

NARRATIVES AND LEGACIES OF DETENTION:

*Zimbabwean asylum seekers'
experiences in Britain*

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‘I’ll never forget that... a year inside – you feel is it true, is it me? ... You just feel like someone who is dead – when you come out it’s like someone who has risen from the dead... you feel you are just a useless thing... you feel you are really mad to be in this world... to be dead is much better than such a life.’

MaiMoyo, seeking asylum in Britain since 2001, detained 12 months

‘I feel I don’t have my human rights with me, that has been taken away from me – cut from the world, kept in detention for no reason, you haven’t committed a crime but you’re mixed with criminals... seeing all these things, people committing suicide, cutting their hands with razor blades ... then coming out... not allowed to work and support yourself ... that is a degradation...’

Jacob, torture survivor seeking asylum in Britain since 2003, detained 2 years

‘Recently I got the British passport ... being granted citizenship can’t cross out that experience of being in detention... persecuted by my government ... and then to come to a country where I’m detained for saying I’m persecuted by my own government ... I think maybe it will be something I live with for the rest of my life.’

Francis, torture survivor, detained 5 months in Britain

‘At the moment my mind is just blank... My life will never be the same again. When I’m just sitting like this, my heart will be beating, as if something can happen. I can’t sleep... All the time I hear cars passing, I’m always thinking about those vans that took us to the airport ...’

Chipso, seeking asylum since 2002, detained 2 months

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Executive summary

Detention under immigration powers has been justified in terms of facilitating rapid deportation of foreign criminals and failed asylum seekers, but many detainees are released on bail, eventually have asylum claims accepted and build a life in Britain. This report discusses the experiences of 21 such ex-detainees: it details narratives of periods confined, including mental health, access to the law, coping strategies, participation in hunger strikes, comparisons between prison and detention regimes as well as experiences after release. It explores the social and political legacies of this form of confinement and its effects on attitudes towards self and personal relationships, ideas about Britain, the law, justice and belonging.

Some interviewees had temporary status or indefinite rights to remain as refugees or naturalised British citizens, while others were awaiting final decisions on their asylum cases or a resumption of deportations to Zimbabwe, and were subject to reporting procedures and electronic surveillance. All 21 had made asylum claims: some had been detained simply for claiming asylum or following failed claims, others had served prison sentences for illegal working/false documents. Eight had status in Britain at the time of the interviews while 13 had claims that were not resolved. Nine were torture survivors.

The findings reveal instances where procedures to protect torture survivors from protracted detention did not work in practice. They also highlight the effects of the delay in resolving so-called 'legacy cases' (ie backlogged cases from before 2006, some of which date back to 2000) and the refusal of rights of participation to asylum-seekers and failed asylum seekers who cannot be deported. For these individuals, seeking asylum has been an experience of protracted insecurity and impoverishment, often with repeated spells in detention and multiple unsuccessful attempts at deportation.

Detention caused acute distress over the short-term for the majority in the study: interviewees reported deterioration in their mental and physical health, loss of property, shame, fear, flashbacks to confinement and past trauma, difficulty in adjusting and strained relationships. But for many, the psycho-social and political legacies of detention also proved to be enduring, and persisted over years, even for those detained for periods much shorter than the EU maximum of 18 months. The long term legacies of detention depended less on personal histories (eg whether or not interviewees had experienced torture, or the length of time detained), than on whether or not asylum cases were resolved after detainees' release. The major disjuncture in the interviewees' lives hinged on whether or not they had status, and thus on whether or not they had the basic security necessary to rebuild personal and public dimensions of their lives.

Those whose cases were not resolved and who experienced protracted insecurity after their release universally reported depression and anxiety. Some described suicidal thoughts. Enforced dependence through prohibitions on work stretched personal relationships to breaking point and led to ex-detainees' sense of moral failure as adults. The stigma attached to detention among Zimbabweans was not just about criminalization,

but was also about adult dependence. Many felt they had failed as parents, blamed themselves for the deaths and suffering of those left behind, for failing to provide for their children.

In contrast, those who gained status in Britain after their release had the basic security to reconstruct personal and public dimensions of their lives. Most were either in professional work or combining work with study. Some were in the process of retraining and planning new careers; many spoke with enthusiasm about their prospects and opportunities. They reported much lower levels of depression and anxiety than those who were insecure, indeed most made no mention of depression. Three felt there were no long term negative psychological legacies of detention. Yet the majority of those with status (five of the eight) felt they were unable to put experiences of detention in Britain fully behind them. For some, there were practical long term legacies in the form of criminal records, which made it difficult to find work. But these five also described continuing to experience intrusive flashbacks to detention triggered by reminders such as white vans and police officers. Despite wanting to eliminate memories of detention, they described them as something they would probably have to live with.

Detention produced varied reactions to ideas about the law and Britain. Most ex-detainees had arrived in Britain with high expectations, but lived with the sense of having been victims of injustice, and a conviction that the asylum system is arbitrary and unfair. Though some arrested for illegal working described feeling resigned to serving criminal sentences, being held for indeterminate periods under immigration powers with the fear of removal was more difficult to cope with. Some described feeling hate or anger towards Britain, the British and 'the system'. The sense of having experienced an injustice was not eradicated by subsequently having asylum claims accepted or being granted British citizenship. To help them cope, the ex-detainees had turned to religion and/or become involved in diaspora politics and protests and support groups for asylum seekers and detainees. Although some had withdrawn from public and political life, the experience of detention had turned a larger proportion of ex-detainees in this study into civic activists.

Expanding the use of administrative detention in the asylum process and failing to resolve 'legacy cases' has emotional and political effects that extend beyond the short term and beyond the individuals detained, influencing broader ethno-national communities, provoking resistance and working against the integrated and cohesive society other aspects of government policy aim to create.

Introduction

Detention under immigration powers has been justified in terms of achieving rapid removal of illegal immigrants and foreign criminals, yet most of those detained under immigration powers have made asylum claims at some point, some spend protracted periods in detention, are detained more than once, and deportation efforts commonly fail. Significant numbers of ex-detainees make successful asylum claims, gain temporary or longterm status and build a life in Britain. This report discusses the experiences of 21 such ex-detainees, and also draws on the views of members of their family, friends, sureties and visitors. It examines the social and political effects of detention - on private and public domains of ex-detainees' lives, attitudes towards Britain, the law, justice and belonging.

In the past, detention was considered an extreme measure or 'last resort', but over the last decade, its use has been extended and mainstreamed, such that it is now a standard part of the asylum process, used to facilitate 'fast track' claims.¹ The powers to detain are based in the 1971 Immigration Act and its successors,² and are also elaborated through non-statutory measures, such as the UK Border Agency Enforcement Instructions and Guidance. Unlike other forms of detention, immigration detention is not legally a punishment and has no rehabilitative aim. Rather, the goal is removal and asylum seekers and other foreigners can be deprived of their liberty simply for administrative convenience. Asylum seekers in Britain can be detained at any stage of the process: when they first make a claim, when they are awaiting a decision, or when awaiting removal following an unsuccessful claim. Others detained under immigration powers include people found to be living or working in the UK without permission and ex-prisoners after completing their sentences.³ As these categories are not mutually exclusive, one individual may experience several periods of detention for all these reasons. Unlike detention without charge under the anti-terror laws, which has a statutory limit of 42 days, there is no maximum time limit to immigration detention. In contrast to detention in the criminal justice system, the decision to detain is not made through the courts but by an individual immigration official, and although detainees have the right to apply for bail, there are no automatic bail hearings and many detainees have no legal representation.⁴

The detention estate has been expanding over the last decade, and there are now 11 'Immigration Removal Centres' (IRCs) - the term replaced 'detention centre' in 2002 - with a capacity to hold around 3000 detainees. Every year, around 30,000 foreigners pass through these IRCs.⁵ In May 2008, the government announced a further 60% expansion

¹ This section draws on BID 2008, ILPA 2008, LDSG 2009

² The Immigration and Asylum Act (1999), Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002), UK Borders Act (2007), Citizenship, Immigration and Borders Act.

³ The UKBA Enforcement Instructions and Guidance explains detention as appropriate 'to effect removal; ...to establish a person's identity or basis of claim; where there is reason to believe that the person will fail to comply with any conditions attached to the grant of temporary admission or release'
<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/guidance/enforcement/> chapter 55:2 BID 2008.

⁴ BID 2008:1. The provision for automatic bail hearings in the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, which had never been implemented was repealed in the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act.

⁵ BID 2009.

of the detention estate, such that 30% of all asylum claims will be fast-tracked from within IRCs, and the opening in March 2009 of a new facility at Brook House near Gatwick with space for 426 more detainees, is testimony to the unrolling of this policy.⁶ The government has also opted out of a new EU directive on returns, which placed a statutory limit on immigration detention of 18 months. Jacqui Smith, Secretary of State for the Home Department told the House of Commons in late 2008 that she ‘was not persuaded this directive delivers the strong returns regime that is required for dealing with irregular migration.’⁷ The cost of this policy is significant: in 2008-9, the UKBA spent over £27.6 million of public funds on attempted removals, while the cost of holding a single detainee for a year in Colnbrook IRC (which operates at the security level of a Category B prison), was £68,000 in 2005-6.⁸

The government has consistently argued that ‘Detention is a final option and is only used for the shortest period necessary’,⁹ and that safeguards are in place to exclude vulnerable groups. Yet Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), Medical Justice, the Refugee Council, UNHCR, the London Detainee Support Group (LDSG) and others have all expressed concern that detention can be protracted, and that measures to protect vulnerable people such as torture survivors often do not work in practice – findings that are confirmed through this study.¹⁰ A growing number of successful compensation cases to individual ex-detainees also illustrate instances where protections have failed and detention was prolonged.¹¹ These include an award of £150,000 for psychiatric damage caused to an 8 year old Congolese child detained with her mother and 1 yr old sibling; a settlement of £15,000 to a Zimbabwean who continued to be confined after removals to Zimbabwe were suspended in January 2002; settlements for unlawful detention at the end of prison sentences where there was no possibility of removal and detention for removal when appeals had been lodged, or where the Home Office had lost or inadequately maintained records. Other settlements were made under the Race Relations Act for false imprisonment of individuals suspected of immigration offences even though they produced papers demonstrating they had rights in the UK.¹²

Much of the existing literature on the psycho-social consequences of immigration detention has been produced in Australia, which took the lead among western nations in its policies of mainstreaming the detention of asylum seekers from 2002. The Australian research provided clear evidence of the mental health disorders that accrued from the practice of detention itself, and related social consequences taking the form of ‘high rates

⁶ ILPA 2008:8, BID 2008: 3.

⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090423/text/90423w0015.htm>

⁸ On Colnbrook costs, see LDSG 2009: 7, 12. On deportation costs, see

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090706/text/90806w0013.htm 6 July 2009.

⁹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090423/text/90423w0015.htm>

¹⁰ BID 2006, 2007, 2009; Medical Justice 2009; LDSG 2009.

¹¹ In 2005, the Appeal Court granted permission for private law proceedings against the Home Office for damages for unlawful detention, since when a number of claims have been granted on the grounds that their detention amounted to false imprisonment and/or a breach of article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Scott and Wistrich 2005.

¹² Details of these cases, handled by Bhatt Murphy Solicitors, can be found on <http://www.bhattmurphy.co.uk/bhatt-murphy-60.html>.

of suicide (completed and attempted), inter-personal violence, riots, burning of facilities, hunger strikes and acts of public self mutilation'.¹³ British-based research reinforced these findings that 'those held for long periods suffer from profound hopelessness, despair, and suicidal urges';¹⁴ and medics and psychiatrists have raised doubts over the possibility of 'offering psychiatric treatment in a setting - prolonged detention – that is the root cause of the mental disturbance'.¹⁵ Official inspections of IRCs have also raised concerns: in 2006, for example, an official inquiry into the deteriorating health of two Ugandan women at Yarl's Wood IRC following a hunger strike revealed 'underpinning systems were inadequate and the healthcare service was not geared to meet the needs of those with serious health problems or the significant number of detainees held for longer periods for whom prolonged and uncertain detention was itself likely to be detrimental to their wellbeing'. It described 'inadequate staff training (particularly in relation to trauma) and insufficiently detailed policies and protocols for example with regard to food refusal', problems which were 'compounded by the unresponsiveness of the IND to clinical concerns about an alleged history of torture or adverse medical consequences of continued detention.'¹⁶ Bhui's study of released foreign prisoners suggests that the legacies of detention can be enduring and notes that 'the impact on families and resettlement, and issue of self harm... emerge as particularly problematic areas'¹⁷

Detention has political as well as psycho-social effects. A further body of work has explored political consequences, and the emergence of anti-deportation and pro-regularization campaigns. Studies of these movements, and of the political agency of detainees themselves, highlight the contradictory and politicizing effects of confinement.¹⁸ Peter Nyers casts detention as 'as a site where key political dynamics are enacted' and interprets acts of collective non-compliance such as hunger strikes and suicide not as desperation or escape, but as political statements. A study of Somali and Yemeni deportees from the USA argues that deportation had the effect of making the deportees come to see themselves as rights bearing subjects who desired to regain access to the law to challenge their treatment.¹⁹

This report focuses on Zimbabweans, who are not among the top nationality groups detained in the UK.²⁰ A recent survey of 292 Zimbabwean asylum-seekers conducted by the Refugee Council, found that 40 (14%) of the sample had been detained, half for more than three months, one fifth for between six months and two years.²¹ Zimbabweans have been severely affected by the delays in resolving 'legacy cases', dating from before 2006. On 29 January 2009, the Home Office estimated there were 'more than 10,000'

¹³ Reviewed in Fazel and Silove 2006: 251. See Silove, Steel and Waters 2005; Mares et al 2002.

¹⁴ Fazel and Silove 2006: 251, based on Amnesty International 2005, McCleish et al 2002, Salinsky and Dell 2001.

¹⁵ Fazel and Silove 2006: 252

¹⁶ HMChief Inspector of Prisons 2006:8.

¹⁷ Bhui 2007: 369

¹⁸ Nyers 2003, Barbara 2007, Rodier 2007

¹⁹ Nyers 2008, Peutz 2007: 89

²⁰ Government figures showed the nationalities accounting for the highest number of asylum detainees in March 2008 were, in order: China, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Jamaica, Pakistan and Iran. BID 2008: 4

²¹ Refugee Council, July 2009.

backlogged Zimbabwean cases.²² The fact that many Zimbabweans were detained in 2000-2 and 2005 when deportations were active but most were not removed provides a good case for exploring legacies.

The study

This research was conducted in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Association (ZA). The ZA is a small community-based asylum seeker support group, formed in 2001. Over eight years, it has built up a range of activities to assist detained asylum-seekers by providing information, pointers to legal and other advice, moral support during asylum and bail hearings, assistance in finding sureties, friendship through visits, and support after release through networks of contacts to broader Zimbabwean communities. It has also campaigned against the detention and deportation of its members.

ZA staff and volunteers used their personal networks to contact the 21 ex-detainees who participated in this study. Some of the interviewees were themselves ZA volunteers.²³ We did not approach anyone whom we considered unstable, or who was receiving counselling for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other mental health problems. These findings may therefore under-emphasise severe mental health legacies (though depression emerged as a major issue). We discussed the nature of the research and the scope of questions with those who said they were interested in participating before the interviews, to ensure that they were in a position to give informed consent.

Of the 21 interviewees, all were asylum-seekers and none had committed a serious crime: some had been detained simply for seeking asylum or failed claims, while others had been picked up for illegal working/false documents and had served prison sentences as well as being held in IRCs. Nine were torture survivors, eight had status at the time of the interview (either refugee status, temporary leave to remain or British citizenship), while 13 had asylum cases that were still pending. Some of the latter had been seeking asylum for nine years. All but two of the ex-detainees had been held for more than two months and the longest for two years. Some spent additional periods with electronic tags. The ex-detainees collectively had experience of ten detention centres as well as a number of normal prisons.²⁴

²² Letter from Deputy Director Operation Policy, HO to ILPA, 29 January 2009.

²³ One interview was discarded and is not discussed within these findings. It was with an asylum seeker detained for a short period (one week) in 2002 when he was still a junior: he said he had forgotten about his detention, and was unable to recall basic facts about it (where he was held, his route into detention, how long he was held or how he got out).

²⁴ There are now 11 IRCs, 3 of which are run by HM Prison Service (Dover, Lindholme and Haslar), and the other by 5 different private companies subcontracted to the UK Border Agency, namely Serco (responsible for Yarlswood and Colnbrook), GEO Group (UK) Ltd. (Campsfield House), Global Solutions Limited (Tinsley House, Brook House, Oakington), Group 4 Securicor Justice Services (Dungavel), Kalyx (subsidiary of Sodexo) (Harmondsworth). Brook House opened only in late March 2009.

We also interviewed 14 visitors – a mixture of detainees’ friends, family and sureties, ZA detainee visitors, members of other visitors’ groups or church figures who had been closely involved with Zimbabwean detainees.²⁵

All names in the report are pseudonyms. Particular interviews are also referenced by numbers (2, 4, for ex-detainees, V1, V7 for visitors).

The context for detention of Zimbabweans

Zimbabweans began to claim asylum in Britain in significant numbers in 2000, as state violence escalated against the newly formed opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), civic activists and others.²⁶ Large numbers of Zimbabweans were detained in this early period when deportations to Zimbabwe were on-going, and refusal rates on asylum claims were exceptionally high, partly due to an inaccurate and misleading country guidance report, which was subsequently amended. In January 2002, the British government suspended removals in the context of the elevated violence in Zimbabwe in the run up to the March 2002 presidential elections, and under pressure from a campaign on the part of British-based Zimbabwean lobby groups, which had drawn increasing support from parliamentarians across party lines, and from both left and right-wing print media and newspapers publicized cases of deportees from the UK being mistreated on return to Zimbabwe. The same year, Zimbabwean asylum applications peaked and the country became Britain’s top asylum-seeking nation: the numbers were brought down by the imposition of a visa regulation in November 2002, which exacerbated the difficulties of leaving and had the effect of channelling large numbers of people into irregular routes, particularly through the purchase of Malawian and South African passports.

At the end of 2004, the no returns policy was lifted. The then Minister, Des Browne explained this ‘does not reflect any improvement in conditions in Zimbabwe...[but] that the absence of enforced returns increasingly acts as a “pull factor” for Zimbabweans, and for others posing as Zimbabweans’.²⁷ Over the next 6 months, 260 Zimbabweans were forcibly returned, and some also returned voluntarily. By the summer, several Zimbabweans had sought rulings from the High Court that they should not be removed because they would be at risk of mistreatment in Zimbabwe for having sought asylum in the UK. In July 2005, the government reinstated the ban on removals to Zimbabwe while the courts considered these claims.

The context in Zimbabwe by then was the violence of the aftermath of the March 2005 parliamentary elections and the subsequent mass urban demolitions of Operation Murambatsvina in which 700,000 people lost their homes and/or livelihoods, and which many commentators saw as punitive action against urban-based MDC voters.²⁸ In Britain, there was once again a surge of opposition to removals with support that spanned

²⁵ 5 of the ex-detainees were also interviewed as visitors.

²⁶ This section is based largely on Grimwood 2009, see also Ranger 2005, McGregor 2008.

²⁷ Cited in Grimwood 2009.

²⁸ Tibaijuka 2005, Potts 2006.

party political and ideological divides in the House of Commons, Lords and the press, as well as involving other leading public figures such as the Archbishop of Canterbury. As G8 leaders were meeting and the UK cricket team pulled out of matches in Harare in summer 2005, between 57 and 112 Zimbabwean detainees began a one month long hunger-strike in protest against removals that gained much media coverage and was only called off when Home Office announced the decision to suspend forced removals, while the risk on return was considered by the courts (the strike is discussed further in the body of the report).

Removals remained suspended following the AIT judgement in October 2005 (involving a case known as AA), as the judge deemed those forcibly returned from the UK to be at risk on return. The evidence considered in making this (and subsequent) judgements included testimony from former intelligence officials about airport procedure for deportees arriving in Harare, and from the ZA documenting the fate of a number of individuals who had been forcibly returned. By June 2006, ZA had information on 23 cases, 11 of which had been ill-treated on return (ie their treatment had been abusive beyond simply detention and questioning – they had been beaten, tortured in various ways, some had fled and some were missing). Although the AA judgement was subsequently overturned and further country guidance cases found no generalized risk on return, the categories of people deemed to be at risk gradually expanded and deportations to Zimbabwe have not been resumed.

The most recent country guidance decision in November 2008 (RN) took place in the context of the elevated violence following the MDCs narrow and contested victory in the March 2008 elections, a presidential run-off called off at the last minute, and the interregnum before a power-sharing agreement was finalised between ZanuPF and MDC. In a case celebrated by Zimbabwean asylum campaigners, the Tribunal concluded that there was a real risk not only to people who supported the MDC or fell into one of the risk categories, but for all those unable to demonstrate a history of support or loyalty to ZanuPF. There followed a surge of new asylum cases in the first quarter of 2009, mostly made by people who were already in Britain rather than from individuals fleeing directly from Zimbabwe. In March 2009, the Home Office issued a new Operational Guidance Note to supersede RN, though refusals guided by these notes are open to legal challenge, as there has been no formal appeal against the RN ruling.

Since 2005, Zimbabweans held in detention under immigration powers in Britain have been largely individuals who had entered Britain on false foreign passports threatened with removal to destinations other than Zimbabwe (particularly Malawi and South Africa), those detained while making initial claims, and Zimbabweans with criminal records being held after completing their sentences. Removals to these two countries (particularly Malawi) have at times been resisted by Zimbabwean detainees and criticized by UNHCR, as some individuals have been imprisoned on arrival, and the Malawian government has passed Zimbabweans with fraudulent Malawian passports on to the Zimbabwean authorities.²⁹ Ex-prisoners have also found themselves held longterm, given

²⁹ The UNHCR position is cited in an account of a recent attempt to deport a Zimbabwean family to Malawi, *The Times*, 7 March 2009.

the lack of removals to Zimbabwe: in 2008, this category included a group of 7 Zimbabweans in Haslar IRC who became the object of a campaign of release organized by Haslar Visitors Group. Though held for the supposed threat they posed to the British public, all had completed prison sentences for minor offences (the majority for working with false documents, one had been charged with cheque fraud and one for stealing £20) and all had full remission for good behaviour. Yet one had been detained for more than 2 years after completing a 9 month prison sentence. All were released either by Home Office or judicial decisions following a campaign involving media coverage, a petition and the recruitment of high profile public figures as sureties.³⁰

The context for the interviews in this study was that of the uncertainty created by the new unity government in Zimbabwe formed in February 2009, involving ZanuPF and MDC. While many Zimbabwean asylum cases in Britain were being accepted under the RN ruling, those without status were also fearful that the agreement in Zimbabwe would lead to deportations being resumed.

³⁰ 'Zimbabweans in Indefinite Detention', 7 August 2008, 'How we got them all out' 13 August 2008, <http://www.haslarvisitors.org.uk/hvgnews.htm>

Deportations to Zimbabwe and country guidance cases

2000- Jan 2002: Removals to Zimbabwe allowed

Jan 2002: Deportations suspended

Nov 2004: Deportations resumed

July 2005: Deportations suspended

Country guidance cases

SM and others (2005): Defined some categories of people as at risk on return and outlined the difficulties of internal relocation due to centralised record keeping and monitoring. Those at risk included perceived political opponents including low level MDC activists and teachers.

Established no general risk for failed asylum seekers; being white alone was not a risk factor.

AA (October 2005): Judged deportees to be at risk on return solely on the basis that they had claimed asylum in Britain, regardless of the strength or otherwise of their cases. Returned Zimbabweans may be questioned at the airport and, thereafter, may be monitored in their home area or elsewhere.

AA2 (August 2006): Reversed previous AA judgement – found there to be no risk simply for having claimed asylum in the UK, some asylum seekers can be safely returned. However, the group of those deemed to be at risk was broadened.

HS (November 2007): Confirmed AA2 that some asylum seekers can be safely returned, but risk categories expanded further to include human rights activists and those involved with civil society organizations.

RN (November 2008): All those unable to prove a history of loyalty to the regime deemed to be at risk, not just those with a history of MDC support or in one of the risk categories.

Asylum statistics

Year	Number of claims
2000:	1010
2001:	2115
2002	7695
2003	3280
2004	2045
2005	1070
2006	1625
2007	1770
2008	2630
2009	4550 [first 2 quarters only]
TOTAL	27790

Findings: Narratives and legacies of detention

Existing studies show that the acute mental strain of immigration detention reflects the isolation, lack of information and understanding of the reasons for confinement, the lack of time limits, fear of deportation, and for those with personal histories of torture and violence, invocation of past trauma. The discussion extends existing studies in three main ways:

1. The study explores short and long term legacies following detainees' release, whereas previous research has mostly focussed more narrowly on time in detention.
2. Research on detainees' mental health has often been individualistic, whereas this study follows Summerfield (2004) in emphasizing the social framing of experiences. To do so, it explores the stigma attached to detention among Zimbabweans and its effects on ex-detainees' inter-personal relationships, notions of self-worth and adulthood that hinge on responsibility and provision for family. Zimbabweans in Britain (including asylum-seekers) are overwhelmingly from middle class/elite backgrounds and have to deal with mythical understandings of the former colonial motherland as a place of wealth and opportunity that circulate in Zimbabwe, and the elevated expectations that this creates.
3. The study emphasises the importance of transnational socio-political fields in shaping reaction to detention and emphasises political effects. All the Zimbabweans in this study left in a context of escalating political conflict and economic collapse. The deteriorating conditions in Zimbabwean jails, the widespread abductions, torture and killings from 2000 were intimately connected to the experience of detention in Britain not only through the personal trajectories of some individuals, but also in the fears of all those detained with the prospect of deportation, exacerbated by the distrust created by the extension of Zimbabwean state intelligence networks in Britain. The consequences of detention reinforced diasporic identification and led to political engagement in relation to homeland affairs as well as rights in the UK.

Part 1: Narratives of confinement

This section explores narratives of detainees' experiences inside, which provides the necessary context for a discussion of legacies in Part II of the report.

1. Apprehension, movements between centres and attempted deportations

In many detainees' accounts, the moment of apprehension stood out as a particularly stressful episode, alongside other periods of movement between centres or to airports for deportation. For some, there were direct parallels with experiences of abduction and detention in Zimbabwe.

Being apprehended was described as particularly fearful when it took the form of night-time/dawn raids by numbers of uniformed men (aside from home raids, detainees were taken while making asylum claims or reporting, following vehicle checks and from work, in several cases *en masse* when employers had arranged 'training sessions'). Arrest was often followed by periods of detention in police cells before being taken to IRCs or prison: many described being given no explanation for the reasons for their detention and no information as to what would happen next, where they would be taken or for how long. One was given false information, including being told a flight had been booked for his deportation when this was not the case (5). Other periods of being moved around were recounted as similarly stressful: detainees were frequently moved between IRCs without preparation or explanation, often in the middle of the night, handcuffed and in the back of vans with bars (1, 2, 9). Some friends/relatives/visitors also mentioned how 'apprehension was the worst', and recounted being rung by those detained in a state of panic (V3, V7, V9, V10). They emphasised the problems created by 'fear and not knowing' (V8), '... in prison they know when the sentence is going to end, in detention they've no idea, they can come in the middle of the night and be taken to another centre or deported – they just don't know, they're totally powerless' (V1)

Unannounced movement between centres created problems of communication with relatives, friends, lawyers and others. In one instance visitors had turned up to support a Harmondsworth detainee at a bail hearing, only to find he had been taken at 1am the previous morning to Yarl's Wood (V12). In other cases, detainees moved between English IRCs and Dungavel IRC in Scotland lost legal representation as Scottish and English legal systems differ (V14).³¹ Some felt such disruption was, at least sometimes, a deliberate strategy (V14).

³¹ One such case was recorded in the ZA submission to the IAC. In a second case movement around Britain had a similar effect: JW was detained in a police station in northern England, but was moved South to a detention centre on the Wednesday with removal directions for the Sunday. His lawyers (based in the North) could not represent him in the South, and a new lawyer secured on late Thursday was not able to prepare a judicial review in the time available. JW's passport was taken to the immigration office at the detention centre on Saturday, but the only person in a position to cancel his removal directions was the Immigration Officer in charge of his case, who was not working on the Sunday. The detainee was removed to Malawi on the Sunday. ZA submission to IAC, November 2007, para 5.6

Apprehension and movement between centres was stressful for other reasons too, because it was frequently the occasion for property to be lost. Four ex-detainees in the study lost their personal belongings either at the moment when they were taken into detention or when being transferred between centres (1, 2, 3, 7). Some lost identity documents and evidence for their asylum claims, alongside valued personal mementos, clothing and other property. Visitors emphasised the importance of fetching property from homes and flats, particularly when detainees did not have relatives in the UK with status (V12, V1, V10).

The stress of being taken into detention was exacerbated by the fact that the detention estate was not considered beyond the influence of Zimbabwean government informers. Two interviewees dwelt on this issue: one was an ex-police officer and part of a group who had managed to escape Zimbabwe after several periods of imprisonment by forging their superior's signature on holiday leave forms (17), the second was an MDC activist who feared the exposure brought about by the hunger strike and was interrogated after being deported to Zimbabwe in its midst (4). A visitor spoke of a detained member of the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) who had fled after refusing to carry out orders to kill somebody 'his job was to meet people at the airport and beating them up... he was terrified, absolutely terrified that he'd be recognised... he had all his papers with him in detention, photos of himself in uniform, payslips and everything... his state in detention? Just absolute fear that he'd be recognised by other Zimbabweans, by the CIO, that they'd infiltrated, were among the detainees' (V1)

The fear of removal that made apprehension and movement between centres so stressful was heightened when detainees saw other Zimbabweans being forcibly removed and were themselves issued with removal directions. Nine of the ex-detainees gave accounts of attempted deportations, some had experienced and resisted several attempted removals, one had experienced 5 removal attempts (7), while another eventually decided to leave voluntarily in an unsuccessful effort to evade interrogation on return (discussed below) (4). Generally these deportation attempts involved being fetched from rooms by escorts without warning in the middle of the night and were called off only at the very last moment, when the individuals were on the plane or the tarmac. Several ex-detainees described receiving verbal abuse from the escorts; some had witnessed excessive force or trickery in taking others. In some accounts ex-detainees described a total breakdown of trust within IRCs such that rumours circulated and anything out of the ordinary was interpreted as trickery to achieve removals: detainees described believing that removals were achieved through sedation by injection, laced drinks, or gassing under the doors (2).

The detainees' own accounts make these points in a vivid way. The following are from individuals who had been politically involved in Zimbabwe, or were targets for the regime as teachers and disloyal public servants:

The raid was the most terrifying thing, because they raided us at 4am ...they knocked saying police, police, so we opened the door, but they ransacked everything, so you just panic... They took us to a police station and a holding cell... I asked what was going to happen to me and they said "we don't know

you'll be here until immigration officers let us know what is happening"... They took me to the airport at Gatwick to get a bus to Oakington, but no one explained that to me – I thought I was going to be deported. They put me in the room where they kept all those they wanted to deport – it was terrifying, people were shouting, refusing, crying, a lot of trauma in that room... those Group4 guys they then came to take me and I asked where we were going and they said they couldn't tell me – it was very confusing...' (Farai, leader of doctors' strike, abducted/interrogated in Zimbabwe, detained 6 weeks in UK on claiming asylum in 2001 [5])

It was a real big shock... they came at 6am. Initially I thought, OK...next thing is that they are going to put me on a plane back home, and being scared. And when they said, "no, we're taking you into detention we'll deal with your case there", that's when I said, "OK how long am I going to be held here?" No answer. People I met in detention, they told me about the process, they were the ones to tell me, advise me to look for a solicitor... The worst thing was not knowing what was going to happen, because you're in limbo, you're scared, are they going to beat me up, to kill me? Especially coming from Zimbabwe, where they were doing all those things... I just left with what I was wearing. I couldn't find someone to bring my things to me...so I convinced somebody to put them in the post – so they posted a bag to me with a change of clothes. Everything else, all my property, I had to write off ... I changed solicitors 3 times in Campsfield... my case was going nowhere... That's when stress levels rose very high, and that is when I then had medical issues to deal with...stressful watching others taken to the airport, struggling...friends were deported (David, teacher who left Zimbabwe following colleagues' abduction 2001, detained while waiting for work permit [3])

I thought it was quite unsafe to claim asylum at Heathrow because we didn't want information relayed back... but eventually we realised we didn't have a choice... so we ended up being detained on the day we claimed... that experience was really scary, especially for me and some colleagues – you see we'd been imprisoned several times in Zimbabwe... and to relive that experience was really scary...it felt like chickens waiting for slaughter...I was afraid of informers – it wasn't safe to stay in the detention zone, there was that fear of exposure, afraid of being deported to a country I feared... all my claims failed and I became more despondent, hopeless with time... It became like a tunnel (Vimbai, ex-policeman, detained 2 months claiming asylum 2001-2, status since 2002 [17])

2. Legal representation and dealings with the Home Office

All those in this study had their initial asylum claims refused (like the vast majority of those who make claims from within detention centres).³² Some described having cases turned down for spurious reasons (eg for responding to a question over results in his MPs

³² On refusal rates for claims fast tracked through detention centres, see BID 2006; 2007.

constituency through rounded off figures – 27,400 voters rather than 27,416 voters [20].³³ Others spoke of poor legal representation (three were represented by bogus firms with a reputation among Zimbabweans, whose solicitors made money out of the ignorance of recent arrivals, 5, 6, 11).³⁴ Some described how arriving on false documents appeared to over-ride all other considerations (1, 9, 7, 18), and others how histories of moving between Zimbabwe and other countries in the region, and/or being charged for working illegally in the UK negatively affected claims (18, 12, 13). Three said the HO had lost their files (7, 2, 18). All described communication with legal representatives as a huge problem (most episodes of detention predated the decision to allow mobile phones in 2009). The legacies problems in initial claims led to subsequent difficulties.

Of the nine ex-detainees in this study who had been tortured in Zimbabwe,³⁵ most made first claims from within detention/prison and described inadequate investigation of claims of torture. Some recounted difficulties in trusting lawyers and described the problems of talking about their experiences (1, 2). Two were released when evidence was belatedly considered: one had a large partially healed head wound from which stitches were removed while he was in detention and described receiving help from outside in finding solicitors to appeal the initial refusal and a referral to the Medical Foundation (20); the second was let out by a judge on bail after more than three months detention after he had rolled up his shirt to reveal his severely scarred torso to the court aide, yet was detained again on subsequent occasions, has been threatened with removal five times several of which were intercepted only at the very last minute, and his case is still unsettled (7). These two were relatively well known political figures. The latter was a Harare MDC activist who had amongst his documentary evidence, POSA arrest documentation, letters from MDC leaders, a US State Department report that singled the individual out as being specifically at risk, and a promise from Minister Charles Clarke that he would personally investigate the case (7). The effect on the broader Zimbabwean community when such individuals' cases were refused and they were repeatedly detained and threatened with removal were acute: many people felt it was not worth entering the asylum system, such as one in this study, a former student activist, who described delaying because he felt 'if even well known politicians with physical torture marks can't get out and can't get claims – why should I put myself through that, expose myself, why don't I just hide' (14)

Many of these nine detained torture survivors did not understand or feared entering the asylum system. Although some claimed asylum on or shortly after arrival, others made claims only after being picked up for illegal work. Some described being traumatised and initially gave false information or received bad advice regarding how to present their claims which undermined their credibility (2, 9). The ex-detainee held the longest in this

³³ On the range of spurious arguments used to deny cases and how knowledge of the MDC was used to turn down cases, see Ranger 2005

³⁴ The ZA submission to the IAC, documented a range of failings with Zimbabwean cases they followed including instances where legal representatives did not prepare cases properly, failed to present evidence, did not turn up for hearings or failed to appeal against an initial refusal despite telling their clients they had done so; one individual was given removal directions without having an appeal hearing. November 2007.

³⁵ Those defined as having been tortured in Zimbabwe had been subjected to a range of different forms of extreme bodily violence. The category of 'torture survivor' in this report is not used for individuals who had simply been detained and interrogated or given death threats.

study had been tortured in Zimbabwe, but managed to escape from the old military camp where he was being held and arrived in the UK on Malawian papers in 2003. He did not understand asylum and worked illegally, before being arrested when he applied for a National Insurance number in 2004. He spent a total of two years in prison/detention in Britain, with two failed deportation attempts and his case had still not been resolved at the time of the interview, six years after his first claim (1).

Accounts of bail hearings again emphasised the difficulties in accessing good legal representation and not understanding the system. Many described setting up self help groups within detention, several said they had represented themselves at bail hearings, acting on materials from BID, having been unable to secure legal help. Some described being refused bail because they did not have relatives or friends in the country who could stand as surety for them, because relatives were said to have too little space, or because they were told they would abscond. One such, a woman who claimed asylum on arrival in 2006 had a history of cross border trading between Zimbabwe and South Africa and had entered on South African documents and subsequently served a sentence for illegal work. She described being told repeatedly she would abscond, said hearings were repeatedly postponed because the Home Office did not bring confiscated Zimbabwean documents, then when bail had been granted because of confusion over identities and addresses as she shared the same surname as her cellmate, then because the HO appealed. She spent 14 months in detention at the end of an eight month prison sentence before eventually being released with an electronic tag (18).

Visitors played an important role in helping detainees understand their legal situation. Yet the diverse and frequently changing security regimes at different IRCs created problems for visitors trying to play this role, or simply trying to keep in contact. The visitors universally requested less lengthy security checks, more flexibility in visiting slots especially for visitors travelling lengthy distances, and to be allowed to bring pencil and paper to visits. A father, for example, travelled all day from NW Britain to Chelmsford prison in the SE to visit his detained son, only to arrive ten minutes too late for the visitors slot and so was refused entry (V6).

3. Mental health problems

Stress, depression and other mental health problems were reported by all the detainees interviewed and also in visitors' accounts of detainees' wellbeing. Two women described feeling suicidal in the interviews (11, 15), several recalled forgetting who they were, losing the capacity for language, not recognising words, being unable to read or concentrate (2, 9, 11, 15). Some described stress leading to medical problems, in one case taking the form of a rash all over the body, which reacted to the artificial fibres of the detention centre clothing (11). The overwhelming majority described sleeplessness and loss of appetite; most had been issued with anti-depressants. 'You just sit – waiting, not knowing what you're waiting for, just eat and sleep. It just makes your mind go crazy...', one man recalled (7); a woman said: 'I just started feeling down, down down...like my life was going to end' (15). One ex-detainee gave a compelling account of how trauma had affected his capacity to make an asylum claim:

Nicholas was a Harare-based MDC activist. He fled Zimbabwe in 2000 after being abducted with his wife on return from the rural areas and was subjected to torture including waterboarding and falanga. He was still in pain when he arrived in Britain and further traumatised when his wife died from her injuries two weeks after he left Zimbabwe. He was detained when he claimed asylum shortly after his arrival. His case was refused, partly because the judge dismissed the psychiatric report produced within Oakington as unprofessional. From there he was moved to Campsfield House and then on to Wandsworth prison for 6 months. He had a sequence of different solicitors, was served with deportation orders and his file was lost. He described the way his trauma undermined his capacity to make his claim and how his mental state deteriorated over seven months confinement. At the time of the interview, nine years later, his claim was still outstanding.

‘I hadn’t recovered from the death of my wife and what I had been through. All that trauma I had to carry... You are in a position where you don’t know, nobody is explaining to you and everybody is doing anything against you and you don’t understand what is happening... The way it was done, it was terrifying... It affects the way you present your case, you don’t think properly because you are stressed, you can’t recall, you can’t settle down to recollect. Oh! I was suspicious of everyone, even the lawyers – I didn’t trust. Even talking to them, it was difficult, considering what I had gone through... and each time I was moved, a different lawyer, you had to go through everything again... Then there were other Zimbabweans being bussed in from the airport, and you would just be hearing gossip – some people were being taken to prison, some were being deported... no contact with outside, no phone numbers, nothing. After seven days, after presenting the case then they gave us a decision and you are moved, and then you are told you are liable for deportation... Then they tell you we are keeping you in detention, and you are transferred and you find that detention is prison... And I found myself mixed with criminals, murderers and rapists... we were locked in that cell for most of the day - it was just like the torture we went through in Zimbabwe, you could think of that... There came a time when I didn’t know who I was, couldn’t read, couldn’t understand words...’

The interviewees raised a range of complaints over mental health care, particularly about anti-depressants and sleeping pills: some said they did not understand what they were being given, one pretended to take the pills then spat them out (9), one described her room mate storing pills up with the aim of taking an overdose (13); another felt tablets were useless as what he wanted was somebody to talk to and help get him out (5). One man was told he was HIV positive, but this diagnosis was not followed with counselling, anti-retrovirals or any other support (3).

Several ex-detainees spoke of being optimistic when they went in, being confident there had been an error, but that their attitudes changed as they met others who had been in for months or years (3, 6, 17, a point also echoed by relatives and visitors V1, V10). One visitor recalled how a longterm Haslar detainee, who was held for 2 years at the end of a

9 month prison sentence for illegal working/false documents ‘was withdrawn and resigned... he didn’t allow himself to hope’ (V2).

The ex-detainees also described the distress of witnessing others’ attempts at suicide, self harm and mental deterioration, and from living through riots, hunger strikes and other incidents of public disturbance. The vast majority had experience of other detainees (in some instances room-mates), attempting suicide or self harming. These events were described as disturbing in themselves, but additionally stressful in that detainees felt powerless to help, and because they tended to be followed up by enhanced surveillance in the form of roll calls, riot police, being locked up and the circulation of wild rumours.

I’ve seen people trying to commit suicide – people go crazy, mental – the system does that to them...very disturbing – just before I was released, a certain lady wanted to kill herself, opposite my room – with the sheet, tied herself up – they’d be talking all night, banging, shouting, crying, screaming, she was banging the doors, windows, screaming, you couldn’t sleep – they put a person on guard until that person calmed down – it went quiet, but I don’t know what happened, she disappeared, maybe deported or to prison (Faith, detained 22 months 2007-8)

Some Zimbabweans it was too traumatic for them, they broke down, got unhinged, started shouting, singing – manic. Oh it was terrible – you’d meet them when we went for exercise – the authorities thought they were playing up, would just leave them... Or someone you’re sharing the room with you, disturbed - you could find him urinating in the bin...the system can’t pick up things like that – how much confidence can you have in a system like that? Nobody did anything, no one was responsible – that type of madness – you don’t see it on the street – frightening levels of energy, not normal, shouting, just losing it, dangerous, just mad, crazy. You could see somebody doing something you couldn’t imagine, embarrassing themselves – can’t they do something? Everyone would be saying that – but there were no channels... At one time we even thought it was deliberate, you could think they were doing something to destroy us. You can imagine anything, something you saw in a movie – they can experiment on us... nothing can allay your fears because no one is telling you what is happening and there is no trust (Nicholas, detained 7 months 2000-1 [2])

While we were on hunger strike in Campsfield a Kurdish guy hanged himself – they were about to deport him, but his mum and dad were killed and he was refusing, saying he’d rather die here. He hanged himself from the door – that means their security wasn’t working - he was on suicide watch, but 4am it happened... After that, people were taken out for roll call – then they were refusing to get back in... They called in the riot police... another tried to take a needle, sewed up his mouth (Chuma, detained 3 months 2005 [7])

The different IRCs had varying levels of security, facilities such as courses or libraries, different rules for visiting and access to phones. Many ex-detainees and visitors compared the centres close to airports unfavourably with those further away, due to the

hysterical atmosphere created by people being taken for flights, whereas others had a less rapid turnover and there were more opportunities for study. On the other hand, those who spent lengths of time in centres away from the airports described stress from feeling 'dumped' and fearing they'd never get out. Women consistently favoured experiences in prisons over Yarl's Wood IRC on the grounds that in prison they could work and study (12, 13, 15, 18). Yarl's Wood visitors echoed this point 'they say prison is better, in Yarl's Wood they feel depressed, miss the work and camaraderie' (V3). For men, however such comparisons were overshadowed by the violence and elevated security in male prisons (which was similar to some particular IRCs), which could cancel out any benefit from enhanced educational facilities or being allowed to work. One detainee singled out the repeated strip searches in one IRC run by the prison service as being the most difficult thing to cope with (6). Boredom was a major issue, but even when facilities were available it could be difficult to access them (one who spent three months in prison, only finally got permission to use the library two weeks before his release [14]), or detainees described being too stressed over potential deportations to be able to concentrate (7).

The two ex-detainees who did not describe detention as traumatic were both relatively well-known MDC politicians who arrived in Britain with a network of connections and contacts with journalists, support groups and others, such that neither felt deportation was ever a reality, and neither experienced the sense of being totally cut off from the outside world. Both had experienced Zimbabwean jails and one had been tortured, and the contrast with conditions in British IRCs had the effect of making them feel reassured: one described coping with six months detention following a failed claim by reading Nelson Mandela's autobiography 'however bad it was, it was not going to be that bad or that long inside' and keeping himself busy with courses and going to the gym (10). The other, whose ticket to flee to Britain was bought by a British journalist, and whose contacts arranged a good lawyer described:

Comparing the detention in Zimbabwe for those high crimes and the detention here, well, I can't complain very much, I simply can't – I've been in a lice-infected prison, and when you get out you need to shave your hair and boil all your clothes – I have had so many friends die... So for me Oakington was a blessing! In terms of basics - we had food, they'd wake you up, force you to take a bath, I hated that, 'wakey wakey, time to get up' and I don't like bathing daily, but I thought what kind of prison system is this? and then we had phone cards to phone home [supplied by ZA]... we didn't know where they came from... (20)

4. Effects on personal relationships

The strain that detention placed on personal relationships – with family and friends in the UK and with family back home – has already begun to emerge. One visitor described that for detainees 'worry about family is all you do' (V9) Those detainees who described themselves as acutely depressed/suicidal while in detention spoke at length about worry for their children/parents/spouses in Zimbabwe, about the difficulties of communicating with them, about their sense of failure in the relationships that mattered most to them. It

is notable that the point in the interviews that the ex-detainees' found most upsetting, was when they began to talk about effects on family relationships. One of the women – Chipo - who described feeling suicidal in detention, for example, recalled blaming herself for the Zimbabwe government's demolition of the family home with her father inside.

I started having suicidal thoughts...especially when we were on hunger strike and our home in Harare was demolished with my father inside – people were saying, that was because the daughter is in Britain...you're getting money from the MDC, so they demolished the house to dust...when I was in detention I went through a lot, blaming myself – I wept, oh, oh I'm putting my family through this, I'm thinking I'm safe here, but I'm not... I couldn't help him with anything couldn't get him medication or anything... (Chipo, asylum-seeker detained 2 months in 2005 [11])

Problems in communicating with relatives at home were not only about the practical difficulties (acute before mobile phones were allowed) or powerlessness in relation to events in Zimbabwe. Detainees also spoke of the difficulty of conveying what they were going through to relatives who did not understand the idea of administrative detention for asylum seekers, had mythical views of what Britain was like, and needed and expected financial help from relatives in the UK.

Ex-detainees described how relatives thought that they were lying when they explained that they had been detained for no reason. When detention was protracted, explaining became the more difficult, and relatives felt the detainees must have committed serious crimes. One teacher detained for six months, for example, described trying to talk to his wife at home (also a teacher): 'When I spoke to my wife back in Zimbabwe, it was as if [she didn't believe me]... always, when are you coming out? When are you coming out? I don't know. How can you be in prison, you must know when you're coming out? If you're serving a sentence then you must know when you're coming out? But I'm not serving a sentence, I'm just waiting for something to happen.... Very difficult to explain that' (Francis, torture survivor detained 6 months [6])

Another described 'My mum back home was very, very depressed about what was happening to me. I tried to talk to her, but I couldn't much, all the phones were monitored, I was scared to put her at risk, she'd already been beaten because I was involved with MDC, they could track that I was communicating. I wanted to make it OK, was trying to make her understand, make it a bit simple, but she was asking why are you there for 9 months? It was hard to explain, I didn't understand what was happening to me, so it was very difficult to explain...' (Maxwell, torture survivor detained 9 months [21])

Support from family outside (both in the UK and back in Zimbabwe) was mentioned by many as what 'kept us going', one described: 'Visits kept me going – my family, brothers, sisters, even my father and mother came from Zimbabwe to see me in there – it was really touching...but when they came, they were in tears... they'd been imagining Zimbabwean jails... and the security outside, the way they treat you as you go in, you

feel like a criminal...’(5) But a significant number described problems with close relationships after being detention. Some detainees described not having any close relations in Britain (1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 21); others spoke of relatives/friends who had broken contact because they lacked status and feared that communication would put them at risk (3,14). The detainees also described feeling stigmatised as criminals and ashamed to be creating problems for close relatives or friends: one ex-detainee had tried to protect family/friends, telling them not to make the effort to visit, as it would waste a day and he had seen how the visitors themselves became upset when visiting the IRCs (18). Another described how the stigma of being a criminal had affected his family’s attitude, and how he had been blamed and cut off after being arrested for illegal work (14).

5. Coping and resistance

The ex-detainees’ accounts provided insight into what helped them cope psychologically and practically. They emphasised the importance of friendships inside, contact with the outside world through visitors, and the support they gained from their religious faith. Many felt the system was designed to try to break their spirit and to force them to give up and return to Zimbabwe. Strategies of resistance involved trying to keep going, refusing to be deported to Zimbabwe (or Malawi and South Africa), campaigns for release coordinated from the outside contesting HO and judicial decisions and demonstrating the individuals’ social embeddedness. The detainees also organised hunger strikes.

Friendship networks inside the detention centres tended to involve other Zimbabweans (particularly in periods when large numbers were detained) as well as other nationalities (particularly other Africans). Some spoke of enduring friendships that they had made when confined (2, 7, 12, 13). Many described encouraging fellow Zimbabweans to socialise rather than hide in their rooms, and gave accounts of meeting up regularly with other Zimbabwean detainees to help each other with their cases: exchanging information over their understanding of the system, trying to understand which solicitors were good or not, what sort of evidence to collect. (Though this was also a means by which rumours and inaccurate information could spread). One recalled ‘There were 20-25 of us [Zimbabweans] in Campsfield, and I sort of organized the group to meet on a regular basis and discuss on the issues and that is when we formed this group to look at cases and affairs affecting us as Zimbabweans in detention. This helped us, helped us a lot – we didn’t know we had to look for evidence, nobody had told us, but because somebody had don’t that and it had helped them, we said, lets look for evidence ourselves’(3) They also formed prayer groups, and passed time entertaining each other by telling stories.

Yet the conditions of detention described above also undermined the support that could be secured through friendships inside: deportations and movement of people around the detention estate meant contacts could be transitory. Two detainees spoke of learning to protect themselves emotionally by not forming close friendships with other detainees: ‘I closed myself’, one recalled, ‘just to protect myself’ (1); the second described ‘Always when a friend then gets deported, that was very, very depressing and stressful as well, so you find yourself not wanting to become too close to people because you don’t know what’s going to happen to them, so I became very detached from people – you’d chat but

you didn't want to become close' (6). The fears of informers also undermined friendships with other Zimbabweans.

Visitors from outside were described universally as a lifeline: not only through their practical roles, in help with understanding and navigating the system, access to competent lawyers, phonecards, books, newspapers, toiletries, and (after mobiles were allowed) with the right sort of mobile phones (ie without cameras), but also as a source of hope.

All the Zimbabwean detainees in this study relied on their faith to help them cope with daily life in the detention centres: church services provided a diversion and something to do, and were a source of optimism and uplift. Some described going to all services on offer, regardless of denomination. Two men described how they had not been religious before, but how detention had turned them into believers. Some described singing and praying through the night. Many gave accounts of how important this had been to them.

Me I was so worried all the time about myself, really not OK, but then I decided to go with the church, and it helped me according to my faith, so that I would focus on something else rather than my circumstances (Jacob, detained 2 years [1])

In Haslar I was very low... always down...I hadn't been practising as a Christian for many years, but when I was detained, I found myself drawn back into practising again. That was one of the coping mechanisms, an outlet ...I became more religious than I have ever been (Francis, teacher detained 6 months [6])

I used to set my alarm for midnight, for midnight prayers ... the pastors used to berate us – “you're going to church now as you're in trouble” – but you get close to god, it's a difficult time, fearing, you don't know what's going to happen – you can think the best thing is to look up to the big man, saying “he is my life, I trust in him, he is in charge and knows what is best”...Nigerians can pray, I tell you – for 30 minutes without stopping – high volume! We were so religious inside (Chuma, detained 3 months [7])

The hunger strike organized among Zimbabwean detainees in the summer of 2005 was the most high profile act of resistance, though there have been a number of other smaller hunger strikes since then.³⁶ Coordinated by Zimbabweans both in and outside detention, with the aim of having deportations suspended, it was not a planned mass suicide (though some individuals became suicidal): ‘we were clear in our heads – this was not about killing ourselves, it was a protest against being removed...’ (1). The timing was propitious: this was the time of the G8 summit, when the UK Foreign Office was publicly criticising human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwean government was embarking on the mass urban demolitions of Operation Murambatsvina and it had been deemed unsafe for the UK cricket team to play in Zimbabwe.

³⁶ Similar tensions characterised other hunger strikes, eg among 13 Zimbabwean women threatened with deportation to Malawi in 2006-7.

The strike began in June 2005 and continued until the first week of August when deportations were suspended as a result of a judicial decision. At its height involved between 57 and 112 detained Zimbabweans in different IRCs (the former figure is from the Home Office, the latter from Zimbabwean groups).³⁷ The strike gave birth to a number of new Zimbabwean campaign groups – including the United Network of Detained Zimbabweans and a new NGO, Medical Justice, formed in the wake of the strike by medical doctors and Zimbabwean ex-hunger-striker, Harris Nyatsanza. Nyatsanza was a geography teacher and torture survivor who had sought asylum unsuccessfully in Britain in 2001. He was one of the coordinators of the hunger strike, ‘as food and our bodies were the one thing over which we still had control’.³⁸ Some of the detainees in this study who participated described the strike as ‘empowering – we were successful in gaining media coverage – we got a lot of attention from journalists over that... and it worked – they called off deportations’ (1). Another recalled: ‘If you really have that fear of persecution, you can say I’d rather have a dignified death here – I’ll die in hospital, under my control, having chosen that – not in the way you’ll be dying in Zimbabwe... that was what people were saying when they went on strike (7). While some adhered to the strike rigorously, most decided to drink juice in order to strike for a prolonged period without damaging their health, and some also had food brought to them secretly in their rooms (12, 13).

But the strike was also a distressing and difficult period, and a time of a more complex politics. It was stressful as those striking rigorously became progressively weaker and more ill over time. The health of one of the strikers – a teacher, Timbha Mqhubeli – was particularly critical after 37 days without food, but his transferral to hospital for emergency treatment was achieved only through the intervention of an independent doctor brought in by campaigners and a court order: he was eventually sent across London in an ambulance, handcuffed the whole time with 3 guards despite being too weak to stand or walk.³⁹ Nyatsanza tried to commit suicide and was placed on 24 hr suicide-watch by Harmondsworth authorities. Both teachers had made claims of past torture that had not been investigated. Both were hospitalised for several weeks, during which time formal complaints were made about the inadequacy of policy and medical monitoring of hunger strikers.⁴⁰

Zimbabweans were forcibly removed to Zimbabwe throughout the strike period and accounts circulated of individuals injured in trying to resist, gaining criminal records for assaulting escorts, or degraded in various ways in the course of being removed.⁴¹ Fears

³⁷ For press coverage see A. Kundani ‘Mass hunger strike against deportations to Zimbabwe’ IRR news 25 June 2005, <http://www.irr.org.uk/2005/june/ak000017.html>; ‘Zimbabwean hunger strikers have short reprieve from deportations’, 15 August 2005, Refugee Council, <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/2005/august/20050815zimba.htm>

³⁸ <http://www.medicaljustice.org.uk/content/view//189/68/>

³⁹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cnhansard/vo050720/halltext/50720>. 20 July 2005 column 444WH, question by Kate Hoey.

⁴⁰ Harris Nyatsanza, <http://www.medicaljustice.org.uk/content/view//189/68/>

⁴¹ Where resistance was successful, deportees were returned to detention, recounting stories of verbal and other abuse from escorts. Visitors also recounted instances of deportations achieved with force and without dignity, such as when an individual was removed in a plastic suit having soiled themselves in fear (V14).

about mistreatment on return were enhanced by a number of stories in the British press reporting disappearances, detention, interrogation and torture of Zimbabwean deportees on return.⁴² Some IRCs responded to the strike by putting individuals they saw as leaders into solitary confinement, or transferring them to different centres to break up organized groups, disrupting support networks inside, as well as legal representation. One woman who had been in Yarl's Wood during the strike recalled what a difficult time it had been:

Back home Mugabe was demolishing the houses – the journalists came to talk to us – that's when we started the hunger strike so that they wouldn't deport us back home that was the aim, not to kill ourselves. So we stopped eating... it was more distressing, as some of the women were trying to cut themselves - it was just the environment that was more stressing, someone trying to cut herself like that just to be in the same place and you know that any day you are liable to be deported...one of the ladies locked herself in the bathroom, so they had to use force to get her out – and she was naked...and the men went to get her – it wasn't right. Physically they took her, it isn't right, they shouldn't force – some ended up in court for that, for assault... (Sibongile, detained 3 ½ months 2005 [16])

The politics of the strike also raised fears of informers within and without the detention estate passing on information to Harare: new leaders were emerging who were not known to established groups, rumours and suspicions circulated about their intent and connections; the formation of new groups was also linked to complaints against existing groups of not doing enough for detainees, undermining concerted action and leading to tension among support groups (4, V14). The campaign to stop deportations and publicise the strike involved circulating emails with lists of names of detainees, and some individuals feared the publicity and visibility this brought, feeling it would elevate risks of violence against them should they be returned (V14). Some detainees decided not to participate in the strike for this reason, and rather chose to keep a low profile (4).

Although not everyone participated, some felt pressured to join in to support their compatriots. Some voices were arguing that the strike needed to be large and protracted in order to gain media attention. This raised concern among others that individuals in poor health were being encouraged to participate, despite the serious risk to their life (interfering, for example, with HIV and other medication) (V14). Regardless of whether they were themselves participating, some detainees spoke of how distressing it was to watch others become ill (7, 16). Aside from the two teachers who were hospitalised, one young Zimbabwean woman died suddenly shortly after her release at the end of the strike (7).

⁴² These included 'Sithembile' whose family told the press she had disappeared on return (*The Times* 24 June 2005), 6 deportees 'tortured and dumped' (*The Independent on Sunday* 3 July 2005), 'Usher' and one other punched on the head and neck and interrogated for 2 days for being British spies. Usher was taken to Harare central prison, beaten on the soles of his feet, subjected to electric shock treatment to his chest and testicles and was then sentenced (with other deportees) to a long prison sentence, but managed to escape, as one of the officials thought he had been given bail; the case of 'Zuka Kalinga'/'Vincent' interrogated at the airport then Bulawayo who escaped to SA (*The Times* 5 July 2005, *The Guardian* 10 July 2005). From December 2004, both UNHCR and Amnesty International issued statements that returns should be halted.

The rising fears of deportation, informers and other tensions during the hunger strike led some to decide to return voluntarily, as they felt the risk would be lower if they arrived without the escorts and bureaucratic procedure of enforced returns (4, V14). One such was a former public servant with a history of MDC activism who had been threatened by the Zimbabwean authorities (he fell into one of the categories recognised by the courts to be at risk only weeks after his removal, through the case SM). His fears of being detained on arrival proved well-founded, as he was aggressively questioned by the CIO at Harare airport, and was twice detained and interrogated by police at his local police station, before managing to flee to South Africa and return to Britain to make a fresh asylum claim. His story from the point at which he was taken for questioning from Harare airport is as follows (4):

‘I asked where am I going, they said that is the procedure if you are deported... they asked me “so you claimed asylum in the UK? so you are selling the country, and then you are coming back here to do something – what is it?” ...From there after 4-5 hours they took me to a camp in Harare where other people were detained and held me over night... Then they let me out, but on condition that I report at the Bulawayo police station’. When he reported at Bulawayo, he was held in an informal detainees’ camp, which once again he managed to leave with relatives’ help, only to be fetched back for another session of aggressive questioning. ‘Oh, interrogation started again – they were busy making phone calls to Harare, “detain him, detain him, we don’t know who he is”. It went on and on. They kept telling me, “you’ve got a case to answer, you’re disturbing our programme – why are you just coming, you must have a programme...” I said the British government is deporting people, and they said “no, you are lying, deportees do not come back with bags like yours...” Then back to the police station, so many questions, “what was I doing in the UK?” ...They knew I had sought asylum and the problem was my history...’ Eventually they let him out on condition he reported back the following morning, but he decided to flee to South Africa. He returned to the UK on a false passport and made a fresh asylum claim on arrival, but his case was still unresolved at the time of the interview, 4 years later.

Part 2: Legacies of detention

This section turns to the short and longterm legacies of the experiences described above. All the ex-detainees were, of course, pleased to be released from detention, but over the short term, the legacies of detention were shaped by on-going insecurity, as in all instances, asylum claims were initially still unresolved. Over the long term, the legacies of detention were shaped by whether or not the ex-detainees went on to gain status in Britain. This formed the major disjuncture in the interviews, particularly in accounts of mental health, such that individuals' personal histories (eg whether or not interviewees had experienced torture, or the length of time detained), emerged as less important in their capacity to adjust and rebuild their lives than whether or not they had status and hence the basic security in which to do so.

1. Insecurity and surveillance

The ex-detainees explained the difficulties that hindered their initial adjustment largely in terms of fear over the prospect of being detained again and deported. This insecurity was enhanced by the conditions of release, involving regular reporting to police or Home Office, and by surveillance in the form of electronic tags. All described how their joy in getting out of detention was tempered by the realisation they were still insecure: 'I felt happy to be free at last but it was also difficult when I got out', one ex-detainee explained, 'there was a backlash from that imprisonment and memories, I couldn't leave it behind. It was better than being inside, but not OK, I was still not trusted, reporting, still fearing...' (Maxwell, an MDC activist and torture survivor, detained 9 months [21]). This was also the case for those detained for shorter periods, such as Vimbai, a former policeman detained for two months, who recalled: 'I was happy for the freedom – that was the best train journey ever! Fresh air, people, normal people, people who are not in distress, people who are alive, talking smiling, people going to, coming from work... but very difficult to adjust from detention...' (17). One detainee was released with no form of ID, as the Home Office had lost his file (an asylum card was eventually issued 4 years later), which enhanced the fear of being picked up (7).

Even those who had considerable support networks emphasised fear. An MDC activist who had been the object of a campaign of release recalled:

I was so happy to be free ...coming out it was now abnormal for me to be free. Then when I got home, there was still that air, you're still under conditions, not trusted, reporting...it was the limbo, not knowing what was going to happen, when you were going to be deported...I'd been arrested back home a few times – the conditions in the police station I was kept were atrocious – filthy, lice-infested, beatings, food was a problem – here it was better, you're not beaten up, no one threatens you...I was in Dover prison for 6 months – you get your clothes washed, you don't have to care about where the next meal is coming from. So when I heard I was to be released the next day, I was quite upset, I was scared of getting out! Scared of the outside world - people were busy campaigning for me

to be released, but myself, I was quite upset....!(Ruben, detained twice, total 6 ½ months [10])

The ex-detainees held for very long periods often felt they had adjusted somehow to being confined. Faith, for example, recalled her confusion and shame on coming out after 22 months in detention:

You can get used to being inside – like my mind was still in there, that was my small world. And then the day I got released, I was so confused, scared – I remember the first time I went to church I was just scared, didn't know what to say to people, I was so confused ... I didn't want to go out, didn't feel secure, people would be asking me where I'd been and I didn't know what I should say...(18)

She was one of two in this study who had been fitted with electronic tags on their release. For both, the tag exacerbated feelings of criminalization (18). Both also described the tag making them feel a further burden on, and source of complications for those they lived with: they described un-announced household visits/checks by officers, one was at first given a complex timetable that was difficult to remember and adhere to. 'That affects those you're living with too... you can't feel comfortable...' (Dumisani, student activist detained 3 months for illegal work, 9 months electronic tag, status since 2007 [14]).

2. Dependence and shame

The shame so many ex-detainees emphasised reflected both the stigma of feeling criminalized, but also the stigma of depending on others. Both sentiments were heightened because Zimbabweans in the UK have elite/middle class backgrounds and movement to the UK (even if fleeing violence) was surrounded by mythical expectations of self-advancement and prosperity. Most were released on bail to live with relatives/friends who had stood surety for them, on whom they were entirely dependent. Only 3 went into NASS accommodation and received £35 weekly vouchers.

Being dependent undermined ex-detainees' moral sense of themselves as responsible adults. Many spoke of feeling infantilised, unable to fulfil roles of providing for others, and which others also expected of them. One woman compared herself to the toddler she looked after:

Life is just difficult – I need an independent life, need to look after myself – my children need me, I don't know what they think – that I have deserted them. I'm here with my relatives, they try to look after me and I look after their kids, but I'm just a burden, they've got their own two kids, and me, I'm an adult, a mother, but they have to look after me too, as if I was still a kid too, just like this 3 yr old...' (Faith, detained 22 months, dependent since release [18])

A man described feeling emasculated by dependence on his wife and the gender-role reversal following detention (2). Other men described being embarrassed and 'appearing

a failure' in front of friends (8). One such, a former MDC organizer in Harare, seeking asylum since 2003 (having fled Zimbabwe on Malawian documents after being tortured) lamented:

I have no life – even if you're not in detention, you're out, but there is no movement in life, you're dependent on another. How can a man depend on another man? It's so embarrassing in front of a friend – what do you say, I've been seeking asylum for 6 years? How can that be explained? (Chuma [7])

The visitors also emphasised the stigma of being a burden on others - 'every time they want to go out they have to beg for a bus fare' (V12, see also V1, V2, V3, V8, V13). Some spoke of individuals who had not coped, whom they felt had undergone long-term personality changes, who had become withdrawn or destabilised, had died or committed suicide after their release, or who lived on the streets (1, 5). They also emphasised problems of isolation in areas to which they had been dispersed if in NASS accommodation.

There is nothing for them to do ... that was the thing I felt desperately [for those I continued to visit after their release] – meeting people and they say how lonely they are. In a detention centre, you've got all these people around you, then all of a sudden, you're in a room with your voucher and a sink downstairs in a damp basement full of dirty crockery. If people were released into areas where they had support... and could have something to do (V12)

3. Mental health and strained relationships

The 13 ex-detainees who were still insecure when interviewed all spoke of depression. Four became visibly distressed in the course of the interviews or broke down, and two of these described suicidal thoughts. Many recounted experiencing flashbacks to their time in detention in Britain, and in some instances to detention/torture in Zimbabwe beforehand. The aspects of their time inside that they described as intrusive were their initial apprehension (particularly dawn raids), transit and transfers between centres and airport, deportation attempts, witnessing suicides and others self harming. The ex-detainees described these unwanted memories as appearing in dreams and triggered by the sight of police officers, white vans, reporting, or even anxiety over simply hearing vehicles outside the house. One explained:

It is a mind game they are doing, and I worry all the time I can be detained again... I had to go to see my GP as soon as I came out, because I was having so much depression – now I forget a lot of things within a short space of time... I still don't sleep, or very light...and flashbacks they can come in dreams...you can't move on... you're still insecure, can be deported anytime [Nyasha, torture survivor, detained twice, total 4 months, last released Jan 2009 [9])

Such memories could persist for years, as in the case of a teacher released in 2005, who had fled Zimbabwe in 2001:

The worst thing is not knowing what's going to happen to you and when – you have the worst nightmares, when, what, how long am I going to be in this state for. It can haunt you, even up to today – those nightmares, especially thinking about what detention means in Zimbabwe... I'm still getting flashbacks...it has after effects and you live with them for a very long time... I had an attempt at counselling...that was 5 yrs ago. But now I feel I need to get back again to seeing one... because the flashbacks and anxiety levels are on the increase again... Nowadays I wake up and I'm too scared to get out of the door most of the time (David, detained 3 months, released 2005, claim unresolved [3])

He had been separated from his children for 9 years and had stopped ringing them, because he felt he had failed them. He continued:

My family, children were school age when I left and that is one area that is really hurting me at the moment. I haven't spoken to them in the last 6 months because I feel I have failed them. When I left I promised my daughters I was coming back to get them, and it hasn't happened. My brothers are the ones who looked after them and ...managed to support them with school fees. But they lack that family structure around them... I stopped speaking to them on the phone, because what can I say? (3)

For a former low level public servant/MDC activist, his own deportation (described above) was the most disturbing:

I do try to forget, but it comes, especially the most thing I remember, when they take you around, you're handcuffed like that, transferring you handcuffed between the detention centres before deportation, moving you about like a criminal...then there was this one episode – there was this one guy, he was taken to hospital because he tried to stab himself in the neck, it always comes to my mind – we were gathered there and he was bleeding... he'd taken the knife from the canteen, he was in pain, blood everywhere... disturbing and shocking, very disturbing (Vincent, detained 4 months prior to removal to Zimbabwe, fresh claim 2005 unresolved [4])

Effects on personal relationships were a prominent feature of most accounts. Some felt their children did not know them or would have good reason to disown parents who had not filled appropriate support roles for years on end. One mother, for example, who had left small children in Zimbabwe eight years previously described:

The situation will force you to think of death...if you are someone who is grown up and you are being looked after by family who have got their own family too, you are a burden to other people...you feel useless ...before I was working, now I have given myself a bad name, anyone can look at me and think that this woman

is not a good person...I've got a bad name, but I'm not bad, I'm not that kind of a person... when I think of that, locked up like a criminal, it makes me down, down down... My family, they thought I was dead in detention... And now, they must be thinking...I have children at home in Zimbabwe, they can't go to school, they have to look to others for help, they must be thinking... (Mai Moyo, first asylum claim 2001, sentence for illegal work and 1 year in prison/detention in 2005, case unresolved [15])

The stigma surrounding detention also affected close relatives - a woman spoke of how difficult it had been when her suicidal mother was finally released after a year of confinement:

She was scared – haunted in a way, and you could see that her mind was distracted, she was withdrawn ...because she didn't know how we'd accept her back, and the community...people were not prepared to have her – like, the reaction, she's been away for a long time, over a year and there she is coming back – we want her home, obviously, but it was difficult. We had to be mindful how we spoke around her lest we triggered some thoughts, or she thought we weren't accepting her. There's a stigma attached to that, and it was just not the same...we were thinking what next? We were worried - what was she going to do, how were we going to care for her? ... She has been that low – suicidal – she has come to that mentality, and I start telling her, if you think like that what do you expect me to do, how do you think it will bear on the little one back home?... it has been very, very difficult (V11)

Personal relationships were strained by a whole range of problems created by ex-detainees' confinement and dependence. Some described relatives saying they did not want to be associated with criminals or accusing them of mis-managing their asylum claims. One recounted: 'Where would I be without my friends? I can't thank them enough – my relatives were unsupportive ... It's a problem being known as a criminal, it damages people and their relationships' (Dumisani, detained 3 months for illegal working, electronic tag 9 months [14]). A man whose detention was caused by an attempt to leave Britain on a false passport to seek asylum elsewhere described ensuing tensions with his family because he had not consulted them, and his initiative had made his asylum claim more complex as he now had a criminal record (8). His daughter recounted how it had shattered her sense of 'looking up' to her father as 'role model...I felt really betrayed, my mum too, the whole family felt betrayed' (V4).

Some ex-detainees escaped tensions with relatives/sureties by sleeping rough on tubes and buses (V7). One man recounted: 'I stayed [with my sister] for a few weeks only, and the problems started – I was a full time activist, but she didn't approve, she thought I was wasting my time, thought I should get a job... so I moved on to a friend – again that didn't work, so then I moved on again...I lived like that, moving from sofa to sofa' (10). A young woman described coming out of prison into her boyfriends' home (who was also her surety) but when the relationship became abusive she felt unable to move out as she was dependent on him:

I can't go to a friend, they'll laugh at me, I can't trust anybody...it's like you're nowhere, going from house to house, they're also working hard, can they accept you just sitting there... I called the police twice [when my boyfriend threatened me]...I just want my life back, not to be reduced to this life of begging and fear – I think back to prison when I'm inside the house, looking at the walls – just reminding me of the rooms we were in – when I go outside it's better, I can lift myself up...They say right to work but why not right to life – I have no life, I want my life back (Marion, in Britain since 2001, detained 3 months for illegal work 2007, case unresolved [19])

4. Legacies after gaining status in Britain

Ex-detainees who were secure in Britain at the time of the interview lived in very different circumstances. They spoke much less of depression than those who were insecure, indeed most did not mention depression at all in relation to the present. Of the 8 individuals with status, most were forward looking, and were combining work and study; three were in professional employment. A policeman who had retrained as a social worker described his life after getting papers: 'That was the easy part! There was lots of pressure from my family to work and study – detention, the whole asylum system impacts people mentally and some can be disturbed for a long time, only resilient people can bounce back and resume a normal life...'. (Vimbai, detained 2 months [17]). Another described an urgent need to 'catch up': 'When I came out I had to catch up – I didn't waste time, went into full time education and also working, trying to catch up those years I'd missed' [Maxwell, torture survivor, detained 9 months [21]). One woman's papers had come through a couple of months before the interview and spoke enthusiastically about various possibilities (16).

All of the ex-detainees with status wanted to put the whole episode of detention behind them. Perhaps for this reason, many visitors in this study who were part of church or other visiting groups spoke of detainees losing contact with them after their release (V1, V2, V3). But the majority (all but three) of those with status in Britain described still living with unwanted memories of their time in detention.

It still gets to me, still comes back, even now, when I'm just lying down, I can still think of that... I try not to, but it's difficult to put it completely behind... the not being free...the fear, each time it comes, the being in prison when you've not committed a crime, just for running when they tried to kill you and then being locked up, called an absconder, the treatment, no body cared, the cuffs, handcuffs going to court, like a proper thief, people swearing at you... Sometimes seeing a policeman I can think of that (Maxwell, torture survivor, detained 9 months seeking asylum 2001-2, status since 2006 [21])

For one woman, it was the experience of attempted deportation she could not forget:

I felt relieved [to get my papers]...but sometimes when you think about life, you can think about those men, the ones they took me to the airport, handcuffed, abusing, shouting, swearing at me, personal comments, shocking – um! Insulting me...because I refused ...that stays with me... It distresses me, comes in dreams, I can remember too clearly...(Sibongile, detained 3 ½ months in 2005, refugee status 2008 [16])

Such memories could persist for years after refugee status had been secured, as in the case of Francis, a teacher and torture survivor, who had been detained for 6 months in 2002, but had status in Britain since October 2002 and had gone on to take out British citizenship.

My experiences at Haslar can't be crossed out by citizenship, maybe in time, but not at the moment... I think it will be something I live with for the rest of my life – you come to a country that is supposed to be very democratic and you get detained and imprisoned for no apparent crime... Being persecuted by my government...and then to come to a country where I detained for saying I'm persecuted by my own government [Francis [6]]

For several, there were direct parallels between experiences in Britain and Zimbabwe:

Even us with papers, it affects us still – even up to now, I'm not comfortable, going into a detention centre, or talking to a police officer, I haven't put that whole episode out... that fear comes back because of that incident when they took me, transported me from one centre to the other, they don't trust you, they treat you like a criminal... When I left Zimbabwe, I'd been taken during the night by CIO...abducted, interrogated...so then in UK, being taken again, at 4am in the morning, in a raid – it was just the same...(Farai, detained 6 weeks 2001, status since 2007 [5])

The reasons why ex-detainees had not been able to put detention behind them were not all about psychological legacies, as criminal records were grounds for being refused employment. One man, granted five years refugee status had lost his job for this reason when CRB checks came back:

It's difficult for me to find work – the fact that I've got a criminal record now, that affects the employers...when the CRB came they said they didn't want to keep me. The reason was that criminal record – the way it appears, it can make it seem a lot worse – all I'd done was to try to escape and then work on false papers... so, the detention affects me directly because of that (Dumisani, former student activist detained 3 months for illegal work, 9 months electronic tag, papers since 2007 [14])

Three ex-detainees with status in Britain felt there were no lasting negative emotional legacies of detention in Britain. One was a torture survivor and relatively well-known and well-connected politician who had been detained relatively briefly had also not

described detention itself in the stressful terms that others had done (discussed above) (20). The second recalled the trauma of reliving past violence when detained and felt it had been a life-changing event, but felt with time and support from family, he had been able to resume a normal life 'after three years [with status], maybe life restarted after that', and that the episode had taught him more about his rights and about how to challenge abuses (Vimbai, detained 2 months, status since 2002 (17)). The third likewise stressed the way detention had transformed his understanding of human rights and entitlement (Ruben, detained twice, total 6 ½ months, status since 2007 (10)).

5. Coping strategies

Those who had received support from close family described this as essential in allowing them to recover. One explained: 'if I hadn't had support from my family to get over this, then maybe I could have ended up mentally unwell for the rest of my life ... people don't know what they're doing, what's happening to them – there was nothing to do all day, people were just sitting around feeding like chickens – it was very depressing, and you're told all day and night that you'll be deported to a country you're really scared to go back to.' (Vimbai, detained 2 months [17]). Yet the strains on close relationships, and the fact that asylum-seekers were frequently separated from close family meant that many had looked to other sources of support - from members of Zimbabwean diaspora groups such as the ZA, from individuals they did not know before who helped them and from churches. Many had become stalwarts of diaspora protests and campaigns, such as the Vigil outside the Zimbabwe embassy on the Strand, maintained every weekend since 2002, or had joined branches of the MDC in the diaspora. They also filled their time by participating in local asylum-seeker support groups or undertaking voluntary work. Some had become visitors and befriended other Zimbabwean detainees (1, 5, 6, 9, 20).

Church and faith emerged as particularly important to ex-detainees both in detention and following release. A young mother described: 'There was a time, I wanted to end my life, but all the counselling I got from church, it did help me a lot, helped me to be strong and keep going, to have hope that things will be better one of those days...I just try to keep busy, in the past with MDC, but now with the church...it is what keeps me going'(Chipo, detained 2 months 2005, first claim 2002, unresolved [11]). Another ex-detainee lived in a Christian community: 'Right now people are making contributions towards my 2 sons' school uniforms...I'm relying on that charity, but I don't want that – I want to work so that I'm able to support my family and be able to do something for myself – I'm an electrician, I did the transfer course, but they say I don't qualify to work, I find that really inhuman and degrading (Jacob, detained 2 years, released in 2005, case unresolved [1]).

6. Attitudes towards Britain and the law

The experience of being detained as an asylum-seeker without having committed a crime, or serving prison sentences for illegal working/false documents and then being transferred without charge to detention centres after completing criminal sentences all had repercussions for attitudes towards the law and towards Britain. Most ex-detainees

had come to Britain with a rosy view of the country as a place of opportunity where human rights were respected, but had to revise their opinion given their experiences of an asylum system they considered arbitrary and unfair, which left them with a sense of being victims of injustice, treated as exceptions from the usual protections.

There are many things in this country that need to be addressed – unfairness, how justice is carried out. Having experienced a 3rd world country and then experiencing this... it fell short of my expectations... People can get into politics without being physically abducted, killed - that is good. But I expected the rule of law to be fully applied to all people, but it is not... There are some exceptions, especially in the way they behave towards asylum-seekers. Putting asylum-seekers in prison... Someone who has experienced all of that, they'll not have full confidence in the system' (Nicholas, torture survivor, claiming asylum since 2000, detained 7 months [2])

Some ex-detainees were angry. A visitor recalled how, after her release, one female ex-detainee exclaimed: 'I hate Britain and the British! They put me through all of that, detained like a criminal when I'd done nothing wrong...' (V10) Another ex-detainee also elaborated how such experiences could lead to hate: 'I wasn't expecting the treatment we got – going from Zimbabwe, I thought I'd get much help – I find that very difficult sometimes – immigration is a big thing here, sometimes I can understand why, but the way we were treated... the law is supposed to be enforced, I can understand that, but it's not right, it can make you hate, angry... when I see a policeman I can think of that, but I try to tell myself... there are some good British people' (Maxwell, torture survivor, detained 9 months, papers since 2002 [21])

One of the responses to detention was to become an activist. While some of those in this study had personal histories as activists, others described how the experience of detention in Britain was responsible for their activism with the MDC, the Vigil and/or a range of campaigns and demonstrations about the treatment of asylum-seekers' and foreigners' rights. One such described:

When I came out I started trying to help other detainees – the lack of recognition of what was happening because at that time no one accepted Zimbabweans needed asylum, they just thought people were lying, they were being deported, people were being tortured on their way back... Without that experience of detention I don't think I would have got involved – when I saw the situation, the shock of being detained like a criminal, and the ignorance and the way the solicitors were taking advantage of us... so we got organized, began visiting detainees and also campaigning and lobbying MPs about the situation...(Farai, detained 6 weeks in 2001 [5]).

Another man had been involved in politics in Zimbabwe, but recounted how detention had given him a new understanding of himself as a rights bearing citizen, and spoke positively about Britain despite his detention: 'Then I became an activist when I came out... If you compare the treatment to Zimbabwe or South Africa where they treat

Zimbabweans like dogs, Britain is streets ahead - I've learnt about my rights here, what I'm entitled to – back home I didn't know, was just abused – now we can go back enlightened, and put something back into our community' [Ruben, detained twice total 6 ½ months [10].

Some of the women, who had not been activists in Zimbabwe, spoke of how detention had 'hardened' their attitude towards authority and taught them not to defer and bear things in silence:

When something is wrong, you want to speak out.... It has that effect... I used to be a quiet person, never spoke my mind. Now, I'm hardened, if I see an abuse, I'll tell that person direct, what you're doing it's wrong, I've just got that attitude, now I'm stubborn, I speak up. I learnt that in detention – if you don't make a fuss nothing happens, they abuse that... I learnt that attitude from the Jamaicans – just giving back shit if you get shit, being rude... it makes you want to copy that... before I was a quiet polite sort of person. I just put my Christianity to one side - no I'm not going to turn the other cheek – I'm going to answer back, say what I think; it's just out of anger, that anger builds up inside you, it brings hatred, anger, it puts hate in you (Chipo, detained 2 months 2005, case unresolved [11])

While the experience had turned many of the ex-detainees into outspoken human rights or political activists, for others, confinement had the opposite effect, and rather than becoming more engaged, they had retreated. Sometimes, this simply reflected insecurity, such as one former political activist who felt 'since I came here [to Britain], I just toned down, if I got status, definitely, but not at the moment, I can just be taken....' (4) Others spoke of turning to the church rather than politics (6). One described how the experience had made him cynical of states and politics in general: 'What is the point [of engaging]? Politics is the same everywhere – double standards, money, abuse of those who are vulnerable...' (2). For some the stigma and shame of detention and dependence (discussed above) appeared to be the prime reasons for withdrawing.

Conclusions

In describing 21 Zimbabwean asylum-seekers narratives of their time in detention and its legacies, this report has highlighted both short and long term psychological and political legacies. Particularly, it showed that such legacies could persist over years even for those detained for periods much shorter than the EU maximum of 18 months.

The short-term legacies of detention were shaped partly by individuals' personal histories, the length of time inside, and social support networks on release, but the difficulties in adjusting were primarily the result of insecurity, enhanced by reporting requirements and surveillance, as well as poverty and dependence accruing from restrictions on work. When such insecurity stretched over years, the ex-detainees continued to suffer from anxiety, depression and ill-health, characterised by intrusive memories of their time detained (and in some instances to previous trauma) and a sense

of personal failure reinforced by the stigma attached to adult dependence among compatriots.

The ex-detainees who had gone on to secure rights to remain in the UK were in a very different situation. None of those who were the most visibly distressed, or described the most acute depression were among those with status. Most had embarked with energy and enthusiasm on the process of rebuilding their lives, through a combination of study and work, and many were in the process of rebuilding their family life. Some had secured professional work, and others are likely to do so when they complete their studies/retraining courses. Yet the majority of those with security nonetheless felt that they could not put the experience of detention fully behind them, and described still experiencing intrusive memories and anxieties of their time inside, at night and in dreams, and provoked by the sight of policemen, white vans or other reminders.

Detention affected attitudes towards Britain and the law. The legacies of confinement included not only depression, but also anger and hate, which had significant and varied political consequences, spurring the growth of civic activism around asylum-seekers rights as well as fuelling engagement with diaspora homeland politics. Ex-detainees lived with the sense of having been victims of injustice, and a conviction that the asylum system is arbitrary and unfair, having been shaped by immigration policies that responded to anti-immigrant sentiment. Memories of such injustice were not eradicated by subsequently having asylum claims accepted. The experience of detention had turned a significant number of ex-detainees into civic activists.

The use of the detention estate in the asylum process is removing basic freedoms and creating abuses that work against the integrated, cohesive and humane society the government claims it wants to create. While the emotional and political legacies of such extreme measures are still insufficiently understood, it is clear they have effects that extend beyond the short term as well as beyond the individuals detained themselves, shaping the attitude toward Britain of broader ethno-national communities, fuelling diasporic activism and campaigns for civic rights.

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