failure...you have failed your husband ...you have failed to honour your marriage vows...you have set a bad standard for your children...by not being here to nurse your husband... I often replay these words in my mind... I feel guilt... It troubles me psychologically... I sometimes feel that I let my children down...but then what could I have done...? Should I have sacrificed my own life for theirs...? Either way things appeared hard... I don't know how I could have done it...but it makes me feel I failed my family...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Tendai deeply regretted that she had been unable to return to perform important cultural rituals expected of widows:

...being here...I could not attend his funeral...In our culture...a widow is expected to be the central attraction of her husband's funeral, with people coming to comfort her...asking what really happened and how she feels about the whole tragedy... This is believed to be the healing process... In my case...instead people were coming to comfort the kids as if I was dead... I can imagine how it was like... If I were to go back now...can you imagine how embarrassing it will be ...after all these many years...shedding tears over my husband's death?... In African terms...it means I am not a real woman...it makes me feel unworthy...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Rudo, whose husband also died as she waited for her asylum claim to be determined, likewise explained:

It is hard to come to terms with the truth that my husband is now dead... I dream of him so often... It seems I am living with him in my dreams²⁵... I never had the chance to attend his funeral... This is not proper in African terms... I am failing to forgive myself... I don't know if my husband's relatives have forgiven me for this... It gives a bad picture of me ... It seems like I didn't care about him at all... But I tried my best...I don't think anyone knows how hard it is for me to live with...(Rudo, female aged 39).

The above discussions have shown how my interviewees were unable to act to protect or even financially support their children. They often knew exactly how their children's lives were unravelling, and yet could do nothing but watch helplessly. Their relationships with partners, parents, friends and other kin also disintegrated before their eyes. Trust broke down as the period of separation prolonged. It was not simply that they had, like Arendt's stateless, been torn from the social texture in which they had established a place for themselves, but worse – with new technology, mobile phones, better communications, news media etc., they could keep in touch, then gradually over time, could watch themselves cease to count for anything in that social texture that once was home.

²⁵ From a psychological perspective, Corr, (2002:51) observes that funerals and related social and cultural bereaving rules and rituals are essentially designed to help people to dispose of loved ones' bodies in ways that are seen as appropriate, which also makes real the implications of the death of loved ones which concurrently helps the bereaved to come to terms with the reality and to work towards social reintegration and health ongoing living. Borrowing the words of Staples, (1994) Corr, (2002:52) stresses that "rituals of grief and burial bear the dead away"...and warns that, "cheat those rituals and you risk keeping the dead with you always in forms that you mightn't like." His final advice is that "choose carefully the funerals you miss" (Corr, 2002:52. Also see Rando 1984 on this issue).

Conclusion

The Zimbabwean migrants I interviewed in the UK were not entirely without any rights and were not in the same situation as Jews in Nazi Germany. My interviewees could not be murdered with impunity as the UK Border Agency or the British citizens did not have the power to kill them. Some of them had minimum rights to keep them physically alive. But they were individuals who lived for many years in a legal limbo, struggling and always hoping that somehow their immigration status would be regularized such that they could remain in the UK and bring their children into the UK and work (i.e., become full subjects). During this time, they gradually witnessed the disintegration of the connections they had to their children and kin back home, were unable to create new connections, or to have any sense of belonging to a community in the UK, and unable to maintain an identity they once secured through work. Their social 'selves' fell apart, they ceased to be able to identify as full human subjects, individuals with connections to others and a place in any social fabric, and increasingly experienced themselves as biologically alive, but socially dead.

The following and concluding chapter explores this experience of social death in more detail.

Chapter 8: Bare Life and Living Death

Introduction

As chapter one of this thesis has noted, Arendt's stateless were stripped of rights in their own places of birth and later found it almost impossible to claim and exercise human rights in exile. Goffman's institutionalized experienced the mortification of self (stripping of rights and identity) through the legal processes of total institutions. Patterson's slaves were stripped of all rights and claims of identity and belonging, by the institution of slavery. Though not identical, there are parallels between the experiences of the stateless, the institutionalized and the enslaved persons and those of my interviewees who equally were stripped of rights in their country of birth and later experienced the stripping of self and loss of personhood through the immigration processes when they migrated to the UK. As asylum seekers, refused asylum seekers or undocumented migrants, my interviewees suffered unprecedented levels of rights violations and long spells of degradation as they moved through the different stages of the asylum and immigration processes in their endeavour to become legal citizens. Like Agamben's concentration camp inmates, "the increasingly nascent figure of our times", (Downey, 2009:110) who were reduced to 'bare life', deprived of basic rights and confined to 'spaces of illegality' that "divide the legal and the illegal, the legitimate and the illegitimate, the overt and the clandestine..." (Lee, 2010:62), my interviewees, though not in exactly the same way, they too were reduced to 'non-beings' in the UK, a condition of 'living death' through the immigration law.

In this final chapter, I will explore these issues further and conclude, through a focus on dishonour, guilt, grief and agency.

8.1 Loss and Dishonour

Honour, Patterson (1982) contends, goes hand in hand with power, yet it is also closely associated with integrity. In this sense, “honour envelopes “the whole man”, and, Patterson continues, “it is seen as an intimate personal quality relating to both his physical and characterologic attributes” (Patterson, 1982:80). To demonstrate this, Patterson argues that those who seek to honour a person invariably seek to find out: “Is he a man of his word? Is his oath inviolable? Can he assert his will as a man of honour? ...” (Patterson,1982:80). The essence of honour is thus personal autonomy, according to Patterson, which is why being in another’s command ‘restricts it’ (1982:80). Slaves are therefore generally viewed as having no honour because their existence is merely an expression of another’s being (Patterson, 1982:78). The migrant parents I interviewed were not slaves and had not been forced to surrender their autonomy to the will of another human being. However, their autonomy, their ability to keep their word and assert their will, was severely restricted and all my interviewees experienced this as profoundly ‘dishonouring’.

My interviewees spoke of the humiliation they experienced as a result of their lack of rights to remain, to work and access medical care and they also felt dishonoured in relation to home and family left behind. They had failed to keep many promises. Due to restrictions imposed by immigration law, those who were married failed to bring their husbands and wives over. Not only that, but others could not even go back to bury their spouses who died while they were trying to get their asylum claims settled. All had failed to bring their children to the UK, yet this was a promise they had made to their children at the time they left home. Many had also found themselves unable even to provide for the children and their carers, which was often perceived as a great failure or betrayal by those who remained at home. These issues are illustrated through the interview material presented below.

I will start this exploration by looking at the case of Sukai, whose son died while she was trying to get her asylum claim settled in the UK. She explained that problems concerning the arrangements she made for her child's care when she left Zimbabwe dated back to the death of her husband (an event that took place before she left). Sukai had refused to conform to the cultural expectations that are often made of widows in Zimbabwe:

When my husband died, his brother wanted to inherit me...Following my refusal to cooperate with this arrangement...he wanted to have my son's custody, but I refused...because I did not think that they were going to look after him well. Also I wanted to give him my best care since he was now the only one I had in my life. This stance...is not culturally accepted. You are always expected to give in to his family's views...but now it haunts me...I don't know whether this was the best thing to do... (Sukai, female aged 39).

As Peterson and Parisi (1998:144) have correctly observed, "understood not as agents in their own right – full 'human' – but as reproductive members of the group or even as property, women are subject to objectification and abuse", and the nature of this human rights abuse is not always recognised in international human rights instruments. It seems that Sukai was taken as an object or property or rather, a vehicle for social relationships rather than a subject and agent who could make social relationships for herself (see Rubin, 1975). However, in going against these dehumanizing social expectations, Sukai was also dishonoured in the view of her husband's family. Sukai then refused to leave her son in her own brother's custody the time she left Zimbabwe for the UK, and this angered him, meaning she had transgressed the boundaries of culture both in relation to her husband's and her own family. She was thus viewed as a dishonoured person within both circles of family relations. With hindsight, Sukai felt that because she went against these norms and

conventions, the extended family felt justified in withdrawing their love, support, involvement and commitment from all affairs pertaining to her son, as well as her. The child was now perceived as the son of a woman without honour, so much so that when he died, no relative attended the funeral:

I suffered the rod of punishment as the mother when he [son] died...after receiving the bad news that my son had passed away...the first person I called was my husband's brother notifying him of the death... but he told me...he was out of it...because I denied them his custody...He was not prepared even to attend my son's funeral and for sure none of my husband's relatives did... Also my brother...said he had nothing to do with my son's funeral. In fact he said 'why do you want me to take responsibility now... You did not think that I was good enough to look after him when he was still alive, so what makes you think I am good enough now that he is dead? I don't want to be used to do the dirty work... Let the person you have been giving money to look after him for all this time finish the job'...But my friend also refused to take the lead...she distanced herself as an outsider...(Sukai, female aged 39).

Therefore, besides issues of relatives competing for a migrant's children in order to benefit from remittances (see chapter four), it is clear that being entrusted with a migrant's children is an important assertion about social hierarchies and social relationships which then translate into questions of honour. Thus, Sukai's immediate relatives felt dishonoured when Sukai decided to leave her son with someone considered somehow lower down the extended family hierarchy. However, what makes this scenario more complex and disturbing is that Sukai's son bore the punishment for her supposed disrespect of her extended families. He was treated as worthless/dishonoured in human terms to the extent that when he died, extended family members refused to acknowledge any feeling for him and would not publicly grieve for his death by attending the funeral. This compounded Sukai's guilt and shame; she felt she had failed her son absolutely. He died without her, and because

she had not maintained relationships with his kin, his funeral had to be facilitated by people who had no blood ties with him; suggesting the funeral of a dishonoured person:

I had to beg the head-teacher to take the lead in burying my son...at the mission's grave yard... It's a shame or a curse rather to have your only child buried by strangers... I failed my son, my only child... I don't know... His funeral was equivalent to that of an orphan or destitute, yet I am still alive... I don't know who was there...or who gave testimonies about his life...perhaps school-mates did...This is unheard of ...it was just like both parents were dead... But this was an extreme situation because in normal situations extended family members always fill the gap... This was not what I would have wanted to happen...if I had a choice...(Sukai, female aged 39).

Sukai felt deeply hurt and let down by the people who abandoned her and her son, but she also felt guilt, saying that because she had refused to comply with their orders and decisions, she did not deserve any honour. Sukai tearfully talked about the special plans she had for her son:

I thought I was going to get the opportunity to compensate for all the torture he [son] had suffered during my absence. I thought I would get the chance to bring him over to the UK and explain to him that 'I am sorry that I left you to suffer on your own for all these years, but this is what I was fighting for. I wanted you to enjoy the good education, food, clothes, and all the good things that are found here'. But this never happened. I am a disgrace especially to my husband's relatives...fighting for a child whom I failed to sustain... (Sukai, female aged 39).

Sukai reflected on the fact that her son was twice denied a UK visa during their period of separation, recollecting all the legal steps she took towards reversing the Home Office's decision of refusal as at that time she was still on a student visa. She dwelt greatly on what she saw as some of the inhumane practices by the Home

Office, stressing that her son was refused a visa while she believed she had full rights to family reunion. Expressing her frustration and helplessness Sukai said:

If the Home Office was a person, I could have demanded to see him/her. I would have wanted to go to where he/she lives and cry out all my anger. I would have demanded to see how ugly and inhumane this creature is. Unfortunately, they always say the Home Office is a 'system'... You cannot get to sit down with this thing called the 'system' and have a one on one talk explaining exactly what you are going through, asking him/her 'can you please do something about it'... (Sukai, female aged 39).

There are strong echoes of Goffman's emphasis on the systematic degradation of inmates' self once they engage themselves with the institution, in particular his observation that some institutions, though technically presented as places which exist to provide answers to humanitarian difficulties, are in reality mere 'storage dumps', as people who engage with them discover as they experience the loss of self and stripping of personhood (Goffman, 1961:24). This occurs, Goffman explains, because their bureaucratic systems exist primarily to serve the purposes of the wider system as opposed to supporting the interests or meeting the needs of those who require their assistance. Thus although the UK asylum regime supposedly exists to provide sanctuary to the persecuted and their families, the experiences of people like Sukai remind us that an asylum seeker remains "a figure defined in law in order to facilitate government-level avoidance of humanitarian obligations by emphasising the non-refugeeness of asylum claimants" (Gill, 2009:1).

In addition to being a refused asylum seeker, Sukai was HIV positive and by the time I had my second interview with her she was very poorly and had to be urgently admitted to hospital afterwards. As a refused asylum seeker, she had no right to

medical treatment and during one of the follow up interview meetings I had with her after she had been discharged from hospital Sukai explained that:

...there was a day when I cried to God like never before... I said to him 'God make me human again... If this can no longer happen...please take the life that is left in me...let me die now physically... I have lost my son, I have lost relationships, I have lost my health... I am being treated as if I am already dead... what am I still here for...?' It was after I had been mistreated...I was treated as if I was not a human being (Sukai, female aged 39).

Sukai continued:

...getting admitted in hospital was a struggle...although I could not walk or remember much...it was said I had no right to medical treatment because I was a refused asylum seeker... Although they finally admitted me...this was used as a weapon to deny me human treatment throughout the process... I remember the first 3 days after my operation were the most terrible ones... No medical staff came into my room besides the doctor... I would buzz...and buzz I would eventually turn the buzzer off myself... They would sneak in just to place food and tablets on the table... No one wanted to come nearer me ...I was a stranger with a strange disease... Thank God people from church supported me...but not everyone was there to give me support... Some would come to see how bad I was... Some even phoned my relatives telling them that I was dying... My cousin called me from America and said 'why don't you go and die among your own people...' The worst time was when the doctor said 'I have discharged you...you need to live in a clean environment... Look after yourself well'. I told him I had no home to go to – I was destitute... (Sukai, female aged 39).

Being destitute, Sukai said the doctor could not discharge her on to the street, hence he recommended that she remained in hospital until accommodation was arranged for her, which is very unusual, but also profoundly stigmatizing. Indeed, the

two weeks she inhabited the hospital as a home generated experiences which reinforced her sense of being a person utterly without honour, less than fully human:

I think they [nursing staff] felt I was getting comfortable... They would transfer me from one room to another every other day... There was this day when I went to sit outside... It was sunny... When I came back...my belongings had been removed from my room ... When I protested...I was told 'you have no right to be here...we are only doing you a favour... I was also cynically asked 'have you missed anything'?... I wonder what could have been stolen from you'... I had no right to privacy...(Sukai, female aged 39).

As a refused asylum seeker who had no right to accommodation, getting somewhere to be discharged to involved lots of politics:

...she [Social Worker] tried the council...but she was told I did not qualify... NASS said I needed to apply for 'hard cases' support...but I had to sign that I was prepared to go back home... Eventually I had to sign for deportation... Although the doctor had said I needed to live somewhere where I did not need to go up the stairs because of my health condition... After signing for NASS support...I was given a room on the 2nd floor at this place...they call 'bed and breakfast'... The room was filthy ...the person who last lived there must have been a chain-smoker... I had to clean it although my condition did not allow for this... Then in the morning I asked what time breakfast was... I was told 'bed and breakfast' was only a name...there was no breakfast for me... I called the NASS officer who had organised this accommodation for me...but he said to me... 'you should be grateful at least you now have a roof over your head... Wait for your financial support to be approved...' I longed to die physically...I grieve over the loss of humanity...(Sukai, female aged 39).

Sukai's case is extreme in many senses, and yet a closer look at other cases also reveals that even in situations where children were left with, or in agreement with spouses and closer relatives, and where children were still living, parents' narratives were characterised by intense guilt, shame and expressions of self blame. Consider, for example, Chenai, who expressed the following views:

I have failed as a mother in that I left my husband with the children... One was a baby whom I left when he was only 18 months old... My husband managed to raise him... he is 9 years now... I cannot make any special claims about motherhood, yet this is where the identity of a woman is attached to, especially an African woman... I can't even control what is happening to him now... Although I strongly claim to be an African woman, I don't have any special ground to base my claims... I don't have any stories to tell my children about their childhood...which is a shame. In future if they wanted to find out about such things, they will have to ask their dad, which is unheard of...in African societies... A mother is always the source of all stories of growing up...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Chenai's guilt was compounded by knowledge of her son's unhappiness and poor health:

What worries me a lot is that my son has developed a psychological problem due to my continued absence... He passes out frequently when he is at school... From the way my son is said to have explained his problems to the doctor... I got the understanding that I am the problem because my son said the person he misses most in his life is me. He even said he only stops thinking about me when he is asleep. The doctor has even requested that I phone him...(Chenai, female aged 45).

But then, further reflections on her son's problems led Chenai to admit that she felt guilty because she had never bonded with her son as she had left him whilst he was still a baby:

...he [son] doesn't know me and I don't know him either... This has affected him; his schooling and social life... it has also affected me... I am so stressed... I am depressed...I don't know what to do... One day I called home...and talked to him... I asked him if he needed me to help him in anyway... He said to me... 'How can you help someone you don't know?...if you loved me why did you leave me behind?... My friends laugh at me at school...that I don't know my mother... The day I went to school in one of the jumpers you bought, the teacher asked where I got it from...I told her it was from my mother... She said 'Your mother must by now be married to a white man'... Is this true mama...?' I felt so helpless – I have failed to raise children the normal way... He is suffering...even teachers who should support him are not sensitive...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Chenai, who had been in the UK for 8 years, talked about her other four children as though she was now completely detached from them:

I don't have any vision of what my children look like now...A photo does not mean anything to me...I can look at it, but it does not tell me anything. I sometimes try to close my eyes and imagine how each one of them looks but I have lost the vision...last year my husband said my first born was getting married...In January this year...I was told she had a baby...I broke down....I wept bitterly...I could not imagine my own daughter nursing a child...I have not been there for her to teach her how to take care of the baby...she was taught to nurse a baby by the internet as if I am dead... It's a disgrace...in my culture... I feel useless...(Chenai, female aged 45).

Similar feelings of shame and guilt were also expressed by Rute:

I think you know that in our African culture any mother can do anything to protect her children. You hear of women who endure abusive marriages because of children...You hear of women who sacrifice their all so that their children can have a good future...Women who undergo divorce always fight to have custody of their own children. That's one thing that gives an African woman identity... Children are a woman's crown. I cannot claim to be a real mother...my children are suffering abuse...I can't solve the situation over the phone...I was trying to serve my own life...and I left them...but their situation now... reveal my weaknesses...Spending 8 years away from one's own children...in our culture...it shows lack of concern...it is a disgrace...I have all reasons to be ashamed...It is a hopeless situation...because I don't know whether I will see them again...(Rute, female aged 49).

For Jonasi who said his son was living with his ex-wife's mother, his inability to provide for his son made him feel dishonoured both in the eyes of his son and the carers:

I had not been in a position to provide for my son...one day when I called him he asked questions which even now makes me think that, to him I am now dead...He said 'Dad do you have any other relatives here... brother or sister?' I told him that all my relatives were deceased...he then said 'I wish I knew where they were buried...I could visit their graves...so does this mean I am left alone...?' I tried to assure him that I was still there for him...but he said 'You don't even do anything for me now...you don't buy clothes...food...not even anything...grandma [mother's mother] told me that you are now useless...she said perhaps your father is dead'...It is painful to know that people incite a child to think this way...but if I recall how I used to be close to my son...and what I used to do for him before ...in our Shona culture a father who cannot provide for his children is equated to a dead person: '*ko munhu here...wakafa kare*' [he is not a person, he died a long

time ago]...we use this expression a lot in Shona...I cannot deny that my situation resembles that of a dead person ... (Jonasi, male aged 39).

Mary who was a prostitute in Zimbabwe before coming to the UK, reports that her daughter was also in prostitution at home constantly reminding her of her own powerlessness. Even though she had obtained leave to remain as a member of the EU family (as explained earlier), she was not entitled to fulfil her promise to her children that she would bring them to the UK and so had to listen helplessly to stories about their suffering:

I was told that my daughter was now into modelling and had joined a modelling group at one of the army barracks... 'at least she brings groceries' my mother said... my mother also told me there was a man who used to come and pick up my daughter in the night ... also one of my sons is always said to have been hunting in the forest... this is hurting me... because it's a reflection of my failures... (Mary, female aged 37).

Reflecting on her own experiences of childhood, Mary recalled that she had suffered similar kinds of stigma, claiming that her mother actually pushed her into prostitution which she feared could be also happening to her daughter:

I remember very well the time I had my first child... my mother insisted that I sell myself... I would bring food home... and she was happy about it... I don't know... I am not saying this is what is happening... but it seems my daughter is going through what I experienced... this is scary because she could contract HIV/AIDS... I hope this is not the case... (Mary, female aged 37).

My interviewees were not slaves, and yet their capacity to assert their will or influence even the most fundamental aspects of their children's experience was so restricted as to resemble that of the enslaved or the inmate of an institution. Their powerlessness turned them into people without honour both in exile and at home. These mothers and fathers therefore carried a heavy burden of shame, guilt and grief. They were grieving the loss of their own honour and individual identity as well as the separation from (sometimes permanent loss of) children, spouses and kin. However, in the absence of any social space to share their grief or mourn publicly, or any public recognition of their loss, this grieving added another layer to their suffering and exclusion.

8.2 Disenfranchised Grief

Thornton and Zanich (2002) note that the losses that induce grief²⁶ reactions are not limited to situations involving the physical death of the people we love, but also encompass the vanishing away or disappearance of other things which would have formed part of people's normal ways of living. However, for people experiencing loss, especially the situations of the migrant parents I interviewed for this study, the process of grieving can be hidden and complicated. Doka (1989:4) employs the concept of 'disenfranchised grief', which is "the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported". Doka (2002) further notes that grief is disenfranchised primarily in situations where people live in communities where there is a lack of recognition of the relationship, lack of acknowledgement of the loss, and/or exclusion of the griever.

²⁶ Rando (1984) defines grief as, a reaction to all kinds of losses, not just death. She also notes that grief is based upon a unique, individualistic perception of the loss, arguing that it does not take the loss to be recognized or validated by others for one to experience grief.

Certainly for my interviewees, the absence of recognition or acknowledgement of the losses that routinely occur in an asylum seeker's life was experienced as painful, dishonouring and excluding. It added to their sense of being socially dead, people without honour and whose worth as human beings goes unacknowledged. This came through most strongly in my interviews with women migrant parents who, as they tried to describe their grief would cite other tragedies and vulnerabilities affecting children that were currently in the news, in order to contrast public reactions to the suffering of citizens and the suffering of migrants. Almost all my interviewees referred to the case of Madeleine McCann, who disappeared while on holiday with her parents in Portugal. The huge international effort to find Madeleine and reunite her with her parents, as well as the immense and mostly sympathetic media interest in the case was contrasted against the situation of migrant parents whom the Home Office treat as asylum seekers first and parents later (if ever), and who are therefore forced to spend many years in the UK without their children. Some interviewees also pointed out that in the UK, there is virtually no public recognition that an asylum seeker's child matters and stands in the same need of parental care and guidance as any British national child (issues relating to asylum seekers' children are not clearly addressed in the legislations that seek to protect the welfare of children in Britain including The Children Act of 1989 and The Every Child Matters of 2004).

Tendai, who had lost all control over her children's lives (she had heard that one son was in South Africa trying to get asylum, and that her daughter who had been rejected by her sister's husband while Tendai was in detention and unable to send remittances, was said to be moving from one distant relative to another), commented:

I am grieving over my children...I have not finished grieving over my husband yet...the situation of these children always reminds me of my husband's death...had he not died, things wouldn't be the way they are...There are times when I wail ...but when I go out I put on a plastic smile...I cried aloud...the day I heard about Madeleine's disappearance...it became an issue which attracted the whole world's attention...Some offered to help her parents financially...some helped physically...words of hope were flying to them from all directions...on the radio, the TV and newspapers...It was all about Madeleine...I cried because...no one has ever thought about an asylum seeker's child...I don't know where my children are right now...I don't know what is happening to them...They might not have been kidnapped, but they are not in my life anymore...what I know is that they are vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and exploitation...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Tendai concluded that:

What I think is that when the UK government talks about children as having 'rights', it only refers to English children with a white skin...not children of migrants. This takes me back to the very olden days of colonialism in Zimbabwe where non-white parents and their children were not allowed to cross certain boundaries or enjoy certain benefits...We run away from Mugabe, we are not wanted here either. We are caught between these two hard places...but those who suffer most are our children... and both parties don't care... I can't stop grieving over their lives...(Tendai, female aged 45).

Chenai also spoke of how the McCann case painfully drew attention to the worthlessness of her own grief:

...I have been crying all night...this is not the first time...I am going through a grieving process...I have never had anyone to discuss these things with... the day I watched Madeleine's parents on TV being comforted by the whole

world...I cried bitterly...I was depressed for days... (Chenai, female aged 45).

I once visited Chenai at the shared house where she lived. Her room was unkempt, the bed seemed broken and in fact, the room looked abandoned as if nobody lived there. I asked her why she was leading such a life, and she replied:

I am in a state of mess...I am grieving over my home...this is not home to me...it's just like a hole where I creep in, in the night...and leave as early as I can...I don't regard this place as home at all...if I spend a day here I get depressed...this place reminds me of what I have lost...it makes me cry all the time...One of my friends visited me last week...she was surprised to find out that this is where I live...she said to me '*pasi netsvina*' [down with filthiness]...I know she has already told other Zimbabweans how dirty I am...but no one knows the truth about my life... no one knows what I am suffering ... (Chenai, female aged 45).

Mutsa referred to the McCann case as follows:

When Madeleine was snatched away from her parents...it attracted everyone's attention...all people stood with them...I remember at church...on a Sunday...the Pastor said 'let's all pray for Madeleine's life...' People prayed violently...with all passion...with tears...I broke down...I could not control myself...I had to walk out...I went straight home...I yearned to be in the McCann's position...I am not saying they were in a better state...but their tragedy was understood by others...I thought about my own daughter in the hands of her murderous father...I imagined her being abused...both sexually and physically...this is what I ran away from hoping to make a way of escape for her...but it does not seem the case...I have no one on my side to make this dream come true...I am battling alone in this journey...it is my own private concern... (Mutsa, female aged 32).

8.3 Choice, Agency, and Dishonour

In the literature on forced migration, the issue of agency is often debated, with many commentators criticising a tendency to represent forced migrants as objects and eternal victims, lacking in agency (Krause, 2008, Schaap, 2011 (forthcoming), Gündo du, 2006, Lee, 2010). Lee (2010) has even criticized Agamben for generalizing the condition of 'bare life' in the concentration camp to all undocumented migrants in ways which overlook migrants' agency and questioned: "do there not exist episodes in which undocumented subjects refuse the status of bare life and take on moments of being political in countering the abjection of camp?" (Lee, 2010:63).

However, whilst it is important to recognize migrants' agency, we also have to remember that agency is not the same thing as autonomy – that is, the agents' capacity to assert their will depends on the structural constraints operating on them (Lister, 2004, O'Connell Davidson, 2005). O'Connell Davidson, (2005:78) argues that:

...the idea that human beings can be neatly divided into fixed, impermeable groupings defined by their difference from one another – Adult and Child, free worker and slave, voluntary migrant and trafficked person, agent and victim, subject and object – is just that, an *idea*. In reality, the lines between tyranny and consent, domination and freedom, objectification and moral agency, childhood and adulthood, are not and never have been clear-cut, nor do they map neatly onto one another. Those who are tyrannised and treated as objects are still subjects, still feel their dishonour as keenly as those who are treated as fully autonomous human beings... when people experience themselves as objects, it is painful, humiliating and destructive precisely because they are aware of their own consciousness or subjectivity.

This is crucial to understanding differences that exist even between migrants who are all, in Agamben's terms, 'stripped of juridico-political rights and reduced to a state of exploited bare life' (Lee, 2010) and more particularly to understanding the experience of my interviewees. The asylum and immigration system prevents them from asserting their will, pursuing their life-project of bringing children over to join them in safety, or even continuing to support them financially back home, and yet they are still agents in the sense of being conscious, living, purposive actors. They reflect back on decisions they made, and in retrospect question or regret them. They fear that others perceive them as autonomous agents who could or should have made different choices.

Indeed, some of my interviewees' narratives demonstrate this:

I have been reflecting a lot these days...and I feel I did not do myself any favour at all by coming here...I was running away from death...but equally I am dead anyway... I resisted the war veterans thinking I was escaping to a place where my identity and professionalism would be respected...but its like transferring from one hell to another...running away from the frying pan straight into the unquenchable fire...I don't think that the Home Office believe that asylum seekers are human...(Voni, female aged 49).

Sometimes I wonder whether coming here was the best option... I know it was dangerous to continue living in Zimbabwe... but then being here is not any better... especially if I look at how my life has turned out to be... even that of my son... I cannot provide for him because I am not allowed to work... no one understands how hard it is here... people at home think you are enjoying yourself...(Jonasi, male aged 39).

Conclusion

As this thesis has tried to demonstrate, my interviewees were rendered rightless in their country of birth where their government directly threatened their physical lives and/or livelihoods, and they migrated to the UK in search of human rights and protection. However, when they arrived in the UK, it turned out that the immigration and asylum law affords only the most minimal of rights. Unlike Jews in Nazi Germany, as asylum seekers, failed asylum seekers or undocumented migrants, my interviewees had the right to continue to exist physically – not to be gassed or shot or murdered. More than this, in some cases, my interviewees had minimal rights to basic subsistence, accommodation and health care. Yet what they were denied were the full compliment of rights that inclusion in a political community confers – crucially, the right to work and the right to family reunion. Arendt argued that to be forced to live outside all legal systems of a nation is in effect to be expelled from humanity. As Somers and Roberts, (2008:395) put it: “Shorn of political membership, a person becomes what Arendt calls “nothing but human” and the Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben...calls “*homo sacer*” the condition of “bare life” in which a person is legally and politically dead while biologically still alive.” The connection between rightlessness and loss of individual self or personhood is also evident in Orlando Patterson’s (1982) exploration of slavery as the ultimate form of rightlessness. Like Arendt’s stateless person, the slave was stripped of rights and “alienated from all “rights” or claims of birth, also meant that he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order” (Patterson, 1982:6). This inability to properly belong to any social order is one of the aspects of slavery that leads Patterson to describe it as ‘social death’. This position was also described by one of my interviewees as follows:

My situation is now no longer an immigration issue...it is now a death sentence...I am as good as a prisoner, yes I am in prison, but I don't know when this prison life will end...I am in a prison with invisible walls...This is the hardest thing for me...no one realizes what's happening to me... It is a state worse than death itself... I have totally lost the children I left behind...I have lost out here too... and the life I am leading now is not fulfilling at all...I am no longer living... (Voni, female aged 49).

This thesis has shown that migrant parents forced apart from their children are afforded such limited rights; that like Arendt's stateless, Goffman's institutionalized and Patterson's slaves, they are in effect socially dead. It is crucial to note that rights are indivisible – to be afforded limited and partial rights (i.e., the right to continue to live and breathe, 'bare life' but not the right to full official status and juridical rights) is to be condemned to a living death. According to Patterson (1982) and other slavery scholars, slavery is equivalent to death because it replaces death. In Roman times, victory in warfare entitled the victor to impose slavery instead of death upon the vanquished. The expected absolute obedience and lack of rights of the slave were the consequences of his/her redemption from complete extinction (Turley, 2000:3). The slave was dishonoured because s/he chose this humiliating condition over death, and similarly my interviewees felt guilt and shame because with the benefit of hindsight, it looks as if they 'chose' their own physical safety over their obligations to their children and subordination to the Zimbabwean government systems which they instead 'chose' to run away from. But also, as with slavery, it seems that for my interviewees, the price of escaping complete extinction is living death. Somers and Roberts (2008:395) note that 'Arendt describes statelessness as losing "the right to have rights" a phrase she coins to assert that human rights are specious delusions without first having the right to recognition, which requires membership in a political community'. Also, Gertrude Page wrote about the lot of black miners in the Rhodesia Herald under the title 'Rhodesian Slavery', asking:

'Which is worse, I wonder, to be a slave and know, or to be told you are a free man, and treated like a slave?' (Onselen,1982:101). For my interviewees, a similar question arises: 'which is worse, to be entirely rightless and know, or to be told you have human rights, but denied the possibility of realizing your humanity?' The choicelessness of such a choice was described by one of my interviewees as follows:

If I compare the two systems I feel Mugabe's system is better in that you know from the outset that human beings have no rights, if you try to fight against the system you will die physically...whereas the British system works on...deception. From the outside the system appears democratic and caring, yet it is cruel..., oppressive..., and discriminatory from inside... It takes you to go through it in order to realise its dehumanising nature. It leaves you dead from the inside... (Sukai, female aged 39).

In this thesis, the term 'migrant parents' has been adopted which, on the one hand, could have enabled the thesis to capture the experiences of both the female and the male migrants as parents. Yet, on the other hand, the use of this all-encompassing term could have underplayed the experiences of mothers as it is apparently clear that the data presented in this thesis suggest that Zimbabwean migrants' experiences are much gendered. Indeed, gender related issues are particularly evident, and have characterized the narratives of many of my women interviewees particularly in chapter three which has devoted a section on the gendered aspect of violence in Zimbabwe, clearly demonstrating that some of the forces that displaced mothers were by all means unique. Still in chapter three, many married women's narratives reinforce notions of gender relations as mothers had to firstly get approval from their male partners before they could take the initiative to migrate which sharply contrasts with men's migration decision-making processes. It also follows that threaded through chapter four are similar notions of gender relations and roles

especially with regards to childcare arrangements as women who left children under the care of their male partners routinely mentioned that their spouses 'agreed' to stay with the children, and in most cases, the appropriateness of these arrangements was emphasized by giving reference to the presence of other females in the family, including maids. Whereas, in the case of fathers who left children with their wives, childcare arrangements were described as simply 'leaving children with their mother' and in some cases, with men alluding to notions of patriarchal norms by emphasizing the fact that wives and children were left under the overall charge of their extended families. However, what this thesis could have failed to clearly establish is whether, in some cases, mothers were not able to apply for the passports of minor children due to lack of approval from the children's fathers, and whether this was a factor in separating mothers as opposed to fathers from their children. While this is most likely to have been the case in the situation of mothers whose migration was not approved by male partners and/or their families, more work still needs to be done in this area in order to establish the extent to which women in patriarchal societies struggle to gain legal recognition of their guardianship status in regard to their children and how this impacts on children's migration rights, protection and well-being.

The migrants' gendered experiences before migration (as discussed in the earlier chapters of the thesis) also suggest that the experiences of women as parents were most likely going to be very different from the experiences of men in the country of destination. Yet, given the data, a comparative approach between genders with regards to my interviewees' experiences of separation from children in the UK is clearly not possible. Nonetheless, it is apparent that this data still provides strong indications that parental experiences of separation from children were gendered as mothers routinely discussed that the ability to raise one's own children under any circumstance was the proper identity of an African mother echoing the view that

their being forced to live in limbo represented explicit divergence from the traditional norms of mothering, which increasingly was the source of many mothers' guilt and shame.

Having said this, I also recall that the narratives of my male interviewees were equally heavily characterized by expressions of guilt and shame, which could be directly related to the fact that these fathers as traditional breadwinners, who were caught up in the limbo of illegality and destitution, found it almost impossible to satisfy their important traditional role of providing for their families. More interestingly though, is the observation that some of the fathers displayed a profound desire to exercise intimate relationships with their children including tucking them up in bed, which sounds very unusual for many fathers from a Zimbabwean context. This situation suggests three possibilities; first, it could be possible that the experience of being forced apart from one's children while living in a society where men increasingly participate in childrearing activities could have influenced the fathers' perceptions with regards to caring and nurturing tasks. Second, all the five fathers who participated in this study also identified themselves as single parents; in three cases (Farai, Jonasi and Nyasha) male migrants were divorced whereas in two cases (Tafara and Simba) male migrants were widowed. This state of affairs, though far from conclusive, is certainly suggestive of the fact that one of the reasons why male migrants chose to participate in the research was because they considered themselves as solely responsible for the children they had left behind. Third, there is a possibility that my being a female researcher could have in some way impacted on the manner in which male migrants described their experiences of separation from children. There is therefore a possibility that the study could have generated more distinctively traditional male views regarding separation from children had the interviews been conducted by a male researcher.

In the main, generating a more representative sample and involving a male researcher in the process of interviewing fathers are particularly critical issues to consider for future research.

Finally, the thesis has painted an exceedingly bleak picture of the lives of Zimbabwean migrant fathers and mothers who are at the mercy of an unrelentingly faceless immigration system, yet, the more surprising thing is that these parents' sufferings and distress remain privately experienced owing to the fact that, as yet, there has not been any organized political activism by the Zimbabwean community in Britain in demand for family reunification. This is profoundly worrying given the situation that Zimbabweans in Britain are an active community that is well renowned for its political activism in response to the different issues that affect its members. Their activism especially, in the past has increasingly gained considerable public support, and this is clearly evident in the case of the hunger strike staged by Zimbabwean detainees in 2005 which subsequently pushed the Home Office to reconsider its deportation policy with regards to refused asylum seekers from Zimbabwe. Whereas, in the case of separated parents, it remains unclear whether or not it is the sensitive of the issue of leaving children behind which makes it a difficult subject for discussion among the Zimbabwean community members or whether it is an act which is considered so shameful that those who are affected find it almost impossible to share their pain with their own community? This is worthy of future study in order to understand the Zimbabwean community's views regarding leaving one's children behind.

Meanwhile, this pioneering work offers critical lessons which community activists and the Home Office can equally draw useful insights from; particularly the key lessons that confining parents in the limbo of illegality and destitution is as good as

condemning them to a living death as this; i) increasingly force families apart for prolonged periods of time, which is a traumatic experience for both the migrant parent and the children left behind; ii) denies parents the rights to provide for and protect their children, which is profoundly humiliating and dishonouring; and iii) reinforces children's vulnerability and exploitation.

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Appendix 1: Selected Case Studies of My Interviewees' Migratory Processes

Case Study 1: Tendai

Tendai was a female aged 45 years who was also a teacher in Zimbabwe before migrating to the UK in 2002. Tendai left Zimbabwe after she was victimized by war veterans in the context of the country's political upheaval. With the support of her husband, Tendai decided to migrate to the UK. On leaving home, Tendai left behind three children who were 10, 12 and 14 years of age. These children were left under the care of Tendai's husband but with the help of a maid, who was also a close relative. Tendai left her children behind because she did not have the financial resources to migrate with the whole family at the very outset. So the plan was that of leaving the children behind hoping to send for them once she arrived safely in the UK.

Before leaving Zimbabwe, Tendai was advised by her friend who was already in the UK not to seek asylum at the port of entry, as the plan was that Tendai's friend would pick her up from the airport on arrival and will later take her to a place where she would seek asylum. When she arrived at Gatwick, Tendai had to lie to the immigration officials that she had come to visit her cousin who was pregnant and was going through complications. She was then granted a three months visitors' visa. Although Tendai's friend had promised to meet her at the airport, when she arrived, the friend was not there. Tendai made considerable effort to call her, but her mobile phone was turned off. This left Tendai in a very desperate situation in a new country as she had not made any alternative plans. Eventually, with the assistance of other migrants, Tendai was signposted to an African Church in London that offered temporary accommodation to destitute migrants where she stayed for almost three months. By the time Tendai finally went to Croydon to seek asylum,

her visitor's visa had already expired. With the changes in asylum law and processes, Tendai had challenging moments trying to convince the immigration officials that she was a victim of Zimbabwe's political violence as they expected her to justify why she did not claim asylum on arrival. Also as proof that she had lied to the immigration officials on arrival, evidence of discussions made during the time of her arrival was brought forward to contradict her asylum statement. Tendai had insufficient evidence to support her asylum claim, and was therefore detained for almost a month, only to be released with the help of a solicitor.

Tendai's initial asylum claim was rejected in 2003, at almost the same time when her husband was killed by a petrol bomb in Zimbabwe. She immediately appealed against the Home Office's refusal decision and one of the reasons she gave was that she needed to be reunited with her children as a matter of urgency as there was now no one to take care of them in Zimbabwe. However, the immigration officer who attended Tendai's appeal hearing told her that she had left her children willingly and requested her to provide evidence regarding her husband's death. Tendai managed to provide the Home Office with the evidence they requested in December 2003. However, she never got any response from the Home Office regarding the status of her asylum appeal. When I had my interview with her in 2009, she was still waiting for her asylum appeal to be determined.

Meanwhile, in Zimbabwe, Tendai's children experienced repeated bereavements which forced them to move from one carer to another as follows: when Tendai's husband died, the children remained in the family house being cared for by the maid, who unfortunately died 6 months later. Tendai's mother took the children, but she also died within a short period of time. Tendai's father continued to live with Tendai's children, but he also died within a year. One of Tendai's sisters volunteered to take Tendai's children, but it also happened that she died after 4

months of living with them. Eventually, Tendai's two sons who were 15 and 17 years of age by then started living on their own, while her daughter who was 13 years went to live with one of Tendai's sisters.

This left Tendai as the sole breadwinner, regardless of the fact that she had no right to work in the UK. In the absence of other alternatives, Tendai had to acquire a fake work permit which enabled her to get a care job in one of the council's nursing homes in the area she lived. As from the time Tendai started working, she would call her children regularly as well as remitting money monthly in order to meet their needs. As time progressed, Tendai's two sons dropped out of college and they were also married by then. It was Tendai's responsibility to meet their needs and those of their wives and children.

Tendai's family set up was a cause for concern as she frequently received reports from other relatives that her sons were drinking heavily and that they were misusing the money she was sending them. Additionally, her daughter routinely complained that Tendai's sister was using the money she was sending to meet her own family needs, claiming that her (daughter), who was the intended beneficiary, was not benefiting as expected. This left Tendai caught up in between, confused and powerless to intervene. These family problems were a continuous cause of trauma in Tendai's life. Tendai was also very worried because when her husband died, she could not go back to Zimbabwe to bury him as she was trying to get her asylum claim settled in the UK. It appears that lack of closure was a continuous cause of guilt and shame in Tendai's life, because she repeatedly explained that culturally, she was a dishonoured person as widows are always expected to perform certain rituals, which she could not do because of her being in exile.

Since Tendai was a refused asylum seeker who was working illegally in the UK, in October 2009, she was raided, detained and sentenced. Obviously, this had grave effects on the lives of her family that solely depended on remittances. When I had my last interview with Tendai following her release from detention, her children's lives had fallen into pieces: her daughter was chased away by her sister's husband as Tendai was no longer sending money to support her (daughter). Also, her older son had gone to South Africa where he had sought asylum. In the UK, Tendai was now living in destitution and was no longer in a position to support her family.

Case Study 2: Tafara

Tafara was a male and widower aged 45 years who had been a teacher in Zimbabwe for almost 20 years before moving to the UK. Tafara left Zimbabwe as a result of Mugabe's political campaigns against teachers which had begun in 2000. The Mugabe regime expected all teachers, nationwide, to become ZANU (PF) supporters and those who were unwilling to do so were automatically assumed to be supporters of the opposition party and were increasingly targeted. Tafara did not want to join ZANU as he did not believe in its policies. This forced him to seriously start looking for a teaching job abroad. In his job hunt, Tafara came across a teaching job which was advertised on the internet by a teachers' recruiting agency in Kent, in the UK. He applied for the job online and was invited to attend an interview. On leaving Zimbabwe, Tafara left his two daughters who were 5 and 9 years old with his parents as he did not have the financial resources to migrate together with them.

When he arrived in the UK, Tafara was granted a 6 months visitors' visa at the port of entry after proving to the officials that he had come for an interview for a teaching job. He proceeded to Kent where he had an interview, and was, in theory offered the job. The agency's recruiting officer then asked him to leave his passport with them so that they could process a work permit with the Home Office on his behalf. Tafara claimed that the Home Office never returned his passport, and as he continued to wait, his 6 months visitor's visa lapsed, which automatically turned him into an undocumented migrant.

On 6th October 2001 in the morning, Tafara was raided by the Home Office officials who told him that he had no right to remain in the UK. Although he tried to explain

his situation to them, they did not believe him. Tafara was put in detention where he eventually claimed asylum as by then he felt it was dangerous for him to go back home. Tafara's asylum claim was rejected while he was still in detention. He appealed against the decision and was rejected again. Tafara was kept in detention for more than a year, only to be released in 2003, the time the Home Office had temporarily stopped deporting refused asylum seekers from Zimbabwe.

His release from detention also meant that Tafara had to start living in destitution which eventually forced him to engage in illegal working. Tafara used to work in factories, and at some point he worked as a sales representative for a company which sold cooking utensils. Tafara was in contact with his children as he used to phone home at least three times a month. He was also occasionally remitting money to them depending on his earnings. However, during our second interview Tafara was very concerned about his older daughter. On the one hand, his parents had informed him that his daughter was misbehaving and was difficult to control. Yet, on the other hand, his daughter claimed that Tafara's parents were abusing her. Tafara expressed his helplessness to intervene, as he found it difficult to believe that his own parents could abuse his daughter. He also felt guilty that as a father he was not in a position to provide for his family as he used to do before. Also, he had spent almost 8 years away from his family, and he was still not in a position to make any plans for the future, especially with regards to being re-united with his children because of his illegal status in the UK.

Case Study 3: Chenai

Chenai was a female aged 45 years, who worked as a self-employed interior designer during the time she was in Zimbabwe. Chenai's main clients were the white community in national parks, farms and hotels. It was therefore her association with the white population which made her a victim of the Mugabe regime. In fact, Chenai was attacked by war veterans when she was coming from supplying her clients with their orders in one of the country's national parks. War veterans forced her to surrender the money she had earned, and proceeded to burn her vehicle. Finally, they warned her to never engage in any dealings with white people again. Chenai reported this incident to the police, who did not give her any protection. She later received a letter from the war veterans, threatening her for reporting them to the police as well as instructing her to go back to them and withdraw the case. If she failed to do so, the war veterans threatened that they would dissolve Chenai and her children in a drum of sulphuric acid and get rid of their remains in the Zambezi River. Chenai further made the claim that she was deprived of family protection as her husband's family felt that she deserved to be punished by the war veterans. Because of this, Chenai decided to flee for her life. Thus, she left Zimbabwe for the UK in 2001 as by then she did not need a visa to get into the UK.

On leaving home, Chenai left her 5 children behind; two sons aged 18 months and 11 years and three daughters aged 13, 15 and 16+ years under the care of her husband. Chenai could not migrate with her children due to the following reasons: first, some of her children did not have passports. Second, Chenai did not have enough money to buy air-ticket for her 5 children. Third, even if everything was in place, Chenai said her husband's family would not let her take the children with her

as culturally, children are believed to belong to the husband. Also Chenai's husband's family refused Chenai the opportunity to make alternative childcare arrangements as Chenai would have wanted her own mother to take charge of the children during her absence.

On arrival in the UK, Chenai lodged an asylum claim at the port of entry where she experienced complications as she could not speak English fluently and also, she did not have the necessary evidence to support her claim. Chenai was detained for almost two months, and was later released after engaging a solicitor. From detention Chenai went to live in a shared NASS house. Her initial asylum claim was rejected after almost 2 years of waiting. Although Chenai had the right to appeal against the refusal decision, she decided not to utilize this opportunity as by then, asylum seekers were increasingly being detained and deported immediately following an appeal hearing. Chenai had to leave NASS accommodation and started living with a friend who was a refugee, who also helped her to get a care job in a nursing home. Chenai worked in this place for almost 3 years, until 2006.

Chenai was in constant touch with her children from the time she was released from detention. She was also remitting money monthly before she lost her job, although she did not want to disclose the actual amount. Occasionally, Chenai would also send her children clothes, toys and other things. However, Chenai lost her first job when her employer discovered that she was an asylum seeker who was working illegally. She then started taking jobs with care agencies. In February 2009, Chenai was accused of abusing a client in a residential home where the agency had sent her to work, which made her lose her job. By the time I had my initial interview with Chenai (in March 2009), she was living in destitution and was working towards submitting a fresh asylum claim to the Home Office.

Chenai was a co-founder of an organization which supported African women asylum seekers. She used to hold meetings with African women asylum seekers once a week. The time I had my final interview with Chenai, she had submitted a fresh asylum claim and was seriously considering applying for welfare support under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. However, she expressed concerns that this could possibly lead to her deportation in the long run as the Home Office routinely expected applicants to sign for deportation.

During the entire period of my interaction with Chenai (March 2009 to January 2010), she shared with me her deep concerns regarding the situation of her children in Zimbabwe. In particular, her younger son whom she left when he was only 18 months old had developed a psychological problem. Chenai felt guilty because she had never bonded with him. Also, reportedly, the son had told the psychiatric doctor who was assisting him that he only could stop thinking about his mother when he was asleep. Furthermore, Chenai was now completely detached from her other children (for example, her daughter, the first born was married by then and had just had a baby, yet Chenai seemed not to be very much involved). Chenai was also concerned about her marriage as she had been in the UK for almost 8 years without her husband. She suspected that her husband could be in a long-term relationship with another woman, which she all blamed on herself. To Chenai, all these family issues were a reflection of her own inadequacies as a mother and wife due to being forced to live in limbo.

Case Study 4: Nyasha

Nyasha, a male aged 46 years was a cricket coach in Zimbabwe for many years. Nyasha's business was severely affected by Mugabe's anti-whites campaign which intensified in 2000 as his main clients were the white community. Initially, Nyasha did not want to leave the country as he believed it was the citizens' responsibility to bring about a change of government through their active political contributions. He then joined the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and became one of its strong supporters. In 2002, he actively participated in the presidential elections as a polling agent, which caused the Mugabe Regime to target him as one of its enemies. Nyasha eventually decided to leave Zimbabwe in 2003 following an incident in which he was victimized by war veterans. On leaving Zimbabwe, Nyasha left his two daughters, aged 15 and 17 with his wife, as he did not have the time to process visas for them, but was hopeful that he was going to be reunited with them in the UK within a short period of time.

Nyasha used his business visa to gain entry into the UK where he claimed asylum at the port of entry. He was detained for almost two months as immigration officials were not convinced that Nyasha was a genuine asylum seeker. His initial asylum claim was rejected, and although he immediately appealed against the refusal decision, Nyasha was refused again as the Home Office insisted that he had only taken advantage of the fact that he had a business visa which gave him easy access into the UK. Following his second refusal, Nyasha was evicted from his NASS accommodation and started living in destitution. He admitted working illegally (mostly in factories) and that he was occasionally remitting money home to support his two daughters whom he claimed to have been in contact with. However, when I had my final interview with Nyasha, he had stopped working, which he said was a

result of frustration due to exploitation, and also that the lawyer who was assisting him with his fresh asylum claim had warned him that working illegally had the possible of jeopardizing the credibility of his fresh claim.

With regards to his family in Zimbabwe, Nyasha's wife had divorced him in 2005, the main reasons being that Nyasha had failed to fulfil his promise of bringing his family over to the UK and also that he was no longer in a position to provide for the family as he used to do the time he was in Zimbabwe, before the economic hardships. Nyasha's ex-wife was now reportedly said to be married to another man in Zimbabwe. Particularly, Nyasha's younger daughter routinely complained to her father (through telephone conversations and email communications) that she was suffering serious abuse at the hands of her step-father and that her mother was not giving her support. As a person who could not visit his children or bring them to the UK, Nyasha's source of trauma was his powerlessness to intervene in their situation. Like other migrant parents, Nyasha had to helplessly listen to stories about his children's suffering.