

Friends, Corporate Parents and Pentecostal Churches: Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo in London

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

by

Åsa Maria Charlotte Wahlström

School of Social Sciences, Department of Anthropology
Brunel University

July 2009

For Sandra

May your prayers be heard and your dreams come true

Abstract

The thesis provides an ethnographic study of the experiences of lone asylum seekers who are provided local authority care in the London Borough of Hillingdon. The research builds on sixteen months' ethnographic fieldwork between April 2006 and September 2007, examining how the young people adapted to their changing and adverse circumstances and how welfare institutions in the United Kingdom responded to their situations. The young refugees in this research created personal relations of patronage in bureaucratic organisations, quickly formed networks and obtained goods by non-formal routes. They created space for play and spiritual growth, and maintained a position of obliviousness towards much of the events and logistics involved in leaving the DRC and seeking asylum in Europe. It was through these activities that personal agency of the young people emerged. However, the young people were not occupying positions of power. Their 'agency' was restricted and confined within social and political structures imposed on them. I argue that the separation of welfare services to religious life was for research subjects an arbitrary distinction. They had come from a Christian fundamentalist (Pentecostal) interpretation of the world in Kinshasa. God and evil were seen as omnipresent and omnipotent, and a true Christian (*mukristu ya solo*, a Christian of the soul), must be vigilant and pray all the time to be at one with the divine power. The young Congolese viewed their lives within such a theological 'model' and fitted all other seemingly 'competing' discourses and practices within it. As the young people negotiated their new lives in a new country, they adopted their coping strategies in ways that helped them benefit from the English welfare system and the Pentecostal faith respectively.

Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis I hope to give some insights into the lives of lone asylum seekers in the London Borough of Hillingdon. I am extremely grateful to all the young people who feature as main informants in the study. I also owe much gratitude to young people not explicitly included in the thesis, but who nevertheless helped me understand what it was like to seek asylum alone in Britain. Thank you in particular to ‘Lillian’, ‘Emmanuel’, Shahram and Faduma.

Some of the material here derives from focus group discussions I conducted when evaluating the Well-Being Project in the London Borough of Hillingdon. A very special thanks to Project members, especially Amanda Austin and Karen Murray. Amanda’s insightful observations have been extremely useful in conducting this research and analysing the material. Karen provided me with crucial documents and statistics. Karen Goodman at the Young Persons Asylum Team and her successor Paula Neil let me embark on this study among their clients and provided me with invaluable information. Many thanks also to all their staff members, and Cathy Bamborough, Head of Youth Services.

Among African churches in London, words cannot express my greatest gratitude for your warmth and welcoming, especially to everyone at The Glory and The International Assembly of God the Glory. Thank you to Deacon ‘Nobert’, ‘Carol’, ‘Niclette’, band and choir members.

Thank you to Mao at the Congolese Young People’s Group and Liz Atherton at the Congolese Support Group. A special thanks to Patrick Ramazani, whose vitality and goodwill stands out in spite of everything, and who is an inspiration to all of us.

My appreciation goes to my supervisor Doctor Isak Niehaus for his continual guidance and constructive criticism. I cannot thank him enough for taking over the supervision at a time I was experiencing much difficulty. You provided me with unfailing support and commitment throughout the analysis and write-up of my material. Thank you the time, inspiration and for pushing me to always go further. I am thankful to Doctor Melissa Parker for insightful comments and criticisms of some

of the thesis and for unfailing support over a long period of time. I am highly indebted to Professor Adam Kuper for taking my side and arguing for my case, as well as his encouragement over the years. Thank you to the Department of Anthropology, especially Eric Hirsch for helping me out with the transfer from the School of Health Sciences and Social Care and all the encouragements and practical support thereafter. Thank you to everyone at the research student seminars constructive criticisms. Thank you to Nicolas Argenti and Peggy Froerer at the Centre for Child-Focused Research in Anthropology.

In the School of Health Sciences, I am grateful to Professor Pascale Allotey for accepting me to Brunel University and for granting me the Studentship. Without her, the research project would not have come to be: it was her initial contact with the Well-Being Project and the Young Persons Asylum Team that enabled me to embark on the particular research topic. She introduced me to Susan Bissell at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence. Many thanks to Susan for letting me present my research proposal there.

How can I thank Alexandre, my fiancé, for all the hours of work and commitment that enabled me carry out fieldwork whilst I was pregnant? Also your looking after our daughter Lily so I could write the thesis. Lily, you are the light. You made sure I lived in your world – and not in the world of thesis writing – every evening and on weekends. I could not have done it without you. Thank you to family and friends who have provided practical support and encouragement. Special thanks to Pam Dutfield who proof read some of the thesis.

Finally, I acknowledge the financial assistance provided by Brunel University Studentship that made the research possible.

Glossary

<i>Banyamulenge</i>	Tutsis from South Kivu
<i>Mukristu ya solo</i>	A ‘true’ Christian (literally Christian of the soul)
<i>Belge</i>	Belgian
<i>Évolué</i>	A Congolese person who had climbed the social evolutionary ladder in the eyes of the colonial Belgians
<i>Interahamwe</i>	Rwandan Hutu paramilitary organization
<i>Kadogos</i>	Child soldiers
<i>Kinois</i>	Resident of, or person from Kinshasa
<i>Sapeur</i>	A person who spends huge amounts of money on designer clothes with the motive of making him/herself as conspicuously elegant as possible

List of abbreviations

ABAKO	<i>Alliance des Bakongo</i>
AFDL	<i>Alliance des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo</i>
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
MONUC	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo</i>
MPR	<i>Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution</i>
UNCRC	United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child
USCRI	United States Committee for Refugees and Migrants

List of figures

- Figure 1 Hayes Town High Street p. 37**
- Figure 2 Shoes in a girl's room p. 112**
- Figure 3 Church Seminar Promotion Flyer p. 136**
- Figure 4 London International Church p. 139**
- Figure 5 Church 'Conference' Promotion Flyer p. 169**

Table of Contents

	Page
Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Glossary	vi
List of abbreviations	vi
List of figures	vii
Table of contents	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	11
The official concern about unaccompanied asylum seekers in the United Kingdom	13
Lone asylum seekers in previous studies: recipients of care	17
Congolese childhoods	20
Methodological issues	24
Structure of thesis	30
Chapter Two: Doing Fieldwork in ‘Red-Tape’ Society	33
Gaining access	34
Different ethical standards	38
Conclusion	52
Chapter Three: Home and Exile: An historical and Political Background	54
A country in ‘crisis’	55
Historical background	56
Background of informants	67
Emmanuel: Escaping execution	70
Micah: Arbitrary attacks and domestic conflict?	72
Lillian: Escaping political persecution	74
Rachel: Escaping abduction of government Police	75
Stephen: Treatment of an adult asylum seeker	76
Conclusion	77

Chapter Four: Can the Corporate State Parent? Becoming Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers in the London Borough of Hillingdon	79
The Children Act 1989	80
Can the corporate state parent unaccompanied asylum seekers?	81
The social care process in Hillingdon: Age assessment	83
Accommodation	86
Assignment of personal or ‘duty’ social worker	88
Health checks, subsistence allowance, legal matters, and statutory review	88
Education	89
Unaccompanied asylum seekers as an economic burden	90
Clients under social control	94
A bureaucratised care system	96
Visits to the duty worker	97
‘Hard to reach population’	99
Conclusion	102
Chapter Five: Constructing Primary Personal Relationships and attachments to place	104
Daily reality, marvellous imaginations	105
Les histories et le sapeur	110
Establishing patron-client relationships	114
Friends, children and lovers	122
Conclusion	124
Chapter Six: ‘Family of God’: The Search for Community and Spiritual Power	127
The transformative effect of the Pentecostal ritual: a first-hand encounter	128
‘Family of God’	133
Omnipotent presence of evil	140
The intercessors	141
In search of community or spiritual power?	147
Conclusion	149

Chapter Seven: Citizenship and Prayer: Imposing Divine Will on Difficult Situations	151
The quest for citizenship and Christianity	152
The unbounded body	157
The effectiveness of political protests	160
The efficacy of prayer	162
Effectiveness of conferences	166
The effects	170
Conclusion	172
Chapter Eight: Conclusion: Agency under constraints	175
Corporate parent	178
Peer relationships and social networks	182
What is to be done? Limbo of the asylum seeking process	184
Costs of looking after unaccompanied asylum seeker children	186
Bibliography	189
Appendix	206
Summary of key informants	206
Case studies	207

Chapter One

Introduction

Friends, Corporate Parents and Pentecostal Churches: Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo in London

The plight of lone asylum seeker children is rarely heard either in the news media, anthropology or studies of migration. Yet, children who claim asylum without adults and family constitute some twelve percent of all asylum claims in the United Kingdom (Home Office 2007). Asylum seeker children represent a moral conundrum: they are seen as an undesirable burden to the British welfare system, while at the same time prompt moral claims for compassion and protection by the state. The British government struggles to marry these two moral stances. It tries to be restrictive in its immigration policies while at the same time aiming to protect and safeguard displaced children (Giner 2007).

This thesis examines the experiences of young adults from the Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter DRC), sixteen years of age and older, who arrived in the United Kingdom in 2004 and onwards, and sought asylum alone. The thesis builds on sixteen months ethnographic fieldwork in the London Borough of Hillingdon between April 2006 and September 2007. While the majority of Congolese refugees flee civil war in the East of the country to Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda and Rwanda¹, the young people in this research predominantly fled conflicts occurring in or near to the capital Kinshasa. Adults helped them flee to the United Kingdom on false passports and visas. The thesis gives an ethnographic account of how the young people adapted to their changing and adverse circumstances and how welfare institutions in the United Kingdom responded to their situations.

The young refugees in this research created personal relations of patronage in bureaucratic organisations, quickly formed networks and obtained goods by informal routes. They created space for play and spiritual growth, and maintained a position of obliviousness towards many of the events and logistics involved in leaving the DRC

¹ At the end of 2007, there were 247,600 Congolese refugees in these countries alone (USCRI 2008).

and seeking asylum in Europe. I argue that it was through these activities that personal agency of the young people emerged.

Secondly, I show that for the Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers the separation of welfare services from religious life was an arbitrary distinction. They had come from a Christian fundamentalist (Pentecostal)² interpretation of the world in Kinshasa. God and evil were seen as omnipresent and omnipotent, and a true Christian (*bakristu ya solo*, a Christian of the soul), must be vigilant and pray all the time to be at one with the divine power. The young Congolese viewed their lives within such a grand theoretical ‘model’ and fitted all other seemingly ‘competing’ discourses and practices within it.

The centrality of the Christian religion to the Congolese lone asylum seekers was not always apparent to professionals working with them because the young Congolese learnt to adopt speech and behaviour according to context. They learnt what kinds of pain could be expressed under what conditions, in what manner, with what intensity, and in whose presence (Reynolds 2005: 82). With mental health workers, legal representatives and social workers, they showed their skill at interacting within a ‘secular world’ - by internalizing a discourse of the ‘refugee experience’ in terms of negative mental health. With people they associated with Pentecostal churches, they spoke in positive, self-affirming language as well as exhibiting such behaviour. Both speech and bodily behaviour were thought to actually create the very state that it described (Coleman 2004: 430). It was necessary to carry out these two different kinds of behaviour with uttermost skill. Talking about one’s situation in negative mental health terms was necessary in order to be taken seriously by the Home Office and to communicate one’s needs to social workers and mental health professionals. On the other hand, young men and women exhibited their level of personal success in United Kingdom to encourage such a situation to occur: young women collected personal paraphernalia and household items, called *les histoires*, that they said were for a future home in England. Young men on their part dressed in extravagant

² I regard research subjects’ religious practices as fundamentalist due to their omnipotent presence in everyday life (De Boeck 2004) and their strong efficacious effects (Albrecht 1999). I use the term Pentecostal because that is how the young people often referred to their religion.

clothing, like that of a *sapeur*³, to show a dynamic and positive image of themselves in the eyes of God.

In this thesis I argue, therefore, that as the young people negotiated their new lives in a new country, they adopted their coping strategies in ways that helped them benefit from the English welfare system and the Pentecostal faith respectively. Nevertheless, ‘adopting one’s behaviour’ in these ways always worked within the fundamentalist Christian ‘model’. Young people remained certain that God alone provided for their survival, although such providence may not come through expected means: they could come in the form of mental health workers, material gifts and clothes, and significant others.

My arguments shed new light on debates around children’s relative power and agency in anthropology. I suggest that in certain respects, children are an oppressed group with limited choices on how to lead their lives. However, within these choices they may show a high level of autonomy and ‘tactical’ agency, seizing the opportunities that are available to them (Honwana 2005: 32-33). We can thus speak of a particular kind of personal agency among children and young people. Young asylum seekers encounter contradictory discourses and practices of the ‘disenchanted state’ they left behind (DRC) and familiar (Pentecostal churches) and unfamiliar (Social Welfare) institutions in the United Kingdom. These encounters produce new spaces for political assertion and the creation of certain identities (Durham 2000: 114). This kind of agency must not be conflated with authority. The young people did not occupy positions of power. Their ‘agency’ was restricted and confined within social and political structures imposed upon them.

The official concern about unaccompanied asylum seekers in the United Kingdom

The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) was intended to serve as a practical tool to ensure that the rights of refugee and asylum-seeking children are fully upheld (Morries 2005). According to Article 20 of the

³ This refers to people who spend huge amounts of money on designer clothes with the motive of making themselves as conspicuously elegant as possible.

Convention, 'a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment... shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the state.' A child is in this context defined as someone who is 'under 18 years of age, or who, in absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age' (HO BIA 2006).⁴

Most unaccompanied asylum seekers arrive in European countries at an age of sixteen or seventeen. Most of them are male (Bhabha and Finch 2006). In the United Kingdom, children and young people aged seventeen and below, who have come to this country from abroad, and are not accompanied by an adult carer, have the same legal entitlements to state care as children with British citizenship. They have entitlements to the rights spelled out in the Children Act 1989. This determines that local authorities have a duty to provide a range of services to any child found to be 'in need' in their area, regardless of nationality. There are three crucial criteria that determine whether the young person will be classed as an unaccompanied asylum seeker child. These are that the young person is 17 years of age or younger; that they are without an adult who has parental responsibility for them; and that they are found to be 'in need' according to the terms of the Children Act 1989.

In 2006, the United Kingdom Home Office received 23,520 asylum applications (Home Office 2007). The main countries of origin of adult asylum seekers were Afghanistan, China, Iraq, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Home Office 2007). Of these applications, the Home Office refused 73 percent any kind of protection, granted 17 percent 'political asylum', and 10 percent 'humanitarian protection'. The main countries of origin of the younger unaccompanied asylum seekers were Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia, China, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵ Of initial decisions relating to children and young people aged 17 or younger (2,560), only seven per cent were granted asylum. Less than one per cent of applicants (10 young people) were granted humanitarian protection, 22 per cent were refused, and the

⁴ The definition used by the United Kingdom governmental department responsible for immigration issues, the Border and Immigration Agency (now Border Agency) of the Home Office, (HC of the Immigration Rules, paragraph 349-352).

⁵ Afghanistan (965 or 30 per cent), Iran (320 or 10 per cent), Eritrea (320 or 10 per cent), Somalia (270 or 8 per cent), China (265 or 8 per cent), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (95 or 3 per cent).

remainder (71 percent) were awarded ‘discretionary leave’, mostly up until their 18th birthdays.

During the study period, therefore, unaccompanied children were more often granted ‘discretionary leave to remain’ than ‘asylum’. While this may seem like a generous refugee regime, it should be kept in mind that this is only inclusive of children *believed* to be under the age of 18. In recent years, roughly half of all young people seeking asylum in the UK have had their claim to be under 18 years of age disputed by the Home Office (Crawley 2006: 13-14). Those thought to be 18 years of age are treated as adult asylum seekers.

Discretionary leave is granted for three years or until the child’s 18th birthday, if this comes sooner, after which the case is reviewed. When a child is granted discretionary leave, there is no indication by the Secretary of State that the separated child was in need of protection under any other human rights convention or treaty (Finch 2005: 59). For this reason, unaccompanied minors are less protected under asylum law than adults, once their discretionary leave to remain expires. Adults are granted discretionary leave to remain on the basis of an acceptance that they require protection for reasons other than those of a refugee under the Refugee Convention. These are, for example, if return to country of origin would be in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights. However, when separated children reach adult age, they are treated neither as asylum seekers nor children, leaving them in limbo in legal terms for several years after arrival (Finch 2005). In practice, for many of the young people in this study, this bureaucracy meant a never-ending asylum-seeking process. First, due to a massive backlog of cases, the Home Office decided to grant a number of research subjects leave in United Kingdom until ‘further notice’. Second, in cases where asylum claims were refused and appeals against such decisions had been exhausted, no decisions regarding their immediate future were taken, such as the decision to discontinue their assistance, or a decision to deport them.⁶ In such instances, personal workers to the young people sometimes advised their clients to ‘lie low’, and not to alert the Home Office of their continued dependability on the social welfare system. In a number of such cases, young people

⁶ Although the young people in this research had friends who were deported or who went into hiding so as to avoid deportation.

avoided seeking work permits and chose to work illegally. They were also afraid to apply for a new identity card if their previous one had been lost.⁷

The policy of the Secretary of State for the Home Department is not to return children who are refused asylum to their countries of origin unless there are adequate reception and care arrangements there. In practice, however, no enquiries are usually made about such arrangements (Finch 2005: 58). Once the young person has reached an age of seventeen and a half they can be deported to unsafe situations and have little protection in terms of human rights and refugee convention treaties. This is because their initial asylum claims were not sufficiently addressed at the point of arrival.⁸

In 2005 the Government announced its plans to establish the New Asylum Model (NAM) (Home Office 2005). The purpose of NAM is to speed up the lengthy asylum claims process by fast-tracking initial decisions. Under NAM asylum seekers are categorised into different ‘segments’ under which unaccompanied minors are one of them (Refugee Council 2007). Cases are tracked from the point of application to the final decision by an individual caseworker. However, the Model was not implemented during the time of fieldwork and did therefore not directly affect the young people in this study.

Local authorities generally house lone asylum seekers, who arrive at an age of sixteen years and older, in house share-type arrangements with other unaccompanied asylum seekers. Lone asylum seekers who arrive at an age younger than sixteen are placed in foster homes until their sixteenth birthday. Upon reaching this age, they are moved out from their foster family and placed in the local authority’s house shares for unaccompanied asylum seekers.

⁷ For example Tesfay.

⁸ In 2005 the Government announced its plans to establish the New Asylum Model (NAM) (Home Office 2005). The purpose of NAM is to speed up the lengthy asylum claims process by fast-tracking initial decisions. Under NAM asylum seekers are categorised into different ‘segments’ under which unaccompanied minors are one of them (Refugee Council 2007). Cases are tracked from the point of application to the final decision by an individual caseworker. However, the Model was not implemented during the time of fieldwork and did therefore not directly affect the young people in this study.

While the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), a branch of the Home Office's Border Agency, assists adult asylum-seekers, local social services departments have become the departments, by default, to resume responsibility for the care of unaccompanied children (Humphries 2004). Like local children taken into state care, the local governmental department has to act as their *de facto* parents. The current social care model, through which services to children in state care are delivered, is in social policy referred to as the 'corporate parent'. Corporate parenting refers to the idea that children in state care are not the sole responsibility of the social services, but of the council as a whole (Department for Education and Skills 2003). According to this model, a personal advisor or social worker undertakes responsibility for a child's care arrangements. It is their duty to conduct a needs assessment and work out detailed plans for the young person's exit from care (the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000). Corporate parenting is in practice an oxymoron: parenting becomes invested in corporate organisations rather than private individuals (Bullock *et al.* 2006), especially as most unaccompanied asylum seekers in this study did not have a personal worker allocated to them. In the case of unaccompanied asylum seekers, Social Workers act both as agents of the Home Office as well as providers of social care (Humphries 2004). At times of financial constraints social workers are sometimes forced to make unjust and selective choices about what kind of services to provide and to whom. Evidence shows that in an effort to save money, authorities have systematically denied unaccompanied children aged 16 to 18 their full social service entitlements (Hamilton and Matthews 2007). Social workers have been shown to come under pressure to 'prove' that children are over the age of 18 and not eligible for support, acting effectively as border guards (Humphries 2004).

Lone asylum seekers in previous studies: recipients of care

Studies with asylum-seeking children in Britain and elsewhere are overwhelmingly carried out in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. Here there is a tendency to individualize and pathologize children's experiences (Chatty, Crivello and Hundt 2005). Such research has shown, for example, that some 40 per cent of refugee children in Britain suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders (Hodes 2000, see also Hodes *et al.* 2008). The other major areas in which research with unaccompanied asylum seekers are carried out include the disciplines of social

work (Wade, Mitchell and Baylis 2005, Kohli 2005) and social psychology (Kohli and Mather 2003, Chase, Knight and Statham 2008). Contrary to psychiatric research, these latter studies investigate unaccompanied asylum seekers from broader legal and social welfare perspectives. They also attempt to frame children's behaviour in terms of their strengths and resiliency, rather than simply vulnerability and disorder.

A common denominator for all approaches above, however, is that the young people are invariably reduced to recipients of welfare services. Whilst important for improving services to unaccompanied asylum seekers, these approaches rest firmly on universal, normative and developmentalist perspectives of childhood. It is assumed that growing up in the shelter of one's family is the norm for children everywhere (Boyden 1990: 204), that adults are the providers and decision-makers while children are vulnerable and devoid of autonomy, waiting to come of age and take on societal responsibilities (James and Prout 1990; James, Jenks and Prout 1998). It is further assumed that armed conflict and war disrupt these social and cultural norms (for example Department of Health 2004: 14; Hyder 2005; Hodes 2005). As these normative frameworks regarding refugee children go unchallenged, so do the practices of social work and immigration officers. For example, unaccompanied asylum seekers are sometimes perceived to be coping 'better' than 'expected' of them. At times, they are also regarded as showing more maturity and life skills than British children of the same age. In such instances, social workers and immigration officers may be inclined not to believe that the child is under-age, especially if they are under pressure from management to reduce costs. As Boyden and Hart point out, this raises questions regarding the disjuncture between the officials' expectations of physical appearance or behaviour, and the young people's experiences (Boyden and Hart 2007: 245).

However, over the past decade, 'new' approaches to the study of children in the social sciences have contested deterministic, positivistic and medicalised models and ideals of child development (Gibbs 1994; Boyden and Mann 2000; Mann 2004). The notion of 'childhood' has come to be viewed in terms of the ideas and ideals surrounding it (Ariès 1962), spurring social scientists to examine taken-for-granted understandings of childhood, particularly notions of social agency and transitions (James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Rose 1998). Many anthropologists take the view that children and youth

are ‘active agents in their own right who contribute to, transform and influence the situation and environments in which they find themselves’ (Eyber and Ager 2004: 190).

In this thesis I argue that the social care setting and the reception arrangements of refugee children in host countries must themselves be ‘deconstructed’ and studied on their own terms. There must be room for reflexivity. I am reacting in particular to a recent study by Hodes *et al.* (2008) on unaccompanied asylum seekers in England of the age group 16 to 18 years. Hodes *et al.* show that these young people were more likely to suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress than accompanied refugee children, or younger unaccompanied children (Hodes *et al.* 2008). The study also showed that the unaccompanied asylum seekers of the older age group were more likely to have suffered past trauma, such as combat, torture and detention than their accompanied peers or younger peers. Importantly, Hodes *et al.* point to the inadequacies of social care arrangements for older unaccompanied asylum seekers. As this group of young people have suffered (and continue to suffer) psychological trauma, they should not be left to cope on their own: they too should be put into foster care arrangements.

However, there is another dimension to this finding not examined in Hodes’ research and those similar to it: unaccompanied asylum seekers of the age group 16 years and older are more directly exposed to the state welfare system than those whose encounters are mediated by parents or foster parents. Older unaccompanied asylum seekers may therefore be more sensitised towards knowing how to articulate pain and need appropriately in particular settings (Reynolds 2005). These reservations about previous studies on unaccompanied asylum seekers do not suggest that the young people necessarily lie about their experiences and their psychological health. Rather, they rest on the observation that through time research subjects learnt to internalise a language of mental health and what was expected of them within a social care setting.

It is questionable whether medical models can adequately represent experiences and concerns of victims of violent conflict (Kleinman 1995; Young 1995). The ‘lack of fit’ between refugees’ presenting symptoms and medical diagnosis has been much criticized (Summerfield 2001). Arguably, symptoms of post-traumatic stress and ‘trauma’ are only meaningful in relation to the social and political contexts that reify

their significance. The diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder emerged in relation to Vietnam War veterans' struggle for compensation (Young 1995), but has since then been liberally applied, and some would argue arbitrarily, by the medical profession to refugees' presenting symptoms (Summerfield 2001). Institutions and organisations that assist refugees often consider the 'refugee experience' to be one-dimensional and synonymous with victimization and stories of 'trauma' (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997; Malkki 1995). The perceived 'objective' and quantifiable diagnoses of mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder are often the only terms in which courts of law and managers of welfare services will consider refugees' concerns and why they should take costly decisions to assist them (Ingleby 2005: 22). It is issues such as these that need to be considered in research with unaccompanied asylum seekers in welfare states.

Ethnographic literature on central Africa shows that experiences of childhood often contradict normative assumptions in parts of Europe and North America. Anthropological studies of Congolese refugee children in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Zambia and Uganda, illustrate that reception arrangements for refugees are often informal with no state intervention at all (Mann 2002; Atkinson 2007; Clark 2007). Refugee children's articulations of suffering and of their 'refugee experience' relate to overcoming daily constraints and concerns, less so with psychological trauma. Fundamentalist Christian Pentecostal churches play a central role in young people's lives in Kinshasa and in their lives as refugees. This thesis shows the importance of ethnographic research with unaccompanied asylum seekers, examining how young people actively construct their own life-worlds.

Congolese childhoods

According to local notions of agency, children and youngsters in the central African contexts are often not regarded, nor do they regard themselves, as future proto adults. Rather, children are seen as actors in the present with a central social role (De Boeck 2004: 182; Gondola 1999; Van Acker and Vlassenroot 2000; Aguilar Molina 2005). In Kinshasa children and young people are exposed to violence and hunger in times of peace and in the urban landscape – not just in places of civil war in the east (Devisch 1995; Biaya 2005; De Boeck 2005). Violent clashes between the military and those

opposed the government erupted in the streets of the capital during the election in 2006 (International Crisis Group 2007).⁹ The current political situation in the DRC is often described as devoid of a functioning state (Lemarchand 2002). Public services are replaced by a second or informal economy (MacGaffey 1991) and processes of ‘villagisation’ are taking place, where animal rearing and cultivation of crops are observable in urban areas (Trefon 2002, Devisch 1996). Europe and the West are places aspired to in the face of increasingly harsh living conditions in Kinshasa. Belgium is referred to as *lola*, “heaven” and one would do almost everything to die there (De Boeck and Plissart 2004: 47).

The family is increasingly made redundant as a provider and place of safety for children. In the face of destitution in the capital and elsewhere in the DRC, solidarity between generations and relations are no longer a given (De Boeck 2005). To an unprecedented degree the Pentecostal church and the street are public places frequented by children accused – and confessing to – witchcraft (Ibid. 2005). De Boeck argues that children’s social status, the ideas and ideals around children have changed in Kinshasa. This is due to at least three social processes. First, writes De Boeck, hundreds of child soldiers entered Kinshasa in 1997 as Kabila seized power. This group of children, some of whom were only ten years old, constituted a totally new and rather shocking entity of children for the inhabitants of Kinshasa. They were viewed as dangerous, violent and powerful. Secondly, some young adolescents have taken on forms of economic independence that was previously not the case. In the 1990s, large numbers of Kinshasa’s youth trekked to the Angolan province Lunda Norte to dig and dive for diamonds. If successful, these youngsters often acquired economic power that allowed them to access versions of a modern lifestyle from which their parents were excluded. Anyone who possesses *lard* in Kinshasa today, regardless of age, is said to be a patron or a ‘child with weight’ (De Boeck 1998). In a situation where approximately 50 per cent of Kinois eat only one meal per day and 25 per cent eat only one meal every two days (Trefon 2004: 12), this is perhaps not surprising. At times, the young people’s newfound wealth gave rise to intergenerational conflicts among kin. Thirdly, in popular urban cultural life, children and young people are more visible than before. They appear more often on the music

⁹ International Crisis Group 2007.
http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=37

scene, in films and on TV. Young girls have replaced young people in their late teens as dancers in music videos and on stage with popular orchestras, where they are circumvented as the ultimate *femme fatale* and man-eaters. In filmed dramatisations, often with religious themes, child actors give testimonies of the adults who allegedly initiated them in the world of witchcraft. In real life, children are now often centrally present in the churches during public confession and witnessing. Children may use their narratives and their status of “witch” to settle certain scores with some adult relatives or neighbours, or to reassert themselves from parental or family control and thereby create their freedom (De Boeck and Plissart 2004: 188). Durham argues that when anthropologists analyse phenomenon in which children and young people appear to play central roles, they are always examining a particular ‘topology’ of the social landscape (Durham 2000). ‘As people bring the concept of youth to bear on situations... they speak directly to the question in their societies of what is power, what is agency and of what kinds it is, and how rights are to be negotiated’ (Durham 2000: 116-117). Durham points out that youth as a ‘social index’ is dynamic, contestive and imaginative, rather than static, or at any point in time a ‘given’ (Durham 2000: 116).

There is an emerging literature on young Congolese fleeing violent conflict in the east of the country and their becoming refugees in Tanzania (Mann 2002), Zambia (Atkinson 2007) and in Uganda (Clark 2007). These studies highlight the social agency of children and young people, describing their lives as they go about their daily business in refugee camps or in towns. Young people fleeing Eastern Congo often ‘self-settle’ in their countries of exile. In Tanzania, refugees are required to reside in refugee camps. However, conditions there may not be favourable to the refugees themselves who may choose to ‘self-settle’ in the capital, Dar es Salaam (Mann 2002). There, they are forced to conceal their national and ethnic identification to the host population. Young children learn to adopt such behaviour from their parents, although the parents may not have explicitly instructed them to do so. In Dar es Salaam, Congolese children talk about the harassments they suffer and that they learn to distrust strangers. Many parents do not send their children to school because they feel their lives in Tanzania are temporary. Most children think of DRC as home and have little hope that things will improve if they stay in Tanzania (Mann 2002).

Atkinson (2007) shows that for Congolese refugee children in the Kala refugee camp in Zambia, dependency on voluntary organisations' provision of food was in many ways a defining characteristic of their childhoods. Food handouts, for example, resulted in them not learning to cultivate crops and grow food, a predominant change from life in the Congo. Food, Atkinson writes, provided a 'forum' for the negotiation of power relations between refugees and with the voluntary organisations. Food, with all its social aspects, came up in play, drawings and conversations of the children, more so than 'trauma stories'. Memories of violence in Eastern Congo, did not itself result in 'traumatised children'. Moreover, writes Atkinson, 'even when trauma is an aspect of children's lives, it should not be assumed that it is the only, or even the most important one' (Atkinson 2007: 63). Similar to Malkki (1995, 1992), Atkinson found that refugees themselves could manipulate the meanings of being a refugee.

Clark (2007) shows that it would be inappropriate to describe the lives of the young Congolese people who fled eastern Congo to Uganda in terms of 'total chaos, total loss and total trauma' as has been the case in some of the refugee and youth literature (for example Eisenbruch 1988; Lumsden 1999). She argues that we should deconstruct the notion of 'vulnerability' to incorporate specific contexts and relationships. For example, in a case study of 'Rose', a young Congolese woman who was offered shelter in a Protestant Pastor's home in Uganda, vulnerability to sexual harassment by the Pastor was not merely due to her being a young woman. It related to the fact that the Pastor was an authoritative person who could not be easily contradicted. Moreover, it was uncommon for the young refugees to mention psychological trauma as a defining feature of their lives. They spoke about loss and despair in 'relational terms', with an emphasis of 'being alone'. Clark explains:

'These aspects are relational (being alone) and contextual (in a foreign place) rather than fixed. For Rose, lack of kinship networks, contested Congolese citizenship as Munyamulenge and difficulty in obtaining refugee status in Uganda contributed to her isolation' (Clark 2007: 291).

For the young Congolese in Uganda, Christianity was a fundamental aspect of their experiences as refugees. Christianity and the church communities provided young

people with a sense of belonging. For young people who provided domestic services to locals in return for shelter in their homes, church activities provided the only real break during the working week. “Rose” attended all-night church services on Fridays and sang in the choir on Sunday mornings. She made a few friendships in church and referred to her faith in response to crisis points in her life story.

Ethnographic literature suggests that Congolese childhoods often include violence and hunger. It shows that children and young people are highly autonomous and able to cope in adverse circumstances by concealing certain identities, and manipulating defining features of the ‘refugee experience’ to ‘fit’ with expectations placed upon them. The literature shows that ‘trauma stories’ are not the most common way of talking about past suffering. Loss and despair is experienced in terms of being alone, rather than as an external affliction by specific events. Moreover, vulnerability is not regarded as a fixed state of affairs and the young people attempt to change situations in which they perceive themselves vulnerable. Christianity provided a narrative in which uncertainty is articulated and the church communities are places in which the young persons experience a sense of freedom and distance to struggles in daily life.

My research subjects had little previous experience of public sector institutions and stately support. Yet they quickly learnt what was expected of refugees by the welfare system and adapted their responses to life in exile accordingly. Such arrangements vary vastly across the world: and young people show agency in adapting to them. A central conceptual idea in the present study is that young people learn to incorporate *constructions of themselves* as ‘refugees who suffer psychological trauma’ and as ‘children who are vulnerable and should be given extra care’ into their articulations of suffering (Reynolds 2005).

Methodological issues

The study took place in the London Borough of Hillingdon. Together with Dover and Gatwick, Hillingdon receives the largest number of unaccompanied asylum seekers in the whole of Britain, primarily via Heathrow Airport. Hillingdon is split between the northern leafy, middle-class suburbs and pockets of deprivation in the South such as Hayes and Harlington. Estimated in terms of overcrowding, educational attainment,

central heating, ownership of car, economic activity and employment, the southern part of the Borough is the least prosperous (Shukla 2003). It is in the southern part of Hillingdon in the areas of Hayes, Uxbridge, West Drayton and Hounslow that most unaccompanied asylum seekers are residing. These areas also have the greatest proportion of Asian and Black Ethnic communities. The unaccompanied asylum seekers share houses and flats that the local council rents from private landlords. The houses are dotted along the unsightly, 15-mile stretch of Uxbridge Road that runs from central London to Uxbridge. Hillingdon is typical of the 2nd industrial revolution – the creation of new light engineering industries on the edge of existing cities.

Hillingdon Local Authority has taken care of unaccompanied minors since the late 1980s. The Department of Housing initially offered support to lone asylum seekers 16 years of age and older. As the number of unaccompanied minors increased in the 1990s, the Department of Social Services took over the provision of social care. In 2002, a specialist team, the Children's Asylum Team, was established in Hillingdon to provide care for unaccompanied minors. It was provided as a service separate from mainstream social work and recruited specialist staff.

I was invited to evaluate a mental health project catering for the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers in Hillingdon in 2005. In return, I was granted access to the young people. The mental health project was innovative and experimental. It sought not to individualize and pathologize young refugees, but to engage with their social difficulties in the present.

During the initial phase of the research I carried out participant observation and interviews among the staff of the Young Persons Asylum Team in their office block in South Uxbridge. I was provided with the entry code to the building and given a staff email account. I spent time with the different sub-teams, observing their work in the offices, and shadowing workers as they visited clients and carried out assessments. I accompanied the staff at their lunch breaks and took part in training and staff meetings and carried out interviews with them.

To make contact with the young people I volunteered at a youth club organised specifically for the lone asylum seekers in the relatively poor area of Hayes in

Hillingdon. The staff of the mental health project saw the club as a place where clients could get some positive stimulation by networking with each other and potentially break away from social isolation. Here I met and talked to young people from Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea, Ghana, China, Angola, the DRC, Vietnam, and Somalia. At the beginning of my inquiry I did not focus on one specific nationality, but I came to observe that during the first phase of arrival asylum seekers generally formed close friendships among the different nationalities,¹⁰ rather than across them.

Upon one of my initial visits to the youth club, I met Lillian¹¹ from the DRC. We began talking. She told me she had come from Kinshasa and had been in the United Kingdom since 2005. I kept in touch with Lillian over the next three years and through her was able to embark on ‘snowballing’ techniques to meet other informants.

During fieldwork, the Home Office was drafting plans to deport unaccompanied asylum seekers to the DRC, Vietnam and Angola. These plans were secretive, but leaked to The Guardian newspaper and were met with a storm of protest from child-welfare organisations.¹² The return of the young asylum seekers would be unlawful as they were under age and it would in most cases be forced return (refoulement). Intrigued by these political events, and the fact that I had established rapport with Lillian and some of her friends, I decided to focus my study on the Congolese young people.

The fact that I only speak basic French and no Lingala, became an immediate issue. The young people I interviewed had been in the UK for at least six months by the time I met them, and many of them a year or longer. They had generally learnt English to such a level that it was possible to hold a detailed discussion of events. However, at times informants did not know the English word for what they were describing. I encouraged the participants to express feelings and concepts in their own language, and attempted to find out interpretations afterwards. Language skills in

¹⁰ For want of a better term: Kurdish boys from Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Afghanistan, for example, often made friends.

¹¹ All names of participants in this research have been changed.

¹² The Guardian, ‘500 children face forcible repatriation: Home Office condemned over plan to deport asylum-seeking minors’, Friday 18.08.06

Lingala would have opened up more opportunities to talk to participants in the church as many attendees did not often speak English, and in some cases, none at all. I am also aware of the fact that if I had spoken Lingala I may have reached a more profound understanding of the way in which people described their faith, their psychological health and values and ideas not easily translatable. More generally, speaking my informants' native languages would have deepened my understanding of what I observed.

Through Lillian I came to meet Rafael who lived in the same accommodation as her. In our first interview, Rafael told me that he sang in a church band in Hayes Town and he invited me to come. From my first visit to a church service it was evident that the church played a major part in the young peoples' lives. The theme of immigration was often mentioned during church services, either in preaching or in testimonies people gave. The church service appeared to me a cathartic event in which joy and sorrow could be expressed in public. Churchgoers spent a significant amount of time in the church. They attended prayer groups and evening services, and choir and band practices. In addition to these, there were regular 'conferences' (prayer and worship) to attend, and social events such as birthdays, weddings and football tournaments. The boundary between worship and leisure was blurred and church members were encouraged to attend all these activities. I started to go to the church regularly and took as detailed notes as possible of 20 church services and events. For periods of time I joined the women's choir and the band (*orchestre*) that played on stage. I also carried out participant observation in young people's homes and accompanied them to the Social Services and the youth club. I conducted individual interviews or informal conversations with 48 young people of different nationalities. Of these young people, 30 were Congolese and I interviewed all of them more than once. Over time I built up case studies through in-depth interviewing of eleven young Congolese people. In evaluating the mental health project I facilitated focus group discussions with young people of different nationalities and with staff of the Young Persons Asylum Team. I also conducted individual interviews with Social Workers and their Managers.

The unaccompanied asylum seekers in this research were often reluctant to talk about the past. A number of the Congolese young people never revealed to me the events

that led to their flight (e.g. Rafael, Miriam, Angelica, Bakato).¹³ A study by Thomas, Nafees and Bhugra (2004) into the pre-flight experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Britain combined secondary and primary sources of information in order to overcome this methodological issue. They point out that interviews with young people often generated inconsistent information from case notes. In such instances ‘best available data were used’ (Thomas, Nafees and Bhugra 2004: 121), but it is not clear how such judgements were made. The study found the following reasons for flight representing individuals from 26 countries from Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia: death or persecution of family members (37), persecution of the young person him/herself (21), forced recruitment (15), war (12), trafficked (10), and in search of education (5). A third of the young people (both boys and girls) reported being raped before leaving their country of origin. Around half of these cases reported being raped several times. I consulted case notes where informants gave consent for me to do so. However, the case files held by social services often lacked information beyond what the young people told me.

Kohli (2005) addresses the complex issues of the unsaid in asylum seekers’ testimonies. His research was carried out with social workers who work with unaccompanied asylum seekers. Kohli highlight several tendencies that well reflect those encountered during fieldwork.

‘All the young people (34) were reported to be enigmatic to some degree. They appeared to carry a sense of mystery about their origins, within which only fragments of the everyday lives left behind were known to the social workers.’ (Kohli 2005: 15).

Kohli’s (2005) study concerns social workers’ interpretation of such silences.

According to the social workers, some of the young people were too shocked to talk

¹³ A study by Thomas, Nafees and Bhugra (2004) into the pre-flight experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Britain combined secondary and primary sources of information in order to overcome problems of attrition. They point out that interviews with young people often generated inconsistent information from case notes. In such instances ‘best available data were used’ (Thomas, Nafees and Bhugra 2004: 121), but it is not clear how such judgements were made. The study found the following reasons for flight representing individuals from 26 countries from Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia: death or persecution of family members (37), persecution of the young person him/herself (21), forced recruitment (15), war (12), trafficked (10), and in search of education (5). A third of the young people (both boys and girls) reported being raped before leaving their country of origin. Around half of these cases reported being raped several times.

due to their experiences of grief and trauma. Other clients had been told to be quiet by those that had sent them, so that they did not jeopardize their applications for asylum by revealing fragments which might undermine their claims. However, the social workers identified others who were consumed by the practicalities of resettlement and less preoccupied with dwelling over the past. The fourth group showed a tendency often encountered in the present research. These were young people too unsettled in the present to reflect on the past. They could only open up about their full past lives when they were offered some degree of certainty regarding their asylum applications (Kohli 2005: 8). It was too risky for the young people in the present research to offer any information other than that stated in the Home Office reports. Too risky since they could not be sure to control what such information might lead to, no matter how much they otherwise trust the researcher.

Young asylum seekers are highly analytical in their interpretation of the people they come in contact with during exile. Clinical (and other) studies, relying on what is verbalised, do not account for silences and secrecy, neither do they deconstruct what is said in informative ways. It is reasonable to assume that many young people are aware of which articulations of suffering are appropriate in research- and therapeutic settings, as they learnt which stories of exile asylum courts deem worthy. Young asylum seekers often learn which kinds of information might be damaging to reveal for their future life in the United Kingdom. What can be certain is their need for a presentation of the self in their everyday life (Goffman 1971). The purpose of secrecy, writes Simmel, 'is, above all, *protection*. Of all protective measures, the most radical is to make oneself invisible' (Simmel 1950: 345). While mental health workers were often of the view that young people are unable to speak about their flight because they are traumatized by it, I argue that the 'thin' stories young people give is suggestive of their agency. Despite the difficulties they have faced (and are facing), the unaccompanied asylum seekers manage to successfully retain a degree of mysteriousness around their reasons for flight and how they travel to Europe.

Structure of the thesis

In **chapter two** I examine the difficulties in accessing this group of young people as well as methodological problems encountered during fieldwork. I discuss ethical issues involved in doing fieldwork in an ‘ethics-based’ society.

In **chapter three** I consider whom the Congolese young people ‘are’ that come to the United Kingdom and seek asylum alone. To answer this question, I give a historical background to the current social and political situation in Kinshasa. I show that the young Congolese in this research were almost by definition a distinct and atypical group for whom someone had been able to pay for and help them undertake the journey out of central Africa. I argue that they were therefore not the young people that most frequently occur in anthropological writings on children in Kinshasa. However, the conflicts they ran away from threatened to change their relative privileged situation into a more marginal one in which they would no longer be able to enjoy material and political protection from adults in Kinshasa.

In **chapter four** I aim to shed light on the local political context in the London Borough of Hillingdon in which the young people were received as ‘unaccompanied asylum seeker children’. I show that the local authority were reluctant to include the lone youngsters into the full range of social care provision to which they were entitled. The social care provision became a double-edged sword for the young people: on the one hand they received temporary protection and welfare assistance. On the other, they became dependants on a system that only afforded the young people the most basic forms of accommodation and financial assistance. There was little personal care to be had for the young people who often became alienated to the social services and were rarely in direct contact with their ‘corporate parent’.

In **chapter five** I suggest that the young people had grown up in Kinshasa imagining life in Europe in which the highest standard of living could be had. In relation to such expectations, the social care provision in Hillingdon came to be a great disappointment. The young people obtained minimal subsistence through the social services and lived in dilapidated houses. Yet, girl’s rooms were full of material items, clothes and high-tech equipment. In boys wardrobes there were high-fashion brand

clothes and shoes. The young people acquired these things through significant others and ‘sympathetic adults’ in the welfare system with whom the young people could strike bargains. While the bureaucratic welfare system itself was an alien concept to them, the need to bargain with individuals who held the key to resources was not – such bargains had been integral to their childhoods in Kinshasa.

In **chapter six** I argue that the primary motive for the young people’s joining Pentecostal churches is a search for ‘spiritual power’ (Van Wyk 2008). They aim to attain material wealth, physical health and success in relationships and in marriage (Coleman 2000). The objective is also to prevent bad things from happening and evil forces from entering people’s lives. However, to obtain resources the young people had to become skilled at being a ‘legitimate’ recipient of them. Whether one can obtain what one is looking for is contingent upon entering a church community of true Christians and show oneself as one of them (Pype 2006). The quandary for the Pentecostals is that evil manifests itself through the actions of other human beings. To join a community of others to practice one’s religious beliefs is therefore not only a necessity but also a potential risk. I attempt to show that the institutional context of the Pentecostal church and the complex ways in which Christians believe, are two dimensions of the Pentecostal faith that are analytically inseparable.

In **chapter seven** I explain how, in particular ritual contexts and in prayer, words are to the young Congolese expressions of *commands*. Words are performed in order to effect a change in the world and they are believed to have consequences. For research subjects therefore, words that describe the state of affairs – either negatively or positively – can be distinguished between acts that express what is hoped for and those that are intended to have consequences (Ahern 1979: 14). The attraction of the Pentecostal churches attended by my research subjects was that any one of them could access divine power in which stated commands can become reality. In this sense, the Pentecostal faith and the churches represented ‘magical spaces’ that differed from ordinary life in Hillingdon. In the churches, the young people experienced a sense of fulfilment and control, while their ordinary lives were characterised by the rigid administrative systems that organized their lives in bureaucratic ways.

In the **conclusion** I summarize the key research findings and shed light on some recent social policy developments. I aim to answer the question ‘what is to be done’ to improve the lives of unaccompanied asylum seekers in Britain whilst resources are withdrawn and asylum laws and policies are becoming more restrictive.

Chapter two

Doing fieldwork in ‘red-tape society’: Ethical and methodological considerations

Red tape - ‘complicated official rules and regulations’ and ‘excessive bureaucracy’ –
(Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2000: 867)

In this chapter I shed light on my experiences of conducting ethnographic fieldwork with lone asylum seekers. This process involved overcoming both the hurdle of gaining access to the young people through welfare institutions and dealing with ethical issues of forming inter-subjective relationships with them. Such issues become complicated by the fact that lone refugee children are considered to be the most ‘vulnerable’ of all people in the world of refugee protection (UNHCR 1999: 95). Moreover, in health research and social work practice, it is considered unethical to establish inter-subjective relationships with young people who seek asylum alone. Research subjects are thought to be ‘more open to coercion and manipulation in research than other populations’, and ‘may be more likely to experience adverse effects if ethical standards are not adhered to’ (Maingay *et al.* 2002: 5). However, contrary to the rhetoric in research guidelines, research subjects showed an impressive capacity for critical thinking and personal autonomy. In addition, many research subjects proactively sought to rebuild personal and meaningful relationships with people they came into contact. These relationships included researchers, social workers and peers. Therefore, the prohibition of inter-subjective relationship between professionals and the young people is problematic. I argue that to pre-empt what holds as ethical prior to understanding research participants’ life-worlds, is to disembed and alienate ethics from everyday scientific practice (Meskell and Pels 2005). However, in a ‘red-tape society’ it is often necessary for anthropologists to negotiate official rules and regulations vis-à-vis the more inter-personal ethical dilemmas that occur with research subjects. In such societies, ethical protocols can be used as a technique by institutions to control critique of their operations (Strathern 2000: 5; Pels 2000). In ‘red-tape societies’, ethics can be deployed as a tool for dispute management, especially when a situation of mistrust arises.

Gaining access

A mental health project that worked with unaccompanied asylum seekers 16 to 18 years of age was being implemented within the Young Persons Asylum Team in Hillingdon in October 2005. The project was funded by the Department of Health and its co-ordinator, a Psychologist, asked me to evaluate and monitor the progress of the project from its inception. In a meeting with the Service Manager of the Young Persons Asylum Team, the Psychologist, my supervisor and me, it was agreed that I would evaluate the project from start to finish, over a three year-period. In return for conducting the evaluation I would be allowed to carry out my own research agenda in relation to the young people and the Asylum Service. The agreement was not further discussed with the service manager. The Psychologist became the person within the service that was my first port of call.

I spent two months in the Young Persons Asylum Team offices, shadowing social workers and interviewing staff. I did not want research subjects to perceive me as a person of authority, so I avoided being introduced to the young people via their social workers. Instead, I attempted to gain access to lone asylum seekers via a local charitable organization. The organization provided life skills courses to the young people, as well as tutoring in the English language. As I introduced my study to its Director, I was duly handed an ethical guideline and asked to come back after I had read it. Widely circulated among health researchers, the ethical guideline described unaccompanied asylum seekers as a unique research group who are particularly vulnerable, ‘easily bewildered and frightened’, and unable to express their needs and defend their interests (Royal College of Paediatrics and Health 2000: 117; Maingay *et al.* 2002). Much like the best practice guides of government, the ethical guideline described lone refugees as particularly vulnerable in terms of mental health (Department of Health 2004: 14, DCSF 2008: 31). This is thought to be due to prosecution by authorities in the past and experiences of uprooting and losses when children escaped their country (Maingay *et al.* 2002). The guideline recommends that researchers primarily consult secondary sources, such as case notes and social workers, rather than talking to research subjects directly. Furthermore, it is considered good practice that adults give consent to partaking in the research on research subjects’ behalf. Young people are constructed as fragile, almost

extraordinary human beings, who are *likely* to be harmed if they are involved in research. This rhetoric is widely accepted in health and social research. It comes as no surprise therefore that few ethnographic studies have been conducted with lone asylum seekers and that none of them have included participant observation. I never managed to personally meet the Director of the voluntary organization to discuss the matter further. Meanwhile, I sought out other avenues of contact with research subjects, such as a youth club.

The Youth Services in Hillingdon organized a social club, the ‘international youth club’, for lone asylum seekers with a view to break social isolation and to offer them affordable, recreational activities. The youth club became the place where I struck up some initial contact with research subjects. At the club, young people could access the Internet, play basketball, football, table tennis, and their own music and DVDs. Here I met Kole, a boy of sixteen, who had come from Nigeria. Kole had only been in England one month when I first met him at the youth club. He spoke few words of English and sat quietly by a computer, listening to music on the Internet. A couple of months later, I spotted Kole handing out IKEA catalogues on the estate where I lived. I talked to him and found that his English had much improved. I complimented him on this and asked him how he had been. Kole said that he was on the whole well, but that he did not eat much because he did not know how to cook. He spent all his weekly allowance on Chinese take-aways and only ate once a day. I told him that he was welcome to eat a meal of pasta in my house and that I would show him how to cook it once he had finished his work for the day. Very grateful, Kole came to my house a little later. He studiously looked on as I cooked, asking where he could buy the pasta, the tomatoes, lentils and the onions. He ate a huge plate of the food and began telling me about ‘home’. He said that it was very strange for him to be in a kitchen because this was not the custom of men in the country where he had come from. Yet, he had realized that things were different in England and that he needed to adapt himself to new ways. From where he had come, men went hunting and women stayed at home cooking and working around the house and the fields. People did not always use verbal language to say where they had been and what they intended to do, but sign language. After the meal, Kole said that he would thank me in his local language with words only uttered in the most formal and important situations. He did so. When it was time for him to go home it had gone dark outside and Kole said that

he was afraid of the dark. I offered to walk him home, which was only a quarter of an hour's walk from my house. As we left, Kole made a gesture and spoke in his language. He explained that it was a 'kind of prayer' asking that we would not meet any 'bad people'. On the way to his house he told me that he had been struck down and robbed a few months earlier and that since then he was afraid to go out alone after dark.

Kole completely lacked life skills necessary for daily undertakings. He did not have a bank account and repeatedly went to the bank without understanding exactly what he was asking for or why. When he finally got his cash card he did not know how to use it. He continued to struggle with cooking and ate very little. I tried to help him out wherever I could. Kole took great pride in learning English and was a passionate Arsenal football fan. He occasionally invited me to his room to see how well he did at his assignments.

Kole was not entirely sure why he had come to the United Kingdom. His father had died when he was a child and from then on, he was passed around to different female relatives. One day he was sent away from his village to a town far away. There a woman told him that his relatives had sent him away to get married, but that she had arranged for him to leave Nigeria to the United Kingdom. Now he was in London sick with longing for 'home'. He wanted to go back to Nigeria, but his solicitor had told him that he had no identity documents and that the Nigerian authorities did not recognize his name. Kole cried when he talked about his father's death. Before that, he said, life had been good.

Kole told me that he was in touch with the voluntary organization I had approached in Hillingdon. I went to the organization and spoke to a support worker about my concern for Kole. The support worker seemed kind, telling me that he had signed up Kole for a course in life skills. However, it was clear that this support did not extend itself any further. Kole struggled on with those first few months in London mostly on his own devices. He said that he enjoyed going to the voluntary organization, but that he also got upset every time because he knew he could not really ask them about things that really worried him. After some time Kole made friends with a Nigerian man in Hillingdon who introduced Kole to his Pentecostal church. Kole said that he

had grown up knowing that spirits lived in all things – the river, the stones, the land – but now he enjoyed learning about Christianity. Much later, Kole also made friends with other unaccompanied asylum seekers. He started to fare much better – he gained weight, entered a college course, and spent a lot of time with his friends. He began playing football in Southall every Sunday. However, as Kole showed signs of coping better, social workers took a decision to move him out of his home with a staffed reception, to a house where there were no adults on site. Kole felt unsafe in the new home because local youth loitered around it. They smoked and asked passer bys for cigarettes and money. Kole’s room was adjacent to the busy Uxbridge Road and the traffic kept him awake at night. He preferred to sleep on the floor at his friends’ places rather than to stay in his own accommodation.



Fig. 1: Hayes Town High Street (photograph taken by Wahlström)

It became apparent that there were great discrepancies between the official rhetoric of caring for asylum seekers and how they were actually treated, perhaps by default, ‘on the ground’. While organizations effectively prevent outsiders from accessing lone asylum seekers, this protection creates a social vacuum for recent arrivals. Many other lone refugees shared Kole’s experiences of the first few months in Hillingdon. Typically, they arrived alone and struggled to combat social isolation in the new place. During their initial phase of settlement they appeared extremely vulnerable and to desperately seek assistance from trustworthy individuals around them. My interaction with these young people raised many difficult methodological and ethical issues that I needed to negotiate both in relation to the young people and the elaborate official rules and regulations at my University Department and the Social Services.

Different ethical standards

The School of Health Sciences and Social Care at Brunel University had granted me a scholarship to undertake the doctoral research. Supervised from within a health science, there was an elaborate and prolonged procedure to go through in order to be granted ethical approval for the study. I started to apply for ethical clearance of the study in the month of January 2006. Nine months later, the School's ethics committee had not granted me final approval, but I was allowed to make contact and begin my research within the conditions agreed upon thus far. The delay was due to feedback questions by the School's ethics committee on my ethical clearance proposal. The committee was comprised of a number of staff members and there were often several weeks, or even months in-between their joint decision-making and feedback. The committee did not question the entire rationale of the research, but wanted to know, for example, how I would ask for informed consent from the young people if I observed them in public places such as the youth club. Accordingly I developed a letter addressed to young people who attended the youth club to inform them about my study and ask for their consent to include them in my observations. I was also instructed to obtain written consent, and not only in verbal form. If the first was not possible, I was to record the young person giving verbal consent on my voice recorder. Certainly, researchers must develop mechanisms to inform participants about the purpose of research, assure confidentiality, explain why it is conducted the way it is, that there are no consequences for withdrawal, and so forth. However, the practice of form- and letter-writing also served a different purpose. It was used as a monitoring technique by my University department to control risk and prevent critique of their operations (Strathern 2000: 5).

At the youth club where I had met Kole, I also encountered Lillian, a young woman from the DRC, Tesfay, a young man from Iran, and Hanna, a young woman from Somalia. I came to develop friendly and to date lasting relationships with these individuals. On the whole, however, doing ethnographic fieldwork with young people required much patience. Opportunities to interact with them were sporadic rather than regular and often ad hoc. Phoning the young people every week did not necessarily

lead to appointments. I did not want to be too intrusive or bothersome and so had to gauge when to pursue a contact and when to give it some rest. I appreciated that the young people sometimes acted in ways that would give them privacy. Sometimes they did not want me to observe certain aspects of their lives. Sometimes they were too busy, tired, or just uninterested to help me out with my research. Ultimately, I felt that much of their current and past lives were not something they wanted to share with me at this point in time, and this I respected. However, I knew from experience¹⁴ that I could not know this for certain until a trusting relationship had been established, and this would take time. I had to prove to the young people that I would be around for a long period of time and that I took a personal interest in them. Rajkotia (2008), who carried out research for her PhD with young women from Sierra Leone, (five of whom were unaccompanied minors) found similar methodological difficulties. She settled for semi-structured interviews and accepted that she would only meet many of her informants once.

Lillian was one young person who did want to talk to me. During my first conversation with Lillian at the youth club she said that she had ‘many bad things in her head’, and that the Home Office had rejected her asylum claim. I asked her what she did when she was feeling bad and she said that she was talking to her psychologist. This was a professional of a Department of Health-funded mental health service operating within the Young Persons Asylum Team in Hillingdon. Lillian had no social worker, but the psychologist knew her well and often helped Lillian with social care issues. The psychologist could see no harm in Lillian talking to me or taking part in the research. She described Lillian as a very intelligent young person who was depressed and troubled, but who ‘functioned well’ in a ‘depressive state’. Early on in our relationship Lillian invited me to her room where she cooked Congolese food for me. Lillian was a devout Pentecostal Christian and did not take alcohol. However she had bought a bottle of low alcohol wine for my benefit. She prayed in French over the food and we ate. I spent the afternoon in Lillian’s room, watching music videos on her small TV with Congolese and American artists. She talked to me about living in Hillingdon, how the Home Office constantly mixed up details in her story about why she was seeking asylum. It caused her so much stress

¹⁴ I have previously conducted ethnographic research in South Africa and Ethiopia, over a combined period of 15 months.

that she sometimes thought it better to return to 'Congo and die' than suffer like that in England. She said that she was taking anti-depressants, pointing to a pharmacy paper bag on her bedside table. Her room was filled with personal paraphernalia and her wardrobe was stuffed with clothes. Lillian loved fashion, wanted to be a model, and bought clothes from charity shops. She had a fake fur pillow in the shape of a strawberry that had been given to her by a support worker in the voluntary organization in Hillingdon attended by Kole.

The following week I met a mental health worker of the mental health project and enthusiastically recounted my lunch at Lillian's place. The mental health worker was rather taken aback and asked in what 'capacity' I had spent time eating and chatting to Lillian in this way. It was clear that I was operating within different ethical domains. To the health professionals and the social workers, relationships with clients needed to remain 'objective' and 'detached', in order to protect both the professional and the client from becoming swayed by personal interest and emotional involvement. For me, an anthropologist, the objective detachment-relationship did not preclude such ethical issues from occurring. My ethical dilemmas occurred on a more inter-personal level, to carefully and respectfully negotiate the limits of the relationship (ASA 2000; AAA 1999). In practice however, individuals of all professions dealing with people who suffer physical and emotional pain, have to strike a balance between emotional attachment and distance in order to carry out their work. Too much of either emotional quality is not sustainable: an overly sympathetic stance is likely to disable the researcher's or practitioner's capacity to be unbiased and provide assistance in the long term. An emotionally distant relationship is likely to misrepresent the research subject's experiences and concerns in the first place. Over time, I observed how some social workers and mental health professionals negotiated such stances in their work with the young refugees. Some social workers had to perform the unpleasant task of determining a young person's age as a different one to what the young person claimed. I once observed one such 'age assessment' in which the social worker decided that an Afghan boy's age was seventeen and a half rather than fifteen.¹⁵ The boy was deeply upset about the decision because at this age the Home Office could deport him. The social worker was also affected by the decision she 'had to' make,

¹⁵ She based her decision on four month's interaction with the boy in which she had observed that he appeared 'more mature' and 'capable' than she had expected of a fifteen-year-old.

asking for reassurance from colleagues. On the other hand, social workers sometimes intervened directly in the lone asylum seeker's lives to give advice they were explicitly prohibited to give; bestowed them with second-hand, but nonetheless high-tech goods; and concealed certain personal information about the asylum seekers from public records that would have limited their chances to be granted refugee status in the United Kingdom. These professionals also operated within different ethical domains – the professional work ethic within the institutions that employed them on the one hand, and their own interpretations of what would best serve their client's wellbeing on the other. If they made 'transgressions' as far as their professionalism was concerned, this did not generally transpire into common knowledge. They skilfully negotiated the accountability and trust towards their employers and a different kind of trust towards their clients.

Lillian introduced me to her best friend Miriam who lived three bus-journeys away from Lillian's house. During one of my visits to Miriam's house, the girls were sitting in bed together, appearing tired and bored. We chatted away for a while, watching Papa Wemba at concert in a massive stadium in Kinshasa. Every person in the audience wore white clothes. Papa Wemba was carried in on a throne, like a king. The audience went wild. It was a dangerous place to be, said the girls. People were drinking and fighting. It was not a place for women. Then Lillian started to complain about a headache. She stared at the TV and closed her eyes. As she opened them she looked around as if she did not recognise the room. She stared at us in bewilderment. She spoke to Miriam in Lingala. Miriam spoke to her softly, stroked her head and explained to me: 'She does not know where she is and who we are.' Miriam showed Lillian her bible, saying, 'This is a bible.' She told Lillian she was her friend, Miriam, and that I was her friend, Asa. She gently talked Lillian through her episode. Lillian started crying heavily, and then said she felt very sleepy. She laid down, apologizing to me for 'being like that'. She said she did not understand why it had happened.

I was greatly concerned about Lillian. That evening I rang her psychologist. I needed to talk to someone who knew her, both for Lillian's and my own sake. The psychologist said Lillian had experienced those episodes before she left the DRC. It had also happened to Lillian as she was on the bus on her way from college. Lillian worried about the episodes, fearing that she was losing her mind. The psychologist

had suggested to Lillian that the episodes occurred when there was too much going on around her. 'That is one way of making sense of it', the Psychologist said, indicating that there were no ultimate answers to be found. It was hard enough for Lillian to cope with everyday demands, she continued. She suggested that my visit might have brought the episode on because it gave Lillian a rush of positive stimulation. However, the psychologist wanted Lillian to get more positive stimulation, such as to keep going to the youth club. We talked about Lillian's and Miriam's relationship. I pointed out the nurturing role Miriam seemed to have to Lillian. The psychologist said that Miriam had her psychological problems too and that Lillian was supportive to her in turn, but they were both in a precarious situation with their asylum applications and the support they offered each other was fragile, yet crucial. 'I don't *think* she will kill herself', the psychologist said about Lillian, 'but it is an option.' Lillian and the other young people I met were recent arrivals, who had only been in the United Kingdom between six months to one year. They were going through much upheaval and upsets, similar to Kole's and Lillian's experiences of learning to cope alone, completely cut off from the familiarity of 'home'. A small number of young asylum seekers succumbed to mental breakdowns and committing suicide during this initial phase of settlement.¹⁶ Most of them, however, went through phases of deep turmoil, while at the same time showing a high degree of resiliency, coping and personal autonomy. To simply describe the lone asylum seekers as vulnerable in terms of mental health is too simplistic, because it disregards their strengths. The young people's psychological health and social isolation often improved later on as they built up supportive networks. However, in the beginning of fieldwork I was not aware of this fact. I wanted to restore some hope and positive experience in the young people's lives, by being a sympathetic person who cared about their daily experiences.

One day on the tube I saw an advertisement in a magazine of a 'test shoot' at a model agency in London. 'No nudity, no glamour, no experience necessary. No race or age restrictions.' I saw it as a sign of something I could, should and needed to do for Lillian. I rang up to get more information. It cost £10 to get a few photographs taken at the model agency, after which the agency would decide if they wanted to take the person on or not. I thought it might be something Lillian would really enjoy doing.

¹⁶ Social workers reported about clients who had committed suicide and been sectioned under psychiatric regulations. Interview with social worker 25 October 2005.

The next time I saw Lillian I showed her the advertisement and explained what it was about. I told her it did not mean that she would become a model, but maybe it would be a good experience and practice of being in front of a camera. I asked Lillian if she wanted me to make an appointment. She said that she did.

I later rang the psychologist to tell her about it. The psychologist thanked me, as it was something she had wanted for Lillian for a long time. 'As long as she knows it is just for fun', she said. I told her that I thought she did. I made an appointment on the following Tuesday when Lillian had a day off college. I accompanied Lillian to the photographic studio in Oxford Circus. I wanted to make sure that the agency was reputable and that Lillian understood the conditions and what she was asked to do. Lillian was excited and nervous. She looked very pretty in a borrowed long, brown wig. She wore denim shorts and high heels. At the agency, Lillian was given a form to fill in. She did not understand some of the questions and I helped her complete it. We waited for our turn to be called into the studio. Then a male photographer took shoots of her in different outfits and poses. Lillian relaxed after a couple of shoots, but she was otherwise shy and quiet. We were asked to wait again and were called into the office to look at the test shots. The manager of the studio said that he was very impressed with Lillian and that she was 'gorgeous'. He said they wanted to create a professional portfolio for her that otherwise cost £450. He asked why Lillian had not tried getting into modelling before. The photos would be put on the Website which the agency was marketing. In this way, the models might be called to castings, but the work would always be part-time and nothing might happen at all. However, Lillian owned the portfolio and had the right to show it to whichever agency or employer she chose. We made an appointment for the following Saturday for the portfolio shoot. As we left Lillian was ecstatic. I thought that it was perhaps the happiest day since she had come to the United Kingdom.

In a conversation with the psychologist a few days later, we discussed the rates of pay and about mentoring prospects in the agency. The psychologist thought it sounded credible, but she said the whole thing needed to be run past the Young Persons Asylum Service Manager. I agreed that this was important. The Manager had four sub-teams under her, eight team managers and responsibility for hundreds of staff. She managed a huge human resource operation and did not herself work with the

young people directly. Unfortunately, before I had a chance to inform the Manager for the Young Persons Asylum Service, she heard it from the Psychologist. The Manager was greatly disturbed by that fact that she had been shielded from the course of events. She was of the view that I should have consulted the social services about the issue first since they had *de facto* responsibility of the under-aged person, rather the Psychologist. Here there was a clash between the rules of the official protocol and what was occurring on the ground. At the time Lillian was seventeen and a half and had no social worker – the Psychologist was the only one, apart from me, who knew of her past experiences, reasons for seeking asylum, and had a sense of her strengths and vulnerabilities. Legally, since she was over sixteen, she had the right of to make her own decisions. Furthermore, since the Manager had never personally met Lillian, the Psychologist had been the obvious port of call for me. However, this was not the time to argue about how the situation had unfolded. The Manager questioned why I had that kind of relationship with the young women when I was supposed to be a detached researcher. It was not my role to intervene into her life. She said we needed to have a meeting to discuss the situation and she wanted to see my ethical clearance paperwork. It was clear that the portfolio shoot needed to be postponed. I rang the agency and they agreed to hold the offer for a couple of weeks. It was only on the Friday night that I got hold of Lillian again. I told her I had to explain something and that we should meet. When we met at Uxbridge station, Lillian was late and stressed. She had lost £40 of her own and Miriam's money that she had saved to buy food. She was very upset about it. I offered to buy her food for that evening and we went to Tesco.

In the vegetable aisle I explained to her what had happened. I said the offer of the portfolio shoot was still there; we just needed to wait a couple of weeks until all was cleared with the 'Social'. Lillian stopped choosing vegetables and said very firmly that nothing was going to be put on hold. 'No! This is my life! We go tomorrow! This is my life!' She spoke at length, more than I had ever heard her speak before. She said:

'This is my life. I am not a slave, I am not in prison. The Social don't care about us. They only give money. They don't care about my future. Soon I will be 18 years old and I don't know what will happen then. This is my chance.

Look at Miriam. She is 18 and she has problems with money all the time. The Social is not good. They don't care for people. They are waiting for us to get pregnant so they can say, "Good, now we can put you in a house for mums and babies and give you money." I go to meetings with them and ask for help and they say, "We have our limits". You have seen the people waiting at the Social. They want us to just sit and be quiet. They don't want us to think for our future. I don't know why you came into my life, but maybe it is God who put you here to help me. I don't have family here, or anyone to look after me. I don't talk much, but I talk now because I am angry. Before my parents died, I had a good life. Now I have a lot of stress. People say I don't smile. No, I am sad. I wake up in the morning and I cry, cry, cry. One day I will tell you all about my life. But now, me and Miriam we are tired. Everyone is tired. The Social gives us a lot of stress. This is my life, this is my chance. If I were the Manager's daughter she would let me go. We go tomorrow and we go together.'

We left Tesco and went to Miriam's place. There Lillian explained the whole scenario to Miriam. She was very animated and imitated a pregnant woman, heavy, fat and backward bent.

The next day we went to the portfolio shoot. We decided not to tell the psychologist or the Manager. I was frightened for my own sake. I knew that my action could blow things up even more and that it could be the end of the research. However, I had to make a choice within the different ethical domains in which I was operating. On the one hand, I had a responsibility to be accountable towards the institution that had formal responsibility for the young people. This was necessary in order for the Manager to ensure that she had overall control of what was happening with her clients and their ethical procedures and codes of conduct are followed. However, in that choice Lillian's role in the discussion, her ability to fully comprehend information given to her and make her own, sound judgement, faded into the background. By the same token, the fact that the social services had up until that point taken no direct interest in Lillian, did not seem to matter. To me, the immediate choice I was facing was between shielding the social services from potential criticism and that of following Lillian's own desires. How could I let Lillian down now? In that dilemma,

Lillian had to come first: 'when there is conflict, the interests and rights of those studied should come first' (ASA 1999: 1). It was clear that for Lillian an opportunity such as the portfolio shoot could not be postponed. She had no way of knowing whether the Manager would agree for her to go or not. Living from day to day, opportunities were seized as they came along. I felt I had a responsibility to ensure that Lillian did not go alone or was open to misunderstanding the situation. I felt that it was important that I did not abandon her at any point.

I worried greatly, on the brink of being paranoid, that the Manager would come to know the whole story and that the situation would deteriorate even further. I e-mailed the Manager about the conditions of the model agency and copied in the psychologist and my supervisor, but I did not mention that we had already gone to the portfolio shoot. I was not sure what was the best thing to do. Though I asked to talk to my supervisor, she was busy. 'Write me an e-mail', she said. So I e-mailed her, informing her about going to the portfolio shoot without the Service Manager's knowledge. My 'coming clean' deteriorated the situation. My supervisor was extremely disappointed. She said that I had taken it upon myself to decide what was in the girl's best interest, even though this was not my right. It was the Young Persons Asylum Service responsibility and I had overridden them, upsetting a relationship upon which my research depended. She could understand that the social services did not provide the kind of care that Lillian deserved, but it was not my role to act 'holier than though'. A meeting was set up with my supervisor, the manager, the psychologist and I. However, the meeting could only take place in my absence, as everyone's diary was fully booked until I went on holiday a week later. I learnt later that the discussion took place on a diplomatic level and that no details were discussed.

The Manager held a meeting with Lillian where she wanted to make sure that Lillian understood what she was getting herself into. Lillian told me about the meeting later. She was evidently unfazed by it: she said she had spoken to the Manager 'as if she was my mother. I told her that if I was her daughter she would let me go.' The Manager had said to Lillian that she was not to get into any nudity or glamour work. It was a ridiculous and shocking thought to Lillian who had replied: 'I am a Christian girl.' The Manager could find no fault with Lillian joining the agency.

However, my supervisor did not take my actions lightly and did not pardon me. She thought that it would be better for me to oust 'under-age' informants from my research in order to repair the relationship I had disrupted with the Asylum Service. I did not agree. I countered that I worked with a very special group of young people that not many had had experience of meeting directly. In any kind of contact with these young people, it was extremely important to recognise their needs and vulnerabilities, as well as their strengths and capabilities. In order to do this, one needed to have an ability to empathize and some analytical skills. It was a difficult field, not only because the young peoples' situations were often very heartfelt to witness, but also because it was difficult for someone outside the Social Services to navigate themselves in relation to them. I had thought that keeping the psychologist informed of the events was good enough since she knew Lillian better than anyone else in the social services. There had been turn of events that I had not intended to happen or foreseen, but it was a valuable lesson of understanding the context in which I was operating. My supervisor and I could not agree on how to proceed. She felt the situation had got out of hand and that she was obliged to forward the e-mail I had sent to her to the Head of the School. In response, the Head of School sent me a letter giving me seven days to answer to a charge of 'research misconduct'. The allegations stated that I had carried out 'irregularities of conduct' for three reasons. It was alleged that I had engaged in 'unethical interactions' with a young person under the care of Hillingdon Social Services. Secondly, that I had accompanied this young person to a photo shoot at a modelling agency without prior knowledge and consent of the local authority. Thirdly, I was accused of attempting to collude with my supervisor in misrepresenting the facts. I felt upset, threatened and frightened. It felt unnatural that the Head of School did not invite me to a face-to-face meeting. Too late did I recognise the rules of the game: instead of the diplomatic aloofness that was the style of communication, I replied with a seven-page long, apologetic letter, stating my principled versions of events. I could not concede to 'unethical conduct'. The Head of School chose again not to meet with me personally, but responded in a formal letter: 'I think there may be a case to answer. I will forward the case to the Disciplinary Board.' I was now involved in a quasi-legal dispute management process.

My second supervisor, an anthropologist, was more sympathetic towards my actions after she had read my letter to the Head of Department. She pointed out that

anthropologists constantly intervene in the lives of their research participants. It is not uncommon for anthropologists to pay school fees to their informants' children in low income countries or to give respondents medication. Furthermore, she suggested that it was the term 'model agency' and its connotations that had sparked the scandal. Had I introduced the girl to a football club, the question about my relationship with the girl would not be such a central one.

It was to be six months until the disciplinary hearing took place since the date of the hearing was changed numerous times. I was running out of time to collect data and began to spend time in the Congolese Pentecostal churches. I joined the women's choir and the *orchestre*, attended prayer groups, the Sunday service and the intercession. Instead of asking me for assistance with various problems, Lillian started to rely more on the Psychologist for help. Meanwhile I apologized to the manager of the Asylum Service, saying that the experience was part of a learning curve and that I knew now what was expected of me. She was sorry that I had been taken to a disciplinary hearing. She wrote a letter to the Disciplinary Hearing stating that:

'Asa has stated that she was unaware of the need to discuss or agree with staff in the Asylum Service the contact she was having with the young person in question. She had raised it with [the psychologist] and believed that this was sufficient.'

The psychologist also wrote a letter in support of my case. She stated:

'I believe this has resulted in lack of clarity over roles and boundaries. It is my belief that this whole episode has occurred in that context.'

Asa took considerable time and effort to try and resolve the situation so that the young person would not be disappointed, i.e. get the portfolio shoot postponed so that the service manager had time to assess the situation. In my assessment of the situation I could see the benefits to the young person who has a very captivating presence and therefore it did not surprise me that the agency was interested. Equally given the young person's own interest in

fashion and presentation I understood why the young person herself was interested in doing it.

I am certain that Asa only took her actions in the context of wishing to be helpful towards the young person. I hope that this experience will not put Asa off from contact with this group of young people, or continuing to work with the [mental health project], as I value her dedication and perceptive skills, and which she needs to carry out her research.'

At the disciplinary hearing I got a sense of what the asylum claim tribunals might be like for lone asylum seekers. Tesfay, the boy from Iran, had allowed me to accompany him to one such hearing at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. Similar to his hearing, the style of the trial was formal, following a strict procedure of what type of evidence could be used and who was able to speak when. The formalities of the occasion made it unnatural and intimidating. Simply because the accused has been summoned to the court, she is easily suspected of wrongdoing from outsiders, who do not know the details of the case. My case was held before a panel of three senior university staff. Apart from my own representative (Professor Adam Kuper), no one else in the room knew me personally. I was formally dressed in a suit and sat facing the panel at one end of a large, square table. The hearing lasted for two hours and consisted of a statement of accusations from the School of Health, my defence, and questions to me from the Panel. The School of Health representative, a Senior Lecturer in Healthcare Law and Ethics, sat on the left hand side of the large table formation. The Head of School did not personally attend. Before the meeting began proper, Adam Kuper questioned why I was being treated like a criminal and that the whole show was not necessary in order to resolve the issue at hand. However, the Panel said that the hearing needed to take place. The prosecution (School of Health and Social Care) accused me of attempts to collude and deceive, and suggested that I brought Lillian to the model agency for my own ends, to gain further information from her. I knew of the first accusation already and was prepared to respond to it, but the last one had been added without my knowledge and came as a surprise. It was hurtful since the only thing that had mattered to me was Lillian's interest. At this allegation, I broke down in tears. The Head of the Panel paused the meeting for a short intermission. Professor Adam Kuper left the room. The School of Health

representative handed me a paper tissue with a joke that it was unused and I laughed: the formality of the occasion was slightly broken. As the meeting was reconvened, I apologized for crying, saying that this was not something I 'believed in', but that I had not had much sleep the night before and that I was extremely hurt by the School of Health's last allegation. The Head of the Panel said they appreciated that the experience of undergoing a disciplinary was distressing. Adam Kuper told the panel that the allegations from the School of Health were vague and unclear. He questioned why there had been no attempts of mediation and that this showed lack of care from the School. Furthermore, the accusations of rule breaking were comparable to 'conduct unbecoming a gentleman'. The rules could be 'pulled out from a hat' at random, to be decided upon in whichever way that resonated with the morality of the School of Health. At the end, as the representative of the School of Health repeated his charges, he withdrew the accusation that I had acted for my own ends. The hearing ended. The disciplinary board discussed their verdict and rang me an hour later. They had decided to acquit me of all charges. I transferred to the Department of Anthropology, where I continued my research with a new supervisor. To date, Lillian's career in modelling has not taken off, but she has the pictures taken of her in modelling poses proudly exhibited on every one of her walls.

It is interesting to reflect upon why my actions evolved into such a scandal. I suggest that ethics worked on different levels. On the one hand there were the ethical choices before me of where my allegiances lie. To some extent I did not pay enough consideration to the ethical domain pertaining to social work and health research. Their place of work and my University Department were part of the 'field' in equal measure to my other informants and needed to be negotiated par-on-par with the interpersonal ethical dilemmas I faced with the lone asylum seekers. Understanding this context from the outset may have prevented me from intervening into Lillian's life. Yet, even as all actors in the field are evaluated and considered on their own terms, ethical dilemmas remain and choices have to be made, albeit less overtly. Anthropological ethical standards of the Association of Social Anthropology in the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth (ASA) and American Anthropological Association (AAA) typically guide researchers to make ethical choices, less so than suggesting that ethical choices can be made once and for all before research commences. The guidelines state that anthropologists must expect to encounter ethical

dilemmas at every stage of their work and must make good-faith efforts to identify potential ethical claims and conflicts in advance.

Merkell and Pels (2005) and Handelman (2008) argue that anthropologists cannot know many of the ethical issues encountered during fieldwork in advance, especially when they enter a culture completely unfamiliar to them. If we do know all ethical issues *a priori*, we are either already greatly familiar with the field, or we are not seeing things from research subjects' perspectives. One can argue that running into ethical dilemmas is a minimum requirement for furthering our knowledge of the unknown. Handelman (2008) maintains that 'getting it wrong' (from the health professionals' and social workers' official point of view), is a prerequisite of getting it 'right' from the point of view of our informants. Where conflict occurs, informants' values have priority because they are living their lives in their own *habitus* in which the anthropologist is an interloper. The ethnographer-scholar has the responsibility to be wrong in the face of the other and otherness; only in this way can he behave ethically towards the subjects of his research (Handelman 2008).

However, ethics as discussed above do not explain why the course of events turned into a scandal. I suggest that the service Manager and the School of Health perceived themselves dealing with a potentially dangerous social situation which the School thought called for radical means of dispute management. In their disciplines and in the public imagination, refugees are regarded as vulnerable victims in need of protection and are almost by definition thought to be prone to mental health problems. Any overt challenge to the orthodoxy, such as that refugees assert their own personal agency and are not always vulnerable, is regarded as disruptive. Anyone who actually took their time to evaluate Lillian in her own terms and met with her in person, could see that she was capable of making her own, sound choices. However, in public imagination the 'refugee experience' is so vehemently believed to equate with victimhood and psychological trauma (Eastmond 1998; Malkki 1992), that individuals who beg to differ are met with disbelief, mistrust and even anger. For this reason ethical guidelines and persons in positions of authority cannot publicly state that the categorical, official version of what it means to be a refugee often comes in more shades of grey. Of course, there *are* vulnerable research populations in need of protection from harm and ethical protocols can help minimize such risks. But in the

scenario I have recounted here, risk denotes something quite different to potential harm to research participants. Risk refers to the potential threat to the reputation of people and their institutions. The ethical protocols in health research resort to reductionism and are formulated in a forbidding language because only such recommendations will be accepted. To that end, there are few things that can provoke those institutions any further, than marrying the terms ‘refugee’ and ‘model agency’ in one and the same sentence. A situation of mistrust emerges, not necessarily because the refugee is thought to be at actual risk, although this is partly it, but because an outsider is unwise enough to invite public scrutiny of whether protocols are followed (Strathern 2000). In the dispute management recounted here, people made interesting choices between alternative modes of dealing with disruptive or potentially dangerous social situations (Nader 1969; Gulliver 1969; Abel 1973). In this case, the choice seemed to be between quasi-legal procedures as opposed perhaps to public ‘naming and shaming’, or attempts at mediation, and/or mere gossip. Once a problem is transferred to a public arena, the issues are redefined, sometimes transformed, by persons in authority who deploy official language to shape the interpretation of events and relationships (Merry 1978).

Conclusion

From a universalist point of view, young refugee women such as Lillian are ‘known’ to be vulnerable and in need of guidance and protection and to often suffer mental health problems. Such a view is often the official standpoint in ethical guidelines, social work and health research with this group of people. Less often is it pointed out that mental health issues cannot be detected in all individuals. For those in which it can be detected, psychopathology does not preclude considerable strength, capability and determination to strive for a better alternative and more positive future prospects. My University Department argued that I was at fault in my conduct with Lillian in pointing out that she was likely to be vulnerable to mental health. Invoking the stereotype of the victimized and psychologically traumatized refugee was a ‘safe bet’ because this is so commonly accepted in ethical guidelines. This was also the underlying argument of the Manager of the Young Persons Asylum Team. However, Lillian’s apparent psychological strength and personal agency was ignored. At no point, was the issue of apparent double standards raised: what of service provisions

contradictory practice to leave unaccompanied asylum seekers to cope virtually 'on their own' during arrival and settlement in the new country. In this instance, ethics were used as an instrument to control and monitor risky social situations.

Chapter three

Home and Exile: An historical and Political Background

This chapter aims to shed light on the historical and political situation from which the Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers have come to London. While it has become commonplace to describe the situation in the DRC in terms of an enduring crisis, ‘collapse’ of the state, and widespread corruption by patrimonial autocracy (Lemarchand 2002), it would be misplaced to describe the Congolese political and social situation as ‘total chaos’ (Trefon 2002). New forms of solidarity have emerged. A thriving informal sector of barter trade overshadows the official economy (MacGaffey 1991, De Boeck 1998). On the other hand, a communitarian ethic has sprung up in independent churches, local communities and associations (Devisch 1996: 575), replacing the no longer taken for granted solidarity between blood-relations and families (De Boeck 2005).

The second theme in this chapter is to situate the young people in this research within the political economy of the DRC. The central question this paper seeks to answer is: who ‘are’ the Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers in London? What are their reasons for leaving the DRC and from what social and economic situations did they come?

I argue that my young research subjects were different to those that most frequently occur in anthropological writing on Kinshasa (e.g. De Boeck 2004, 2005). Here, an increasing number of children are accused of using witchcraft to cause illness, death and other forms of misfortunes, and are shunned from their families. Although young people in Kinshasa readily confess to engaging in witchcraft, I did not hear a single reference to this topic. The young asylum seekers in London also differed from children and young people in anthropological writings on Congolese refugee children (Mann 2002, Atkinson 2007, Clark 2007). They had not escaped civil war in the east, but most of them had fled conflict in or near the capital Kinshasa. They were not all from affluent social and economic backgrounds, but also not from the very poorest families. I suggest that the young people in this research were almost by definition a select and atypical group among the larger population of children in Kinshasa and the

larger Congolese refugee population. Someone was able to plan, pay for, and help them undertake the hazardous enterprise of leaving Africa (Ingleby 2005: 3).

A country in ‘crisis’

The DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of Human Development Indicators (nutrition, literacy, life expectancy at birth, and availability of clean drinking water) (Trefon, van Hoyweghen and Smis 2002: 385). It has become commonplace to describe the situation in Congo in terms of an enduring crisis, ‘collapse’ of the state, and widespread corruption by patrimonial autocracy. According to Coleman and Ngokwey, writing during the era of Mobutu, but in a language that could also apply to the Presidencies of the Kabilas *père* and *fils*:

‘Few other countries have suffered a precolonial capitalist exploitation so harsh, predatory, socially disorganizing, and unrestrained; a colonial system of bureaucratic authoritarianism so massive, deeply penetrative, paternalistic, and insulated from external monitoring; ... a democratic experiment immediately before independence of such fleeting brevity and politicised ethnicity; an indigenous leadership so denied of experience and unprepared for independence; an imperial evacuation so precipitate and ill-planned; an initial post-colonial period of such Hobbesian chaos, secessionism, and external manipulation; and the subsequent postcolonial agony of a protracted and seemingly interminable personalistic and patrimonial autocracy by one of Africa's most durable presidential monarchs (Coleman and Ngokwey 1994:306).

Adding to these crises relating largely to the capital centre, there are staggering losses in human life due to the *de facto* partition of the country. While denied by Kinshasa and the international community, partition is manifested on the ground with different armed groups struggling to control various strategic points in the east (Clark 2006: 24). At least 3 million people are believed to have lost their lives in these conflicts since 1998 (Lemarchand 2002: 390).

Historical background

There are several deep-rooted historical processes that have resulted in the present Congolese 'crisis'. A fundamental component of such processes was the patrimonialism of the Congo Free State. Mapped out in Berlin in 1885, the Congo state became King Leopold's private property. Subordination of sound administration to the aim of obtaining the maximum quantity of wild rubber often generated large-scale atrocities (Anstey 1966: 2). The subjects of the Congo Free State were ruthlessly driven to collect and bring natural rubber and ivory to trading posts (La Fontaine 1970: 11). The 'origins' of 'Leopoldville' (now Kinshasa), can be traced to the 1880s when it served as an economic centre for the Leopoldian state. The spatial segregation along racial markers (of the Belgians and the Africans) of the city was strictly controlled, as was migration from village to town.

Following the dissolution of the Leopoldian Congo Free State in 1908, patrimonialism was succeeded by Belgian paternalism. The Belgian colonial system was based on the triumvirate of church, administration and large corporations. On a moral level, justification for the colonial project was the eradication of poverty and unsanitary living conditions, oppressive tribal structures and their ignorant chiefs, unproductive economy of barter and gift which served only the powerful, as well as the superstitious practices which were viewed to obscure reason and undermining morality (Devisch 1996: 559). The enormous missionary venture, stemming principally from Belgian Flanders, was intrinsically linked with the establishment of the colonial administrative order (Devisch 1996: 560).

The Belgian administration effectively prevented upward movement in its social strata. It used the *Force Publique* to control the influx of people to Leopoldville in search of employment and other opportunities. This body of law enforcement was built according to a superstructure of Belgian officers and a body of Congolese recruits, mostly Bangala from the Congo's Equator province. The Bangala spoke *Lingala*, which over time came to be the city's *lingua franca* (De Boeck and Plissart 2004: 31). Other than letting the Congolese serve such functions, the Belgian

government had no interest in training an indigenous elite leadership. Even the European settlers in Congo held no political rights and all important political decisions took place in Brussels (Trefon 2002: 485).

An *évolué* was a Congolese person who had climbed the social evolutionary ladder in the eyes of the Belgians.

‘*Évolués* were mainly urban Africans who had received some education, spoke French and had renounced polygamy. They were to constitute the emerging middle class encouraged by Belgian policy makers in the late colonial period’ (Trefon 2002, note 16).

Thomas Kanza, a political activist who came to join Lumumba’s brief leadership, describes some of the ‘bureaucratic tools’ used by the European colonials in the late 1950s. A *carte d’immatriculation* was given to Congolese individuals who were allowed to move towards integration into European circles. These individuals were permitted to live more or less as the Europeans did. They were able to buy alcohol, sit in European restaurants and nightclubs, see uncensored films at European cinemas and they could send their children to European schools. Any Congolese could also apply for a *carte de mérite civique*, if he considered himself ‘sufficiently detribalised’. Additional privileges could be awarded on successful application of the *carte d’immatriculation*. Although extremely rare, such a card meant rights to Belgian civil jurisdiction. To obtain such rights, the Magistrate ordered first a thorough investigation of the applicant’s private life and personal habits. According to Kanza, only 120 Congolese, from a population of 13 million, were holders of the *carte d’immatriculation* in 1956 (Kanza 1972: 19). In the same year, 900 held a *carte de mérite civique* (Ibid. 19). These descriptions of the Congo colony administration tell of deeply unjust and segregating governance ‘from above’.

The Congo was granted its independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960. Joseph Kasavubu was the first elected President of the new nation. He had earned prominence during pre-independence struggles as head of the ethno-religious organization *ABAKO*, of the Bakongo people. As President, Kasavubu was engaged in

a power struggle with Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, who was also President of the Congolese National Movement.

The appalling lack of political preparation during Belgian domination led to one of Africa's most brutal post-colonial transitions. The major political events included the mutiny of the *Force Publique* only a few days after the national elections. There were secessionist attempts of the mineral-rich provinces of Katanga and Southern Kasai and failed UN interventions. Lumumba was seen as the most threatening vector of Soviet dominance on the African continent by the United States and by Belgium, and was executed by opponents. The West imposed much control over Congo's mineral wealth and fought to prevent a Soviet domination in the region. From these political events followed a *coup d'état* on 25 November 1965. General Mobutu, commander of the Congolese Army, announced his suspension of the Parliament and declared that the Army would rule until the end of the year (Lemarchand 2002: 390). Mobutu quickly consolidated his power with the help of Cold War mercenaries, and was elected unopposed as President of DRC in 1970. In 1971, Mobutu and his party *Movement Populaire de la Révolution* launched an official state ideology of a campaign for 'authenticité'. The authenticity campaign was an effort to eradicate the legacy of colonial impositions and the influence of Western culture to create a national, African identity (Lumumba-Kasongo 1998: 74). In implementations of the campaign, there were several changes to state and private life. The Congo was renamed Zaïre. Geographic place names were changed to more 'authentic' ones and later on, every Zaïrean *citoyen* with a Christian name were obliged to change to an African one. The educational system that had been controlled by the Catholic Church was nationalized, along with University education. Mobutu also imposed a personality cult, replacing images of Jesus Christ in churches for pictures of himself and called himself a 'prophet'. Religious revitalizations other than Protestant, Catholic and Kimbanguist¹⁷ movements were banned. Local prayer groups were driven underground to meet in secret in private homes. Although Mobutu and his statement claimed that the campaign was necessary in an effort to challenge the dogmas, power

¹⁷ 'Kimbanguism is a messianic Christian movement founded by Simon Kimbangu during the 1920s in the Bas-Congo region of the Belgian Congo.' 'Unlike the Pentecostal churches for which the Golden Age is yet to come, the Kimbanguist church relies on a mythical past to negotiate the current internal divisions weakening its spiritual, theological and political centralized organization' (Eade and Garbin 2007: 419).

structure and political history of colonialism, it was in reality a means to vindicate his dictatorial leadership (Devisch 1995).

The Congo-Zaire post-colony renounced its role to provide for basic social and administrative services. Mobutu, not unlike King Leopold, exploited the Congo and its resources as if they were his personal property. Zaire received almost unconditional support from Washington, Brussels and Paris due to the Cold War politics and Western capitalist interests. Until the fall of the Berlin wall, these governments backed a regime steeped in violence, nepotism, personality cult of the 'supreme leader' and human rights violations. It was during the economic decline, emerging in the mid-1970s, that a 'second economy' started to take over the official recorded economy in the absence of employment and state services (MacGaffey and Bazenguizza-Ganga 2000: 30). In the mid-80s and the early 1990s, digging and trading in gold and diamonds accounted for a significant proportion of the country's unofficial exports (estimated at \$500 billion in 1994) (De Boeck 1998: 778). Mobutu played Western investors against one another to diversify his international support. He also manipulated liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique to serve his own ends. The West found opportunities to recycle petro-dollars in exchange for their financing the Inga Dam and the Inga-Shaba high-tension line (Trefon 2002: 486).

In eastern Congo ethnic identity politics, often in relation to claims to land, became increasingly violent in the early 1990s. The war in Rwanda was deeply embroiled in the conflicts. Zairean Hutu militants joined forces with Rwandan Hutu paramilitary organization *Interahamwe*, and attacked Zairean Tutsi. Some Tutsi groups retaliated and new, shifting alliances emerged (Pottier 2002: 41). In 1996, the *Banyamulenge* (Tutsis from South Kivu) supported by Rwanda, started a rebellion. Not long thereafter, Rwanda, Uganda and subsequently Angola invaded the country. Child soldiers, or *kadogos*, were recruited into the army as the rebellion gained support from east to west (Villers and Tshonda 2002). Laurent Desire Kabila, whose foreign backers had put him in command of the AFDL (*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo*), gained control over Kinshasa on 17 May 1997. Zaire was renamed Congo.

Kabila had been in power for little more than a year when he dismissed the Rwandan troops that had supported the country during the liberation period. The Rwandan military and Tutsi members of the Congolese army put up fierce resistance. Subsequently, Rwanda intervened militarily in the Congo. The so-called Second Congo War began in August 1998 and became the deadliest armed conflict worldwide since World War II. It directly involved eight African nations and many more armed groups. An estimated 3 million people died in the conflict during the years of 1998-2004, mostly from war-related diseases and starvation.¹⁸ Together with some of his commanders, Kabila used the war to improve his popularity in Kinshasa by playing upon the anti-Tutsi racism. He removed numerous Congolese and Rwandan Tutsis that had formed part of the presidential leadership (Villers and Tshonda 2002: 405). It was in relation to this sudden anti-Tutsi campaign that an uprising of young *Kinois*, witnessed by some of the young people in this research, took place in the streets of Kinshasa in 1998. Biaya describes the violence and motivation behind it thus:

‘...the month of August 1998 was marked by hunting out all the Tutsi residents of Kinshasa. By liberating itself from the grip of the Tutsi, who at the time were strongly represented in the government, the Congolese political class was able to recover some of the legitimacy that had eluded it. Its return to favour with the Kinshasa populace was nonetheless marked by a multiplication of victims who had been subjected to barbarous rite of rubber ‘necklacing’. The numerous corpses abandoned in the streets made for a macabre scene. Without interrupting either dance or song, the Kinshasa youth performed a sort of collective catharsis that consisted of repeatedly burning the cadavers as if to reaffirm the victory of the population of Kinshasa over the foreigner. The passivity shown by adults at such events goes far beyond any form of cathartic participation, for, according to the dominant animist African culture, incinerating a corpse denotes killing its soul and denying it any vestige of humanity... Such bestial violence were nonetheless saluted by the national authorities as a ‘radical mediation against the vermin’ in order to ‘save the fatherland from danger’. ... this process of reinvention of the nation, founding itself in street culture and finding expression in a sort of mortuary

¹⁸ Violent conflicts in eastern Congo are on-going to date.
http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=37

ritual, served to reconstruct the identity of the young as real *Kinois*, citizens of Kinshasa.’ (Biaya 2005: 221).

Early on in his regime, Kabila maintained rhetoric of preparing the country for real democratic transition. There were promises of re-establishment of political pluralism, elections, a socially acceptable economic liberalism and of good governance (Villers and Tshonda 2002: 406). The regime set up the *Comité de Pouvoir Populaire* (CPP) and dissolved the *AFDL* in early 1999. In theory, CPP was a system of popular assemblies representing all Congolese adults at grassroots level (street, village and neighbourhood), reporting to higher-level assemblies. The pinnacle of the pyramid of committees and assemblies was the National Directorate. In practice, however, there was no intention of giving up power or implementing a transition. The CPPs were not partisan structures because political groups were not allowed to participate in the elections of the committees. The committees therefore effectively represented the existing political leadership.

Laurent Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards in January 2001 and was replaced by his son Joseph. On 26 January 2001, Joseph Kabila was appointed head of state by his father’s political entourage and foreign allies (Villers and Tshonda 2002: 408).

To some extent, Joseph Kabila was able to distance himself from his father’s political attitudes and practices. Peace negotiations in 2002 resulted in withdrawal of Ugandan and Rwandan troops, and an end of the ‘war economy’, but civil violence and proxies remained. Conflicts also continued in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Katanga. A French-led emergency mission under European Union authority intervened in eastern Ituri in 2003, as UN Security Council peacekeepers (MONUC) failed to contain clashes. In March 2005, deaths and displacements led to the United Nations to describe Eastern Congo as the “worlds’ worst humanitarian crisis”.¹⁹

Joseph Kabila adopted relatively liberal laws on political parties and took an interest in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, a necessary step towards implementation of the Lusaka Peace Agreement. However, while dismissing some of the members of his

¹⁹ http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=37

father's regime in April 2001, others were still part of the CPP National Directorate (Villers and Tshonda 2002: 409).

Violent clashes took place in Kinshasa in 2006 after the first round of presidential elections. According to Amnesty International (2007), political opponents to Kabila were jailed, tortured or murdered during the election by Governmental security forces. However, international observers considered the first multi-party election held since independence 'relatively free and fair'. Kabila defeated his main opponent, Jean-Pierre Bemba, in the second round of the presidential election with 58 per cent of the vote. The United States and Britain are supportive to the Kabila government with which it has secured investments.

The political events above, together with shrinking of state resources due to mismanagement and corruption, make up the historical context of hardship in Kinshasa today. A hundred years after the Belgian 'civilising mission' began, people in Kinshasa do without food, without wood fuel, without primary health services, without safe drinking water, political participation, security, leisure and the ability to organise their time as they would like (Trefon 2002). The reality of life for a majority of the country's children is that it is

'...filled with the human detritus of civil war and bloody massacres, of waves of refugees, acute poverty and deprivation, and of the scourge of AIDS. The area has seen child soldiers, child prostitutes and orphans living in the street' (La Fontaine 2007: 7).

However, it would be misplaced to describe the Congolese social situation as total chaos. Trefon argues that there is order in disorder and that function and dysfunction overlap (Trefon 2002: 483). The relative (but not total) abdication of the state has resulted in a process of 'indigenisation' (Trefon 2002) or 'villagisation' (Devisch 1996). The *Kinois*, the inhabitants of Kinshasa, have entered into a 'post'- post-colonial phase by using their own, and no longer imported, resources, networks and ideas in the absence of state sponsored public health, education, transportation, water systems, and food security. For example, the war has cut the city off from its former agricultural areas in the provinces of Equateur and Orientale. The decay of the road

infrastructure contributes to the difficulty in transporting food to Kinshasa and elsewhere. In spite of this, a famine situation has never developed (Trefon 2002).²⁰ In place of previous supply areas, the Bandundu province bordering Kinshasa, now provides between 80 to 90 per cent of agricultural produce for Kinshasa. River transportation replaced road transport since the roads are now of poor quality and there are an inadequate number of lorries and pick-up trucks. At least 150-200 locally made wooden boats ply the Congo River from Kinshasa to Bandundu and Kasai. Commissioning agents (*des agents commissionnaires*) work along the river transporting bulk goods to particular destinations; group travellers together and arrange for their transportation; and facilitate communications through their cell phones (Trefon 2002).

Households obtain food supplies by cultivating manioc and herding cattle throughout the city. 'The increasing number of shops in Kinshasa which sell animal feed is a reliable indicator of small-scale breeding for family consumption and sale' (Trefon 2002: 490). There is a daily movement of people from the *cités* towards the outskirt areas of Ndjile, Masina or Kimwenza in pursuit of cultivation. 'A common sight in the morning is the outward movement of men and women with hoes and machetes - in the evening they return with agricultural produce and fuelwood' (Trefon 2002: 490).

Devisch argues that the healing churches, now present in virtually every street in Kinshasa, have 'reconfigured the space of the modern state and Christian religion within (Koongo) society, by depriving the Church and government of their order, distance and hierarchy' (Devisch 1996: 572). The churches provide an interpretation of the urban space to which the nation state has failed to give order and prosperity. In a context where migrants from so many different ethnic backgrounds congregate, the charismatic churches establish a community with a national or global identity which supersedes social or class differences and ethnic group identities. They provide a more positive, and often utopian atmosphere in face of a predominantly depressing reality. The communities provide an alternative communal form of solidarity, often in place of kin (Devisch 1996: 571).

²⁰ Hunger and malnutrition are, however, a serious problem. Approximately 50 per cent of the Kinshasa eat only one meal per day. 25 per cent eat only one meal every two days (Ministère de la santé publique, 1999:47). Food expenditures represent between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of household budgets (Marijse and De Herdt, 1996).

Pentecostalism with its emphasis on personal salvation in Christ is thought to have entered Kinshasa in 1976, when a French *Pasteur* began to organize healing sessions and performed miracles on Pont Kasa-Vubu (Pype 2006). A local Pentecostal group, *Nzambe Malamu* (Lingala, ‘the Good God’) emerged a year later as a result of this manifestation (Ibid 2006). In the following decade, a ‘charismatic revival’ began, transforming African Catholic rituals. It resulted in a growing popularity for Protestant and more ‘syncretic’ churches, often influenced by an international charismatic wave (Fabian 1994). During the 1980s, Pentecostalism and the Charismatic renewal inspired the emergence of new religious groupings. Often led by local spiritual leaders, these communities gathered around a leader who had received prophetic visions or calls from God. As in the case of the spread of Pentecostalism in Ghana:

‘the leadership accommodated to notions of the spirit world, the ways in which individual subjects were affected by such influences and forces, and it developed distinct ideas on how such afflicting forces could be counteracted in prayer-healing, speaking in tongues and similar rituals’ (Van Dijk 1997: 140).

By the millennium, many of the newly established churches joined under a larger network called *Églises de Réveil du Congo* (ERC). Of these churches, *Combat Spirituel*, headed by Maman Olangi is probably the best known. In 2002, the new churches were recognised as an official religion by the Congolese state (together with Catholicism, Protestantism, Kimbanguism and Islam) (Pype 2006).

The unaccompanied asylum seekers in this research were born during the 1980s and grew up in an era when private and bodily experiences of the Holy Spirit were becoming increasingly acceptable in public culture. For example, hundreds of ‘worldly’ music- and theatre groups converted during this time to strict evangelical forms of performing arts (Pype 2006). While the churches use different denominational names, they can be referred to as Pentecostal because of the particularly strong emphasis on the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, through whom Jesus acts as one’s personal saviour. Moreover, full membership demands the water

baptism ritual and it is said that a 'true Christian' should display thorough knowledge of the Bible.

'Influenced by the Charismatic movement, these churches insist on spiritual gifts (gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, prophesy, etc.) that Christians receive from God. In sum, they encourage trance and 'falling in the spirit' for the individual to get in touch with the Holy Spirit, whilst exorcism and anti-witchcraft rituals reflect the urge of these movements to purify the body and the community' (Pype 2006: 301).

Migration from the DRC must also be added to the social processes involved in people's attempts to ensure survival. Europe and the West are places aspired to in face of increasingly harsh living conditions in Kinshasa (De Boeck and Plissart 2004: 47). The political violence, the collapse of the Mobutu state, the rebellion war and the Rwandan/Ugandan invasion were the main factors contributing to Congolese migration to Francophone and non-Francophone countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, Germany and Holland in the 1970s (Eade and Garbin 2007:418). People who emigrated in the 1970s considered London a safer destination than Brussels and Paris where Mobutu circles were active. The Congolese migrants to London settled primarily in the inner-London areas of Haringey and Newham. These migrants constituted a crucial support network for the unaccompanied asylum seekers and other refugees who arrived after them (see MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 38). Visionaries among the earlier migrants planted Pentecostal churches in London, other major cities in the United Kingdom and Europe (Styan 2003). Through these churches, the young people in this research came to strike up friendships with a settled Congolese migrant community.

There is evidence suggesting systematic mistreatment of asylum seekers who return to the DRC. The National Security Agency (ANS) automatically sees individuals who have claimed asylum in Europe as threats to the Kabila regime. Many are sent to trial under national security legislation and if convicted, detained at the infamous Makala prison. Makala is a place where prisoners depend on outside support for food and medical care. The United States State Department reports that sixty-nine people died

in this prison during 2003, some as a result of severe beatings, others because of starvation and disease (Kundnani 2004). In face of mounting pressure from Human Rights groups, the United Kingdom's Asylum and Immigration Tribunal set out to update its country guidance on the return of failed asylum seekers to the DRC in July and September 2007. Evidence considered for the country report included oral testimonies of the National Human Rights Observatory in Kinshasa; a former liaison officer for the Military Court in Kinshasa; a former employee at the headquarters of the Director-General of Migration (DGM); and a former Immigration Officer at Ndjili airport.^{21 22} The witnesses largely agreed upon physical mistreatment of returnees, and of bribes elicited from them to get out of detention. Some stated that there were DRC government agents present and active in the United Kingdom who passed on information about Congolese political activities in the United Kingdom to intelligence agencies in the DRC. However, the Secretary of State for the Home Department submitted that much of the evidence heard could be discredited for failing to meet 'scientific' standards of inquiry. Testimonies of a BBC journalist and one of the advocates (Miss Atherton), for example, could not verify that the people they had interviewed were failed asylum seekers other than through their taking these peoples' stories on trust: they had not enquired to inspect Home Office documents or other objective information that could prove identity and legal status of the so-called asylum seekers. 'Miss Atherton, asked how sure she was the returnees she had spoken to were telling the truth, said she went by how they expressed their emotions and she had no reason to disbelieve them'.²³ The final verdict of the Secretary of State was that failed asylum seekers *per se* did not face a real risk of persecution or serious harm upon return to the DR Congo.²⁴ It was thus decided that the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal had no reason to change the existing country guidance on the DRC and that Congolese asylum seekers whose claims are rejected should, in principle be deported.

²¹ The other evidence included a BBC journalist's investigation into the treatment of failed asylum seekers returned to the DRC; three advocates for Congolese failed asylum seekers in the UK representing different legal organisations, reports from two human rights organisations, and expert witnesses.

²² BK (Failed asylum seekers) DRC CG [2007] UKAIT 00098 The Immigration Acts

²³ P. 23: BK (Failed asylum seekers) DRC CG [2007] UKAIT 00098 The Immigration Acts

²⁴ or treatment contrary to Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights. Article 3 – Prohibition of torture: 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.'

Background of informants

The young people in this research had all lived in or near Kinshasa before arrival in the United Kingdom. This appears to be the common trend for Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers in London; they had not fled conflicts in the east of the DRC. My young informants rarely seemed to have lived with their parents at their point of departure to the United Kingdom. More often they lived with grandparents, older siblings, or aunts and uncles. All of the young people said that they had no contact with any family member in the DRC. They said they did not know whether relations were dead or alive.

Most of the young people had obtained only primary education, while a smaller number (including Lillian, Hussein and Rafael) had been going to private Catholic schools, or were receiving secondary education as they left Kinshasa (Lillian, Hussein, Rafael). My informants did not appear to have come from the poorest economic households. To this end they were slightly more advantaged than the children usually documented in ethnographic writings. Such children are mainly marginal members of poorer households (e.g. De Boeck 2004, 2005). Children documented in this literature tend to live with a step-parent, or a more distant relative. 'Some have been fostered because they have been orphaned, by war or by AIDS.' (La Fontaine 2007: 13). Here, an increasing number of children are accused of using witchcraft to cause illness, death and other forms of misfortunes, and are shunned from their families (De Boeck 2005). Although most of my informants did not live with their parents, they were not marginal within the family network. However, the young asylum seekers increasingly became more marginal within extended family network, due to domestic conflict. For example, when Rachel's and Micah's family members were taken away by Police, there were no longer any adults available to care for them. When Police interned Lillian and Patrick, adults who had been protecting them were arrested or killed. Even as these two young people managed to escape incarceration, it was too dangerous for other family members or significant adults to look after them. Adults around them acted to 'disperse dependants' in the absence of children's guardians (Spiegel 1987). Unlike young people who are destitute on the streets of Kinshasa: someone was able to plan, pay for, and help my informants undertake a hazardous and uncertain journey (Ingleby 2005: 3). The young people

who left Kinshasa for the United Kingdom, therefore, were almost by definition a select and atypical group.

The unaccompanied asylum seekers in this research were eager to speak about their churches and their Christian faith, but reluctant to talk about their flight from the DRC. Narratives of flight rehearsed to me were generally the official asylum claim stories that the young people had given to the Home Office as reasons for seeking asylum.²⁵ In some cases, informants could only open up about their full past lives when they were offered the final outcome of their asylum applications (Kohli 2005: 8). It was too risky for the young people in the research to offer any information other than that stated in the Home Office reports. Too risky, since they could not be sure to control what such information might lead to, no matter how much they otherwise trusted the researcher. After having known one informant for more than a year (Tesfay from Iran), he told me that the rich ‘uncle’ who had facilitated his exit from Iran was in fact his father. Only after he had exhausted all rights of appeal did he reveal aspects of his private life to his legal advisor that could be considered in relation to a claim for Humanitarian Protection (e.g. that he had family relations in Britain). It should not be assumed, however, that there is a straightforward relationship between events and people’s memories of them (Bernard *et al.* 1984). Children’s official testimonies can become the ‘real’ memory of events instead of ‘what actually happened’, especially if the latter is never articulated to anyone. La Fontaine showed that certain aspects of events may be compelling for children and young people to talk about, due to the cultural attraction of the concept (La Fontaine 1997). Equally, therefore, some things are not part of a ‘cultural repertoire’ of what can be discussed. Other than in relation to the official asylum claim in which the young Congolese described themselves, without exception, as victims of external circumstances, they did not generally talk about events leading to their exit from the DRC with friends, spouses and churchmen.²⁶ Many adult Congolese men who had

²⁵ The narratives from the young people included here may therefore be constructed according to widely available narrative conventions: the stories of flight the young people relate are not taken here at face-value, but neither do I believe them to be entirely fabricated. ‘Narratives are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story’ (Eastmond 2007). For further discussion on the topic see Jackson 2002 and Bruner 1986. With reference to Congolese people in Belgium, see Mayoyo Bitumba Tipo-Tipo (1995).

²⁶ Emmanuel, Miriam, Rafael, Micah, Muhammad and Rachel. The only exception was Lillian.

come to London on their own to seek asylum, never related to their wives their reasons for fleeing the DRC after they were reunited with them.²⁷

The reasons for flight given by the young Congolese include arbitrary arrests and attacks, domestic conflict, and less often, persecution for political reasons. The dates of flights of the young Congolese correspond to the time of the national election in 2006. The political tensions in Kinshasa leading up to the election during the years 2005 and 2006 may have been implicated in the arrests of family members and the young people themselves. Narratives of flight are not easily delineated into one category above another: often the young people themselves did not know the reason for arrests and attacks on other family members. In other instances, they would not tell the nature of events that led to flight, but stressed that they had feared for their lives (see also Chase, Knight and Statham 2008; Thomas, Nafees and Bhugra 2004). The young people preferred not to speak about the practicalities involved in obtaining a passport, visa and flight or of undertaking the journey itself. They often claimed to be oblivious to the logistics involved. Considering that there are no direct flights from Kinshasa to London the journey is not altogether straightforward. In passing, young people mentioned that there had been an adult present during the flight who had shown them where to go, but they stated that they did not know the person prior to flight or that they did not know the person's full name. Some related their surprise at 'running into' a cousin from Kinshasa in the streets of Hillingdon, by 'pure chance'. It is unclear whether they were 'let in' on the arrangements of their departures. However, without doubt the young people were implicated in a 'bargain' being struck in order to escape their critical situation.²⁸

The United Kingdom was often selected as a place of destination because the young Congolese had relatives living there. However, the unaccompanied asylum seekers were sometimes the first to arrive, and were subsequently followed by other relatives. Below I relate some of the stories young people gave of their reasons for leaving Kinshasa.

²⁷ Personal communication with Liz Atherton, Co-ordinator of the Congolese Support Project, 8 May 2007. Whether wives related such stories to their husbands, I do not know.

²⁸ In Kinshasa today, anyone who is in need of either a good or a service, or who needs to resolve a problem is, without exception, in demand of a 'go-between' (Trefon 2002: 487). The work of such an agent is based on trust, ethnicity and social networks. According to Trefon, all *Kinois* are subject to this system because it is a system that permeates all sectors across the social spectrum. People who try to evade this form of solidarity are quickly brought to order, usually by trickery but sometimes by force.

Emmanuel: Escaping Execution

Emmanuel suspected that he came in the way of a bargain being struck by people who were dealing in weapons. He was accused of smuggling the weapons and was arrested by Police. He managed to escape imminent execution and fled across the border to Congo-Brazzaville. However, whether Emmanuel had any involvement in the bargain himself, remains open to interpretation. Emmanuel also related that he had played a very active role in a church in Kinshasa. In Emmanuel's own words:

‘I lived with my grandparents in Kinshasa. I was a member of a church in my street. I was often leading the prayer there. In Kinshasa you will find churches everywhere. There are prayer groups in almost every street. Religion is very important in Congo, not like here [in the United Kingdom]. People go to church every day and they pray all the time. They go to church because they suffer.

I was working for a delivery company. I was delivering parcels to different companies. One day, without my knowledge, there were weapons in the parcels that I delivered. I think that someone was trying to smuggle the weapons. Somebody told the police about it and my colleague and I were arrested and accused of smuggling the weapons. We were brought to the police station where they beat us. Then we were taken to the President's [Kabila's] palace in a military truck. We were going to be executed there. Either we were going to be put to the crocodiles or the lions, or we were going to be shot.

On the way to the presidential palace the military truck drove recklessly through the city. The car hit a woman and a child who were crossing the road. The policemen stopped to see if the woman and the child were alright. A crowd gathered and the situation became chaotic. People were telling me to run for my life. I managed to get out of the van and ran. I disappeared through the crowd. I first went to hide at my aunt's place. But I was not safe there.

They would come looking for me. The intelligence service came to my house to look for me and they interrogated my grandparents of where I was. My grandfather died as a result of this. I think he had a heart attack.

I was hiding in the day. During the night I travelled to Congo-Brazzaville where I knew somebody - a friend of my uncle, who lives in London. I had to travel during the night, because in the day the police or the military would find me and I could get shot. In Congo-Brazzaville my contact contacted my uncle in London. My uncle sent money and arrangements were made for me to go to London. I came with my uncle's friend.'

Emmanuel arrived at Gatwick airport (in the London Borough of Croydon) in 2004, but revealed himself to the local authorities weeks later in the London Borough of Hillingdon. Emmanuel had several uncles in the United Kingdom and Ireland. That was the immediate reason for his coming to the United Kingdom rather than any other European country. However, upon arrival Emmanuel did not reveal the presence of his British uncle to the social services. He claimed to be under age and was classed as an 'unaccompanied asylum seeker'. However, months later, Emmanuel admitted to the Social Services that his uncle supported him. He said that for this reason, the Home Office did not consider him a 'credible person' and his initial asylum claim was refused.

Emmanuel joined a Pentecostal church in London not long after his arrival. He met a young Congolese woman, Bonane, in Hillingdon and introduced her to his church. They fell in love and got married. Bonane had refugee status and Emmanuel resubmitted his asylum claim on the basis of being married to Bonane. Five years after his arrival to the United Kingdom, Emmanuel had not received a final outcome on his asylum claim.

Micah: Arbitrary Attacks and Domestic Conflict?

Micah came from the Tipka area in Kinshasa where he lived with his aunt and uncle. His mother lived with her husband's family (Micah's stepfather) in the Bundundu province (bordering Kinshasa). It seems likely that Micah's reasons for leaving the DRC related to the fact that he and his brother would become a burden to the rest of the family after his mother had 'disappeared'. It is possible that Micah was chosen among his younger brothers and sisters to leave the DRC because he was considered mature enough to undertake the risky enterprise. According to Micah:

'I lived with my uncle and aunty in Kinshasa. They were both working when [Laurent] Kabila was President, but after he was assassinated they lost their jobs. I also lived with my younger brother, and three younger sisters.²⁹ During my childhood I lived for many years in South Africa, in Pretoria, where my father was living.

My family attended the *Arme de l'eternel*³⁰ church in Kinshasa. My mother used to be a singer there. It was a very big church. Thousands of people used to go and it had its own TV channel in the Congo and Nigeria. The services would start seven in the morning on a Sunday and people would start queuing at four in the morning to get a seat. There was also a screen outside the building for people who could not find space inside.

I started learning the drums in a church when I was small. When I was older I got bored with the Christian music. It is always the same, every Sunday. For this reason I started playing profane music and I did not always attend church. I did not want to become a born-again. It was very difficult for my family to understand that I did not want to be a born again Christian like them. Sometimes I felt like running away from home because we were arguing about it so much.

²⁹ One 'sister' was his paternal uncle's wife's brother's daughter. The other two 'sisters' were his aunt's daughters.

³⁰ Eternal Army, referring to the battle led by Joshua.

My mother got married to another man when I was thirteen. She went to live in the Bundundu province with him. I often went to visit them there. Sometimes I stayed for many months and went to school there. But sometimes the school was full, so I had to wait for the next year to be enrolled.

Shortly before I came to London I went to visit my mother and stepfather in the Province. For some time I went to stay in my stepfather's parent's house. When I returned to my mother's house, she was not there. I thought that perhaps she had gone to Kinshasa. I took the boat to Kinshasa. When I came off the ship, I was surprised to see my uncle meeting me there. He was a different uncle to the one in Kinshasa. [His step-father's brother.] He brought me to his place in Goma. He arranged for me to come here [to London]. I didn't understand why.

We went to take my picture, to sign papers. People were asking questions. One day my uncle said: "You're going to England." I didn't understand. We thought that my mother and step-father had been attacked. So, I guess that is why he told me to go. I was crying. Before I left I didn't know where my mum was. My uncle said, "Just go, just go. If you stay in this country there is no one to help you. In the United Kingdom they will look after you." But I knew that if I left I would not find my mom. I have no contact with my family now.

There was a person next to me all the time when I changed airplanes and things, so I think he was on the same plane with me as well. But there was nobody that I recognised on the plane. When it was time to change airplanes, he showed me where to go. He spoke to me in my language. He said he knew my uncle. I trusted him. I arrived at Heathrow at 1 pm. I went to the bathroom and when I came out, that person was gone. I was wondering what would happen when I came out from the airport. One guy was saying, 'Where is your passport'. I said I didn't have one. He asked whom I had come with. I said I came with a guy from Congo. He said I had to talk to the airport people and

that the man had taken my passport. I remembered that I had given it to him along the way.’

Not long after Micah had arrived in Hillingdon, in December 2005, he met a childhood friend, Cindy, whom he had come to know during visits to his father in Pretoria, South Africa. Cindy, who was fifteen years of age, lived in Hillingdon with her mother. Micah and Cindy subsequently became lovers and had a child together. Micah also ran into his cousin (his stepfather’s sister’s son) at the Social Service’s waiting room. Micah said he did not know why his cousin had come. A different person had helped him to leave the DRC in a similar way to himself. The Home Office had refused their asylum claims, but both were appealing against the decision. Micah said that he had to prove to the Asylum Tribunal what had happened to his mother, but he did not know this himself. A support worker had told Micah during his first few days in Hillingdon that he should not lie about his circumstances and that it was better to tell ‘the truth’. However, Micah was adamant that he did not have any information to lie about. He simply did not know the full extent of events leading to his coming to the United Kingdom.

Lillian: Escaping Political Persecution

Lillian was born in Kinshasa in 1989. Her mother had some association with the Moboto family and under his presidency, the family prospered. Lillian grew up in an affluent neighbourhood (Ipenne) in Kinshasa with her older and younger brothers. She attended a private Catholic school staffed by Belgian (*‘Belge’*) nuns, between 1994 and 2005. The parents were Catholic, but Lillian herself joined a Pentecostal church in her street as a young child.

The father died or left the family in 1995 when Lillian was six. Lillian guessed that her parents had separated and that the father had found another woman. Lillian’s mother disappeared in the violence that erupted following Moboto’s removal from office in 1997. She had not heard of her mother since then. Lillian once told me that life was so bad in Kinshasa during the 1990s – especially during 1997 - that you could not live there, yet she lived. There was no food and violence was rampant. She had

witnessed a young man being shot at the back of his head and falling down beside her. She had walked over dead bodies that lie in the streets.

Lillian and her brothers moved to live with their grandparents after her mother disappeared. When the grandparents passed away in 2004 she and her brothers went to live in their own house, supported by her father's friend, Papa Jeremiah. He was a member of APARECO³¹, a political organisation opposed to the Kabila government, as was Lillian and her older brother. In March 2005 Lillian and her brother were arrested as they were organising a political meeting. Police detained them for two months. Lillian was beaten under her feet, slapped, beaten and raped many times by different men. They also made her clean the toilets in the detention. She saw her brother being beaten severely. After two months she was taken out of the prison and Papa Jeremiah helped her escape. She thought that Papa Jeremiah was later arrested and perhaps killed, as she did not hear of him again.

Lillian arrived in the United Kingdom from Kinshasa in September 2005 at the age of 16. She stayed in hospital for four days upon her arrival where she was tested for HIV and diagnosed with high blood pressure. Whilst in hospital, she consulted a clinical psychologist, who stated that she appeared to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of trauma in the DRC. Lillian was initially granted Discretionary Leave to Remain on the grounds that she was a child in need. In the asylum claim that followed, there was no uptake on the evidence of psychological trauma. Her asylum claim was rejected. Three years after her arrival to the United Kingdom, the Home Office told her that she would be granted leave to remain until 'further notice', due to their backlog of cases.

Rachel: Escaping Abduction by Government Police

Like Lillian, Rachel was born in 1989. She too was brought up in Kinshasa, but she had come from a Muslim family and from a less affluent neighbourhood than Lillian. Rachel had lived with her father, mother, sisters and brothers. Her father had worked as a clerk in a government job. Rachel had received primary schooling, but it had

³¹ *Alliance des Patriotes pour la Refondation du Congo.*

often been interrupted by lack of money in the family. She had spent a lot of time at home with her mother and younger sisters and brothers.

In 2005, Police who were looking for Rachel's father raided the family house. The Police took the mother and Rachel's siblings away, but Rachel hid outside in a trash container until they had left. She then ran to a Catholic church near her house and hid there. At the church, a Catholic priest offered her his protection. He travelled with her to the United Kingdom, claiming that Rachel was his daughter. Rachel said that she never knew the name of the priest and that she only called him 'Father'.

Rachel arrived at Heathrow airport in November 2005. In the United Kingdom Rachel decided to convert to Christianity. She said that had it not been for the priest she might not be alive and she thought it was Christianity, not Islam that had saved her.

'It is not my religion, Islam, that helped me. It is the Christian religion that helped me. [When I came here] I thought 'I need to find the church to say thanks. Now I am safe. Like before in my country I was not safe. I was scared. I was very scared for my problem, for my life. And when I went there, to the church, they protected me. That's why I am saying, was it not for that priest I would not have been protected. I couldn't protect myself, but it was because of him I was protected. I need to be praying very well for my God and give thanks.'

Stephen: Treatment of An Adult Asylum Seeker

Stephen arrived at the age of 24 in the United Kingdom. I met him at a demonstration against deportations of asylum seekers in central London in 2007. His treatment as an adult asylum seeker was radically different to his younger peers. In the DRC, he had grown up in a Catholic mission. As a young adult he became dissatisfied with the strict life at the mission and ran away. He sought asylum in Britain in 2004, but his asylum claim was rejected. He was detained and deported several times. Stephen lived with his aunt in east London and attended a Pentecostal church in Tooting. Christianity had come to his 'rescue' in detention.

‘I was born in Congo in 1980. My mother died when I was eight years old and I never knew my father. I grew up in a Catholic mission in a province near Kinshasa. I speak French, but not Lingala because that is what I was taught at the mission. Life at the mission was very strict – it was like being in custody! I was not allowed to visit other places and other young people, as I liked. The education I got was focused on priesthood, but that was something I did not want for myself. When I was eighteen I ran away. I joined Laurent Kabila’s army. The army composed of different people from all over that region in Africa. There was a lot of political strife between the different factions. My faction was accused of assassinating Kabila in 2001. That is why I had to run for my life. There was a rich man who took pity on me and protected me. He paid an agent to arrange for a French passport. I boarded an airplane from Kinshasa to Kenya, and from there I flew to the United Kingdom. I arrived in England in 2004. My asylum claim was rejected and I have been deported five times. I have also been in three detention centres, near Gatwhich, Dover and Heathrow. All in all, I was in detention for two years. I was treated very badly in detention. The guards used to beat me up. I used to want to end my life. But in one detention centre I made friends with an old Salvation Army pastor who came to visit me sometimes. He inspired me to find spiritual growth and Jesus Christ. The old priest had fought in the Second World War so he knew what it was like to be in the army. He told me to be prepared for hard times, but know that God would look out for me. I started reading the Bible and prayed a lot. Over time I learnt that the old man was right. I was able to predict what would happen to people around me in the detention centre. I could tell them not to be at a particular place at a certain time, because the guards would harass people there. The other detainees were impressed by my ability. They could see that I was a Son of God. Thanks to that pastor I was able to smile at everyone in detention and tell them that although things were bad now, everything would work out for them.’

Conclusion

In this chapter I outlined the historical and political situation from which the young asylum seekers had come. The DRC is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Millions of people have fled the civil war in the east of the country. In place of state sponsored public services, processes of informal economies have emerged. To survive the harsh urban environment, it is necessary for the *Kinois* to draw on alternative forms of support to that of public services and extended kin.

The young people in this research had fled conflicts occurring in or near Kinshasa: they were not part of the larger group of refugees escaping humanitarian crises in the east of the country. Nor do they appear to have come from the poorest households in Kinshasa. There was someone in the extended family network or other person able to arrange and pay for the young persons to leave the DRC.

Fundamentalist Christian Pentecostal churches play a central role in young people's lives in Kinshasa and in their lives as refugees. It was not uncommon for the young people to spend more time at church activities, than the people they lived with (grandparents, aunts and uncles, more often than parents). In the United Kingdom Congolese Pentecostal churches were one of the first port of call to the settled Congolese community for the newly arrived refugees. The informants reluctantly spoke about their reasons for seeking asylum. When they did, they narrated their official asylum claim stories. But there is no straightforward relationship between events that have occurred and people's memories of them (Bernard *et al.* 1984), especially as such memories are extremely politicised and 'hyped' (La Fontaine 1997) in the process of seeking asylum. Other than the frame of reference of the asylum claim, it appeared an alien concept to the Congolese refugees to talk about events leading to flight with friends or spouses.

Chapter four

Can the corporate state parent? Becoming Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers in the London Borough of Hillingdon

‘Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you’ (1 John 3: 13).

Immediately upon arrival at Heathrow airport, young refugees came into contact with immigration authorities and the social services. They were rendered dependable on the welfare system and treated as a uniform group. This chapter describes the social care procedure and the local political situation in which young people are incorporated as unaccompanied asylum seekers in the London Borough of Hillingdon. I show that the local council is fairly reluctant to include young asylum seekers into mainstream public services and full care provision. I also shed light on ways in which social workers exercise social control over the young people, such as determining their age and taking decisions on who to exclude from its full range of services.

In the United Kingdom, the social services act as the *de facto* parents of the unaccompanied asylum seekers. Referred to in social policy as the ‘corporate parent’, it is this governmental department that takes on the practical role of providing care for the young people. Since the very existence of state care means that certain rights and duties become invested in corporate organisations rather than private individuals (Bullock *et al.* 2006), the simile of the family used in this context is noteworthy. Because family and kinship relationships are felt to be natural, the symbol of the family in this context naturalizes corporate parenting as well (Delaney 1995: 177). Unaccompanied asylum seekers themselves readily accept the idea that the corporate state should parent them. They invest in the process in which they hold equal rights and come to be looked after just like local British children in state care. However, of all the children the local authority looks after, unaccompanied asylum seekers are seen to be a burden on the local government budget. Arriving in the United Kingdom and becoming an ‘unaccompanied asylum seeker’ involves rapidly learning to accept the corporate parent as a ‘natural’ care giver, but almost simultaneously, that the relationship with the corporate parent is anything but a close and caring one.

The Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 is the key mechanism for fulfilling the United Kingdom's responsibility under the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Morries 2005). This Act 1989 specifies that local authorities have a duty to provide a range of services to any child found to be 'in need' in their area, regardless of immigration status. A child in need is defined as a child 'unlikely to achieve or maintain... a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by local authorities', and a child whose 'health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired without that provision' (Children Act 1989: Part III).

A child in need is cared for by its local authority either under Section 17 or Section 20 of the Act. Section 17 addresses the provision of support and services within the home environment of the child that will safeguard and promote the child's welfare. Section 20 concerns the provision of accommodation services and support in situations where the child is abandoned or there is no person to take on parental responsibility for him or her. Unaccompanied asylum seeker children were in the past often excluded from the rights to be looked after. However, the Hillingdon judgement³² forced local authorities to acknowledge that 'where a child has no parent or guardian in this country, perhaps because he has arrived alone seeking asylum, the presumption should be that he would fall under the scope of Section 20 and become looked after' (Local Authority Circular 2003 13). The fact that asylum seeker children should be given 'looked after' status meant increased financial obligations on the part of the local authority.

There are also mechanisms to ensure that once a young person has turned 18, he or she is not isolated and is able to participate socially and economically in society. If a young person has been cared for by the local authority for at least 13 weeks and is in full-time education, he or she is entitled to continued support from the local social service authority until the age of 24, under the Children (Leaving Care) Act of 2000.

³² The judgements related to four young people supported by the London Borough of Hillingdon who the court ruled were not provided with adequate social care support. *R ex parte Berhe Kidane Munir and Ncube v London Borough of Hillingdon and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills*, High Court, 29 August 2003, [2003] EWHC 2075 (Admin), known as 'the Hillingdon Judgement'.

Research has since shown severe shortcomings in how social services manage their responsibilities towards unaccompanied children of the older age group. In a study of 212 children and young people, only 38 were under the appropriate care framework of Section 20 of the Act. Most children were provided assistance under Section 17, and were supported within the community (Wade, Mitchell and Baylis 2005).

While there are legal instruments in place to provide a wide range of services for unaccompanied asylum seekers, pressure on local authority resources have encouraged practices that conflict with specific terms of the Children Act and also its wider intentions (Morries 2005: 2). There is an apparent internal selection process within local authorities about which children should be the 'natural' legal recipient of its resources.

Can the corporate state parent unaccompanied asylum seekers?

Children in state care are not the sole responsibility of the social services. The council as a whole assumes the role of the corporate parent (Department for Education and Skills 2003). Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health (between 1997 and 1999), suggested that corporate parenthood should be conceptualised as similar to the relationship between any parent and a teenage son or daughter. A guideline to councillors around the same time ('Think Child' 1999), emphasizes that while there are legal requirements under the Children Act 1989 to carry out their work, the attitude should be a moral conscientiousness to want children 'do well at school and to get the best start in life' (Department for Education and Skills 2003:13). Health, Education and Housing services were urged to 'join up' to help social services to provide seamless care for children. Moreover, children who had spent a significant time being looked after by the local authority should afterwards be given the kind of support that decent and responsible parents would give to their own children.

The imagery of the family used in this context is noteworthy. It can be argued that because family and kinship relationships are felt to be natural, it follows that the use of imagery of the family naturalises corporate parenting (Delaney 1995: 177).

Bullock *et al.* (2006) examines the question whether the corporate state is able to parent. They argue that parenthood in the English society is comprised of personal, comprehensive and continuing commitments to children, as well as a mutual emotional attachment between them and their parents. The authors point out that the very existence of state care means that certain rights and duties become invested in corporate organisations rather than individuals. Yet it is only individual people working with the child concerned who can carry out the essential parental responsibilities that corporate organisations assume. But these individual workers are rarely assigned full responsibility. 'Attachments tend to be partial and open to disruption as the professionals and the children come and go' (Bullock et al. 2006). Once a child enters substitute care, they argue, it is this separation of actual care from formal responsibility that constrains the parenting role. In the case of young asylum seekers different aspects of care are divided up into activities performed by different groups of people, such as social workers and managers, therapists, and legal representatives. For these reasons, there is not any one person within the welfare system to carry the responsibility for maintaining overall and integrated continuity of care for the child. Under these circumstances, the corporate parent can carry out their formal duties, but is not able to provide personal and affectionate care (Bullock et al. 2006).

It is questionable whether corporate parenting was ever intended to be fully inclusive of unaccompanied asylum seekers. Since the late 1990s, the United Kingdom government has actively resisted the inclusion of this group of young people in certain measures that would protect them. Unaccompanied children do not fall under the duty of protection of 'Local Safeguarding Children Boards' that coordinate the children's services (Children Act 2004, S10). The government has also exempted the Immigration Service, the Border Agency, and Removal Centres from the duty to promote unaccompanied minor's welfare (Bhabha and Finch 2006: 38). While social services must act in the child's best interest, the Immigration Service is under no such obligation. This is problematic for local authorities since social services are required to share confidential information about the unaccompanied minors should the immigration service need it. In July 2005, the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) (now the Boarder Agency, BA) launched the National Register for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, a database where information

about the asylum seekers could be shared between the Home Office and the Local Authority. Local authorities are of the view that the BA uses the database to aid the removal of young people once they have reached 18 (Morries 2005).

The social care process in Hillingdon

Age assessment

When unaccompanied young people arrive at Heathrow airport the Immigration Service carries out an initial interview with them. If the immigration officers deem it likely that the person is a minor, he or she is referred to the Intake Team at the Young Persons Asylum Service. The Young Persons Asylum Service is the specialist team within the Department of Social Services that provide care for unaccompanied asylum seeker children in Hillingdon. Once a young person has been referred to the Intake Team, an initial assessment of age takes place to determine whether he or she is eligible for its services (e.g. is sixteen or seventeen years of age). If the young person is granted access to social care, he or she is referred to as their 'client'.

Not all unaccompanied young people come to the Intake Team directly from Heathrow airport. They are often picked up from Colnbrook or Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centres because the immigration service believed that the young person was over 18 years of age.³³ If the young person continues to claim that he or she is a minor, the Intake Team can carry out an age assessment of the young person at the detention centre. In a practice guideline for age assessment of young unaccompanied asylum seekers (Hillingdon 2005), it is stated that:

‘Assessment of age is a complex task, which is a process and not an exact science. This is further complicated by many of the young people attempting to portray a different age from their true age. ...In circumstances of age uncertainty, the benefit of doubt should always be the standard practice.’

³³ ‘Roughly half of all unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom in recent years have had their claim to be under 18 years of age disputed by the Home Office’ (Crawley 2006: 13-14 in Boyden and Hart 2007: 245).

In the autumn of 2005 I witnessed an age assessment of an Afghan boy, Ameen Hadi. The boy and nine other people were found wondering on the M1 motorway on 7 June 2005. Bedfordshire police were alerted and picked up the refugees at Junction 12. Ameen Hadi was taken to Colnbrook detention Centre in Hillingdon. He claimed to be a minor and was therefore referred to the Asylum Intake Team. Two social workers from the team did an initial age assessment at Colnbrook. They assessed that Ameen Hadi was around sixteen years of age. The social workers placed him in local authority accommodation.

Ameen Hadi was allocated to a fourth social worker of the Asylum Intake Team, Sunita, who had worked with the boy for four months in October 2005. She carried out another age assessment of Ameen Hadi October 27. Her feeling was that he was much older than he claimed to be. Sunita said that age assessments were the most difficult part of her job. In this case, she said, the age assessment had not yet been done formally. The boy's age had until then been noted to be fifteen. This was also the age the boy claimed to be.

The assessment was held at the Young Persons Asylum Team premises. Ameen Hadi had been told that it would take place at one in the afternoon. He sat waiting in the reception area of the building. He was fairly short and small built. He looked like he could pass for a fourteen or twenty year old. He had black hair, hairy arms and shaved facial hair. The interpreter was behind schedule and Ameen Hadi had to wait an hour and a half for the meeting to begin. Before the interview, Sunita asked Wini, a colleague social worker to attend the meeting and to pay particular attention to the boy's appearance and reactions. When the interpreter had turned up, Sunita explained to Ameen Hadi why he was there. In a small cubicle adjacent to the reception area, Sunita went through a series of questions, to which the boy answered, 'I have answered these questions ten times already'. Sunita asked questions about family life, celebrations of birthdays, and what he used to do in his spare time. Here is an extract from the interview:

‘Sunita: How do you know your date of birth?’

Ameen Hadi: My mother told me: this is your age if anyone asks.

S: How old were you when she told you?’

- A: She told me before I was going to the UK: your age is fifteen. Just three days before I came here. That is what she told me.
- S: Did you celebrate birthdays?
- A: Yes.
- S: How old were you at the last one?
- A: Fourteen.
- S: How did you celebrate it?
- A: We made food, family and relatives came. That's it.
- S: Do you have a birth certificate?
- A: No.
- S: How do you think your parents know your age? Do you know your birthday in any other format but the English calendar?
- A: No, I never asked for date of birth. We never had birth certificates to look at.
- S: So even your mother's guess is approximate?
- A: No, because a mother knows when her child is born, so my mother knew.
- (...)
- S: What did you do with your friends?
- A: I don't know, smoking, talking. [further probing from Sunita]. I wasn't doing much, going for walks. Me and my friends used to sit together and talk. Just talking, sometimes playing cards, walking.
- S: How old were your friends? Did you have a girlfriend, did you try alcohol?
- A: They were the same age as me. I had no girlfriend, it is not allowed in Afghanistan to have a girlfriend. I never tasted alcohol either, it is forbidden.
- S: Why did you try smoking?
- A: Sometimes I wanted to try.

Ameen Hadi was asked to wait outside the cubicle while Sunita made her decision of his age. It was clear that she was carrying out a profiling exercise, attempting to make an informed guess in relation to what she assumed a fifteen year old boy was likely to

act and look like. She had already made up her mind, prior to the assessment, however, based on her interaction with Ameen Hadi over the past four months. She said that he was acting ‘very mature and responsibly’, and was able to look after himself well, so she was sure that he must be older than he claimed. Sunita and her colleagues were under pressure from their management to restrict the number of lone asylum seekers provided with care services. In the disjuncture between her expectations of the boy’s physical appearance and behaviour, and Ameen Hadi’s life experiences and the age he claimed to be (Boyden and Hart 2007: 245), she was required to make a radical choice.

Ameen Hadi was called into the cubicle. Sunita said to him that she was going to determine his age at seventeen and a half, and not fifteen. Ameen Hadi refused to accept the decision. ‘That is not my age’, he said. ‘Every time I come here you say I am older.’ Sunita gave Ameen Hadi a copy of her statement, but he refused to take it. She said, ‘You can take it to your solicitor. You have the right to appeal the decision’. Ameen Hadi said, ‘I’m not coming here again.’ ‘Are you not coming for your money either then?’, said Sunita.

For Ameen Hadi, having his age put at seventeen and half instead of fifteen would have significant implications for his future in the United Kingdom. Now he would be treated as an adult by the immigration authority and he could be deported.

Accommodation

If the young person is under fifteen years of age or younger, he or she is placed in a foster care home. The foster care homes are usually located outside of Hillingdon Borough. Local children taken into care are given preference to local foster families due to a shortage of foster parents. When the young person reaches 18 years of age, the foster care arrangement discontinues and the young person is housed within the Borough of Hillingdon. The young person who had made friends and started schooling at their first location often described the transition to the London Borough of Hillingdon from a different area as disruptive and upsetting. A sixteen year-old boy from Eritrea said this in a focus group discussion:

‘Because I’m under Hillingdon social services, they are supposed to put me in the Hillingdon area now that I’ve turned sixteen. But when I first came, they put me in Angel [northeast London]. My friends are in Islington and Holloway. I have lived there for two years now. Now they [social services] are telling me that they are going to move me to Hillingdon. But I am used to living in Islington. It will be hard for me to make new friends, and find a college that will take me. Isn’t it just better for me to stay in my area where I can continue my education and stay with my friends? I don’t even know the Hillingdon area, I just know Uxbridge station, I’ve seen the cinema, the shopping centre, that’s it, that’s all I know.’

Social workers working with this age group also described their unease with having to move their clients out of stable foster home placements into a care arrangement where they were expected to manage independently in a new community setting. To quote a Social Worker in Hillingdon:

‘A lot of young people are living out of Hillingdon Borough and when they are 18 we have to move them out of foster care placement because the package has finished. This is because of the Leaving Care Act that has changed.... That’s the really difficult part of my job because some of them they live there [in their foster families] for 3 or 4 years and they don’t want to come to Hillingdon. They want to settle where they are, and find accommodation in that area. ... [when we move them] they get isolated from their friends, their family... We all work very hard to find accommodation in that area.’³⁴

Young asylum seekers who are 16 or 17 years of age are accommodated in ‘supported housing’ in the Hillingdon Borough. These are houses in which each young person is allocated a room and either have their own, or share a kitchen and bathroom. There is always an adult supervisor or support worker present in these homes. Support workers also visit the accommodations regularly to monitor the young people’s concerns. However, these visits are usually superficial, as the support workers often do not

³⁴ Social worker at focus group discussion 11 June 2007.

know the young person personally. Clients are not allowed to stay away overnight since this may be a sign that they have 'absconded' or that they have been abducted. If the young people do stay away for more than one night, Support Workers contact the Police.³⁵

When clients reach eighteen years of age they are moved out of supported accommodation to be placed in unsupported placements, called 'independent houses'. These are regular houses or flats across the Borough that the local council rents from private landlords. Each young person has his or her own room and share kitchen and bathroom with others. Asylum seekers from different nationalities are always placed in the same houses. They are not accommodated with British children in care.

Assignment of personal or 'duty' social worker

When the young person has been placed in accommodation, he or she is allocated a social worker. However, most research subjects did not have a personal worker assigned to them because of staff shortages at the Young Persons Asylum Team. It was more common that the young person was supported via a 'duty worker', a staff member of the asylum service who took on outstanding clients after a rolling schedule. Whenever the young people had a problem, they were required to make their way to the Young Persons Asylum Team in Uxbridge, to line up in a queue for at least an hour to be served by the duty worker. This system caused considerable frustration among the young asylum seekers. The service was impersonal and after they had been waiting for a long time, they were often told that their issue depended on their obtaining a document of some kind from their college or solicitor.

Health checks, subsistence allowance, legal matters, and statutory review

After having been allocated a Social Worker, or having consulted the Duty Worker, the young people are assisted with dentist, optician, and health check-ups. They receive a clothing allowance worth £100 for summer and £150 for winter, and are

³⁵ Abduction of children from supported accommodation in Hillingdon is a real problem. At least 77 Chinese children have 'gone missing' from such accommodation since March 2006. It is believed that these children contact their trafficking agents who pick them up at the homes (The Guardian Tuesday 5 May 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/may/05/china-child-trafficking-heathrow>).

assisted with finding cheap clothes. They are also given £44 a week to spend on a bus pass, cleaning materials, toiletries, hair cut, and other expenses.³⁶

Social Workers facilitate appointment with solicitors. They also accompany young people to the Home Office to lodge a claim for asylum, unless this was done at the port of entry. The next step in the social care work is a statutory review of the child's welfare, progress and future possibilities, and a determination of whether the child would continue to be looked after. The review sometimes takes place within just a few days of the young person's arrival. In the case of a local child, the review would include information from teachers, carers and professionals in contact with him or her, but in the case of unaccompanied asylum seekers, it contains the initial assessment, which often builds on information from the child alone, and sometimes also a medical assessment. The child, the duty- or allocated worker, an interpreter, and the Independent Reviewing Officer, who chairs the meeting, attend the review meeting. If the child does not have a social worker, he or she may not have met the duty worker prior to the meeting. According to the Child Commissioner, the Independent Reviewing Officer is in fact not independent as he or she appears to be registered social worker employees of Hillingdon and is therefore affected by the policy of their employer (Hamilton and Matthews 2007).

After the review meeting, the young person is referred to one of the three different sub- teams, depending on the age of the client. These are the under 16; the 16 to 18 years of age team; and the 18 years and older age teams.

Education

Social care workers assign young persons to English tutoring classes. Young people often wait two months or more to enter these classes. This time period represents a confusing hiatus in the life of young asylum seekers: they have minimal contact with social care services and have not yet begun to trust and make friends with other young people around them.

³⁶ The client is assisted with the cost of travel to the Home Office and refreshments there.

After the young people have completed English classes of a certain standard they are able to apply for courses at local colleges. They are generally not accepted to schools that teach the national curriculum, but they are usually accepted onto vocational courses such as 'Health and Social Care', and 'Ticket and Tourism'. The young people value the opportunity to learn English and obtain an education, but are also of the view that they are discriminated against and barred from entering schools where 'English' children study. They described their 'own' colleges as places where most students do not speak English as their first language and where many of the other students were also asylum seekers.

Unaccompanied asylum seekers as an economic burden

From 2003, the Hillingdon Borough's financial obligation to the unaccompanied asylum seekers increased dramatically. This occurred as a result of the Hillingdon Judgement that determined that local authorities had a duty to provide after-care services for unaccompanied asylum seekers as well as British children in care. This led to reorganisation in the Young Persons Asylum Service and the creation of a new team that dealt with clients 18 years of age and older.

To provide stately care for children is costly. The average gross weekly cost to social services for placing a single child in local authority care in England is £675 (Department for Education and Skills 2005 in Ward and Holmes 2008). Children in local authority care constitute seventeen percent of the total population that social services care for. Yet, they take up 61 percent of the resources available (Ibid 2008: 80).

In 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) limited funding for unaccompanied asylum seeker who were eighteen years of age and older. The DFES grant money was cut from £140 to £100 per person per week. Hillingdon sought a judicial review of the cut in the grant, on the basis that it was unlawful. The Hillingdon Local Authority argued that it had a right to expect the same amount of

funding as the year previously.³⁷ It also challenged the Secretary of State's change in policy in providing funding to those local councils most affected by the Hillingdon Judgement.

However, the Secretary of State with which the court agreed, submitted that she had never approved that the leaving care grant would remain at the rate of £140 per week in the years following the 2004/2005 financial year. The court decided that the leaving care grant had been a discretionary payment and that it was lawful for the Secretary of State to decide on the conditions of the grant after the local authority had incurred the costs (Care and Health Law 2007).³⁸

The financial conflict between the Local Authority and the Secretary of State was not resolved. Hillingdon's three members of parliament and the Conservative Party leaders of the Hillingdon Council presented a united front to support the council's case (Hillingdon Times 15 January 2007).³⁹ The Service Manager of the Young Persons Asylum Team said in an interview in *The Guardian* newspaper:

‘Every one of my staff does their best for these young people, and it can be very distressing work. A lot of these children who come to the UK have got horrible stories to tell. Some have been raped or tortured, and many are totally alone. The government seems to be demanding that we provide for these young people's welfare, and at the same time is denying us the adequate funding to do it. It's not clear what they expect us to do’. (Paula Neil, *The Guardian Unlimited*, 31 January 2007.)

³⁷ ‘The doctrine of legitimate expectation provides that where a public authority has made a promise or adopted a practice that represents how it proposes to act in a given area, fairness requires that the promise or practice should be honoured unless there is a good reason for not doing so’ (Care and Health Law London Borough of Hillingdon v Secretary of State for Education and Skills [2007] EWHC 514. <http://www.careandhealthlaw.com/Public/Index.aspx?ContentID=-66&IndexType=1&TopicID=533&Category=1>. Downloaded 4 February 2008.)

³⁸ Care and Health Law London Borough of Hillingdon v Secretary of State for Education and Skills [2007] EWHC 514. <http://www.careandhealthlaw.com/Public/Index.aspx?ContentID=-66&IndexType=1&TopicID=533&Category=1>. Downloaded 4 February 2008.)

³⁹ In the local election campaign in 2006, the Conservative party won the contest in Hillingdon. In the previous election period there had been no overall control of the major parties.

The Conservative Party Leader of Hillingdon Council, pointed to a £10 million shortfall in the council's budget and that 120 redundancies had been made in 2006 as a result (Ray Puddifoot, *The Guardian Unlimited*, 31 January 2007). The local Labour Party lamented that deficits in the council's budget was a result of the Conservative Party's mismanagement of funds that put the local authority at a crisis in 2000.⁴⁰ A financial adviser to the council suggested that mismanagement of the local budget was the real cause of the problem and that it had little to do with the asylum seeker children.⁴¹

In the wake of Hillingdon council's funding crisis, services to the young asylum seeker were illegally and covertly withdrawn. The Children's Commissioner, Aynsley-Green, alleged at a parliamentary committee on human rights that as a matter of policy, Hillingdon council was intentionally and unlawfully depriving unaccompanied asylum-seeking children of social service support in order to cut costs (Hamilton and Matthews 2007).

Writing to the Hillingdon Council, the Commissioner alleged that it prematurely moved all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from the looked-after care system to the leaving care system, where children had fewer rights. According to the Commissioner:

'The policy change on looked after UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeker children) by Hillingdon has not been publicly announced, and thus the reasons for the change are unclear. However, it is likely that the need to make financial savings play a part. By de-accommodating [discontinue the looked after care system] UASC children after a short period of time, social work will be saved, there will no longer be a need for statutory reviews, saving the Independent Review Officer time and the services that will need to be offered to care leavers are likely to be very considerably less than those owed to looked after children. It has also been suggested that reducing the numbers of 'looked after' children, also reduces the number of unallocated cases [to a Social

⁴⁰ The Labour party's election manifesto 2006.

⁴¹ Financial adviser to Hillingdon Local Authority, personal communication September 2007.

Worker], thus shielding the authority from criticism on this issue.⁴² (Hamilton and Matthews 2007).

The evidence, denied by Hillingdon, suggested that the authority operated a two-tier funding system, using loopholes in the law to deny unaccompanied minors their full range of rights and services given to children with British passports. The same practice, the Commissioner said, was not applied to British children who remained in looked after care until the age of 18. The Asylum Service kept unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the looked-after care system for 13 weeks; the minimum period young people must spend in care to qualify for leaving care services. These children were then moved to the leaving care system at the age of 16. The practice was unlawful since it meant disregard of ‘child-in-need assessments’ laid down by the Children Act 1989. The role of the Local Authority as the Corporate Parent then lost its real meaning.⁴³

In this way unaccompanied asylum seekers were singled out from other children in looked after care to take the brunt of the local governmental budget deficit. This selection process can be seen in the light of ‘politics of recognition’ (Fraser 1999: 25). Seeking recognition as asylum seekers meant that the young people were not accepted as ‘natural’ holders of entitlements. Some advocates of the unaccompanied asylum seekers pressed the aspect of the politics of recognition in the debate. They argued that the underlying assumption of service providers was that children without British passports were deemed unworthy of services. They feared that the ways in which local authorities saved money on unaccompanied asylum seeking children would become acceptable solutions in upcoming governmental reform programmes.⁴⁴ Lisa Nandy, policy advisor at the Children’s Society, gave evidence to the Parliamentary Committee where the Commissioner presented his report. She said in an interview in *The Guardian* that:

⁴² E.g. that clients do not have a personal social worker allocated to them.

⁴³ A policy advisor to the Children’s Commissioner said that ‘local authorities cease to be the corporate parent as they provide a much lesser level of service’ (Adrian Matthews, Community Care, 10 January 2007).

⁴⁴ They referred to the Reform Program introduced by the government in October 2005. The Reform Programme was such that it could potentially relieve the majority of local authorities of any responsibility for unaccompanied asylum seekers who would come under the National Asylum Support Service to which adult asylum seekers are allocated (Bhabha and Finch 2006: 79).

‘...there's a feeling that it's OK to give these children substandard care... we've got local authorities finding ways of shirking their responsibilities and a new reform programme that is potentially preaching the message that it makes no sense to spend money on people who shouldn't be here in the first place. How are we going to give these young people the support they need if we're classing them as asylum seekers first and children second?’ (*The Guardian Unlimited* 31 January 2007).

Clients under social control

The question of how to support young asylum seekers in relation to restrictive governmental immigration policies evidently troubled many social workers in the asylum service as well. They grappled with the conflict to provide social care on the one hand and having the role of exerting social control on the other.

Trotter (2006) writes that ‘involuntary clients’ of social workers tend to be those in the welfare or legal systems for government departments or for agencies funded by government departments. Social workers working with these clients generally have two roles: a legalistic or surveillance role and a helping, therapeutic or problem-solving role (Trotter 2006: 4). Trotter points out that ‘coming to terms with this dual role is one of the greatest challenges in work with such clients. Often workers and organisations find it easier to focus on one of the roles to the exclusion of the other.’ (Trotter 2006: 4). Humphries maintains social work has always had an ambivalent relationship with those who use state services, but that under New Labour the balance has shifted ‘decisively towards control, restriction, surveillance, and ultimately exclusion’ (Humphries 2004: 94). This was often the view of social workers in the team whose clients were older than eighteen and who had come to the end of the social service care. These young people often had no entitlements to social benefits because they were not attending higher education or training. Their Social Workers pointed to the conflict of interest in dealing with people who are subject to often-unjust rules and regulations. These social workers grappled with pressure from management, who perhaps were more removed from the helping role than the social workers themselves, and what they saw as the immorality of making decisions that

were not in clients' best interest. The way the social workers were required to treat their clients could not always be traced to changes in formal policies, but often pertained to informal policies communicated to them by their managers. The managers, in turn, were under pressure by the local government to deal with the reality of a financial crisis.

A Social Worker from the Asylum Transition Team stated the following in a focus group discussion during June 2007:

‘...the best thing about the job is working with young people from different cultural backgrounds and then getting to know them... I really like this part. But the worst thing is, my team is dealing with clients after the age of 18. And often we have to close the case at the age of 21 and it is the most stressful time for us and the client. And I really don't like it because, you start with a human being, you start a relationship with a person and then at the end of the day, you start to think, you've only started to help them to set up a new life in this country. And then comes the time when you can't do anything because the Immigration says it is out of your hands, and you have to close a case with a mother and baby, pregnant girl, vulnerable client with serious mental health issue... And you know NASS doesn't take them - there is nothing for this client. For me it is like you are leaving somebody, you haven't completed the things you were aiming to do. You are leaving them with nothing. It is stressful. I've had lots of difficult times with a pregnant girl. I had to close the case. I couldn't do anything. I had no choice. I had lots of pressure from the management to close the case. I know they are under pressure themselves, but it is a human being that you are closing. It takes a lot of time to prepare a client [for the closure of social care]. We do not get enough time to prepare a client, because we have to close within 1 week or 2 weeks, which is really a disaster, a horrible time.’

A Personal Advisor of the same team also stated that it was at the age of 18 that the real difficulties for unaccompanied asylum seekers began:

‘I enjoy working with young people, with my colleagues, but the most stressful in my work is that we are dealing with the over 18s and that is the time when their problems are starting with the refusal of the application for the extension [of leave to remain], going to courts, going to Eton House [reporting centre], or when they are refused and the immigration people go to their house and take them away, without informing us. That is most stressful to us. We have had cases with mothers and babies taken away and we have young people that are absconding because of that and this is most stressful for them, but it is reflected on us, when they don’t have a place to go, because they don’t want to go voluntarily and what should they do? NASS doesn’t accept them, so they say “Alright, I will go to report to Eton House”⁴⁵, but if they report to Eton House they [Immigration] will stop you there. So it’s very stressful when we have cases like that. It’s very sad to say that it is very stressful for us and that is the negative side of our work.’

Being in no other position than to receive the help from the social services from the outset, this ‘help’ also became a source of debilitating stress later on because it undermined the personal resources of individuals to work things out for themselves (Harrel-Bond 1999).

A bureaucratised care system

The unaccompanied asylum seekers in the London Borough of Hillingdon often expressed their frustrations over their dealing with a highly bureaucratised care and protection system. In this system they could exercise little personal choice over the amount of money they received, where they lived and with whom, and whether they could stay in United Kingdom. They also had few opportunities to come into direct contact with any person who had actual decision-making power over their concerns. While the social workers were obliged to elicit the wishes and feelings of their clients and give due consideration when making any decision about how to meet their needs

⁴⁵ Certain asylum seekers are required to report their presence frequently at Immigration reporting centres. The purpose is for the Immigration authority to ensure that the asylum seeker is not going into hiding.

(Section 53 of the Children Act 2004), in practice, when young people complained about noisy and dirty accommodation, for example, the complaints were passed on to the next duty worker in line.

Those young people who had a personal social worker allocated to them invested heavily into that relationship. They generally spoke fondly of the worker and the help they received. Some of these young people talked of a close bond with their social worker, saying that the social worker was ‘like a mother’ to them. A 17-year old Somali girl said about her social worker at a focus group discussion: ‘My social worker, she helps me, she makes me feel happy. I feel like my social worker is like my mum.’ Other young people, who had been assisted by the service for longer and had been moved on to different teams, often did not have a personal social worker allocated to them. These young people were of the view that it was only worth their while to ask for help with accommodation, health problems, education, money, and so forth if they knew of a person in the service that was sympathetic to them. With these ‘sympathetic adults’ they tended to create a patron-client relationship (see Chapter five). To the extent possible, the young people avoided asking for assistance from a duty worker. When they did, the experience often played out in the following manner.

Visits to the duty worker

A young man from Ethiopia said the following about a visit to the duty worker:

‘When you call social services, in emergency, they are not there. They are not in the office. Even though they give you a duty social worker, you have to explain your whole life story before you can get any help: “Where do you come from? How long have you been here?” And they say, “Oh, you have to wait for your social worker to come.” And it’s really, not appropriate I think. (...) Two months ago I had a plan to go to Manchester to do something so they asked me to sign a paper to say that I want to go with some person older than me, and I gave them everything. But that time I came, the social worker she wasn’t there. I had travelled all the way from east London. They asked me to speak to duty social worker and I told them everything. I had sent the paper by fax everything that they asked for. But they told me, “You have to wait until

your social worker comes back”. So basically I had to miss it, that plan I had decided to go to see some friends in Manchester. After two weeks my social worker came and she apologised and everything. But she is apologising all the time but she keeps doing that so, I don’t know...’

In September 2006, Miriam had not received her benefit money. Miriam was 18 years old and received an allowance of £40 per week. This amount did not allow her to save any money and she needed to resolve the matter urgently in order to buy food and a bus card. Together we went to the duty worker at the Young Persons Asylum Team in Uxbridge. We went on the only day in the week that Miriam was free from college: Miriam needed to show high attendance at school in order to receive her benefit and therefore felt she could not take time out of school to go to the duty worker.

The Young Persons Asylum Team had its own premises separate from mainstream social work. The building was located south of the Uxbridge town centre on a newly built industrial estate. The young people entered the building through a side entrance. Social workers entered through security locked main entrances of either side of the building.

An incident had occurred a few months earlier that had led to tightened security in the building. An angry client had made his way from the clients’ waiting room into the social workers’ open-planned work areas. There he had lifted up a monitor on one of the computer desks and thrown it on the floor. Since then, there was a security guard stationed at the young peoples’ entrance door and the young peoples’ waiting room had been sealed off to other areas of the building.

Miriam and I signed in at the reception desk and sat down on chairs lining the walls in the waiting room. There were many other young people of different nationalities waiting in the room. There was an atmosphere of frustration and boredom. Heavy sighs could be heard. The young people did not seem to know each other and did not talk to one another. Many social workers passed through the waiting area. They did not acknowledge any of the young peoples’ presence – nor mine, despite knowing me at this stage - but swiftly passed through the waiting area.

Miriam and I waited for one hour and a half until a person behind the duty desk served Miriam. Miriam spoke in a low voice. The worker asked her to repeat her question more loudly. Miriam spoke louder. The person behind the desk spoke loudly and slowly in reply, loud enough for everyone to hear in the room: 'You need to get a piece of paper from your college to prove that you are studying there.' Miriam and I left. Miriam was disappointed and angry. She felt that she had wasted half the day going to the duty worker only to be told to come back again with a piece of paper. She said that the duty worker made her feel stupid; talking to her like she had little intelligence. She knew it would take her at least another week to receive her money. She said that the Social Services 'knew' that she was studying at the college and that in any case they could find out by phoning them. Miriam herself did not have enough money to make phone calls and she found it difficult to make herself understood in English during telephone conversations. Other than the occasional visit to the duty worker, Miriam, like most other informants, had generally very little contact with the social services.

'Hard to reach population'

Health and social care policy and best practice guidelines often describe unaccompanied asylum seekers as a 'hard-to-reach' population (Department of Health 2004). My observations during research shed some light on the difficulty of reaching the young people, and the young peoples' difficulties in accessing advice and assistance from people around them, in turn.

Most of the young people could not be easily reached through telephone or letter. They were not easily contacted via telephone because they either did not have one or had changed their phone numbers as they had come across a better deal with a different phone company. In addition, the young people did not have money to phone a person back whose call they had missed. When letters were sent to the young people that did not relate to their benefit payments or Home Office decisions, the letters were often left un-opened by the young people. The young people had come to ignore letters that did not directly affect them; they did not open them because they often did not understand what the purpose of the letter was and had no person around them to explain their contents. These letters were often compiled by the landlord or landlady

who threw them away. Moreover, the young people were moved frequently, and the database with their postal addresses was not always updated.

Young people who lived in supported accommodation, where there was always an adult on site, normally received letters sent to them and a telephone message could be passed on to the young people. However, the contents of the letters were not explained or comprehended, nor the purpose of a meeting. The young people were simply told that they needed to be at a specific place at a certain time. For these young people, language was often a barrier as they had not been in the United Kingdom for very long.

It was such experiences that led the young people who had been in the United Kingdom for a longer period of time to only respond to matters that concerned their asylum applications or benefit payments. They had become 'alienated' from the care system. In was in relation to this relationship with the social services that Lillian stated: 'The social services just give us money, but they don't care for us or our future.'

The other contact the young people had with the social services except the duty worker was the house visits by workers of the Young Peoples Asylum Service. However, such house visits often took place during the day when the young people were in college. I shadowed a worker, Andrew, of the Young People Asylum Service as he went on such house visits in November 2005. The interactions I observed between the worker and the clients were of a superficial nature. The young people did not give much to the encounter, as they did not want to reveal any problems to a person who they did not know.

Andrew and I first visited the supported accommodation in Hillingdon. The house had a reception desk and computers along the walls of the room facing the street. It therefore passed for an Internet café to the local population. At the back of the building was an entrance to flats with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities. We arrived during college time and Andrew said that he would be 'horrified' if people were at home because they should be in school. He chatted to the general manager at the reception desk about whether there were any problems in the house. We then went

around the building with separate flats for girls and boys, and knocked on peoples' doors. One Ethiopian girl was at home. She said she had the day off from college. Andrew asked if there were any problems with the accommodation. The girl said that there were no problems. Andrew asked her about a newly arrived girl in the property and whether she had let her boyfriend stay there overnight. The Ethiopian girl did not want to answer Andrew's question. Andrew said, 'I need to know because she was kicked out from her last accommodation for this reason.' Andrew asked the girl whether she herself had a social worker. The girl said that she did not have a social worker but that she needed one. Andrew asked her why. The girl replied:

'Why? Because many different people who I don't know come to ask things and they don't know me. They ask me to come to the office and when I go there they ask, [who are you?] – Bullshit!'

We visited several other placements for young people who were 18 years of age and older and who lived in independent housing. Andrew asked the young people general questions about their houses, reminded them to sign in on the registration list by the door, and whether they had any problems. None of the young people had a social worker, nor did they report any problems. Two Albanian boys habited one house. Upon the question whether they had social workers, one of them said he could not remember.

Andrew and I then took the bus to Southall. We arrived at a house as a young man was walking out. The boy was 20 years old and from Iraq. He said he had just moved into the accommodation three days ago, but his name was not on the register pinned up on a wall in the kitchen. He was therefore not sure whether he was supposed to live there. Andrew said, 'As long as you have a roof over your head for now and the landlord is not complaining.' The boy had 'made himself homeless' by refusing a room that he said was much too small. Andrew said that for the Home Office, a box room where a person could not even lay stretched out was acceptable, but for the Social Services and the clients it was not.

The boy said that he had moved down to London from North England. His social work papers had not been received by Hillingdon and he had not received any money.

The job centre said he had to fill in a form in order to receive job seeker allowance. The social services had explained to him that he needed to show the case number he had been allocated in North England, but the boy did not know that number and could not fill in the form. He had not eaten the night before or that morning. He asked if he could come with us to the social services. Andrew said that he could but that he could not promise that the boy would get help that day.

At the social services the boy was asked to wait at the reception. Andrew said that his Manager would have to sign for any money that the boy would be given, but as she was in a meeting he could not talk to her. I pushed Andrew a little: was there really no other way, no emergency cash available anywhere? After all, the young man must be hungry. Andrew asked one of the administrators. He said that Andrew should fill in all the necessary details of the form that the manager needed to sign and then disrupt the meeting. The young man was in luck: he was granted two weeks subsistence money that he needed to collect every two weeks thereafter.

Conclusion

The relationship between the unaccompanied asylum seekers and the social services is far removed from the intensions of the 'corporate parent' model. It is fraught with conflicting roles and embedded in a highly politically sensitive area of work – asylum seekers and the state that protects them. In the London Borough of Hillingdon at the time of fieldwork, the young asylum seekers were reluctantly included into mainstream social care provision. 'When resources are scarce relative to need, organisations and individual workers are under pressure to restrict eligibility' (Morries 2005: 25) and it falls upon the social workers to execute such decisions in practice. Of all the children the local authority looks after, it is the unaccompanied asylum seekers that are seen as a burden on the local governmental budget. The young people welcome their benefits from the social services and the protection they have during the asylum claims process. However, they come over time to retract their engagement with their corporate parent in other matters. For many young people, the 'social care package' ends when they reach the age of 18.

The young asylum seekers under the care of Hillingdon local authority frequented a sphere parallel to British young people of the same age. They lived in separate houses and they studied separate college courses. While the social services provided the young people with basic accommodation and subsistence, young people often became alienated from the corporate parent. The conditions of social care provision for the unaccompanied asylum seekers in this research were not on their own helping the young people to cope well with daily life: thus they had to find ways of doing this among themselves.

It is perhaps remarkable that the young Congolese and the other young people found such faults with the social care system. Despite its shortcomings, young people were nevertheless materially much better off than they would have been in their country of origin. In the next chapter I show that arriving in the United Kingdom the young people were met by a whole different reality than that experienced and imaged in Kinshasa.

Chapter five

Constructing Primary Personal Relationships and attachments to place

‘You call this a house? You should come to Kinshasa! Here we don’t even have a microwave!’ - Lillian, unaccompanied asylum seeker from the DRC

In Kinshasa, the local, rich urban elite and expatriates inspired the glorified image of the West. According to De Boeck:

‘In Congo, as elsewhere in Africa, the mirror of the West conjures up the property of the marvellous. The collective social imagery concerning the West (referred to as *Putu*, *Miguel*, *Mikili* or *Zwenebele*) is rich in fairy tale images that conjure up the wonderland of modernity, and the luxurious, almost paradisiacal lifestyle of the West’ (De Boeck 2004: 46).

However, life in Hillingdon turned out to be a rather different reality. While the young people were granted temporary protection and assisted with basic subsistence, they were rarely granted citizenship. The fortnightly allowances did not allow for any savings and the houses in which the young people were placed were dilapidated, dirty and shared with noisy peers. When the young people complained about their houses, over-worked social workers generally dismissed their complaints. Many of the young people also experienced a profound sense of loneliness and disturbance from leaving their family relations behind.

Amidst their relative poverty, an inventory of girls’ and boys’ rooms revealed a wealth of personal paraphernalia, computer- and music equipment and fashionable clothes. The young people acquired these items from significant others, ‘sympathetic adults’ in the welfare system, notably mental health workers, and from their churches. Whilst the welfare system turned out to be a disappointment, the young people found ‘agents’ within the system with whom they could strike bargains. To rely on an informal *arrangement* (arrangement) (De Boeck 1998b) and *coop* (deal) (Trefon

2002) in order to acquire services or goods, were not alien practices to the young Congolese. This had been a daily feature of life in Kinshasa.

In this chapter I shed light on the different kinds of relationships the young Congolese created in Hillingdon and the transactions that took place within them. These relationships were friendships, patron-client relationships, kinships (Wolf 1980[1966]) and transactional love relationships (Hunter 2002). In these relationships, transactions of goods, services, esteem, emotional need, and sex took place. I argue that the emotional motive and satisfaction derived from transactional love relationships and patron-client relationships are intermingled with the materiality gained from them. Hunter illustrates that in Kwazulu-Natal, transactional relationships occur between young, poor women and older, relatively well-off men. Some women engage in these relationships because they have no other means of subsistence (*sex linked to subsistence*). Other young women however, engaged in such relationships in order to obtain goods – including mobile phones, fashionable clothes and shoes - that symbolize wealthy, comfortable and classy life-styles (*sex linked to consumption*). Neither of the two types of transactional sex, however, corresponds to the Western concept of prostitution. In these relationships, sexual partners talk of each other as boyfriends and girlfriends, and the exchange of gifts for sex is part of a broader set of obligations that might not involve a predetermined payment (Hunter 2002: 101). In Hunter's research, however, it appears that meaningful relationships beyond their material aspects are undervalued. For the young men and women in this research, meaningful relationships are *signified* by the transaction of material goods for sex. A man who does not provide for his girlfriend is perceived to disrespect her. He gives her reasons to believe that he is unfaithful. Young men, on their part, know that they cannot engage in serious relationships unless they can provide for the woman. In a similar vein, while patron-client relationships can be thought of as instrumental (Wolf 1980[1966]), they also satisfy emotional needs. When young refugees perceive themselves to be completely alone in Britain, the 'professionals' they encounter can come to constitute primary personal relationships.

Daily reality, marvellous imaginations

Growing up in Kinshasa, the childhoods of my informants took place in the political context of a relative (but not total) abdication of the state. They came of age in a society lacking state sponsored public health, education, transportation, water system, and food security. Addressing immediate and basic needs was the main daily preoccupation for most people in Kinshasa. The most viable way of doing so was in drawing on informal arrangements of 'personalized, 'feudal' structures of decision making, and distributions of wealth' (De Boeck 1998b: 93). Trefon (2002) argues that in order to get by, people have to strike 'a deal' – *la coop*. In Lingala, *na kei kobeta coop* means 'I'm going to strike a deal'. It implies dealing with a go-between who may use trickery to achieve his or her ends. The English word 'bargain' best captures the practice and spirit of *la coop* (Trefon 2002: 487). According to Trefon:

‘Anyone who is in need of either a good or service, or who needs to resolve a problem is invariably the 'client' of a go-between. This applies to dealing with a civil servant in order to obtain an administrative document, buying a bag of cooking charcoal or manioc or 'simply' hailing a taxi. Given the overwhelming precariousness of life in Kinshasa people have been forced to depend on, i.e. 'bargain' with, others. All the *Kinois* are subject to this system that takes place in all sectors of daily life cutting across the entire social spectrum (Trefon 2002: 487).

In sharp contrast to such harsh realities of daily life, the *Kinois*⁴⁶ also witnessed another kind of lived reality, the powerful imagery of First World materialism (Ferguson 2006). A mythologized image of the Congolese life in the European diaspora is portrayed weekly in local television broadcasts (*Mputuville*) (De Boeck and Plissart 2004: 45). Popular songs, the clothes and behaviour of artists who perform them, also play an influential role in the collective social imagery of what life in Europe might be like. Perhaps the most-cited example of such an artist is the legendary Papa Wemba. His fashionable style of clothing was at the height of his fame at the forefront of the *Sapeurs* phenomenon. This refers to people who spend huge amounts of money on designer clothes with the motive of making themselves as conspicuously elegant as possible. This phenomenon attracted wide interest

⁴⁶ These are of course huge generalisations used to make my point. There are individual variation in perception and points of view of what daily life in Kinshasa and Europe may be like.

throughout (francophone) Africa as well as in France from the 1970s onwards. Gandoulou (1984) writes that young Baongo in Brazzaville adapted themselves to the culture of the '*Sape*' to such an extent that they wanted to immigrate to Paris. Gandoulou (1984) describes the disappointments and endurance of young men, most of them uneducated and jobless, as they have migrated to Paris. However, a core part of the values of *La Sape* is to keep up appearances of assets on which social success can be based, even though people may live an ascetic life. Among the Congolese diaspora, it is often denied that life in Europe is anything but a life of luxury. When people cannot live up to expectations of leading a life of abundance, this is often interpreted as a sign of personal failure and weakness (De Boeck and Plissart 2004:46). For the young people in this research these 'signs' were also interpreted in fundamentalist Christian terms. To give way to felt negativity and depression were indications that one had lost faith in God through whom a happy resolution to one's situation would eventually come.

The young Congolese in this research, I suggest, arrived 'armed' in the United Kingdom with two kinds of expectations and experiences: first, that they were unlikely to access assistance, services or goods through formal routes. To achieve their ends they had to strike up relations and dealings with others. Second, life in Europe was by definition thought to be a set of endless possibilities of becoming rich and leading a 'good life'. Arriving in the United Kingdom, however, the young people were met by a whole different reality than that experienced and imaged in Kinshasa. Rachel, whose story of flight from Kinshasa I related in chapter three, described coming to Hillingdon in this way:

'A social worker picked me up at the airport and he put me in an independent house in Hayes. The landlord showed me my room, a kitchen, a fridge full of food and the bathroom. A social worker had given me some money, but I did not know where to buy food and I did not speak English. I stayed in my room all the time. I was very scared. I only went out of my room to go to the bathroom and to take coke and bread from the kitchen. I did not understand that the food in the fridge was not for everyone to share. After two days, an Eritrean girl in the house shouted at me for stealing her food. I said sorry to her and wanted to give her money, but she did not want to accept it. Lillian

lived in the same house, but it took us several days to discover that we were both Congolese. Lillian found this out first and she knocked on my door and shouted, “Open the door” in Lingala. We were so happy to find someone from our own country.’

Micah said the following about arriving in Hillingdon:

‘The people working at the airport did an ID for me, for someone who has no paper. They made me walk to different places. I had to take my clothes off, my jeans, my top. They were not friendly. In my heart, I’d say they were racist. My English was not good. A woman said: ‘Shut the fuck up and sit down.’ From that day being in England was not easy. Then they called the Social Service. I think a guy called Chris came to get me. People say that they are friendly, but I didn’t see it. When I asked questions, he said he was busy. ‘Where are we going right now?’ He didn’t want to answer. We went to a Social Services house. It was a house for boys that had a bed available. There were four or five other people there. There was a woman who said, ‘It’s better you tell them the truth. You have to tell them the truth.’ I said I didn’t know and she said I was lying. I stayed there for two nights. I waited four months to start English language course. I was just sitting at home. The social services have moved me to five different houses. First they put me in a house in Southall. Miriam lived there too. She was helping me. She told me the different places I needed to go and she woke me up in the morning to tell me I had to go. She cooked for me. In the boys’ section there were some Congolese boys, Pascal and Emmanuel. Pascal was Miriam’s boyfriend. He introduced me to his church in Greenford, the *Light House*. I started playing music in church.’

Young people generally described their first weeks and months after arrival in the United Kingdom as a phase of social isolation and fear, in which they were reluctant to leave their rooms and talk to people around them. At a communal housing near Heathrow airport, staff related that for many young people the first few nights were a time of deep distress and anxiety. Some were violent and had to be restrained from

harming themselves.⁴⁷ Many young people were placed in ‘independent’ accommodation during these first few weeks and months, only to be moved to accommodation with more support later after social work staff observed that clients were not coping well.⁴⁸ While the unaccompanied minors received some attention from the social services and solicitors during this time, they spent most of the first few weeks alone in their rooms in Hillingdon. The initial phase of arrival was a time when many young people did not eat well because they did not recognise the food in the shops or knew how to cook; a time when many could not make themselves understood in the English language at all; and a time when being silent or economical about the reasons for - and details of - leaving one’s country of origin, needed to be upheld in spite of everything.

After an initial phase of disorientation and social isolation, however, the young people came to show the full extent of their resourcefulness. They established friendships with other asylum seeker young people or people from a settled migrant community. This was out of necessity: from each other they learnt life skills necessary for daily undertakings, created social networks and found places of worship. They learnt how to use cash-cards, bus routes and where to buy cheap second hand goods and clothes. They now came to know the nature of the social services provision and what could be expected of life in Hillingdon. Their situation was characterised by the haphazard relationships with the Social Services, the Home Office and various other professionals in the welfare system. The young people’s experience of ‘house-shares’ in Hillingdon was in many ways no different to that of other migrants, students, or workers in London who have little money. The houses shared were dilapidated, long abandoned by their owners to be rented out for profit. Practically no effort had been made to make the houses, flats and rooms ‘homely’. They were sparsely furnished with unkempt gardens and interiors. Objects lay around from multiple previous occupiers. Walls were bare or retained pictures and posters hung there by previous tenants. This domestic materiality affected a sense of deprivation and an absence of home-making (Drazin 2008).

⁴⁷ Support worker at this house related to an Afghan boy who had arrived a few night previously (02/06/07).

⁴⁸ and as such accommodation became available.

Lillian had reportedly come from an affluent background in Kinshasa where she had lived in a huge house with servants and a swimming pool. In stately care in Hillingdon, Lillian did not live the kind of life she had envisaged. She felt that at the college where she was studying she had no chance to improve her English, because many others were asylum seekers there. Over time she also grew tired of her dependency on the social services in which she was not able to work and save money for her future. Once, when the social services had placed her in a room she considered much too small, she said to me: ‘You call this a house? You should come to Kinshasa! Here we don’t even have a microwave!’ Lillian found it particularly offensive that in the Young Peoples Asylum Team, social workers often sighed heavily as she complained about the houses she was accommodated in. She recounted an incident in which a social worker had indicated that Lillian was too forward in her demands and should be pleased that she could get free social housing in England at all. The reduction of central government spending on unaccompanied asylum seekers of her age group⁴⁹, pointed to the fact that they were accommodated by the Hillingdon local authority on a relatively short-lived, temporary basis. However, an examination of the material items young people collected, and the personal relationships through which they acquired items, revealed that the asylum seekers had every intention to stay in Britain.

Les histoires and le sapeur

In visiting the Congolese young peoples’ rooms I was struck by the following observation. Men’s rooms were often bare, save for their smart clothes in their wardrobes and sometimes a sound system. In the young women’s rooms, however, one had to navigate through a plethora of personal possessions. These included some of the following items: A wardrobe full of clothes, rugs on top of the carpet, a refrigerator, a small plastic shelf unit with glasses and cups, cuddly toys, a TV, two DVD players, a sound system, a printer, a computer, a laptop, and a bookcase full of shoes. The young Congolese referred to these items as *mes histoires* – ‘my histories’. There was a difference between *la chose* (belongings) and *l’histoire* (story, business).

⁴⁹ In 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) limited funding for unaccompanied asylum seeker who were eighteen years of age and older. The DFES grant money was cut from £140 to £100 per person per week. Hillingdon sought a judicial review of the cut in the grant, but lost the case.

The first was just ordinary material items, while the latter put emphasis on how *personal* these items were; and that they were given to them by people who were especially significant in their lives.

The girls showed and spoke of these '*histoires*' with much affection. A girl would for example show me a large, cuddly toy in the shape of a strawberry, and relate how it had been given to her. She would lug it around to the many different houses to which she moved. The '*histoires*' were acquired within the first few months of arrival in Hillingdon. Young people bought many of the things from what they called 'Sunday markets' - flea markets in Hayes and Hounslow – or from charity shops. They also acquired material things from sympathetic adults with whom they came in contact. These were social workers, mental health workers, staff at voluntary organisations and friends from the settled migrant community. In addition, girls were given money and gifts by their boyfriends: it was expected that men with whom they had a relationship would provide gifts.

The gifts the girls acquired were 'investments' into their households. They showed what they perceived to be essential feminine qualities of being able to look after themselves and their homes, through acquiring and displaying their *histoires*. However, more than that, the *histoires* were collections to bring to a *future* home. The concept corresponded to that of a *trousseau* or *hope chest* – the clothes and other possessions collected by unmarried young women in anticipation of future marriages or married lives. As Miriam explained to me:

'If by chance God would grant me to stay in this country and I would be blessed with a good husband and maybe to move to a one or two bedroom house or flat, I would already have most of the things I need. I would only have to buy maybe a sofa and a bed.'

While Miriam and other girls said that not just the Congolese, but all girls in Britain liked shopping for cheap household stuff and bargain clothes, it was important, as they had little money, to invest in a household over time. To invoke the will of God into this explanation and hope is also significant: here Miriam was announcing her faith and what she was expecting would happen to her.

Boys were obliged to give spare money to their girlfriends, rather than spend it on their own *histoires*. They acquired smart clothes in a *sapeur* fashion rather than household items. Upon one visit to Rafael's room, Rafael opened his wardrobe to show me a neat row of suits, shirts, and tops hanging on a rail and, under them, a line of polished leather shoes. However, Rafael had not bought these clothes himself.



Fig 2: Shoes in a girl's room. (Photography taken by Wahlström)

They were instead gifts from God, given to him by other people through whom God 'worked'. Rafael said:

'I got these, expensive shoes. I didn't buy it. I never go to the shop. I don't know the price of them. I got this, Dolce Gabana, I was given them. I didn't buy it. I just do my job. I do it with love, with all my will. I do it. Yeah, I just do it and God knows it.'

Rafael always dressed smartly and was a devout Christian. His 'job' referred to his involvement as a lead singer in the *orchestre* of a Pentecostal church in Hayes Town (*The Glory*). As well as clothes, he also often received cash from adult individuals of the larger Congolese community. He had a girlfriend, Lorraine, on whom he spent much of the cash he received. Rafael had high aspirations for their relationship and insisted that he was not a boy who 'played around' with girls, but had sincere intentions with her. Yet, he knew that because he did not have his own house and since he was not in employment, he was not yet ready to marry and have children with Lorraine. He had learnt in church, he said, not to pray for things for which one

was not ready, but to pray instead that God would make him ready. Rafael was studying physics at a local college and he knew his education was the most important investment in his future. All the same, it was important to show a dynamic image of oneself in the eyes of God: to dress well in church, and specifically at conferences (themed prayer and worship); the successful image of oneself could manifest itself in real life (see chapter six and seven).

Similar to the 'Kinshasa bargain', the young people in Hillingdon found themselves relying on others to acquire what they were after. The girls were mostly given their material items from adults in the welfare system, boyfriends and friends. In Rafael's case, settled Congolese migrants in London often gave him fashionable clothes. Transactions of goods and clothes, therefore, were central to the relationships the young refugees established.

While refugees often see returning home as their end goal, in terms of its relationship with a place or territory (Allen and Turton 1996, Malkki 1995), my research subjects did not plan to return to the DRC at this point in time. However, they did envisage temporary visits to the DRC once they had obtained citizenship, education, material wealth and a family in Europe. The young people focused upon establishing relationships with their new place of residence by pulling together fragments of meaningful social attachments. These were children, household items, clothing, friends and lovers. They were preoccupied not with remembering a past that legitimized their right to return in peace (Malkki 1995), but with a perceived project of improving their social and material situation through becoming 'legitimate' recipients of social benefits and of establishing a future home *at site* (Denzin 2008). The particular forms home-making activities took were among the Congolese firmly rooted in popular music and fashion-clothing that glorify the migration cycle (Wa Kabwe and Segatti 2003, MaGaffey and Bazenguiza-Ganga 2003; Gandoulou 1984, 1989) and within a Pentecostal faith gospel. Popular music videos were circulated among the young Congolese and were forever played on their small, second hand televisions in their rooms. Both men and women were intent upon staying in the United Kingdom until they had acquired citizenship, education, employment and a family.

Establishing Patron-client relationships

Most of my informants did not have a personal social worker allocated to them. These young people were of the opinion that it was only worth their while to ask for help with accommodation, health problems, education, money, and so forth if they knew of a person in the service that was sympathetic to them. The workers of the Young Persons Asylum Team were constrained in providing certain assistance because they had to uphold 'objective attachment' relationships towards the young refugees (Ruch 2005; Young 1982). They were not, for example, allowed to advise the young people on aspects of the asylum claim, and they were expected to keep a personal distance towards their 'clients', even though the nature of their work made such concessions extremely difficult. However, some of them covertly went beyond these roles in their interactions with their clients. They became 'patrons' of young people to whom they granted extra goods, services, and primary personal relationships (Wolf 2001: 180 [1966]). The young people in turn paid back in less tangible assets, such as demonstrations of esteem, loyalty, and in creating good will (Ibid 2001: 180 [1966]). One case in which I observed this was in the relationship between Tesfay, a boy from Iran, and his social worker, Imtiaz.

Immediately upon arrival in 2004, Tesfay came into contact with Imtiaz who came to be his social worker over the next five years. Early on in their relationship, they formed a trusting bond. Tesfay was not sure of his 'real' age when he arrived in Britain, but he thought he might be eighteen. However, since there was no documentation to prove Tesfay's age, Imtiaz advised Tesfay to state that he was seventeen. Later on, although Tesfay was not entitled to work, Imtiaz suggested to Tesfay that if he was 'streetwise' enough he would be able to work in the black market for periods of time. Moreover, Tesfay was accommodated in a dozen different houses from the point of arrival and throughout the time of fieldwork. Tesfay often found the rooms too dirty, noisy and unsafe and he went through periods of time without being able to sleep or study well. Time and again, Imtiaz helped Tesfay to find better rooms and more suitable accommodations. At times, however, Tesfay worried that his constant complaining about accommodation would put Imtiaz in trouble with his manager and therefore often kept silent about how bad his living

situation really was. Tesfay often said that Imtiaz was one of few people in Britain who had a real interest in looking out for him and someone he really trusted.

While none of the Congolese established such relationships with social workers, they came across ‘sympathetic adults’ elsewhere. Often, these were adults of the settled Congolese migrant community in London that the newly arrived refugees met upon joining Pentecostal churches. In addition to these, Lillian, Miriam and Rachel came to obtain some extra help and personal care through mental health workers in Hillingdon. In the patron-client relationships that formed between the young asylum seekers and the professionals that worked with them, the young people were sometimes able to barter in ways that helped them gain further assistance and material items. Most important to such bartering were the ‘trauma stories’ (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997) that has come to be ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu 1984) in negotiations for asylum. In the everyday lives of the unaccompanied asylum seekers, the trauma stories featured in the construction of themselves as legitimate recipients of care. Resources allocated to the unaccompanied asylum seekers were constantly a contested issue at the local governmental level and within the social services. Concerns about young people’s mental health were to some extent apolitical: it was perceived as an objective reality of the psychological state of young people that could not be contested.⁵⁰ If mental health issues, particularly those pertaining to past experiences of trauma, could be confirmed in a client, professionals could motivate their decision to offer a young person individual attention, allocation of resources, and efforts to help them move into better accommodation.

There was a team of mental health personnel⁵¹ that worked within the Young Persons Asylum Team during fieldwork. They worked for the local Primary Care Trust and had obtained funding from the Department of Health for a three-year outreach project that focused only on lone asylum seekers sixteen and seventeen years of age. They viewed causes to psychological suffering not only in terms of past trauma, but also the present situation that young people coped with. These professionals stated that the

⁵⁰ While it is of course a political choice to frame refugees’ experiences of flight and settlement in terms of mental health. It places the locus of refugee suffering on individual psychology and not on the broader political economic context, which may be causing suffering in the first place (for example Zarkowsky 2000).

⁵¹ I use this single profession for convenience. They included a systemic psychologist and a mental health worker.

young people experienced 'extended trauma' in going through the asylum-seeking process with all its uncertainties, including the often uncaring social care process. These were, according to mental health workers, underlying 'factors' that could have consequences for psychological health. Therefore, these mental health workers were cautious in attempting to uncover young people's past experiences. To begin with, they focused on helping the young people to deal with their immediate social situation.

The young people came to internalise and utilise the language of mental health to describe their emotional suffering and to legitimize themselves as recipients of care. In their interaction with social workers and mental health workers (and this researcher), they drew attention in an opportunistic way to the fact that their status as asylum seekers disadvantaged their social and emotional welfare.

Lillian, Rachel and Miriam came into contact with these mental health workers upon arrival in Hillingdon. The girls often appeared lethargic, low and, Lillian especially, distressed. During fieldwork both Rachel and Lillian attempted to take their own lives.

Upon arrival in Hillingdon from Kinshasa, Rachel was placed in independent housing. Four months later, her key worker was concerned about her low mood, headaches, moments of absent-mindedness, and suspected post-traumatic stress disorder following her experiences in the DRC. Rachel was moved to semi-independent housing where she could be under closer observance and where she met with a mental health worker once a month. However, Rachel attempted suicide eight months after the move to the semi-independent house. She then started seeing her mental health worker every week. Two months after the attempt to take her own life, Rachel was again moved to independent accommodation.

I learnt about these events that occurred during Rachel's first year in Hillingdon, during a visit to her third house.⁵² I looked around Rachel's room and complimented her on making it look nice. There was one wardrobe, two small rugs on top of the

⁵² 7 November 2006.

carpet, a sink, a large refrigerator, a small plastic shelf unit with glasses and cups, cuddly toys, a TV, two DVD players, and a sound system. She had bought some of these items at the 'Sunday market' in Hounslow. Other things had been given to her. One DVD player was broken so she had bought a small one from Argos. There was also a big floor fan. She told me it was given to her by the Social Services because they locked her window in the last house where she had lived. 'Something happened', Rachel explained. In August she had tried to kill herself by jumping out of the window. She was in hospital for five days. She said she had felt lonely, 'very confused', and *craqué*.⁵³ After her suicide attempt, Rachel began to meet her mental health worker each week and a patron-client relationship emerged between them. The mental health worker once recounted to me an incident in which she had bought nappies for Rachel's baby. She commented that Rachel had been successful in acquiring many 'extras' from their relationship.

Lillian spoke of her psychologist with affection. Over the two years that she saw her psychologist, her mental health also visibly improved. Lillian said that she often 'thanked God' for the psychologist who talked to her about what she could do when her emotional reactions became overpowering.

Over time the psychologist came to take on various tasks clearly out of her 'remit'. She came to help Lillian access better housing and gave her various goods such as an old laptop. Furthermore, Lillian's initial asylum claim was refused on the grounds that there was no sufficient evidence to support her claim of political persecution. The psychologist saw to it that Lillian had a psychiatric assessment at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture to support the appeals following her refuted asylum claim.

According to the psychiatric assessment Lillian suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She also experienced anxiety, sleeping problems and nightmares, low self-esteem and negative thinking. It said that she sometimes got overwhelmed by past memories and experienced 'seizures'. These seizures had started to happen

⁵³ Congolese-French slang for feeling 'stressed out'. Literally 'to crack'.

before Lillian came to the United Kingdom.⁵⁴ The report said she had once tried to stab herself with a knife and that her friend had stopped her. Lillian said in the report that it was her friend (Miriam) and her Christian faith that prevented her from killing herself. The report related Lillian's current distress to the experiences of torture.

Lillian's psychologist had advised the social services that Lillian should not be moved to a small room and to a house where she had to live with many other young people. However, when Lillian turned eighteen, she was moved to a room half the size of her previous accommodation. Lillian felt claustrophobic. She said that because she had asthma she could not breathe properly in the room. Black bin bags stuffed with her clothes and shoes took up every inch of the floor. She also had a computer, a printer, a laptop, a TV, and DVD players, all bought second hand in charity shops, 'Sunday markets', or given to her. There was a small wardrobe in the room where Lillian could only fit a fraction of her many clothes. The new living situation eventually made Lillian so worked up that she had a 'seizure' and went to Accident and Emergency in an ambulance. After that incident, the psychologist spoke to the manager of the Asylum Team and the girls were moved to a new house.

The psychologist said to me that she did not think the Asylum Team manager quite 'understood' why Lillian had got herself so upset about the house. The psychologist related how she had been 'very tactile' in requesting that Lillian be moved to a better place, insisting that the final decision of course lay with the social services, but that she thought living arrangements had a fundamental impact on Lillian's psychological health.

As with other concepts developed in Western psychiatry, it is important to examine how the paradigm of post-traumatic stress disorder is embedded in cultural meaning and social relationships (Kleinman 1980). Arguably, symptoms of post-traumatic stress and 'trauma' are only meaningful in relation to the social and political contexts that reify the therapeutic recounting of traumatic events, the acknowledgement of

⁵⁴ I never learnt the full nature what these 'seizures' were about. They may have been an epileptic symptom, or as the psychologist thought, a psycho-somatic reaction to her past trauma triggered by both positive and negative stimulation. I know that Lillian also experienced one of these 'seizures' on the local bus and there was nothing to suggest that any extraordinary 'stimulation' had occurred to trigger it. Lillian herself seemed frightened and puzzled about what she called 'fainting' and never suggested that an explanation to it had been offered her in Kinshasa.

stress response, and the production of a formal diagnosis (Kienzler 2008: 220). There were many lone asylum seekers in Hillingdon who could not engage in the ‘therapeutic relationships’ with mental health workers. Watters (1998: 285) writes that there is ‘insufficient knowledge of the cultures of refugee groups and of culturally-specific ways of addressing mental health and social care needs’. Summerfield (2001: 161) argues that mental health needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in local areas are poor and existing mechanisms for ‘ethnic monitoring’ carries little explanatory power about refugee populations because the categories are too broad. However, the mental health professionals within the Young Persons Asylum Team were of the view that the issue was not always about ‘cultural difference’ between lone asylum seekers and ‘westerners’. Rather, they felt that gaining the trust of the lone refugees was key to establishing ‘therapeutic relationships’ with them. It was a grave error, therefore, to ask young people about past experiences, since it was not self-explanatory to the young refugees why uncovering their past experiences of loss and violence was a perceived necessary step in the healing process. The following narrative by a Personal Advisor of the Asylum Service illustrates the difficulty for a young man from Rwanda to engage with health professionals. Many mental health professionals of external organisations were in turn reluctant to take on particularly ‘complex’ cases of young people, including this young man.

‘The client is already... from my assessment he suffers from severe depression, where he lost weight, then progressively he was talking about things that were a bit concerning. I referred him to the Medical Foundation, but because he doesn’t have physical trauma, they wouldn’t take him on. They referred him to another counselling service which they felt was the best thing for him, but the client came out of there even more traumatised and panicked because he felt that they were questioning him like the Home Office would and so that traumatised him, that experience. He went to two meetings. I spoke to somebody, it was the Tavistock Centre, and she seemed to say, ‘Well we’ve advised him to wait until we have a specialist worker who knows more about the country where the client is from.’ Erm, he is from Rwanda and we all know what happened in Rwanda, whether he is the tribe that got killed or the tribe that was doing the killing, none the less he still went through some

horrific, terrible times. And I felt that their approach was already wrong from the beginning. And that was an obstacle for me and for the client, especially. I then wrote to his GP to try and see if he could speed up another counselling service for the client, 'cause I was trying different areas, hoping that if this one would fail, another one would not. And the GP referred him to the, is it called the Natasha Foundation Trust? Anyway, they offer counselling services to young people and he was getting counselling. He went there a few sessions, and he started to display signs of psychotic episodes. And they said they couldn't help him, but that we needed to refer him to somewhere where he could get long-term, in-depth therapy. The thing is, he is not mad. He is just an end-of-line client, that means he has no appeal remaining and he is going to be sent back home.

Unfortunately, I'm a Tutsi and he a Hutu and I'm from the tribe that was the victim and he doesn't feel free to talk to me about that which he went through, and also because of the position I am in authority, he feels that he can't trust people around him.'

The Personal Advisor went on to describe the difficult relationship she held with her client:

'The thing I felt from him is that he lacks emotional warmth and he lacked it from before. Where he said things like, "You know, a mother's love is so important." And I felt that he is probably getting some kind of emotional warmth and support from me, but he can't trust me completely, because a) I'm his worker from a local authority, b) I'm a Tutsi, although we are from different countries but he still nonetheless feels that he cannot talk to me about whatever it is that he is going through. (...) He will also panic if he sees somebody who looks like a social worker (...) Some one he thought was social worker was in a car, laughing at him with some children. And he said, "Why are they laughing at me, I mean I haven't done anything, I haven't killed anyone", so he must have gone through some serious issue back home, but he is not telling me what it is. Except he keeps saying, "I haven't killed anyone". I believe he hasn't harmed anyone, but he probably feels guilty on behalf of his people and his family. And it will need someone to take him

seriously from the mental health team on that basis, to actually give him some help, as opposed to them saying, “Oh, he is depressed he needs to get counselling”. Because the counselling, when he was receiving counselling, he was getting very, more stressed, and that is why he stopped going for counselling.’

To research subjects, the psychiatric paradigm was entirely new and alien. For some mental health professionals, the troubled asylum seekers constituted perhaps an alien group of young people they could not offer assistance. It was particularly hard to establish trust and sustainable relationships in situations where young people were to be sent back to their country of origin. While Lillian said that she found it helpful to talk to her psychologist about how to manage her suicidal thoughts and psychological suffering, it was equally important to her that the psychologist came to take on a role of a ‘parent’. Through the trusting relationship with the psychologist, Lillian did not perceive herself as being totally alone in Britain. Lillian said about the psychologist:

‘She’s a good woman. Very good. I pray to God, God bless her. Like you [are a good person too]. If I have an appointment with her, I explain to her: “You see my problem is... I feel like taking all my tablets [ending my life]. What can I do?” She says: “No Lillian, do this.” You know? She gives me the idea how to live like this and you know, and I’m feeling, I’m not feeling *alone*. Sometimes I am feeling I have no parent, but I have someone who is looking after me. Because I don’t have a social worker. But if I’m together with her she helps me because I don’t know about this country properly, yeah. It’s like this.’⁵⁵

The ‘patron-client’ relationships the young people established with mental health workers (and others), therefore, transcended purely instrumental dimensions. They crossed-over with other kinds of relationships that provided emotional reassurance and closeness. In Wolf’s definition, a patron-client relationship refers to ‘a maximum point of imbalance’ in which ‘one partner is clearly superior to the other in his or her capacity to grant goods and services’ and where ‘a minimal charge of affect’ is

⁵⁵ 18 July 2007.

involved' (Wolf 1980: 79[1966]). In order for this definition to work fully, networks of kin and friendship relations must already be in place (Wolf 1980: 180[1966]). For the young people, however, sustainable networks were in the making. The mental health workers and other professionals working with the young people were by default replacing other kinds of relationships, such as parental guardians. However, not all lone asylum seekers were able to accommodate themselves to such relationships, as was the case with the Rwandan boy above.

Friendships, children and lovers

Other types of relationships also became important to the young men and women in their desire not to feel alone. Significant relationships were the peer relationships between the young people themselves and friendships with people in the settled migrant community (Mann 2004; Cullum 2002). The young refugees struck up close, 'emotional relationships' in which they satisfied emotional needs in one another (Wolf 1980: 175 [1966]). Lillian and Miriam, for example talked about each other as 'sisters'. Lillian said about Miriam that 'She understands me. I don't have to explain anything to her.' Miriam was also for a long period of time the only young person to which Lillian revealed her experiences of rape in the past.

Rachel struck a close friendship with a Congolese woman, Samantha, from the settled migrant community in her church. This friendship became particularly important to Rachel when she became pregnant as a result of a brief sexual relationship. When she knew that she was pregnant she rang the father of the child whom, she said, 'did not want to accept' and who hung up the phone on her. Rachel's key worker discussed the option of abortion with her. Rachel found the idea abhorrent, particularly because her older sister had died from this intervention in the DRC. During Rachel's pregnancy Samantha was her closest friend and became, Rachel said, 'like a sister'. Rachel often went to visit her friend who would cook for her while Rachel rested or slept. Samantha also acted as Rachel's birth partner. However, for Rachel, the birth of her son came to be the most significant relationship of all in terms of no longer 'feeling alone'. A couple of months after the birth of her child, Rachel told me about the inconceivability of abortion and of her new-found meaning in life with her son:

‘I could not do that [have an abortion]. My mother gave birth to me, and I had to give birth to this child. I thought that if it is a boy it will be like my brother and if it is a girl it will be like my sister. I told the key worker that and she said I was very intelligent. Then thanks be to God, I gave birth to a boy and he is like my brother. Now I am not alone. I am not alone in this country.’

Rachel named the boy a combination of her own and the baby’s father’s last names. It could also be translated as ‘Your family’.⁵⁶

In a number of cases, the young people were reunited with relatives and significant others from their childhood in Kinshasa. Emmanuel and Muhammad⁵⁷, for example, both had many uncles in London from whom they obtained some financial support. They generally concealed the significance of these relations from the social services: indications that there were adults who held parental responsibility over the unaccompanied minors, or who supported them financially, could compromise their legal status. A number of the young people struck up love relationships with girls and boyfriends from their past. Muhammad, for example, had arrived in the United Kingdom as an unaccompanied minor in 2004. He was one of the lucky few asylum seekers to obtain refugee status. Once Muhammad had obtained a British passport, he briefly returned to Kinshasa to marry his childhood sweetheart Jacky. The couple returned to England where they had a son together. Muhammad worked as an assistant accountant and therefore did not qualify for social welfare housing. The family lived in a studio flat in Hillingdon.

Micah, on the other hand, had ‘encountered’ his childhood sweetheart, Cindy, and his cousin in Hillingdon.⁵⁸ In 2006, Micah had a baby daughter with Cindy, who he had known in Pretoria in South Africa. The pregnancy was not planned and Cindy was only fifteen years old when she fell pregnant. She lived with her mother and Micah lived in a separate house. Micah said that now that he was a father he was obliged to provide for his ‘wife’ and baby. He bought nappies and clothes for the baby and gave

⁵⁶ To respect Rachel’s anonymity, I do not include the boy’s name here.

⁵⁷ His Arabic name came from his grandfather who had been a Muslim before converting to Catholicism in order to access education in the DRC.

⁵⁸ Claiming to be oblivious as to why this was possible.

money and other gifts to Cindy. This was expensive. Other than studying at college, Micah spent his time working as a waiter and an assistant in a clothing shop to provide for his girlfriend and the baby.⁵⁹ Micah's cousin was also living as an asylum seeker in Hillingdon. Cindy and Micah and the baby spent a lot of time together in Micah's cousin's house. The cousin lived closer to Cindy than to Micah and the cousin's room was the largest of all their rooms.

In these relationships a transaction of gifts and money in return for love and sex took place. This could be observed in relation to the material items young women collected in their rooms. Gifts played a vital role in fuelling everyday sexual relations between young men and women (Hunt 2002: 100). However, such transactions did not cancel out love and sincerity of those sexual relationships.

Finding life partners was extremely important to the young people as was the possibility of having children. Lillian, for example, desired a life partner and children. Two years after her arrival in Hillingdon, she met a French-Congolese man in the spring of 2008. The man was kind to Lillian and she was very fond of him. He showered her with gifts and money. Lillian said this was the 'African way' of having a relationship. There was no limit to the amount of money and the value of gifts that men gave women. It did not mean that men and women were unequal in some way. To give and receive gifts was merely a sign of the commitment that the lovers made to each other. Since Lillian's boyfriend was working he naturally had more money than her and he showed his love for her by providing for her. In accepting the gifts, Lillian confirmed that he was the only man in her life. In Africa, Lillian said, this reciprocity was merely a way for women to invest in their future, to be able to provide for their children even if the man and woman were to divorce later on.

Months later after Lillian had committed to the relationship, she learnt to her great disappointment that her boyfriend had a child from a previous relationship.⁶⁰ Although the man insisted that he was no longer seeing the mother of his child, Lillian felt betrayed that he had not told her about this prior relationship and broke up with

⁵⁹ Asylum seekers have to apply for a work permit in order to work legally. Whether Micah had a work permit I do not know.

⁶⁰ She learnt this from another woman.

him. She told me that she thought white men on the whole were more faithful to their women than black men. Regrettably, however, white men did not know how to treat African women. Lillian gave me the example of her black girlfriend at College who had a relationship with a white man. That man gave his girlfriend chocolate instead of money. ‘Chocolate!’, Lillian laughed. ‘What can you do with chocolate? Tomorrow I will need a bus pass!’ In the materiality of everyday sex, the young Congolese did not perceive that the transactions were negative or exploitative *per se* (Hunter 2002). They could become so, however, if rules around trust and responsibility were broken.

Conclusion

The young Congolese had grown up in Kinshasa without state-sponsored social welfare and public services. To get by, they utilized informal networks and arrangements, and made deals with persons that could access resources and services for them. Contradictorily, it would seem, when research subjects came to Europe, they were disappointed with the life they were offered there. However, the disappointment related to the fact that life in Hillingdon did not correspond to the marvellous imagination of the West they had grown up with in Kinshasa. Not only were opportunities of social mobility extremely restrictive, most of the young people were also, to begin with, completely alone.

While stately welfare was in many ways an alien concept to the young Congolese, finding ways in which to bargain within a system of control of resources was not. This they had experienced on a daily basis in Kinshasa (De Boeck 1989b; Trefon 2002). However, the young people did not have money or skills with which to barter. Instead, they bartered the symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) of their trauma stories with welfare services.

Although they found their situation precarious and difficult, the negative aspects of their lives in Hillingdon could also be interpreted as a sign of their personal failure and weakness (De Boeck 2004: 46). A Christian dimension to such a failure and success was also apparent among the young refugees. Becoming a refugee was God’s way of putting the individual’s faith to the test – sometimes to the point that the young person was tempted to take her own life – but to which a resolution and a ‘happy

ending' was imminent. In the psychological explanatory framework of becoming a refugee, on the other hand, to lose 'faith' (in a non-religious sense, in life, in not wanting to continue one's existence), were a 'normal' and sometimes an even expected reaction.

In Hillingdon, friends, lovers and children became the most important relationships in which the young people could acquire a sense of attachment to the new place. Various kinds of transactions were integral to these relationships. While patron-client relationships and transactional sexual relationships could be thought of as instrumental (Wolf 1980[1966]; Hunter 2002), the issue trust was at the heart of these relationships. When young refugees perceive themselves to be completely alone, the 'professionals' they encounter can come to constitute primary personal relationships for them.

The young men and women in this research did not yet live in materially desperate situations. However, the young refugees were aware that they were under the protection of Hillingdon Social Services on a temporary basis. The support they received would most likely end in a few years time (as their claims for asylum and appeals were rejected). In the near future, the social support networks the young refugees built up could come to constitute the only means of social welfare and material assistance. To find a spouse – someone with refugee status or citizenship – could improve one's chances of gaining leave to remain in Britain.

Chapter Six

‘Family of God’: The Search for Community and Spiritual Power

In the previous chapter I showed that the young people were on a quest to better their material and social situation in Hillingdon other than through the route expected of them by the social services. Rather than ‘sit and wait’ for a duty worker to change their situation, the young people established patron-client relationships and obtained material items and clothes by various people. They were also attempting to establish meaningful attachment to the new place. Having children was central to this.⁶¹ In this chapter I show a different aspect to the young people’s quest for success and making attachments in the new place. I show their preoccupations with obtaining ‘blessings’ through the Pentecostal faith. Rafael, Micah and Rachel joined Pentecostal churches in London soon after their arrival from Kinshasa. They were in no way exceptional in this regard. Different *églises de réveil* (revival churches) were attended by most Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers in this research, by a large proportion of the people in the Congolese diaspora, as well as by people in Kinshasa (Eade and Garbin 2007, Pype 2006, De Boeck 2005, 2004).

In this chapter I argue that the primary motive for the young people’s joining a Pentecostal church is a search for spiritual power (Van Wyk 2008). The aim is in this way to attain material wealth, physical health and success in relationships and marriage (Coleman 2000). The objective is also to prevent bad things from happening and evil forces from entering one’s life. However, much as I showed in the last chapter, to obtain resources the young people had to become skilled at being a ‘legitimate’ recipient of them. In this chapter, whether one can obtain what one is looking for is contingent upon entering a church community of true Christians and show oneself as one of them (Pype 2006). The quandary for the Pentecostals in this research is that evil manifests itself through the actions of other human beings. To join a community of others to practice one’s religious beliefs is therefore a potential risk as well as a necessity. I attempt to show that the institutional context of the Pentecostal church and the complex ways in which Christians believe, are two dimensions of the Pentecostal faith that are analytically inseparable.

⁶¹ Having children does not further one’s chances of obtaining leave to remain in Britain.

The transformative effect of the Pentecostal ritual: a first-hand encounter

The newly arrived asylum seekers in London found the Pentecostal churches through friends they made in the houses where they were placed, through Congolese people they met by chance in the street or on busses, or through relatives who were already living in London. While the young people mentioned in interviews that they prayed and read the Bible in times of hardship, it was only upon visiting one of these churches myself that I learned to understand the centrality of these churches in the young Congolese's lives.

Rafael told me in my first interview with him that he sang in a church in Hayes Town – The Glory (*la Gloire*) in Hillingdon and that he would like me to come and hear him sing. I promised him that I would and went to the church the following Sunday. I was completely unprepared for what I was to experience, the change in direction of the research, and that it was to be the entry point into the larger fundamentalist Christian Congolese community in London.

I followed Rafael's directions to the church, located at the end of the Hayes Town high street. I saw no one enter the double glass doors to the building, but as I went in, some people greeted me in the hallway. Most people entered the church via the car park at the back. Loud music could be heard from the floor above. I walked up two flights of concrete stairs, following the music, to the first floor. Here, there was a hall on my left, a prayer room, an office and toilets in front of me, and a large hall, from which the music was coming, to my right. A man greeted me warmly at the door. I entered a large assembly-come-sports hall with a worn-out parquet floor, windows near the high ceiling, a raised stage, and a brown stage curtain pushed towards one side. There were red plastic chairs lined up in rows facing the stage with a wide aisle in the middle. A woman ushered me to a seat at the front left of the room. This section seemed to me mostly seated by women. Those not in concentrated prayer nodded to me and greeted me with a 'welcome'. Rafael was talking to his band members on the stage and smiled at me as he spotted me in the crowd. I looked around the room. There were about fifty people present. On

my right there was a section where men and women sat mixed and behind me there was a section for children. I was the only white person in the hall and felt rather self-conscious. The music began proper and people stood up to dance, clap, pray and sing with Rafael as their lead. The songs were repetitive and I was soon able to join in, even though I did not know the words in Lingala.

I felt awkward, however, not being a 'born again' Christian (or being a practicing Christian for that matter). I would have preferred to go to the back of the hall, to observe the event from a distance. This was not my 'scene'. During the many prayer sessions that punctuated the music, in which people mumbled repetitive prayers in Lingala, I sat watching quietly. My half-hearted participation was perhaps noticed. A man, who I later learnt was one of the church's deacons, urged the congregation to 'sing and rejoice for Jesus', to 'wake up', and 'to show Jesus that He is the one'. I felt as though the deacon spoke directly to me. Rafael frequently edged the worshippers on: 'Are you rejoicing? Are you rejoicing?' to which they responded with ululations, waving their hands in the air, and with shouts of 'hallelujah!'. The fact that I was not participating fully was clearly seen as an indication that I was not respecting Jesus and the other worshippers who had come to church to enter into concentrated prayer. Reserved behaviour went against the common spirit of the event and diverted attention away from the common purpose of 'letting go' of inhibitions in order to 'give oneself to Jesus'. Reluctantly, I copied the behaviour of the others, danced, clapped and prayed (citing the alphabet in Swedish), when they did. I squinted and looked with one eye to see what people did when they were told to close their eyes. Luckily it was acceptable to take notes. The preacher considered it to be a good thing to record what he was saying. He expected the worshippers to take note of what was said in order to reflect upon it afterwards.

After about an hour of the singing and the dancing, a man in a green camouflage military clothing stood up from his seat on the front row. The music died down and the man started preaching. This man, I later learnt, was Deacon Bruno. He preached in French, and a woman (Pamela) went up on stage to interpret in English. Much of the logic of the preaching escaped me

entirely, but the core message of the sermon could not be mistaken. Deacon Bruno produced props in the form of a balloon, a helicopter, a visa and the stamp on the visa, all shown in turn as he illustrated his points.

To be a Christian, Deacon Bruno said, one had to embrace Jesus with one's whole heart. He blew up the orange balloon slightly. This was *not* the kind of faith he expected of a true Christian. To be a true Christian, Bruno went on, one had to give all – he blew up the balloon fully – to embrace Jesus with one's whole heart. He blew up the balloon until it burst; that is what it felt like to give oneself to Jesus. In doing so, to live only for Jesus, anything was possible:

‘Those with lack of citizenship will receive citizenship. It becomes easy. If you are alone on this earth God will send Jesus Christ just for you. Have confidence, have trust. Believe in your heart. Be anxious for nothing, for immigration matters and when things are not going right, when anxiety rises. No matter what problem, if you are a true child of God you can confront it and you come out glorious.’⁶²

Who in the room, asked Deacon Bruno, did not have citizenship in United Kingdom? A number of people raised their hands. (I noticed the Rafael did not raise his hand, but that a guitarist in the band and some other people did.) Who, in this house of God, asked deacon Bruno, was the last to receive her visa in United Kingdom? A woman in white clothes a couple of rows behind me raised her hand. ‘How did it feel?’ asked Deacon Bruno, ‘It felt good, didn't it?’ The woman nodded and smiled broadly, and people cheered. A true Christian, a person who gave herself whole-heartedly to Jesus, would be ‘remembered by God’, Bruno explained. Such Christians were invited to enter the Kingdom of God, to sit in his helicopter (the toy helicopter was produced before us), to get their passport (passport shown), and get their stamp on their visa (passport and page with stamp produced). Cheers followed this triumph, feet stamped the floor, hands clapped, there were whistles, shouts

⁶² Deacon Bruno, preaching in Hayes church 6 May 2007.

of ‘halleluja’ and ululation. Deacon Bruno motioned to the church band that immediately struck up rumba-style celebratory music. The music then quietened quickly on the deacon’s indication, to become more sorrowful and slow. It was now two hours into the service and the atmosphere was highly emotionally charged. Some women started shaking, lost control over their bodies and fell down to the floor. Sometimes chairs had to be moved away quickly behind them so that they would not fall on to the chairs. The Deacon urged men and women to come forward. He lay his hands upon them, shouted ‘in the name of Jesus’ in Lingala and they fell to the floor. Two women rushed forward to these people and draped a sheet over them. The women then dragged them away from the people who were falling down in front. There were silent sobs and prayer.

I found myself moved by the music and the display of personal emotion. People were so visibly taken by the performance. Without being able to control it, tears filled up my eyes and ran down my cheeks. I tried to hide behind the people in front of me, but Deacon Bruno motioned to me to come forward. ‘Me?’ I pointed at myself. The woman who had been interpreting came up to me and said: ‘Come! Don’t be afraid!’ She took my hand and walked me up to the front. The Deacon told me through the interpreter:

‘God is telling me you have a lot of sorrow. These are His words. I do not know your situation, but He is speaking through me. He is telling me you want to help people. I do not know what your situation is, but Jesus is talking through me. He wants you to come to him. He wants to enter your life. Your life is about to change.’⁶³

To this I felt embarrassed, but found myself nodding and crying. The Deacon went on: ‘Are you ready to receive Jesus in your heart?’ I nodded: what else was I to do? The deacon laid his hands on my head and pushed me. I gathered that I was meant to fall backwards, but I resisted. Then, suddenly, I felt all embarrassment, worry and self-consciousness leaving me and a feeling of

⁶³ At the time I was going through the ethical difficulties outlined in chapter two: the perfect sentiment to be moved to tears at a charismatic church service.

happiness and bliss enter me. The sensation only lasted for a split second, but it was overpowering. I walked back to my seat, looking at the floor, not wanting to meet anyone's eyes. What must they think of me? I was embarrassed, but at the same time I felt relief and a profound sense of calm.

At the end of the service the Deacon asked me to stand up, to state my name and where I had come from. Another Deacon welcomed me, saying that the seat assigned to me was 'my own' and that if I did not turn up again, that seat would miss me. People laughed at this and women came up to me to hug me and told me I was welcome in their church.

Although my own subjective experience is of limited value in explaining how other worshippers felt and experienced this event, the transformative effect of the Pentecostal ritual for those present could not be mistaken. Clearly, people attended the church with the expectation that they would be 'touched by the spirit' and that change would come, problems addressed and 'taken care of' by God. The issue of wanting citizenship was seemingly a common wish to the people attending – a wish of which the preacher was well aware. The communitarian ethic was also evident: there was the warm welcome, the ways in which one was encouraged to participate like the others and the emphasis that one was now (or could become) 'one of them' (Van Dijk 1997, 2002). The therapeutic and supportive aspects of the belief and of the invitation to belong to such a church seemed to me almost limitless. In a radical transformation of the self and a new collective identity, wealth, goods, dreams and desires could be delivered (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 4; Coleman 2000). I thought the church services perhaps provided a place where the young asylum seekers could address their personal suffering in public and become 'healed' of their burdensome past (Meyer 1998; Van Dijk 2001). I began to attend church services regularly, as well as the various prayer meetings and church activities that took place during the week. I came to see that the newly arrived asylum seekers instantly accessed a larger, settled Congolese community in United Kingdom via the church.

Most of my research subjects joined the Glory in Hayes Town, and spent a considerable amount of time in the church. Even though I did not know the other churchgoers, they invited me, together with Rafael and everyone else, to a baby's first

birthday party, to an engagement party, and to weddings. There were also other collective events, such as ‘conferences’ (praise and worship with a particular ‘theme’), seminars, prayer meetings, and music rehearsals. In short, one could spend virtually each day of the week at some or other church event. I became interested, therefore, in the extent to which the churches and the Pentecostal belief constituted a ‘surrogate family’ for the unaccompanied asylum seekers. I anticipated that there were limitations in how supportive and incorporating the churches were, but it took me many months to see any evidence of it.

‘Family of God’

The church’s own theology reinforced a communitarian ethic. Preachers and members of the congregation constructed the church as a ‘family of God’ in which everyone was sisters and brothers in the blood of Christ. During a Tuesday church service in July 2007, Deacon Paul preached about the importance of these practices. He compared the church community with that of the human body to emphasize that all parts had equally important functions:

‘So there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it: if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.’ (1 Corinthians 12: 25)

The Deacon pointed out that love among the churchgoers was the fundamental building stone on which to serve God:

‘Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms’ (1 Peter 4: 8-12).

Churchgoers were encouraged to ‘invest’ in the church, to devote time, money (tithing and donations) and effort to their faith (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 7). The churchgoers who were in employment were expected to tithe 10 percent of their monthly income. At the beginning of each Sunday service, anyone who so wished

could go up in front of the stage and ‘sing for God’. This, too, was considered an important act of ‘offering’. The more musical the performance or the more moved the person was who sang, the more susceptible that person was thought to be to the ‘touch’ of the Holy Spirit.

Churchgoers were also encouraged to stay after church to talk to one other, to celebrate birthdays and weddings and mourn the dead⁶⁴ in a common spirit. Because I did not have a car and many of the social and church events (the boundaries of which were blurred) took place on the outskirts of the public transport system, members of the congregation often offered me a ride. This was a kind gesture that I always felt indebted to, but it was also actions with an ulterior motive. Once, Muhammad drove me to a ‘conference’ in northeast London even though he did not have time to attend it himself.⁶⁵ All other attempts at taking a lift with people had failed and Muhammad made this sacrifice for me. I thanked him profusely as we arrived and offered him money for petrol, but Muhammad refused, almost abhorred: ‘No’, he said. ‘I can’t accept it, or I won’t be blessed.’ There were blessings from God to be had in return for the services one did for the church, and this included giving to the other people who attended it.

The young asylum seekers who joined the church were quick to take up various responsibilities there in order to earn blessings from God. Often, the young people had held similar roles in their churches in Kinshasa. Micah, for example, who had been a keen drummer in Kinshasa, both in church music and in profane music bands, joined The Glory because a friend attending the church (Flouride) told him it needed a drummer. Micah also enjoyed the preaching, particularly that of Deacon Bruno. In turn, Micah introduced Rafael to the church. Rafael had been a prominent singer in a church band in Kinshasa and was quickly recruited as singer to The Glory church band. He was later promoted to its lead singer. Rafael subsequently introduced three girls to the church: Sarah, Angelica and Rachel. Sarah took up responsibilities as an usher and Angelica became a singer in the band. Rachel did not take on a particular role because she was heavily pregnant upon joining.

⁶⁴ During fieldwork I did not come across any deaths in the congregation, but a few relations passed away in the DRC. These deaths were announced and one was encouraged to show sympathy for the deceased’s relative.

⁶⁵ Which he only told me once we were well on our way.

Young people emphasized that the duties they performed were all in the service of God and were directly acknowledged by Him. God would note every little act and one day He would repay all that which was invested in His house. Participation in the choirs (of *mamans*, *papas* and *enfants* respectively) and the band, interpreting, assisting at healing ceremonies, preparing the hall for the service (putting the chairs in rows before the service and putting them back in stacks afterwards, picking up rubbish and sweeping the floor), setting up the stage (dusting the pulpit, rolling out a rug, placing pots of silk flowers on pedestals), welcoming people on the door, and so forth, was all part of a spiritual venture. Over time, as acknowledgement for their services in the House of the Lord the young Congolese received blessings in the form of money, clothes, distinction on essays, and help with immigration matters.

Save for the unaccompanied asylum seekers who had not yet started a family, most individuals in The Glory attended the church with their nuclear family or some family relation. Many of the parents of these families had attended the church since its inception in the early 1990s. They had then met their spouses, often at church events, and brought their ‘second half’ to the church. Since the church had great attendance by married people with children, The Glory concerned itself greatly with teachings on how to sustain a harmonious marriage and family life. The older and more experienced men and women of the congregation gave advice to the younger worshippers, who were reaching adulthood, on walking the righteous path in future marriage and family life. The older men organised and recruited men to the men’s choir, prayed for the welfare of the men, and organised seminars for matters concerning them. In the summer of 2007, Rafael, Emmanuel, Ezekiel, and Michel, all in their late teens and early 20s, attended a seminar on how to conduct themselves in a future marriage. At the seminar, older, married men shared their experiences with the younger men on how to manage relationships with women.⁶⁶ The instructions by the *départements des mamans* and *des papas* were in turn a directive from the Bible, to:

‘... teach all the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can

⁶⁶ Interview with Rafael 9 August 2007.

train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no-one will malign the world of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.' (Titus 2: 3-9).⁶⁷



Fig. 3: Church seminar promotion flyer.

There was a strong sense in The Glory, therefore, that the older men and women were responsible for the younger generation of the church. In the case of the unaccompanied asylum seekers, this was significant since they often had no relatives in United Kingdom. Upon giving birth to her child, for example, the women of the church visited Rachel. They instructed her on how to look after herself and her baby, such as how to keep herself and her child clean, to eat well, and pray for the welfare of her child. The women also gave Rachel a ‘contribution’ of £250 (£10 per person). Rachel, who had been attending a church with Angelica in Seven Sisters in east London, had come to find the journey there too tiresome. However, aware that the church would support her with both money and prayer as she gave birth, she made sure to attend a church shortly before and after the birth of her child.

⁶⁷ Fieldnotes 28 October 2007, the day that the women visited my house upon the birth of my daughter, Lily.

The ‘blessings’ that the young asylum seekers sought to obtain could not manifest themselves without membership to a church. The type of blessings a person could obtain also varied between individual churches. The young Congolese asylum seekers had a wide selection of Pentecostal churches to choose from that in various ways offered what they were looking for. The family and inter-generational support, the ‘African’ and ‘Congolese’ orientation of The Glory did not appeal to all the young people. The many different Pentecostal churches in London and beyond tacitly competed against each other. They measured their success in terms of how wealthy its worshippers were – sometimes publicly stating that the Congolese community should strive to be as hardworking and prosperous as ‘the Nigerians’.⁶⁸ The different churches also measured the size of the congregation and how ‘strong’ the church was in spiritual power – that is the extent to which miracles manifested themselves during rituals. All these measures of success were intricately linked to the social characteristics and composition of the churches. Pastors in The Glory urged its members to move to higher levels spiritually and to advance in their education and employability. Pastor Paul urged the congregation to become successful ‘like the Nigerians’. He said in a sermon:

‘God wants you to prosper. A poor person has no voice. Money speaks. I want you to prosper. Many people do not prosper because of laziness. They want to get money from the Government, but they don’t want to have anything to do with Europeans. If you don’t like Europeans why are you in this country? Laziness, dishonesty and fraud has no place when it comes to the will of God. If you cheat the Government of benefits and you are fraudulent, you will receive money, but you will never prosper because it is against God. You will die poor. When I grew up there were many rich people around me who are now poor. In America, Mike Tyson used to be a millionaire. Now he is poor and in debt. God knows, God remembers. Don’t be selfish. The one who lends to God, he will receive. I come from Kinshasa. Sometimes people say, ‘Oh, America has sent 200 tons of beans to help the hungry there.’ But the Americans never go hungry. God is telling people to learn English. Don’t be

⁶⁸ Some of the more educated individuals in the Glory, who had jobs in banks and as assistant accountants (Pamela and Muhammad), sometimes implied a sense of frustration that their fellow Congolese churchgoers were ‘lazy’ and wanted ‘easy money’ through social benefits, rather than opting to maximize their income through employment.

afraid to try things out. Don't be afraid to invest and to study. Money shall not be a problem for you.'⁶⁹

Pastor Paul was commenting on the fact that most male churchgoers were either unemployed or in low-skilled employment.⁷⁰ Most women with children were housewives who looked after several children. Some of these women studied English or Adult Education courses at evening classes.⁷¹ Many of the families in the church lived in council houses and received social benefits. Most churchgoers spent little time with other British people and membership in the church with its many social events meant that they had little time for 'integrating' into mainstream British society. For some of the African migrants, 'integration' often begun and ended with membership in the church. Those who had 'integrated' spoke English fluently and were regarded as being more prosperous than others. The unaccompanied asylum seekers often struck up membership with a church soon after their arrival to the UK and membership in the church was yet another place in which they did not interact with the majority population. Muhammad, who arrived as an unaccompanied asylum seeker in 2004 and was a member of The Glory, had actively worked towards 'integrating' himself into the British society ever since his arrival. He took part-time jobs and made sure he studied courses of the national curriculum, rather than the vocational courses the social services assisted the unaccompanied minors to enter. His English advanced mostly, he said, when he took a job as a shop assistant in Gerhards Cross, an affluent area out of Hillingdon. 'There you did not know whether the person you are speaking to was a millionaire or not, and people were always chatty and friendly.' With the help of the interpreter in the church, he entered accounting courses in London and started working as a junior accountant.

Lillian, who had come from an elite background in Kinshasa, sought out a more 'white' and 'more wealthy' church than the ones her friends joined. During the first

⁶⁹ Fieldnotes, 22 June 2007.

⁷⁰ Employment of the men included sorting mail at the Royal Mail, catering, and construction work. There were, however, also a couple of university students, and an assistant accountant.

⁷¹ I only came across one woman in skilled employment, the woman who interpreted the services, Pamela. She was in her late 20s and born in the UK. She had a Congolese husband whose English was basic and they had two young children. Her mother had migrated to the UK and attended the Glory as well. Pamela was working in a bank and had helped the male accountant to access courses and get employment.

two years in London, she had attended a small, Lingala-speaking, Congolese church in Brixton with her best friend Miriam. The girls said the preaching style in this church was similar to the churches they had attended in Kinshasa. The *Pasteur* and the ‘sisters’ in the church had been very supportive of Lillian during her first two years in London. They had for example provided her with tape recordings of sermons that Lillian listened to whenever she felt low. However, as Lillian’s English improved and she had grown tired of her dependability on the social services, she began looking for blessings that did not manifest themselves in the Brixton church - a white, wealthy husband; a university degree and employment. She and Miriam had also come to find the two-and-a-half hour journey to Brixton (most of the way travelled by bus) too tiresome, especially when Miriam fell pregnant. While Miriam joined a Congolese church in Queen’s Park in West London, Lillian joined her friend Bernadette in the predominantly white South African and white English London International Church in Uxbridge (far West London). Lillian said she enjoyed the church because it offered her the opportunity to improve her English. She said that it was time for her to start ‘integrating’⁷² in England and that was not easy if she attended a predominantly African church. In the ‘English’ church (which was in fact a great mix of various nationalities, but most of whom were white), moreover, the individualistic notions of success of the single, career-minded person, was a major theme in its preaching.



Fig. 4: Worship in the London International Church.
(Photograph taken by Wahlström).

⁷² Her choice of term.

However, what might appear as an almost trivial search for congeniality and prosperity had a much more serious dimension to it. At any given moment, evil forces may enter the worshippers' lives.

Omnipotent presence of evil

The main discourse professed by Pentecostal churches in Kinshasa as well as those in the diaspora is that death is omnipresent, and the world is in the grip of evil. In this vein, De Boeck speaks about the 'apocalyptic interlude' (De Boeck 2004 and 2005). This interlude occurs as the world is waiting for the Son of Man to come to earth with his power and glory.

'Life for most in Kinshasa situates itself in this interlude in which Satan fully reigns. For some others, the world has arrived at the end of the thousand year day of judgment and thus at the moment in which Satan is briefly released again. Thus, the popular understanding of the Apocalypse very much centres on the crack of doom and the omnipotent presence of Evil, thereby contributing to the rapid demonization of everyday life in Kinshasa.' (De Boeck 2004: 98).

The worshippers in The Glory were instructed on how to protect themselves from evil by being true Christians. Preachers spoke about evil in terms of the devil or Satan (French, *diable*, Lingala *satána*) or witch (French, *sorcier*, Lingala *ndoki*). Some churches in London put more emphasis on combating evil forces than others. For example, according to media reports, a *Pasteur* in the *Combat Spirituel* church in Tottenham 'diagnosed' children as witches - a widespread practice in Kinshasa (De Boeck 2005). During fieldwork, there were exposés of families who sent their children to Kinshasa to be 'cured' and who physically abused their children for 'ritual purposes'.

However, I did not come across any church or churchgoer who attributed their misfortune to child witches. Informants were adamant that while the phenomenon of child witches did exist; in most cases one could protect oneself from witchcraft and the Devil's work through constant prayer and leading a true Christian life. Clear

boundaries were constructed between Christians (*bakristu*) and pagans (*bapaïen*), as well as between true Christians (*bakristu ya solo*, true Christians) and false ones (*bakristu ya musuni* – carnal Christian) (Pype 2006: 308). Belonging to the family of God, there was a community of Christians in which one could be a true Christian - someone who embraced the faith until one's heart burst (like Deacon Bruno had illustrated in his preaching that first time I attended), to serve God fully and by implication, other children of God. It was only in membership in a church, therefore, that one could be a true child of God, to be close to God, and prevent evil things from happening. The intercessors in church played a key role in the constant vigil against Satan.

The intercessors

There was a core group in the church that constituted of some men and women in their 40s who participated in the *intercession* one evening a week. The *intercession* group was 'the special forces' of the church, in the war waged against Satan.⁷³

In the Hayes church, this group concerned itself with the spiritual growth of the church as well as the growth of the number of recruits. *Les intercesseurs* held the key to the well-being of the church and the individual desires of the churchgoers, be it citizenship, pregnancy, marriage or financial wealth. The intersession intervened to destroy the works of the Devil against an individual or the local church. The local church was the physical church every believer attended, while the global church was the body of Christ. It was the logic of the intersession that 'anything that is manifest in the physical realm begins in the spiritual realm' (Pype 2006: 306). Therefore, anything that was declared in the intersession would manifest itself in the church. An *intercesseur* held responsibility for freeing church members from captivity by the Devil, or to fully understand where they had committed wrong-doing and encountered the wrath of God:

'He [God] is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to *arbitrate* between

⁷³ Deacon Emmanuel, at intercession 21 June 2007

us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more' (*Job* 9: 32-34, my emphasis).

Other cited verses from the Bible that explained the purpose of the intercession included verses from the Book of *Isiah*: 'The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no-one to *intervene*' (*Isiah* 19: 16, my emphasis), and from the Book of *Romans*: 'Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also *interceding* for us.' (*Romans* 8: 34, my emphasis).

The intercessions began with an hour of intense prayer in which the group asked for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

'... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will' (*Romans* 9: 26-27).⁷⁴

The emphasis given to intercessions and the intercessors is significant here because they mediate between the 'ordinary' churchgoer and God. The role of the *intercesseur* added a social or human element to the otherwise direct (unmediated) Pentecostal relationship between the believer and God (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 5).

In The Glory interpersonal conflicts testified that there was a constant struggle in church to maintain a social order of the 'true Christians'. The worshippers' quest for spiritual power hinged on their position in their church at any one time. The 'family of God' had the power to say who was acting like a good Christian and who was not. The intercessors had a particularly strong role to play in this respect.

Niclette had come to the United Kingdom from Angola⁷⁵ with her family at the age of eleven. She joined the Glory with her parents during the late 90s. A few years after the church's inception, a conflict ensued between the first pastor of the church and

⁷⁴ Fieldnotes 21 June 2007.

⁷⁵ In fact a number of individuals in The Glory were from Angola and central African countries.

some of its deacons. In this conflict, Niclette's parents chose to follow the pastor to a new church in Acton. Niclette chose to stay with The Glory in Hayes. Due to this split in the church and the family, a serious conflict ensued between Niclette and her parents. Although Niclette did not want to talk about it in detail, she said that the family's splitting to different churches was at the heart of the conflict. Niclette subsequently ran away from home and dropped out of college. It appeared that women of the women's choir were somehow implicated in the conflict, at least in their commenting on it.

For a long time, Niclette felt it best to take a marginal role in the social life of the church. In 2006 she lived in YMCA accommodation in Kingston, but did not disclose her whereabouts to any member of the church⁷⁶, not even a young woman, Isabelle, with whom she enjoyed the closest form of friendship. For a period of time, she also obtained a second mobile phone, but only gave out the number to Isabelle and me. Niclette told me that 'the mothers' treated her with contempt ever since she left her home. The 'mothers' she referred to were those singing in the 'mother's' choir'. A number of these women were also active participants in the intercessions. She said that they talked behind her back and judged her as 'the girl who disrespected her parents' and who 'ran away from home'. She was clearly uncomfortable that the mothers gossiped behind her back and worried that information about her conflict with her family swayed the *intercesseurs*' willingness to pray for her welfare. Niclette subsequently came to reveal as little as possible about her personal life to other church members in order for her relationship with God to continue without a biased mediation of the *intercesseurs*.

I asked why she thought such conflicts took place in the church. 'It's an African thing', she said. 'People like to know everyone's business and don't see a problem with that.' She said that although the mothers in the choir judged her, they should look at themselves 'from toe to head' before judging others. She said that she acted against God's will whenever she smiled at them with a fake smile, but there was nothing she could do about it. She pointed out that there were other wrongdoers in the church of higher responsibility and rank than her, but over whom the mothers did not

⁷⁶ Except myself. I visited her there 8 May 2007.

pass their judgement. She related the scandal of the charismatic and much-liked, Deacon Bruno. Not long after he had preached that Sunday in his military clothes, he had been found to be practicing bigamy. He was subsequently banned from preaching for six months. Deacon Bruno had a wife and children in the DRC, yet he married another woman in London. He then brought his wife and children from the DRC to London, without divorcing the second wife. Deacon Bruno had thus entered into bigamous marriage which was against the law and God. For this reason, Niclette said, people in church should not judge her before they looked at their own sins.

Although Niclette had a difficult relationship with the church she continued to attend services after a few months' intermission. In the summer of 2007, Niclette had a serious throat infection and let it be announced in church that she was 'seriously ill' and that she asked for everyone's prayer.⁷⁷

It puzzled me that she sustained her relationship with The Glory. She lived more than a two-hour bus journey away (she could not afford the tube and the train) and seemed uneasy with many of the people who worshipped there. Why did she not join a church closer to where she lived and where she felt more comfortable? I watched her walk up in front of the congregation on Sundays to 'sing for God'. The congregation was not as jubilant during her singing as they were with some other singers, but Niclette still asked to sing for God almost every Sunday. It was clear that her singing was an offering to God in which her personal pleasure had no relevance. Niclette said that she both did and did not feel at home in The Glory. It was a place for her to maintain her relationship with God, to worship Him, and a place and group of people with which she was familiar. It was clear that Niclette had a long-standing relationship with The Glory that itself was significant and could not be entirely isolated from her worship. In any other church she said she would feel like a stranger. However, she had come to learn to only reveal a certain side to herself, a side that the mothers in the choir and the intercessors would approve of.

One's primary reason for going to The Glory church to worship God was emphasised by Carol, a woman in her early 40s. Carol had been looking for a church to join and

⁷⁷ Fieldnotes 22 July 2007.

spotted a sign of the church in Hayes. She did not know anyone in the church. Unlike others, Carol commented, she did not just accompany a friend to church, but came to serve God through prayer and listen to the preaching. Carol was a member of the women's choir and commented on the friendships she struck with the other women:

‘When you sing in the choir you make relationships. You are sisters and brothers in Christ, but when you go [to church] for your God, God comes first. First of all you establish a good relationship with Jesus. The rest is less important’.

Carol said that ‘friends can give you problems’, could ‘disappoint’ and give you ‘a bad feeling’. That was undesirable in the church. Having close personal relations in the church could complicate things and it was wise to keep people at a certain distance.

Conflicts did not only occur between different generations in the church, like Niclette had experienced, but also between people of the same peer group. Rafael and Micah, for example, had a fall-out over Christian conduct that resulted in Micah leaving the church. Micah was an aspiring musician and wanted to improve his drumming skills. He felt that church music offered a limited opportunity to do so because the same songs were usually played over and over again. Micah sought out musicians who played profane music outside the church to assist him in developing his musical abilities. Rafael, who had become lead singer of the church band, had the responsibility to lead and pray for the success of the singers. Micah sometimes missed rehearsals and Rafael thought that Micah was undisciplined and disloyal to the band. When Micah suggested that the band should try out some new songs, Rafael did not want to cooperate with Micah.

Rafael believed that Micah did not take his service in The Glory seriously enough. As Pype writes, dance and music are markers of a clear boundary between Christians and pagans, as well as between real Christians and insincere Christians (Pype 2006: 308). Rafael said to me that the musical gift (*le don*) was a call from God to develop one's musical ability so that one could channel the Holy Spirit to the congregation. Rafael's singing was ‘like an irrigation system’ through which the Holy Spirit flowed to the

worshippers and in this way helping them to receive it. That Micah failed to respect this service to God, was in Rafael's view unforgivable. Micah had trained Deacon Emmanuel's son in drumming, and this boy started replacing Micah at the drums at church services more frequently. Micah sometimes went to band rehearsals 'just to be friendly' with Rafael and to 'show that everything was okay' between them, but Rafael failed to accommodate this gesture of continued friendship. Micah was also discouraged to attend The Glory because his girlfriend Cindy, who was from South Africa and did not speak Lingala or French, did not enjoy the services or the church activities.

Nobert, who was the leader of the church band (guitarist), and a few years senior to Rafael, was more tolerant and forgiving towards other band members' behaviour. Emmanuel maintained that one had to 'be at peace with everyone' as Jesus said to Peter in the Bible. Emmanuel was of the view that in life it was important to get on with everyone, Christians, true Christians and non-Christians alike. It was presumably for this reason that Emmanuel went to great lengths to conceal to the other churchgoers a serious family crisis that played out for him at the time of fieldwork.

Emmanuel was married to Bonane, a young woman from Kinshasa who had refugee status in United Kingdom. Emmanuel had arrived as an unaccompanied asylum seeker in Hillingdon and did not yet know the outcome of his asylum application. Bonane had cerebral malaria and it was important, the doctors had told Emmanuel, that she was not subjected to stress. Bonane sometimes went up to the front of the church at the end of church services where she whispered that she sought help with a 'health problem' to the preacher. The preacher laid his hands on her to heal her. One day at home, Emmanuel tripped and fell on their toddler son, Mani. Emmanuel knew that Mani was hurt, but because he did not want to upset Bonane, he did not mention to her about this accident at first. However, over the days that followed, Mani cried and moaned and the parents eventually took him to accident and emergency. There it transpired that Mani had a broken collar-bone. The social services were informed and Mani was removed from his parents and taken into foster care. Over a year, Emmanuel and Bonane visited Mani in his foster home, but were not allowed to take him home or be alone with him. At a one-year-old birthday party at one of the church member's home, I chatted to Bonane and asked her how things were with her family.

Bonane immediately changed the subject. The following Sunday she apologized and explained that she did not want other people of the church to know what was going on.

Bonane later became pregnant a second time. The family went to a hearing at the family court over whether Mani should be returned to them and whether the unborn child should be taken into care. The court ordered the family to live under observation in a 'community home' for two weeks. Here they were reunited with Mani under the supervision of social workers and received training in parenting. Emmanuel sometimes called me during his stay in the home to ask me for help with various assignments that the social workers had given him, among other things to state five reasons for his wanting to have children. Throughout this time Emmanuel remained humble and kind and did not let on to others that he went through a personal crisis. Emmanuel did not let on to other church members what was going on with his family until he and Bonane were required to live in 'the community home'. He then felt compelled to explain to the other band members why he could not attend rehearsals. The family problems had then transpired over more than a year. Eventually, the family was reunited and could return home together, although under certain supervision from the social services. During the whole saga, which affected the very heart of the family life, Emmanuel and Bonane chose not to talk about their distress in church.

In search of community or spiritual power?

Several anthropologists have discussed the fraternising and internal harmony of Pentecostalism (Englund and Leach 2000, Van Dijk 1997, 2002, and Martin 2002). Englund, for example, shows that in the Pentecostal church he studied in Malawi, men and women perceived themselves to be united in the blood of Jesus and engaged in mutual support (Englund and Leach 2000: 35). Martin argues that Charismatic Christianity is a 'portable identity' for people in the diaspora (Martin 2002: 145). In situations where individuals do not have residence permits and their national identity politics is contested, the churches provide a space in which marriages can still take place and in which new imaginations of community are incited (Van Dijk 2002: 49-66 in Meyer 2004: 461).

Contra to such analysis, Van Wyk (2008) criticizes anthropological studies of Pentecostal churches for being predisposed to view them in terms of their institution building and stabilizing effects. Similarly, Meyer points out that anthropology of religion as a whole is biased toward an understanding of religion as stabilizing 'in that it offers modes of orientation and control and a secure place to feel at home' (Meyer 2004: 463). There is a tension here concerning the worshipper's motives for joining a particular Pentecostal church. The one stresses the search for new forms of communality among the urban migrants and diaspora groups. The other emphasizes the search for spiritual power. Young Congolese people in this research experienced these dimensions in their Pentecostal faith as an ongoing tension they could not 'resolve'.

Worshippers' primary purpose for attending the Pentecostal churches such as The Glory was their search for spiritual power and to find ways in which to maintain one's relationship with God (Van Wyk 2008). In this way they aimed to attain material wealth, physical health and success in relationships and marriage (Coleman 2000). They also strove to prevent bad things from happening and evil forces from entering their lives (Pype 2006). The focus on combating evil forces is more outspoken and visible in some churches than others. However, there is a complicated twist in maintaining a harmonious relationship with God. Evil forces are omnipotent and can take the grip of human beings and Christians who are spiritually weak. Christians may, for example, be tricked to accept gifts of prosperity from the 'wrong source' – the Devil and witches – naively thinking (or justifying their actions) that the offer of a car much below its real value, or a large sum of money suddenly appearing on their bank statement, is a reward from God. In accepting this gift, they then become indebted to the evil source and are forced to engage in a destructive, dependable relationship with it. This is likely to bring down others into destruction and viciousness. To protect themselves from witchcraft (brought about by significant others), worshippers then have two options. They can either minimize their social interactions with other worshippers in order for personal relationships not to interfere with their rapport with God. Such a situation evidently occurred in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God studied by Van Wyk (2008). Here social activities were completely separate from spiritual activities and no personal relationships were

formed in the church. Van Wyk describes how worshippers did not know each other, even the other's names, despite having attended the church together for many years.

The second option is to attend a church where sociality is encouraged, but only on certain terms. For example, worshippers can choose to reveal limited personal information about themselves in church. To reiterate the directive from the Bible cited by older women in *The Glory* above, this can have the desired effect, 'that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us' (*Titus* 2: 9). However, where worshippers do know a great deal about each other because they are related, have lived together, or have engaged in social church activities for a great number of years; worshippers are taking a potential risk in participating in such a church.

Conclusion

Fundamentalist Christian Pentecostal churches play a central role in young people's lives in Kinshasa and in their lives as refugees (De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Pype 2006). As in Kinshasa, young people are greatly attracted to such churches because of their equal distribution of spiritual gifts (Fabian 1994: 370). When the young Congolese people come to London, the Pentecostal churches constitute one of the most significant places in which they can establish support networks with other Congolese. Malkki (1995) showed that for refugees fleeing Rwanda, Christianity provided a language in which they saw themselves as legitimate exiles. However, the young Congolese migrants are more concerned to establish a Christian commonality along the lines of shared British citizenship. This is often a topic evoked in prayer and in rituals of deliverance. The Pentecostal genre in *The Glory* and other churches the young people joined provided a set of 'techniques' (Van Wyk 2007) in which to conceptualise and manage their separation as national aliens. Christianity provided a narrative in which uncertainty is articulated and the church communities are places in which the young persons experience a sense of freedom and distance to struggles in daily life.

Young Congolese in this research were on a quest for 'blessings' of various kinds. To obtain these blessings they joined Pentecostal churches in order to maintain optimal

relationship with God. Whether one can obtain what one is looking for is contingent upon entering a church community of true Christians and show oneself as one of them (Pype 2006). The quandary for the Pentecostals in this research is that evil manifests itself through the actions of other human beings. The institutional context of the Pentecostal church and the complex ways in which Christians believe, are two dimensions of the Pentecostal faith that are analytically inseparable.

Chapter seven

Citizenship and Prayer: Imposing Divine Will on Difficult Situations

‘Stay alert and pray all the time’ (Deacon Nobert preaching at Intersession, Hayes Church, 8 July 2007).

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God’ (*John* 1: 1)

A psychotherapist working closely with the Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers in Hillingdon once made the following remark to me:

‘When you ask them how they are, they always say: “A little bit good” [*un peu bien*]. Never that things are bad, although they may be... To them the glass is always “half-full”.’⁷⁸

I came to ponder over this analysis. I had observed during fieldwork that when I asked how my informants were, they would answer: ‘By the grace of God, I am okay’, or ‘Thanks be to God, not too bad’, even though the question was asked at a time when they had just had both their children removed from them by the Social Services, they were up for an asylum court hearing the following day (upon which their future in the United Kingdom depended), or went on to talk about how impossible they found their situation in the next sentence. When the young people said that things were alright, (even though they would immediately proceed to tell me how bad things really were) did this mean that they viewed their difficulties in relative terms? Were they better at ‘positive thinking’ than others? Perhaps they did not *really think* their situation too bad, but knew that stressing their difficulties to health professionals, and to researchers in contact with social workers, could generate greater attention to their needs.⁷⁹ Perhaps it was just a matter of a polite greeting, a convention, which did not reflect on the real situation at all. There was an element of truth in all of these explanations, but during the course of my fieldwork I came to appreciate another dimension to these seemingly confusing and contradictory verbal statements. In this

⁷⁸ Fieldnotes 11 April 2006.

⁷⁹ The social workers were under statutory duty to carry out needs assessments with the young people and to give due consideration regarding their wishes and feelings in care arrangements.

chapter I suggest that young Congolese people, uttered certain words and verbal exchanges with caution. To state that one was depressed, suicidal, lonely and sad were in some instances viewed as making statements of *defeat* in one's fight for God, against evil. And it was in showing such weakness that the Devil could find an entry into one's life. Giving thanks to God in an extremely precarious situation was a means of showing faith and disciplining the 'doubting self' (Coleman 2004: 33).

On the other hand, I argue, in particular ritual contexts and in prayer, words are expressions of *commands*. They are performed in order to effect a change in the world and they are believed to have consequences. My research subjects distinguished between words that describe an actual state of affairs – either negatively or positively – acts that express what is hoped for, and those that are intended to have consequences (Ahern 1979: 14). The attraction of the Pentecostal churches for my informants was that any one of them could access divine power (Fabian 1994) in which stated commands can become reality. In this sense, the Pentecostal faith and the churches represented magical spaces contrary to ordinary life in Hillingdon (Handelman and Kapferer 1980). In the churches, the young people experienced a sense of fulfilment and control, while their ordinary lives were characterised by the rigid administrative systems that organized their lives in bureaucratic ways.

The quest for citizenship and Christianity

The young people's ordinary, every day lives were defined by an administrative system that gave temporary protection in Britain, but in which the young people could not lead the lives they desired. Throughout this thesis I have shown that the young refugees sought out ways in which to they could better their material and social situation in the United Kingdom. Their specific personal quests included money, marriage partners and children. In chapter five, I showed that the young people desired to bear children in Britain and that children were seen as their new family in the new place. Young people also worked hard at presenting a dynamic image of themselves through clothing and through collecting items towards a permanent home. There was a belief that successful body language worked as a kind of 'positive confession'. This meant that to speak or act in an appropriate Christian 'positive' way about a situation might actually create the very state that it described (Coleman 2004:

430). These were activities part of an overarching project in which they were set on pursuing belonging and a permanent home in Britain. For above all, the young people were on a quest for citizenship.⁸⁰

The asylum claims process was certainly the most powerful way in which a particular social order was imposed on the refugees: it restricted them in all areas of life and social mobility (see chapter four). Emmanuel, leader of the church *orchestre* in the Glory church in Hayes town, once told me what it was like for him to wait for a resolution to the asylum claim:

‘You can’t move [house or go abroad] or do anything when you don’t have a paper. The Home Office takes a long time to give their answer. The rules change every time and everyday. I’m not allowed to study. I am not allowed to work. The only way for me to make life possible here is that I’ve got my wife. I believe that God brought us together. She gets benefits so we survive on that.’

Then, characteristically, Emmanuel offered that his deep, sincere faith helped him get through the worst of times:

‘I survive because I’m Christian. This means I am a person who prays and who lives according to the Christian way of life. If anything goes wrong, I don’t have to worry about it. It is all in the hands of God. I don’t have to worry about anything. But non-Christians, the pagans, they loose control. They react differently. They may get a lot of stress, loose weight and such. For me, being a Christian means you go through bad times, but it is for me to gain experience so I can help others. When I need help I go and pray and ask God why this is happening to me. I am talking to the Holy Spirit. There is a voice inside you: That is the Holy Spirit who helps you through. You open the Bible and God is talking directly to you. He is showing me how I can control myself.’

⁸⁰ I use this term as shorthand for young people’s wish to be granted permanent protection in the United Kingdom. Political asylum is granted initially on a five-year basis. This refugee status can be succeeded by neutralization and citizenship.

Emmanuel thus related the conceptualizations among the Congolese Pentecostals I introduced in the last chapter: they constructed clear boundaries between Christians (*bakristu*) and pagans (*bapaièn*), as well as true Christians (*bakristu ya solo*, a Christian of the soul) and false ones (*bakristu ya musuni* – Christian of the flesh) (Pype 2006: 308). Belonging to the ‘family of God’, as the church was portrayed, meant that a community of true Christians could stand united in the war waged against Satan. The Pentecostal Christians thus perceive the earth as the battleground for a spiritual competition between God and the Devil (Pype 2006: 306). They were up against a multitude of evil spiritual forces that lurked behind individual misfortunes (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001). The quest for citizenship became one desire that the believers sought divine intervention for and tried to make sure that the Devil did not to interfere with God’s plan.

It was in relation to this doctrinal logic that Deacon Nobert urged the attendants at one *intercession* to ‘stay alert and pray all the time’.⁸¹ The Devil (*le diable*) and through him witches (*bandoki*), were always looking for an entry point into people’s lives. These evil forces were observing and waiting for moments of disobedience, disloyalty and weakness in people. According to his rhetoric, believers could not take for granted that they would breathe another breath, that they would wake up in the morning and live another day. Every minute of the day was in the hands of God and one needed to constantly fuel God’s mercy with prayer for continued (and successful) existence. Prayer here becomes the domain of the individual’s constant and free converse with God (Mauss 2003: 24). To that end it was crucial to speak affirmatively about unknown outcomes, lest evil could find an entry into the situation. It is in this context that giving thanks to a wish not already granted is one way of showing belief in God, and serves to discipline the ‘doubting self’ (Coleman 2004: 33).

This mode of expression about difficult situations emerged in one interview with Rafael. Rafael spoke about his experience with British doctors who had not impressed him. After expressing this negativity about ‘Britain’, Rafael quickly edited himself for fear that such talk would lessen his chances to stay in the country. Rafael added:

⁸¹ Fieldnotes, Preaching by Deacon Nobert at Intersession, Hayes Church 8 July 2007.

‘But Britain is good, especially if you have the paper... There is no point in me going around thinking about it. It is in God’s hands if I get the paper. I can only pray and carry out my services for God. I know for Him everything is possible.’

Rafael did not want to talk badly about Britain, or in this way reveal his fear of deportation. In this context, in a conversation with a researcher, who also happened to attend his church (as opposed to a conversation with a legal representative who did not), Rafael was quick to edit himself in ways that were appropriate according to the Pentecostal discourse. Rafael continually switched from the mode of communication of secular discourse to a Pentecostal mode of communication, using the latter for statements concerning his unchallenged role as a Christian (Bloch 1975).

Rafael frequently experienced evidence of the fact that God recognised his service at The Glory. He gave me the example of how God removed his sickness when he felt unwell prior to singing during a Sunday service.⁸²

He had long suffered problems with fatigue, dizziness and breathing problems. After almost a year of complaining that his doctor did not examine him properly, and self-medicating himself against malaria and parasites in the blood, an x-ray confirmed that Rafael had a serious chest infection. One particular Sunday he was extremely unwell with fever and sweating. He lay in his bed watching the clock ticking closer to the time he had to leave for the Service. Out of despair he asked God for help:

‘So God, you take people to be involved in your service. So now I have to go to work. But look at me I can’t go, so what do you say? If I don’t go, who’s going to take my place? What am I going to do? I said, “God, *remember me.*”

In that moment he felt ease of breath and the fever leaving him. He hurried to church where he performed well, enabling the sisters and brothers to receive the Holy Spirit.

⁸² Interview with Rafael 9 August 2007.

Both evil and benevolent forces entered one's life through the body. As Pype comments:

‘*Kinois* perceive their body as a house in which the spirit resides. (...) People have to open their body to invite God. The problem is that the same opening of the body might allow bad spirits to enter. Therefore, Christians are warned over and over not ‘to open a door for the Devil (Lingala *kofungola porte*), because that is the way in which spirits (both good and bad) enter’ (Pype 2006: 306).

This ideology posited an essential continuity between the worship mode-of-being in church and the everyday lives of worshipers. It was in this way that young Congolese, in ordinary conversation, felt a need to express a *wish* of what they hoped for (Ahern 1979: 14). This was necessary, because a statement could help bring forth the outcome projected. The action performed in the polite greetings and the inferences made by Emmanuel and Rafael in the interviews, were not thought *necessarily* to have an effect on the course of events. However, this style of talk was expressions of wishes or desires that served to reaffirm a person's faith (Coleman 2004: 33). That in turn was precautions taken to improve *the chances* of something happening.

However, at heightened moments of uncertainty and difficulty, such as around the time of Asylum Tribunal hearings, the doctrine was tapped into more feverishly than at other times. Through certain actions, stringent body politics, and Pentecostal genres such as public testimonies, believers initiated a process of self-surveillance and deployed true Christian actions, language and behaviour with real expected effects. Such technologies of the self permitted individuals to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of purity and immortality (Foucault 1988: 17). To achieve these effects, the person had to reach a higher charismatic state of self in the Pentecostal ritual.

The unbounded body

The physical body was not only the way in for evil forces to enter a person, but also the instrument through which persons could become unbounded and transcended by the Holy Spirit. Coleman writes that in the Pentecostal Word of Life ministry ideological oppositions are conceptualised around the body as the ‘outside’, while soul and spirit are on the ‘inside’:

‘... the spirit-filled inside of the born-again person is ‘larger’ than the outside and is, indeed, unbounded because this is the space where one becomes united with God. Unbounded ‘inner’ must dominate bounded ‘outer’. While the soul (roughly analogous to mind) and body are subject to contingency and human temptation, the renewed spirit is an infallible point of contact with the Holy Spirit.’ (Coleman 2004: 429).

At this ‘infallible point of contact’ there is a divine and superior form of knowledge and action taking place.

‘The spirit part of the born-again person is ideally able to *impose divine will* on difficult situations and is not bound by social context or emotion; it is also performative, in that the power of such spirit is realized only as it is transferred from the inner self into the environment, or even into another person (Coleman 2004: 430, my emphasis).

It was according to this theology that Rafael, lead singer of the church *orchestre*, told me that he had been blessed with a gift (*don*) to help people ‘get connected’ with the Spirit. Sometimes when he sang, he would ‘change the level’ [of consciousness], ‘going deeply’ inside himself. There he would experience an out-of-body sensation where the Holy Spirit replaced his own physical presence. (*Moi je disparais et le Saint-Esprit est apparu* – ‘I disappear and the Holy Spirit appears’). He was convinced that he was ‘God’s instrument’ at services to bring the congregation into closer contact with the Holy Spirit. According to Rafael, the music and his singing

was like ‘an irrigation system’ (*méthode d’irrigation*), ‘channelling’ the Holy Spirit to the congregation. He had the responsibility to:

‘be on the right track, so God can do His manifestation, so people are prepared for the Spirit to enter them. We [the band] have to prepare the people so that when the pastor comes to preach, they are ready’.⁸³

The manner of the worship enabled participants to *experience* the power of the Holy Spirit as they, at almost every service would *feel* the presence of God. The musicians in the church played an extremely important role in facilitating this experience. At some point during the service, either in the last minutes of the first hour, or in the last fifteen minutes of the preacher’s sermon, the congregation was emotionally ‘prepared’ to reach a state of anti-climatic ecstasy in which they received the charismatic gift of speaking in tongues (inspired utterance or glossolalia). The field notes I took of a church service during November 2006 illustrate the moment of ecstasy, at this time in the last phase of the preaching:

‘The music suddenly quietens and people pray without music. ‘*Nzambe malam*’, ‘God is good’, resonates throughout the hall. One woman behind me is standing on her knees, arms outstretched, shouting and wailing. A man at the back falls over. People are called forward to share their problems. The other white woman⁸⁴ of the congregation goes forward. The Preacher places his hands on her, praying loudly, pushing her. She goes into a fit, screaming, shaking. She has to be held up by people because she is falling all over the chairs. Finally she comes to a rest, falling backwards, received into peoples’ arms. She is laid down and a blanket is draped over her. One woman from the choir goes forward. She did not speak her problem out loud, but the Pastor prayed that the immigration judge would find it in his heart to give a positive answer. He asked Jesus to enter the immigration judge’s heart.’

⁸³ Interview with Rafael 9 August 2007

⁸⁴ This was a French woman called Stephanie. She and I were the only two white people of the congregation. Stephanie attended the church with her Congolese husband and their three children.

At the moment of contact with the Holy Spirit, the phenomenal self passes away and it is no longer the common man or woman speaking: it is God speaking through the individual (Beatty 2000: 54). However, the Holy Spirit can only ‘touch’ a person once their senses have been stilled and they enter into a higher plane of consciousness (*Ibid.*). A number of individuals were considered better at this than others. They often took it upon themselves to pray before prayer meetings and church services began in order to help the manifestation of the Holy Spirit during these gatherings. Emmanuel was one of these individuals. He often arrived some time before the meeting proper began. He would walk around the hall, praying with much concentration to facilitate the Holy Spirit to manifest itself during the session. I once made the mistake to walk up to him and ask how he was. This evidently broke his concentration and he had to ‘start again’ to enter into a higher level of consciousness.

Other people proved that they possessed the ability to be touched by the Spirit, whilst singing for the congregation on Sundays. Rachel once performed such an offering after she had given birth to her child. She became very moved during the song, sobbing and momentarily become quiet. She stopped singing before the song had ended. I asked her afterwards how she felt when she was singing. Rachel replied:

‘I don’t know how to explain it. I just felt like I was about to... like I could fly. I was about to fall down any moment. I felt like that. That’s why I stopped. Like I was losing control... I like to sing for God. It is important. If I have no Jesus Christ I have no life. I need Him to have my life. Everybody said to me: “You don’t know how to sing, but you sing very well.”’

It was not so important in the church in Hayes to have a musical talent, but rather that in singing, one had the ability to be touched by the spirit.

Albrecht (1999: 208) writes that ‘the Pentecostal ritual affords its ritualists the opportunity to express things that matter most to them. Their liturgies dramatize human concerns, social role identity and theological relationships.’ In church, the young Congolese had a chance to give public expression to their desires and to experience a sense of togetherness, fulfilment and hope. Rachel, Emmanuel and

Rafael, experienced ordinary life in Hillingdon outside the space of the church, as a constant reminder that their ‘leave to remain’ was on a temporary basis. However, it was more common for the young people to address this pressing political concern in church rather than at political gatherings.

Effectiveness of political protests

During fieldwork, a support group⁸⁵ for Congolese asylum seekers campaigned to mobilize the Home Office to reconsider the practice of returning failed asylum seekers to the DRC. The Support Group collected some hundred testimonies of people who had been returned to Kinshasa and submitted this evidence to Home Office Country Guidance on the DRC (see Chapter three). They also organized a number of protests. I went to several demonstrations against deportation of Congolese (and other) asylum seekers (on 27 February, 5 May and 12 June 2007) outside ‘Reporting Centres’⁸⁶, Downing Street, and the Houses of Parliament.⁸⁷ I invited my Congolese friends to these demonstrations. I gave leaflets with information about the political actions to Deacon Nobert, with whom I had good rapport, asking him to tell about the demonstration and the support group to anyone who might be interested. However, none of the Congolese I knew turned up at these events. Those who did participate in the demonstrations did not necessarily believe that protesting publicly would make a difference. However, they wanted to show their support and solidarity to the Support Group that had helped release them from detention. There were at least four reasons for why the Congolese I knew did not participate in the political gatherings. First, people had little faith that the United Kingdom government would intervene so radically as to end deportations. Second, there was a fear amongst the Congolese that current DRC government officials were actively reporting on political activists in London to its intelligence agencies. This was indeed confirmed by the testimonies of returned failed asylum seekers to Kinshasa. They faced serious consequences such as imprisonment and physical mistreatment for having shown ‘disloyalty’ to the current government, whilst in exile. Third, people were busy with their daily lives of

⁸⁵ The Congolese Support Group.

⁸⁶ At these centres, some asylum seekers are required to report every week, fortnight or month in order to prevent their going into hiding.

⁸⁷ The demonstrations did not halt the deportations, although they led to temporary suspensions of deportations to the DRC while a tribunal was held over the Home Office’s country guidance.

schooling, looking after their children, working, and above all, attending church. They had little spare time and money to travel to political activities in central London. Fourth, they believed that individual prayer at church rituals were more efficacious and safer than participating in political demonstrations. Those who actively supported the work of the Support Group also addressed the political problem in 'direct dialogues' with the divine. One of these people was Stephen.

Stephen had been deported from the United Kingdom five times, but had returned each time. At one instance, he had not been listed on the immigration officials' list of returnees at the Kinshasa airport. He was therefore not allowed back into the country, or even to get off the airplane. At one other instance, Stephen had been deported even though his lawyer successfully appealed for government to grant an injunction against his deportation. As the chartered flight stopped in Ethiopia for further transfer, Stephen refused to board the next airplane. Eventually, the Ethiopian airline refused to board him on their plane and he was again returned to the United Kingdom. Stephen had been detained at different times at all detention centres around London and had received much mistreatment during his times there. The Congolese Support Group had helped him out from his last detention. He turned up at the demonstrations, he said, to support their work. At the same time, throughout all his hardships, his devotion to his Christian faith had grown. Adherence to the Pentecostal faith was the overriding theme in Stephen's story of life in exile. The asylum seeking process was to him likened to the 'yoke' that Jesus had to bear. It was through devotion to Jesus that resolution to the asylum claim would finally come. He would, as in the resurrection of Jesus, become 'free'. The Holy Spirit spoke to him through dreams and in meditation, encouraging him to keep up his fight to 'freedom'. Stephen had the following recurring dream:

'In the dream I am standing at the back of a large mass of people, of all different nationalities. They are kneeling and praying, saying 'Hosanna, Hosanna' over and over. Before them a man emerges, hundred times bigger than the people in the crowd. I can't see the man's face because there is a strong light beaming around it. The light is completely blinding. I want to go

forward, but a heavy rucksack, like the one I had in the army, weighs me down.⁸⁸ I struggle to go forward, but I don't succeed. Then the huge man in front talks to me: "What is it that you want?" "I want to be free", I say. "I want to get rid of this heavy baggage." The man answers me: "This will be so, but you will have to struggle and sacrifice your body. If you do, you will be free."

Stephen's dream constituted an important Pentecostal form with an intentional message (Charsley 1973), a 'culturally defined means of communication' (Fabian 1966: 560). Stephen interpreted the dream to mean that his physical body had to be sacrificed many times before he would be granted refuge. Like Jesus Christ, pain was inscribed on the physical body before a transition to freedom could take place. This was exemplified in his mistreatment at detention centres (beatings by prison guards) and during the deportations (cuffed by the hands and feet). However, it was only through transcending his bodily experiences in prayer, dreams and worship that God could hear him. In such moments, of being in touch with the divine, he perceived that he would be granted his prayer and become free.

The quest to be granted asylum or amnesty in Britain was asked through both political means (asylum claims process, demonstrations) and through religious rituals in the churches. The difference was, I suggest, that in church people experienced a higher level of control in the ritual through which the quest was lodged than they did in the 'political' system. In the political system, they were always at the mercy of others to mediate and advocate for them. In the Pentecostal ritual it was possible to ask the highest authority directly, provided that one asked in the right way.

The efficacy of prayer

In general terms, believers could influence life events through prayer, fasting, meditations and offerings (giving donations, tithes and 'working' for the church). However, none of these sacrifices worked 'on their own': the power of both sacred words and material resources were seen as lying dormant until activated and given 'life' (Coleman 2004: 433). There were certain ways in which words and items

⁸⁸ Stephen was temporarily conscripted into the Laurent Kabila's army.

(money, handkerchiefs) could be made potent. By calling out the name of Jesus, ‘something must happen’, and things were put in motion. By adding the Word of God, whilst being ‘in touch’ with the divine, spoken words became powerful, authoritative and of greatness. This doctrine was demonstrable on the Sunday services through rituals of deliverance: in the worship the root causes to the individual’s misfortunes were eliminated (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001: 9). However, Deacon Reagan described the teaching behind activating the charismatic power in more detail during a mid-week session in the spring of 2007.⁸⁹

The mid-week prayer meetings were shorter than the Sunday service and it was generally one of the Deacons of the Hayes church that were preaching.⁹⁰ Not all churchgoers attended the mid-week sessions. There was no *orchestre*, but the Lingala songs were sung *a capella*, accompanied by clapping. The whole prayer meeting ordinarily lasted for an hour and a half. When a greater number of people had arrived they took up prayer and singing, succeeded by preaching. People were not usually ‘touched’ by the Spirit as ‘visibly’ during these sessions as they were on Sundays. However, as Rafael had pointed out to me, one could not always ‘see’ that a person was touched by the Spirit. This was particularly the case for men, who were often able to stand still and control their bodies whilst being ‘touched’. However, Carol and Lillian explained to me that women were more ‘emotionally intelligent’ and susceptible to the touch of the Spirit, and that was why they often lost control over their bodies.

This particular Tuesday evening, Deacon Reagan began by referring to the book of Peter to illustrate that miracles could take place in Jesus’ name:

‘A crippled beggar outside the temple asked Peter and John for money. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went

⁸⁹ Fieldnotes, preaching by Deacon Reagan, Tuesday service, 29 May 2007.

⁹⁰ On Sunday services, a *Pasteur* was generally visiting from another church branch.

with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God.’

Believing in this, and worshipping God, the Deacon explained, believers possessed such power as Peter. He emphasised that to access that power the worshippers needed to have faith, to worship God in the way prescribed in the Bible. He quoted the Book of Saint Luke to underline this instruction from God: ‘So if you worship me, it will all be yours’ (*Luke 4: 7*).

Invoking that power, the Deacon said, one could determine one’s future. There was a direct causal relationship between words that were said in the past and one’s present situation. Indeed, according to Deacon Reagan:

‘You will discover that the things you have been saying in the past will happen to you. Those words will affect your life and your relationships: the person who is always thinking to win. You have to be the pilot in your life. Everything you say, those words will direct your life. If you say, ‘I will become rich’, those words will direct your life and you will become rich. You need to be perfect in everything you say in your life. Even if you get angry, you need to conserve your language. Everything you say will be judged accordingly. Your children’s life will be judged by the words you and other people say to or about them. Always see good things, even if you see bad things happening. People who work in the market they never control their mouths. Equally, so you can destroy your friendships by the words you use. We pray to control our mouths even if we get angry: “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know to answer anyone”’ (*Colossians 2: 6*).

There were many people in the world, the Deacon continued, who did not understand these simple truths. It was possible, he held, to recognise a child of God and a witch respectively by the way they spoke. Erratic and thoughtless ways of speaking could bring destruction upon people’s lives. Carelessness in one’s language could imprison a person in words. To quote:

‘Someone who is clever, he will not say any bad words. Sometimes you may say a bad word for yourself and that may bring destruction to your life and your future. But the mouth of someone who knows God will always speak the good word. Some people they seem to be a witch because of the way they speak about their life. You need to be careful about the words that come from your mouth.’

People who were not true Christians, in particular, bad mouthed churchgoers. These were generally people who did not belong to the church community (‘family of God’), and who were ‘Christians of the flesh’, or ‘pagans’. However, when personal conflict erupted between churchgoers, gossip behind one’s back was known to take place, such as was the case with Niclette (see chapter six). When these words were ‘allowed to last’ and ‘linger’, Deacon Reagan explained, they could take effect. If one did not do anything about them after just two minutes, they could ‘imprison’ the person. If one let the words remain in their destructive state for longer – say for two hours or two weeks - their effect would be even worse. Many people were poor because words had imprisoned them, and because they displayed a lack of faith in the word of God. Such people typically said, ‘We’re a poor family, we will never succeed’, ‘I think I am cursed’, or ‘My husband is not a Christian’. As they let these things be said, they would happen. A child of God, on the other hand, was a person who was always ‘thinking to win’.

Showing doubt, letting on, or going with spontaneous and uncontrollable thoughts about how the situation was in fact rather rotten, was an unnecessary invitation for negativity to linger. It meant that one invited a likely negative outcome and ‘allowed’ the situation to end badly.

But what then, could one do about the words that were already ‘out there’ – those that had been said about oneself or by oneself that served as entry points by the devil and witches? The Deacon offered a practical solution. The time had come to put an end to all the bad words that manifested themselves in the person’s life, or were waiting to do so. The Deacon urged the gathered

worshippers to stand up and ‘cancel’ bad words and curses that had been said against them. Accordingly, we all stood up and ‘cancelled’ bad words and curses in the name of Jesus. The congregation prayed passionately and at length, gesturing with hands and arms, and stamping their feet. Paula, who stood next to me, said her prayer in English that she repeated over and over:

‘In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus! I cancel in the name of Jesus the bad things that have been said about me and about my family, about my children, about my husband, about my work, about my money!’

The prayers quietened and the Deacon led them into a second prayer that would ‘make this become reality’: ‘From now on, let this become reality! In the name of Jesus!’ Again, people stood up and passionately shouted out their requests at great length. Finally, there was a prayer thanking God for his work.

During this Tuesday evening service, then, and in the church’s ideology more broadly, words were seen to be particularly efficacious in worshippers’ prayer. At some events, such as ‘conferences’, efficacious effects of prayer and worship were thought to have heightened power than at other times.

Effectiveness of conferences

In the summer of 2007, the churches organised a ‘conference’ (gathering of prayer and worship) called the Time of Visitation. It was hosted in the ‘main church’ in Edmonton in Northeast London. The church was located in a large warehouse on an industrial estate. The walls on the first floor inside the building had been painted blue and white and posters of green forests and high waterfalls covered the windows. The main church had some two hundred members and several pastors. Everyone who attended the conference exaggerated physical attire and clothing styles for the event. At the time leading up to the conference, people’s behaviour were increasingly concerned with being ‘blessed’ in return for their actions (such as adopting their speaking styles, singing for God, and offering car rides). At these conferences, the various *départements* of the individual church branches joined forces. All ushers from

the different churches worked at the events together, as did all the *orchestres*, assistants, *Pasteurs* and so forth.

The main attraction of the conference was a pastor visiting from the Word of Life ministry in Accra, Ghana. His preaching and performance of miracles was hugely popular. People spoke of him as being a particularly ‘strong’ man of God. Virtually everyone assembled during the conference, a crowd of approximately two hundred and fifty people, went forward during the service to have miracles performed for them. The charismatic pastor was known particularly to help people in financial distress. To perform miracles he was not concerned primarily and only with words. He also blessed a heap of handkerchiefs in plastic wrappings that were handed out to people who wished – in return for an offering – to achieve success in their businesses.

I arrived to the second day of the conference with Bakato, singer of the *orchestre* in The Glory in Hayes Town, and her family. Bakato had taken two hours to transform her look and in this way we were much delayed. When we finally entered the church hall the service had already gone on for a couple of hours and was in full swing. Bakato’s extravagant clothing, hair style and make-up did not stand out among the gathered. Everyone wore his or her smartest and most fashionable outfits, accessorized with sunglasses, jewellery and new hair-dos. The room was crowded, hot and steamy and the atmosphere was highly charged. Bakato, her family and I were ushered to the other side of the hall, on the right hand side of the stage. Bakato wasted no time. As soon as we had been assigned our seats, she went down onto her knees into deeply focused prayer. Tears streaming down her face soon smudged her carefully applied make-up. She, like other people around her, prayed so fervently that sweat lined the sides of her face. Bakato’s husband closed his eyes and joined in concentrated prayer: I found myself looking after their two young boys, to whom the parents no longer paid attention. On the pastor’s call, Bakato, her husband and other people went to stand in front of the stage in a long, curved line. He went up to each person individually, touching their heads, blessing them, and moving on to the next person. Almost all people in the line fell to the floor and assistants rushed forward to pull them out of the way and cover them with sheets of cloth.

After this ceremony, congregants placed a heap of handkerchiefs on the floor in front of the pastor. He held his hands over them and cited the following passage from the Bible:

‘God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even *handkerchiefs* and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.’ (*Acts* 19: 11-13, my emphasis).

The pastor first asked people who had their own businesses to come forward and receive a handkerchief. A handful of men and women in formal office wear went up to the pastor and lined up in a row. They each handed him an envelop with money and were given a handkerchief in return. The envelopes were sealed and the amount of money was not publicly announced. After these people had received their handkerchiefs, the heap on the floor was still piling high. The pastor thus invited other people to come forward to have a miraculous handkerchief. However, they too had to place a sum of money into a grass-woven basket. The Ghanaian pastor recommended that people gave a minimum of five pounds. Both Bakato and her husband, as well most of the people from The Glory church in Hayes Town received their own potent handkerchief.

During this conference, therefore, money featured as a fetish to an extent I had not witnessed during ordinary church services in the Glory. The monetary gift ‘to God’ was donated during the conference where multiple returns were expected (Coleman 2004: 431; Kiernan 1988). Similar to the Swedish Word of Life ministry studied by Coleman, large sums of money at conferences were thought to be more effective than tithing at ordinary church services. This related both to the perceived powerful status of the preacher and to the size of the collective donation: a large collective donation was thought to have heightened sacrificial giving power (Coleman 2004: 431).

In Coleman’s research, money was central to transactions between believers and God. People thought it necessary to deploy ‘positive’ language for sacrifices and wants to materialize. However, my young informants ‘donated’ primarily services to the church, rather than cash. I mentioned in the previous chapter that all the young refugees who joined The Glory through their friendships with Rafael, quickly took up

various ‘services’ there: they became ushers, singers and helped tidy the hall after meetings. At conferences, they carried out different tasks together with people from other churches. Here again, the collective effort was perceived to have heightened sacrificial giving power, not least because conferences lasted for many hours a day, over several days. Some roles had higher status than others, and people performing them were expected to take greater responsibility in their role. In return, however, they could expect higher returns for their work. A singer had higher status than an

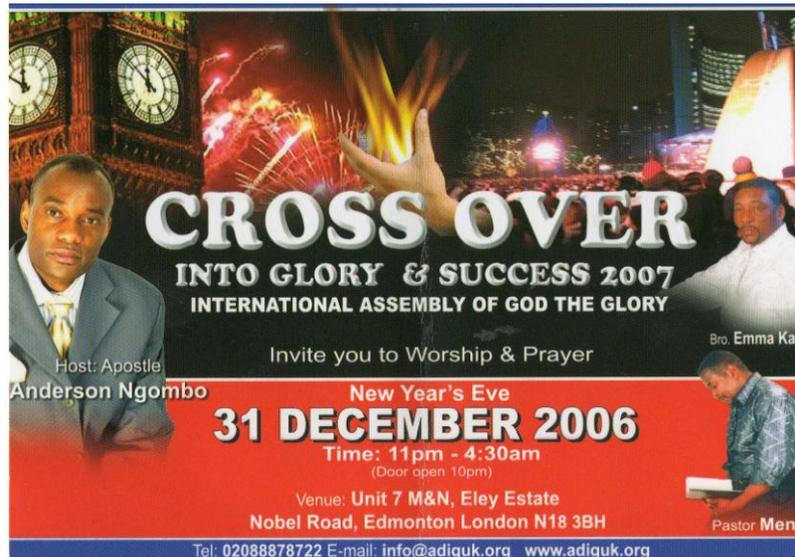


Fig. 5: Church ‘Conference’ Promotion Flyer.

usher and was therefore expected to be more involved during a conference. The singers of the various church *orchestres* fasted and prayed together the whole night before the ‘Time of Visitation’ conference was to begin. In return, however, the young singers were given money during the conferences. Worshippers would suddenly feel the urge to give a note of money to a particular singer during a performance. It was thought that God or the Holy Spirit asked the worshipper to give the money. However, the person who paid money performed an offering for which they too could expect a return.

The singers of the *orchestre* in The Glory not only received money and gifts at church, but also at other times. Rafael had started to receive many blessings in the form of clothes and money since he began to sing in churches, both during his late childhood in Kinshasa and as he continued his services in churches in London. During a visit to one of the Deacons in the Glory church in Hayes Town, the Deacon passed

him a sealed envelope, saying that it was a contribution to Rafael's travel expense. When Rafael came home he opened the envelope and discovered that the sum of money was much more than the day's cost of a London travel card. It was one hundred pounds. Rafael insisted that he did not receive such gifts because he was 'special' in any way, but he said: 'It is because I found grace in the eyes of God. Because in the Bible it says, what is impossible to man, is possible through God.' The Deacon had not only performed a kind gesture, but also an offering. He would in turn receive blessings as his own gift was appreciated and remembered by God. For the young Congolese who joined Pentecostal churches in London, other gifts 'from God' could also be had, such as amnesty to remain in Britain.

The effects

The Pentecostal faith was important in terms of its efficacious effects. The Pentecostal faith and its churches constituted the fundamental locus where the correct ways of requesting various 'wants' such as money and leave to remain in Britain could be learnt. The popularity of Pentecostalism in Kinshasa has been explained in terms of their expressions of a collective disappointment in Mobutu's promises of his authenticity campaign, or more abstractly, as the manifestation of a 'malcontent' with modernity (Fabian 1994, Devisch 1996, De Boeck 2004). However, 'a sympathetic account of religious life must go beyond a plotting of ideological positions to take account of what believers themselves take seriously' (Beatty 2000: 40). The young Congolese applied their Pentecostal faith in pragmatic ways.

Lillian was one of the young Congolese who at various points of time during fieldwork were terrified of being returned to the DRC. She was of the opinion that if she was sent back to the DRC she would be returned to the situation she had been rescued from: internment and subjected to torture. She too, put her hope in the Pentecostal message of powerful words, actions and offerings. As I mentioned in the last chapter, Lillian did not attend The Glory, but a Pentecostal church in Brixton and later changed to the International Church of London that was close to her home in Uxbridge. Lillian described the church as 'English' rather than 'Congolese'. However when I accompanied her to one of the church services, I found that the church had been 'planted' in Uxbridge by English-speaking white South Africans. At the service,

we took our seats towards the back of the hall where Lillian prayed in French next to me. She listened intently to the South African woman, Margaret, who preached. Margaret preached discipline of the wanting heart, that one could not ‘cheat’ God, because He always knew the true agenda of one’s prayers. One could not expect a ‘fat bank account’ (to which Lillian laughed) as the outcome of one’s prayer if one had insincere purposes. Towards the end of the service, congregants were invited to come forward to receive ‘a miracle’. Lillian was one of the last to go to the front. Margaret prayed for her and placed her hands on the sides of her head. Lillian swayed a little, but did not fall to the floor like many of the others had done. She went back to her seat and wept quietly.

Since Lillian had struck up membership with this particular church, God had performed miracles that related directly to her various desires in Britain. She had improved her English, obtained distinctions on much of her coursework, and God was showing her signs that he had a purpose with her coming to the United Kingdom. She had realized that to be depressed, quiet, contemplating about one’s suffering all the time, were practices that tempted the devil to enter. Lillian began to go to Congolese parties in London and also to parties in her new church. She began to see that she could handle a social life other than her best (and previously only) friend Miriam. She felt less fearful that her ‘seizures’ would occur and that socializing posed a risk to her short temper and sense of self-preservation.

But then a refusal letter from the Home Office to her last appeal for asylum arrived. Overcome by anxiety, sleeplessness, and desperation for a long period of time, Lillian had resorted to three days of fasting, prayer and meditation to ask God for guidance and help with her ‘paper’. No long thereafter, Lillian received a letter from the Home Office stating that she had been granted ‘leave to remain’ in United Kingdom until further notice, because of its huge backlog of cases. Lillian saw this as a sign from God that he had not forgotten her and that future miracles were in store. Although the temporary amnesty left Lillian in a political and legal limbo, it was temporary relief and a sign that ‘only God knows why I am here’ [why she left the DRC and came to the United Kingdom]. During the three days of spiritual wake, the Holy Spirit had also intervened. She had heard the voice of the Holy Spirit cite a particular passage in the Bible. Lillian told me about this verse, she said, because she trusted me and I ‘was

her friend'. But it was not a verse that should be spoken of, verbalized, to others because it was 'between her and God', a holy intervention that must not be dirtied by other people's talk. The words were powerful in and of themselves and she repeated them in moments of danger.⁹¹ It read the following:

'The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing..." So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there... At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who appeared to him.'

Lillian suggested that those very words had efficacious power and she needed to comply with the rituals surrounding that belief. To that end she spoke affirmatively in relation to her future.

Conclusion

The uncertainty over the asylum application outcome had a profound psychological impact on the young people. While many of them learnt to live with this uncertainty on a day-to-day basis, it raised its ugly head at particular points in time. During times of court hearings, certain public holidays and birthdays, for example, the young people were forced to relive the events that had led to their departure from Kinshasa. At such times they felt much anxiety for relations they had left behind. Pentecostal churches provided a sacred space out of ordinary life (Handelman and Kapferer 1980) in Hillingdon, a daily life shaded by the worry of whether one would be granted final leave to remain in Britain. However, it would be unfair to suggest that the Pentecostal faith allowed for a retreat from the world for the young asylum seekers (Marshall

⁹¹ I have left out a few verses so that the particular verse she was referring to will not be identified in respect of the importance Lillian attributed to keeping it unspoken.

1991). Young people who seek asylum are by definition involved in political mobilisation and action, personally and directly. In court hearings and with legal representatives they engaged with their political quest. Informants often took a very active role to provide evidence of their political persecution. Lillian, for example, provided her lawyer with a DVD produced by her political organization (APARECO) that described the 'corrupt' politics of the Kabila government that she feared. She was also an active political member of the organization in London. However, an overriding feature of such political engagements was that they were carried out along the chain of command of a bureaucratic and administrative system. Legal representatives, immigration judges and Home Office representatives always mediated the quest for citizenship. One virtue of the Pentecostal faith was that it could be readily adapted to local problems and concerns (Robbins 2004). Research subjects knew that it was possible to circumvent the bureaucratic system by addressing their political concerns to their sense of the 'Highest Authority' - God. To Congolese asylum seekers, prayer was anti-bureaucratic. It allowed them to circumvent the chain of command of administrative governmentality.

Polite statements are genuine, clearly formulated wishes. The act of making such statements is not efficacious in itself. This does not mean that its effects are nil, rather that one is playing for safety: if I comply with courtesy rules I avoid the risk of offending or inviting uncertain outcomes. To that end, courtesy greetings do not depend on their own qualities (Mauss 2003: 51). Prayer, however, is thought to have effects precisely by virtue of the very nature of the practice. 'The power of the rite comes not only from the fact that it is performed in conformity with a given prescription: it comes also, and above all, from the rite itself' (Mauss 2003: 51). Although the young Congolese learnt the technicalities involved in applying for political asylum, such systematic knowledge did not guarantee any degree of certainty or safety. Here, the importance of applying prayer as one carries out other techniques of problem-solving becomes apparent. A passage from Malinowski (1948) comes to mind, pointing out the necessity of combining both magic and mechanical work in high risk expeditions:

'But even with all their systematic knowledge, methodologically applied, they are still at the mercy of powerful and incalculable tides, sudden gales during

the monsoon season and unknown reefs. And here comes in their magic, performed over the canoe during its construction, carried out at the beginning and in the course of expeditions and resorted to in moments of real danger' (Malinowski 1948: 30-31).

Chapter eight

Conclusion: Agency under constraints

In May 2009, The Guardian newspaper reported that unaccompanied asylum seekers were ‘disappearing’ from their homes in the London Borough of Hillingdon. At least 77 children had ‘gone missing’ from the council since March 2006. It is believed that these children contact their trafficking agents who pick them up at the homes (The Guardian Tuesday 5 May 2009).⁹² Around the same time, social workers were instructed by their managers not to register newly arrived refugees in Hillingdon within the first 48 hours: if the young people were not officially registered in the local authority before the children absconded, it had no responsibility to find and protect them.⁹³ On the rare occasions that the plight of lone asylum seeker children is heard in news media it is generally in these terms: they come across as passive, helpless victims to human traffickers. I include this news story not to cast criticism on failures to protect and safeguard lone asylum seekers, but to illustrate my main argument of the thesis. In thinking about the experiences of lone refugees there is a tendency to overestimate either their agency or vulnerability. Lone asylum seekers are not too vulnerable and not totally in control. In taking both agency and vulnerability in ‘moderation’ the responses by welfare institutions to lone asylum seekers could better support them.

In ethical and best practice guides on doing research and working with lone refugee children, we are told that these young people constitute a unique research group who are particularly vulnerable, ‘easily bewildered and frightened’, unable to express their needs, and defend their interests (Royal College of Paediatrics and Health 2000: 117; Maingay *et al.* 2002). In psychology and psychiatry, studies with asylum-seeking children in Britain and elsewhere tend to emphasize the prevalence of pathology. Lone refugees are frequently singled out as the most likely group among all asylum seeker children to suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (Hodes *et al.* 2008). Social psychology and social work approaches often talk about the potential for resilience among separated children and not just vulnerability (Chase, Knight and Statham

⁹² The Guardian 9 May 2009. ‘People trafficking: a phone call, a car door opens - and another child vanishes’ (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/may/05/china-child-trafficking-heathrow>.)

⁹³ Personal communication, Adrian Matthews, researcher to the Children’s Commissioner, 12 May 2009.

2008). However, this concept does not build on the understanding that children have personal agency. Rather, such approaches commonly regard resilience in relation to its positive psychological effects and coping of *some* children (Lambert 2001).⁹⁴ Personal ‘agency’ among young people denotes something different. It is by now a well-established view in anthropology that children and youth are ‘active agents in their own right who contribute to, transform and influence the situation and environments in which they find themselves’ (Eyber and Ager 2004: 190). It is rarely disputed, therefore, that children ‘have’ agency. By ‘agency’ I mean young people’s ability to act self-reflexively in their social world (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982: 2). Reflexivity, in Turner’s sense (1976) refers to moments in which social actors become conscious of and can reflect upon social life in ritual and other cultural performances.

However, the degree to which children assert agency is debatable. Some anthropologists over-estimate the agency of children and young people who experience hardship (e.g. De Boeck and Honwana 2005). De Boeck and Honwana (2005: 2) argue that children and youth in Africa are makers of society by acting as political force and as sources of resistance and resilience. They state that children and young people in Africa are more than anyone else the ones who ‘undergo, express, and provide answers to the crisis of existing communitarian models, structures of authority, gerontocracy and gender relations’. According to De Boeck and Honwana, in the processes of being ‘makers of society’, young people are also

‘frequently broken, put at risk, and destroyed by unemployment, exploitation, war, famine, rape, physical mutilation, poverty, homelessness, lack of access to education and medical facilities, and HIV/AIDS’ (De Boeck and Honwana 2005: 3).

I argue that what is at stake in the present research is *agency under constraints*. Although research subjects were often able to embody and survive the processes that ‘broke’ them, this did not make them into makers of society. Clearly lone refugees exhibit some degree of agency in their ability to evaluate their situation, the choices at hand, and acting upon them. The young people who are trafficked to Britain are

⁹⁴ While social psychology (Luthar 2003) often state that asylum seeker children show ‘resiliency’ this concept does not go far enough to suggest that children possess the capacity for critical thinking.

presumably under pressure to contact their traffickers once in 'safety', perhaps to pay off a family debt incurred for the cost of the journey to Western Europe. They may find their situation hopeless, and may live and work in dismal conditions, but they have evaluated a choice between 'hell and a hard place'. They do not just avail themselves to British immigration authorities waiting to be 'saved' by them. They are seemingly aware that there is nobody that can save them and their families except through their own sacrifice. The unaccompanied asylum seekers in Hillingdon generally have a capacity for critical thinking. The concept of 'agency' is a necessarily theoretical understanding – an ideal type – to have of children in order to for us to examine them as critically thinking individuals.

The young people in this research were restricted and confined within social and political structures imposed on them. In the conflicts they escaped from in Kinshasa, they had had little authority; they could not alter their legal status as non-citizens in Britain; and they were completely dependent on the social services support. At the same time, they accommodated their coping strategies within these constraints. Young people's actions denote *bargains* and accommodating arrangements to larger power-structures rather than resistance to them (De Boeck 1998b). There was one exception to this. In their relationship with God, the young people experienced a high level of control. While in the social service system young people were always at the mercy of others to mediate and advocate for them, in the Pentecostal ritual and prayer, it was possible for them to witness miracles and real effects of their prayers directly. Through charismatic rituals they experienced authority and power. In the social service system, young people were always at the mercy of others to mediate and advocate for them. In the Pentecostal ritual it was possible for them to ask the highest authority directly. The attraction of the Pentecostal churches for my informants was that any one of them could access divine power (Fabian 1994) in which stated commands can become reality. In this sense, the Pentecostal faith and the churches represented magical spaces contrary to ordinary life in Hillingdon (Handelman and Kapferer 1980). In the churches, the young people experienced a sense of fulfilment and control, while their ordinary lives were characterised by the rigid administrative systems that organized their lives in bureaucratic ways.

Corporate parent

Safeguarding and protecting asylum seeker children in British politics is fraught with competing moral frameworks (Giner 2007). On the one hand, there is the tendency to regard refugees as ‘bogus’ asylum seekers who exploit the British welfare system (Stevens 2004). On the other, commitment to child welfare works as ‘symbolic capital’ for welfare states. There is a strong moral belief in the responsibility of adults and the state to protect children (Boyden 1990). Officially, there are legal instruments in place to provide a wide range of services for unaccompanied asylum seekers.

In the United Kingdom, children and young people aged 17 and below, who have come to this country from abroad, and are not accompanied by an adult carer, have the same legal entitlements to state care as children with British citizenship. They have entitlements to the rights spelled out in the Children Act 1989. This determines that local authorities have a duty to provide a range of services to any child found to be ‘in need’ in their area, regardless of nationality. Local authorities generally house lone asylum seekers, who arrive at an age of sixteen years and older, in house share-type arrangements with other unaccompanied asylum seekers. Research subjects were provided with shared accommodation, a subsistence allowance (approximately £44 per week), schooling (English language courses and college courses), and access to social care and legal advice. They were not entitled to work, but it was possible for them to apply for work permits.

The current social care model, through which services to children in state care are delivered, is in social policy referred to as the ‘corporate parent’. Corporate parenting refers to the idea that children in state care are not the sole responsibility of the social services, but of the council as a whole (Department for Education and Skills 2003). According to this model, a personal advisor or social worker undertakes responsibility for a child’s care arrangements. It is their duty to conduct a needs assessment and work out detailed plans for the young person’s exit from care (the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000).

The shortcomings of local authority care have been much highlighted (Humphries 2004; Wade, Mitchell and Baylis 2005; Morris 2005; Hamilton and Matthews 2007;

Chase, Knight and Statham 2008). While there are legal instruments in place to provide a wide range of services for unaccompanied asylum seekers, pressure on local authority resources have encouraged practices that conflict with specific terms of the Children Act and also its wider intentions (Morries 2005: 2). In the wake of Hillingdon council's funding crisis, some service provision to the young asylum seeker was illegally and covertly withdrawn. The Children's Commissioner, Aynsley-Green, alleged that as a matter of policy, Hillingdon council was intentionally and unlawfully depriving unaccompanied asylum-seeking children of personal social workers and statutory reviews, that come under the 'looked after' care provisions under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Hamilton and Matthews 2007).

The thesis illustrated how the young people experienced their care services. Young people generally described their first weeks and months after arrival in the United Kingdom as a phase of social isolation and fear, in which they were reluctant to leave their rooms and talk to people around them. While the unaccompanied minors received some attention from the social services and solicitors during this time, they spent most of the first few weeks alone in their rooms in Hillingdon. The initial phase of arrival was a time when many young people did not eat well because they did not recognise the food in the shops or knew how to cook and a time when many could not make themselves understood in the English language at all. After the initial phase of arrival, research subjects expressed their frustrations over their dealing with a highly bureaucratised care and protection system. In this system they could exercise little personal choice over the amount of money they received, where they lived and with whom, and they had few opportunities to come into direct contact with any person who had actual decision-making power over their concerns. The fortnightly allowances did not allow for any savings and the houses in which the young people were placed were dilapidated, dirty and shared with noisy peers. Many of the young people also experienced a profound sense of loneliness and disturbance from leaving their family relations behind.

While the social workers were obliged to elicit the wishes and feelings of their clients and give due consideration when making any decision about how to meet their needs (Section 53 of the Children Act 2004), in practice, when young people complained

about noisy and dirty accommodation, the complaints were passed on to the next duty worker in line.

Although the impersonal care system often made research subjects deeply unhappy, it is perhaps remarkable that the young Congolese found such faults with the social care system. Despite its shortcomings, young people were nevertheless materially much better off than they would have been in Kinshasa. Moreover, in Hillingdon there were no direct threats to their lives. The reasons for flight given by the young Congolese included arbitrary arrests and attacks, domestic conflict, and less often, persecution for political reasons. The dates of flights of the young Congolese correspond to the time of the national election in 2006. The political tensions in Kinshasa leading up to the election during the years 2005 and 2006 may have been implicated in the arrests of family members and the young people themselves. Many of the young Congolese were aware of the conditions of refugees and internally displaced people in DRC and other parts of Africa – aware that refugees receive no state or international assistance at all.

My informants did not appear to have come from the poorest economic households. To this end they were slightly more advantaged than the children usually documented in ethnographic writings. Such children are mainly marginal members of poorer households (e.g. De Boeck 2004, 2005). However, the young asylum seekers increasingly became more marginal within the extended family network, due to domestic conflict. For example, when Rachel's and Micah's family members were taken away by Police, there were no longer any adults available to care for them. When Police interned Lillian and Emmanuel, adults who had been protecting them were arrested or killed. Even as these two young people managed to escape incarceration, it was too dangerous for other family members or significant adults to look after them. Adults around them acted to 'disperse dependants' in the absence of children's guardians (Spiegel 1987).

Why was it that they so easily came to complain about their living conditions in Hillingdon? I suggest that the young Congolese arrived 'armed' in the United Kingdom with two kinds of expectations and experiences: first, that they were unlikely to access assistance, services or goods through formal routes. In Kinshasa,

they relied on an informal *arrangement* (arrangement) (De Boeck 1998b) and *coop* (deal) (Trefon 2002) in order to acquire services or goods. To achieve their ends they had to strike up relations and dealings with others. Second, life in Europe was by definition thought to be a set of endless possibilities of becoming rich and leading a 'good life'. Arriving in the United Kingdom, however, the young people were met by a whole different reality than that experienced and imaged in Kinshasa.

Lone asylum seekers internalised the criticisms of local authorities' service provisions. They learnt from social workers, mental health workers, and peers that it was possible to bargain for a better house, more personal attention, and various goods. Most important to such bartering were the 'trauma stories' (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997) that has come to be 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1984) in negotiations for asylum. In the everyday lives of the unaccompanied asylum seekers, the trauma stories featured in the construction of themselves as legitimate recipients of care. Resources allocated to research subjects were constantly a contested issue at the local governmental level and within the social services. If mental health issues, particularly those pertaining to past experiences of trauma, could be confirmed in a client, professionals could motivate their decision to offer a young person individual attention, allocation of resources, and efforts to help them move into better accommodation. Amidst their relative poverty (compared to British, middle-class homes), an inventory of girls' and boys' rooms revealed a wealth of personal paraphernalia, computer- and music equipment and fashionable clothes. The young people acquired these items from significant others, 'sympathetic adults' in the welfare system, notably mental health workers, and from their churches. Whilst the welfare system turned out to be a disappointment, the young people found 'agents' within the system with whom they could strike bargains.

The young people in this research were preoccupied with overcoming their complete cut-off from family relations in Kinshasa. The importance of establishing new relationships in London was often talked about in terms such as that the young people were now 'no longer alone'. While Lillian said that she found it helpful to talk to her psychologist about how to manage her suicidal thoughts and psychological suffering, it was equally important to her that the psychologist came to take on a role of a 'parent'. The 'patron-client' relationships the young people established with mental

health workers (and others), therefore, transcended purely instrumental dimensions: they crossed-over with other kinds of relationships that provided emotional reassurance and closeness. In such instances, complaints about housing and other issues may even be secondary to the personal attention to which they could lead. However, there were many lone asylum seekers in Hillingdon who could not engage in the ‘therapeutic relationships’ with mental health workers. There is perhaps ‘insufficient knowledge of the cultures of refugee groups and of culturally-specific ways of addressing mental health and social care needs’ (Watters 1998: 285). However, according to some social workers and mental health professionals in the Young Persons Asylum Team, it was not that lone asylum seekers’ experiences and psychological needs were more complex than other refugee populations. The key issue, these professionals pointed out, was to establish trust. Secondly, it was necessary to understand the young refugees’ present social situation before any exploration of their past could take place. Often, the problem was that mental health professionals of external organizations tended to focus on the young refugees’ past traumatic experiences at the very first interview. This often made young people suspicious. When a ‘therapeutic relationship’ could not develop, mental health professionals of external organizations argued that this was due to ‘cultural difference’. Here, the lone asylum seekers were believed to ‘have’ culture, while the mental health professionals were ‘westerners’ without a ‘culture’. However, the ‘culture’ of the mental health paradigm rested on the idea that past traumatic events must be ‘uncovered’ in order for psychological healing to take place. Here there was a disjuncture and a ‘true’ cultural difference since the young people were reluctant to talk about the past.

Peer relationships and social networks

Other types of relationships also became important to the young men and women in their desire not to feel alone. Significant relationships were the peer relationships between the young people themselves and friendships with people in the settled migrant community.

Studies of refugees and asylum-seekers have pointed to the power of social networks to influence adaptation. In Koser’s study of Iranian asylum-seekers in the Netherlands, social networks provided emotional support in the form of frequent visits

during dejection or depression and information about how the transport system worked, as well as health care and education services (Koser 1997: 602).

Wallin and Ahlstrom (2005) did a follow-up study of unaccompanied young adult refugees in Sweden and found

‘that most of the participants expressed contentedness with their lives and had begun to adjust to their new country. They had a social network of friends from the same ethnic group and their Swedish contacts were mostly work mates. A few felt lonely and expressed despondency and depression. They were single and reported a small network and limited social support’ (Wallin and Ahlstrom 2005: 135).

Mann (2004) points out that peer relationships are likely to be particularly important among unaccompanied asylum seeker children for two reasons. Many of them have grown up in societies where peers adopt duties ordinarily undertaken by parents in other parts of the world. Secondly, it is likely that these young people feel a common bond by virtue of their experience in the asylum cycle. Cullum (2002: 17), in her study of adolescent refugees in London argues that ‘the adolescents recognise their shared liminality and status transition and it is this shared experience that binds them temporarily’. She argued that this sense of common identity ran across nationality and ethnic identification: ‘no one... is left out or ignored; everyone is greeted and included in any activity... regardless of race or ethnicity’ (Ibid: 17). In Kinshasa in the 1960s, La Fontaine (1970b) observed how poverty had weakened the authority of the adult head of the household. Youth who were not in school or employment form solidarity segmentations among themselves called ‘bandits’ (La Fontaine 1970b). De Boeck has highlighted similar bands of children in Kinshasa, including the *shege* – street children (De Boeck 2004).

Peer relationships were central to research subjects’ psychological well-being. Consider for example Lillian and her relationship with Miriam. It was Miriam who had prevented Lillian at one time to commit suicide. Lillian certainly felt a common bond to Miriam due to the fact that they were both unaccompanied asylum seekers. However, it cannot be assumed that such peer relationships and social networks are

always supportive. Supportive ties are embedded in larger networks that give them their particular meaning and function (Wellman 1981: 179, 180). Many ties are held with persons whom one does not like and with whom one would not voluntarily keep in touch. Nevertheless, such ties can be important in terms of the time spent on them, the resources that flow through them, the ways in which they constrain other network members' activities, and the gateway they create to other and more supportive relationships (Wellman 1981: 181). Lillian did not think that she was 'the same' as all other Congolese unaccompanied asylum seekers, especially not those from less affluent and educated backgrounds than herself. She refused for some time to attend Congolese churches, choosing instead to join an 'English' church. In the networks established in churches, the young people sometimes needed to spend time and interact with people they did not necessarily get along with. Niclette did not find people in The Glory very supportive to her difficult situation, yet she chose to 'stay put' because it was a place in which she could enjoy a good relationship with God. The churches constituted fundamental sources of spiritual help as well as flows of money and gifts, even though relationships there were not always 'close' or friendly.

In church, to obtain what one was looking for, one had to enter a church community of true Christians and show oneself as one of them (Pype 2006). The quandary for the Pentecostals in this research was that evil manifested itself through the actions of other human beings. To join a community of others to practice one's religious beliefs was therefore a potential risk as well as a necessity. However, these interactions were necessary to learn to manage without personal conflict in order that one could access the more important and effective relationship with God.

What is to be done?

Limbo of the asylum seeking process

While the young people were granted temporary protection and assisted with accommodation and basic subsistence, they were rarely granted citizenship. Unaccompanied children were more often granted 'discretionary leave to remain' than 'asylum'. Discretionary leave is granted for three years or until the child's 18th birthday, if this comes sooner, after which the case is reviewed. When a child is granted discretionary leave, there is no indication by the Secretary of State that the

separated child was in need of protection under any other human rights convention or treaty (Finch 2005: 59). For this reason, unaccompanied minors are less protected under asylum law than adults, once their discretionary leave to remain expires. When separated children reach adult age, they are treated neither as asylum seekers nor children, leaving them in limbo in legal terms for several years after arrival (Finch 2005). In practice, for many of the young people in this study, this bureaucracy meant a never-ending asylum-seeking process. First, due to a massive backlog of cases, the Home Office decided to grant a number of research subjects leave in United Kingdom until 'further notice'. Second, in cases where asylum claims were refused and appeals against such decisions had been exhausted, no decisions regarding their immediate future were taken, such as the decision to discontinue their assistance, or a decision to deport them. What is to be done?

At a minimum, unaccompanied asylum seekers should be afforded a personal legal guardian (Bhabha and Finch 2006; Save the Children and Separated Children in Europe Programme 2007). Crawley (2004: 90) argues that quicker decisions on young people's asylum claims is a necessary improvement to the current legal system:

'It is in the best interests of children and young people that a decision is made regarding their immigration status as soon as is possible. Keeping children in limbo regarding their status – and hence their security and their future – is not in their best interests.'

It is true that during the time of the unresolved asylum applications, young people cannot plan for their future. They also become absolutely dependent on the welfare system. Some of these issues will potentially improve as a result of a new governmental programme to speed up the asylum application process. In 2005 the Government announced its plans to establish the New Asylum Model (NAM) (Home Office 2005). The purpose of NAM is to speed up the lengthy asylum claims process by fast-tracking initial decisions. Under NAM asylum seekers are categorised into different 'segments', including 'unaccompanied minors' (Refugee Council 2007). Individual caseworkers track cases from the point of application to the final decision. The Model was not implemented during the time of fieldwork and did therefore not directly affect the research subjects.

Contra Crawley (2004), I argue that it is not in young people's best interest that the asylum application process is shortened. This would only be favourable to them if their asylum claims were accepted and they were granted stay in Britain. But most of them are not. Instead, the inaction of bureaucratic institutions can pan out more favourably for the young people. First, long-running decisions to *reject* asylum claims are better than such fast decisions. Secondly, as there are seldom reception facilities available to return young separated children in their countries of origin, return is not always desirable. The exception to this is situations where young people want to be returned home and they will be looked after upon return. For an increasing number of failed asylum seekers, however, life in Britain means homelessness and destitution. While the Kafkaesque asylum-seeking process leaves young asylum seekers vulnerable in legal terms, it does accord them the possibility of remaining in the United Kingdom. During the prolonged asylum-seeking process, some of the young people lodged new claims for leave to remain in the United Kingdom on the grounds that they had married a person who had refugee status. Most young people built up social networks they could draw upon once rights to welfare services are withdrawn.

Costs of looking after unaccompanied asylum seeker children

To provide state care for children is costly. The average gross weekly cost to social services for placing a single child in local authority care in England is £675 (Department for Education and Skills 2005). Children in local authority care constitute seventeen percent of the total population that social services care for. Yet, they take up 61 percent of the resources available (Ward and Holmes 2008: 80). In 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) limited funding for unaccompanied asylum seeker who were eighteen years of age and older. The DFES grant money was cut from £140 to £100 per person per week. While the European Parliamentary Assembly urges states and local authorities to mobilise resources to afford the costs of separated children, some cost sharing need also take place from central governments and international humanitarian agencies such as the UNHCR.

Foster care arrangements could be a way of reducing costs as well as potentially providing more personalized care for older unaccompanied asylum seekers. Under Article 19.2 of the EU Council Directive European Council Member States can choose to place unaccompanied asylum seeking children with adult relatives, with a foster-family, in accommodation centres with special provision for minors, or in other accommodation suitable for minors (Bhabha and Finch 2006: 86).⁹⁵ Hodes *et al.* point to the inadequacies of social care arrangements for older unaccompanied asylum seekers. As this group of young people have suffered (and continue to suffer) psychological trauma, they should not be left to cope on their own: they too should be put into foster care arrangements. Hode's (2008) finding was that unaccompanied children are 18 per cent less likely to suffer symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder associated with past persecution and trauma if they are placed in foster care as opposed to independent or semi-independent accommodation. With appropriate training for foster families (Kidane and Amerena 2004), the young people would be potentially much better cared for.

The government introduced the Reform Programme in October 2005 to implement 'specialist local authorities' around the country that will take an agreed-upon number of unaccompanied asylum seekers into their care. The Reform Programme can potentially relieve the majority of local authorities of any responsibility for unaccompanied asylum seekers who would come under the National Asylum Support Service to which adult asylum seekers are allocated (Bhabha and Finch 2006: 79). The purpose is to spread the costs of looking after unaccompanied asylum seekers to different local authorities. The government implemented a similar intervention for adult asylum seekers in 2001 when these were dispersed around the country upon arrival to Britain. The advantage of such a programme is that costs and service provision can be planned and implemented in advance to young people's arrival. Some disadvantages are that asylum seekers can be accommodated in a local authority that has little asylum law expertise available, and asylum seekers may be marginalized in an area with little ethnic diversity. The government should conduct a mapping exercise to establish where different nationalities have been dispersed to in Britain since 2001. At present this is not known because asylum seekers were not

⁹⁵ Minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers 2003/9/EC, 27 January 2003 (Bhabha and Finch 2006: 86, note 12).

dispersed to a particular area in relation to their national origin, but according to quota. It is important for Congolese young people to be able to live in an area where they can access Congolese Pentecostal churches and prayer groups. The profound sense of upheaval and turmoil young people experience as they first arrive and settle in Britain, could potentially be minimized if they are immediately placed in a family setting. It may be appropriate for Congolese young people to be fostered with Pentecostal Christian families. The government would need to design campaigns to encourage Congolese and other ethnic minorities in Britain to foster children from their countries of origin.

Bibliography

Abel, R.L. (1973) 'A comparative theory of dispute institutions in society'. *Law and Society Review*, **217**.

Aguilar Molina, J. (2005) *The invention of child witches in DRC*. London: Save the Children.

Ahern, F., Loughry, M., and Ager, A. (1998) 'The experiences of refugee children'. In: A. Ager, ed, *Perspectives on the Experiences of Forced Migration*. New York: Pinter.

Ahern, E.M. (1979) 'The problem of efficacy: Strong and weak illocutionary acts'. *Man*, **14**(3), pp. 1.

Aitken, S. and Herman, S. (1997) 'Gender, power and crib geography: transitional spaces and potential places'. *Gender, Place and Culture*, **4**, pp. 63.

Albrecht, A. (1999) *Rites in the Spirit: A ritual approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Allen, T. and Turton, D. (1996) 'Introduction: In search of cool ground'. In: Allen, T. and Turton, D., ed, *In Search of Cool Ground: War, flight and homecoming in Northeast Africa*. London: African World Press.

American Anthropological Association, 1998-last update, *code of ethics of the American Anthropological Association*. Available:

<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm> [07/06, 2009].

Amnesty International, 24/10/07, 2007-last update, 'Democratic Republic of Congo: torture and killings by state security agents still endemic'. Available:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR62/012/2007> [07/06, 2009].

Anstey, R. (1966) *King Leopold's Legacy*. London: Oxford University Press.

Ariés, P. (1962) *Centuries of Childhood*. New York: Vintage Press.

Association of Social Anthropology of the UK and the Commonwealth, 1999-last update, *Ethical guideline for good research practice*. Available: <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.htm> [07/06, 2009].

Atkinson, L. (2007) *Living, eating and learning: Children's experiences of change and life in a refugee camp*, PhD thesis. Department of Social Anthropology. University of Edinburgh.

Beatty, A. (2000) 'Islamic and non-Islamic prayer in Java'. In: Parkin, D. and Headley, S.C., ed, *Islamic Prayer Across the Indian Ocean: Inside and outside the Mosque*. Richmond: Curzon Press.

Bernard, H.R. (1984) 'The problem of informant accuracy: The validity of retrospective data'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **13**, pp. 495.

Bhabha, J. and Finch, N. (2006) *Seeking Asylum Alone: Unaccompanied and separated children and refugee protection in the UK*. Macarthur Foundation: Harvard University Committee on Human Rights Studies.

Biaya, T. (2005) 'Youth and street culture in urban Africa: Addis Ababa, Dakar and Kinshasa'. In: De Boeck, F. and Honwana, A., ed, *Makers and Breaker: Children and Youth in postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Block, M. (1975) 'Introduction'. In: M. Bloch, ed, *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*. London: Academic Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Boyden, J. (1990) 'Childhood and the Policy Makers: A comparative perspective on the Globalization of childhood'. In: James, A. and Prout, A., ed, *Constructing and*

Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood. London: Falmer.

Boyden, J. and Hart, J. (2007) 'Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children: Local and Global Perspectives'. *Children and Society*, **21**(4), pp. 4.

Boyden, J. and Mann, G. (2000) 'Children's risk, resilience and coping in extreme situations: A background paper to the consultation on children in adversity'.

Bruner, E. M. (1986) 'Experience and its Expressions', in Turner, V. W. and Bruner, E. M. (eds) *The Anthropology of Experience*. Pp. 3–30. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Bullock, R.E.A. (2006) 'Can the corporate state parent?'. *Children and youth services review*, **28**(11), pp. 1344.

Certeau, M.D. (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Charsley, S.R. (1973) 'Dreams in an Independent African Church'. *Africa*, **43**(3), pp. 244.

Chase, E., Knight, A. and Statham, J. (2008) 'Promoting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the UK'. London: Thomas Coram.

Chatty, D. Crivello, G. and Hundt, G.L. (2005) 'Theoretical and methodological challenges of studying refugee children in the Middle East and North Africa'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **18**.

Clark, C., (2007) 'Understanding vulnerability: From categories to experiences of young Congolese people in Uganda'. *Children and Society*, **21**.

Clark, C. (2006) *Beyond Borders: Political marginalisation and lived experiences of Congolese young people in Uganda*, PhD thesis. Oxford University.

Coleman, J. and Ngokwey, N. (1994) 'Zaire: The state and the university'. In: R. Sklar, ed, *Nationalism and Development in Africa: Selected essays by James S. Coleman*. California: University of California Press.

Coleman, S. (2004) 'The charismatic gift'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)*, **10**, pp. 421.

Coleman S. (2000) *The globalisation of charismatic Christianity: Spreading the gospel of prosperity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Corten, A. and Marshall-Fratani, R. (2001) 'Introduction'. In: Corten, A. and Marshall-Fratani, R., ed, *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, pp. 1.

Crawley, H. (2006) *Child first, migrant second: Ensuring that every child matters*. London: ILPA.

De Boeck, F. (2004) 'On being Shege in Kinshasa: Children, the occult and the street'. In: T. Trefon, ed, *Reinventing order in the Congo: how people respond to state failure in Kinshasa*. London: Zed Books.

De Boeck, F (1998b) 'Democracy and the stat-society paradigm: Reflections on S. Adelman's paper'. *Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, **89**.

De Boeck, F. (1998) 'Domesticating diamonds and dollars: Identity, expenditure and sharing in Southwestern Zaire (1984-1997)'. *Development and Change*, **29**, pp. 777.

De Boeck, F. and Plissart, M.F. (2004) *Kinshasa: Tales of the invisible city*. Ghent: Ludion.

- Delaney, C. (1995) 'Father state, Motherland, and the birth of modern turkey'. *Naturalising Power: Essays in feminist cultural analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *Staying Safe: Action Plan. Every Child Matters*. London: Department for Children Schools and Families.
- Department for Education and Skills (2003) *'Every child matters'*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Department of Health (2004) *The mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people: CAHMS Standard, National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*. London: Department of Health.
- Devisch, R. (1996) 'Pillaging Jesus: Healing churches and the villagisation of Kinshasa'. *Africa*, **66**(4), pp. 555.
- Devisch, R. (1995) 'Frenzy, Violence and Ethical Renewal in Kinshasa'. *Public Culture*, **7**, pp. 593.
- Drazin, A. (2008) 'Irish-Romanian homes and the anthropology of uncertainty'. *Material World*, **September**.
- Durham, D. (2000) 'Youth the social imagination in Africa'. *Anthropology Quarterly*, **73**, pp. 113.
- Eade, J. and Garbin, D. (2007) 'Reinterpreting the relationship between centre and periphery: Pilgrimage and sacred spatialisation among Polish and Congolese communities in Britain'. *Mobilities*, **2**(3), pp. 413.
- Eastmond, M. (2007) 'Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20(2):248-26
- Eastmond, M. (2005) 'The Disorders of Displacement: Bosnian Refugees and the

Reconstitution of Normality', in Jenkins, R., Steffen, V. and Jessen, H. (eds) *Managing Uncertainty: Ethnographic Studies of Illness, Risk and the Struggle for Control*. Pp. 149–171. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Eisenbruch, M. (1988) 'The mental health of refugee children and their cultural development'. *International Migration Review*, **22**, pp. 282.

Englund, H. and Leach, J. (2000) 'Ethnography and the meta-narratives of modernity'. *Current Anthropology*, **41**(2), pp. 225.

Eyber, C. and Ager, A. (2004) 'Researching young people's experiences of war: Participatory methods and the trauma discourse in Angola'. In: Boyden, J. and De Berry, J., ed, *Children and Youth on the Front Line: Ethnography, armed conflict and displacement*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Fabian, J. (1994) 'Jamaa: A charismatic movement revisited'. In: Blakely, T.D., Van Beek, W.E.A. and Thomson, D. L., ed, *Religion in Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Fabian, J. (1966) 'Dream and charisma: "Theories of dreams" in the Jamaa-movement (Congo)'. *Anthropos*, , pp. 544.

Ferguson, J. (2006) 'Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order'. Durham: Duke University Press.

Finch, N. (2005) 'Seeking asylum alone'. In: H.E.E.A. Andersson, ed, *The Asylum Seeking Child in Europe*. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, pp. 57.

Foucault, M. (1988) 'Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault'. In: Martin, L., Gutman, H. and Hutton, P., ed, *Technologies of the Self*. London: Tavistock.

- Fraser, N. (1999) 'Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition and participation'. In: L. Ray, ed, *Culture and Economy of After the Culture Turn*. London: Sage.
- Gandoulou, J.D. (1989) *Dandies a Bacongo: Le culte de l'elegance dans la societe congolaise contemporaine*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Gandoulou, J.D. (1984) *Entre Paris et Bacongo*. Paris: Centre Pompidou.
- Gibbs, S. (1994) 'Post-war social reconstruction in Mozambique: Re-framing children's experiences of trauma and healing'. *Disasters*, **18**(3), pp. 268.
- Giner, C. (2007) 'The politics of asylum and childhood in the UK'. *Children and Society*, **21**, pp. 249.
- Goffman, E. (1971) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Gondola, D. (1999) 'Dream and drama: The search for elegance among Congolese youth'. *African Studies Review*, **42**(1), pp. 23.
- Gulliver, P.H. (1969) 'Dispute settlement without courts: The Ndendeuli of southern Tanzania'. *Law in Culture and Society*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Hamilton, C. and Matthews, A. (2007) Accommodating asylum seeking children: the de-accommodation policy and practice in the London Borough of Hillingdon. *Childright*, Dec/Jan.
- Handelman, D. (2008) 'The Ethics of Being Wrong, II'. Reflecting on Reflexivity in Anthropology and Social Science Workshop edn. European Association of Social Anthropologists Conference, Ljubljana July 10-14.

Handelman, D. and Kapferer, B. (1980) 'Symbolic types: Mediation and the transformation of ritual context: Sinhalese demons and Tewa Clowns'. *Semiotica*, **30**(1-2), pp. 41.

Harrel-Bond, B. (1999) 'The experience of refugees as recipients of aid'. In: A. Ager, ed, *Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration*. London: Pinter.

Hodes, M. (2008) 'Risk and resilience for psychological distress amongst unaccompanied asylum seeking adolescents'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **49**(May), pp. 72.

Hodes, M. (2005) 'Editorial: Children and war'. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **10**, pp. 131.

Hodes, M. (2000) 'Psychologically distressed refugee children in the United Kingdom'. *Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **5**, pp. 57.

Home Office (2007b) *Planning better outcomes and support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children*. London: Stationary Office.

Home Office (2007) *Asylum Statistics*. London: Stationary Office.

Home Office (2006) *HC of the Immigration Rules*. London: Stationary Office.

Home Office (2005) *Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain - five-year strategy for asylum and immigration*. London: Stationary Office.

Honwana, A. (2005) 'Innocent and guilty: Child-soldiers as interstitial and tactical agents'. In: De Boeck, F. AND Honwana, A., ed, *Makers and Breakers: Children and youth in postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Humphries, B. (2004) 'An unacceptable role for social work: implementing immigration policy'. *British Journal of Social Work*, **34**, pp. 93.

- Hunter, M. (2002) 'The materiality of everyday sex: Thinking beyond 'prostitution''. *African Studies*, **61**(1).
- Hyder, T. (2005) *War, Conflict and Play*. London: Open University Press.
- Ingleby, D. (2005) 'Introduction'. In: D. Ingleby, ed, *Forced migration and mental health: Rethinking the care of refugees and displaced persons*. New York: Springer.
- Jackson, M. (2002) *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression, and Intersubjectivity*. Gylling: Narayana Press
- James, A. and James, A. (2004) *Constructing Childhood*. London: Palgrave.
- James, A. and Prout, A. (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. London: Falmer Press.
- James, A., Jenks, C., and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jedrey, M.C. and Shaw, R. (1992) 'Introduction: Dreaming, religion and society in Africa'. In: Jedrey, M.C. and Shaw, R., ed, *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*. London: Brill.
- Kanza, T. (1972) *Conflict in the Congo: The rise and fall of Lumbumba*. London: Penguin.
- Kidane, S. and Amerena, P. (2004) *Fostering Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Refugee Children: A training course for foster carers*. London: British Association for Adoption and Fostering.
- Kienzler, H. (2008) 'Debating war-trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in an interdisciplinary arena'. *Social Science and Medicine*, **67**, pp. 218.

Kiernan, J.P. (1988) 'The other side of the coin: The conversion of money to religious purposes in Zulu Zionist Churches'. *Man*, **23**(3).

Kleinman, A. (1995) 'Violence, culture and the politics of trauma'. *Writing at the Margin: Discourse between Anthropology and Medicine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kleinman, A. (1995) *Writing at the Margin: Discourse between anthropology and medicine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kleinman, A. (1980) 'Anthropology and psychiatry: The role of culture in cross-cultural research on illness'. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **151**, pp. 447.

Kleinman, A. and Kleinman, J. (1997) 'The appeal of experience; The dismay of images: Cultural appropriations of suffering in our times'. In: Kleinman, A., Das, V. and Lockwood, M., ed, *Social Suffering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kohli, R. (2005) 'The sound of silence: Listening to what unaccompanied asylum-seeking children say and do not say'. *British Journal of Social Work*.

Kohli, R. and Mather, R. (2003) 'Promoting psychosocial wellbeing in unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in the United Kingdom'. *Child and family social work*, **8**(3).

K. Koser ed. (2003) *New African Diaspora*. London: Routledge.

Koser, K. (1997) 'Social networks and the asylum cycle: the case of Iranians in the Netherlands'. *International Migration Review*, **31**(2), pp. 591.

Kundnani, A. (2004) 'The grim fate that awaits those deported to Congo'. *Institute of Race Relations*.

- La Fontaine J.S. (2007) 'Child witches in London'. Seminar Presentation LSE Department of anthropology edn.
- La Fontaine, J.S. (1997) *Speak of the Devil: Allegations of satanic abuse in Britain* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- La Fontaine, J.S. (1970) *City Politics: A study of Leopoldville 1962- 1962*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- La Fontaine, J.S. (1970b) 'Two types of youth group in Kinshasa (Leopoldville)'. In: P. Mayer, ed, *Socialization: The approach from social anthropology*. London: Tavistock.
- Lemarchand, R. (2002) 'Tunnel at the end of the light'. *Review of African Political Economy*, **93/94**, pp. 389.
- Lumsden, D. (1999) 'Broken lives? Reflections on the anthropology of exile and repair'. *Refuge*, **18**, pp. 30.
- Lumumba-Kasongo, T. (1998) *The Rise of Multipartyism and Democracy in the Context of Global Change: The case of Africa*. London: Zed Books.
- Luthar, S. (2003) *Resilience and Vulnerability: Adaptation in the context of Childhood adversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacGaffey, J. (1991) *The Real Economy of Zaire: The contribution of smuggling and other unofficial activities to national wealth*. Oxford: James Currey.
- MacGaffey, J. and Bazenguissa-Ganga, R. (2000) *Congo-Paris: Transnational traders on the margins of the law*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Malinowski, B. (1948) *Magic, Science and Religion*. Garden City: Doubleday.

Malkki, L. (1995) 'Introduction: An ethnography of displacement in the national order of things'. *Purity and exile: Violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1.

Malkki, L. (1992) 'National Geographic: Rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees'. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1), pp. 24.

Mann, G. (2004) 'Separated children: Care and support in context'. In: Boyden, J. and Berry, J. De, ed, *Children and Youth on the Frontline: Ethnography, armed conflict and development*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Mann, G. (2002) "'Wakimbizi, Wakimbizi": Congolese refugee boys' and girls' perspectives on life in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania'. *Environment and Urbanisation*, 14(2).

Marijse, S. and De Herdt, T. (1996) 'Comment survivent les kinois quant l'etat deperit?' Antwerp: Centre for Development Studies

Maingay, S.E.A. (2002) 'Researching Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children: Ethical issues'.

Marshall, R. (1991) 'Power in the name of Jesus: *Review of African Political Economy*, 18(52), pp. 21.

Martin, D. (2002) *Pentecostalism: The world their parish*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Mauss, M. (2003) *On Prayer*. Oxford: Berghahn books

Mayoyo Bitumba Tipo-Tipo (1995) *Migration sud/nord: Levier ou obstacle? les Zairois en Belgique*. Institut africain-CEDAF. Brussels and Paris: Editions l'Harmattan

- Merry, S.E. (1979) 'Going to Court: Strategies of Dispute Management in an American Urban Neighborhood', *Law & Society Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer, 1979), pp. 891-925
- Meskill, L. and Pels, P. (2005) 'Introduction'. *Embedded Ethics*. Oxford: Berg.
- Meyer, B. (2004) 'Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal Charismatic Churches'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **1**(33), pp. 447.
- Meyer, B. (1998) "'Make a complete break with the past": Memory and post-colonial modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal discourse'. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, **27**(3), pp. 316.
- Meyerhoff, B. and Ruby, J. (1982) 'Introduction'. *A Crack in the Mirror*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press.
- Morris, J. (2005) '*Children on the edge of care: Human rights and the Children Act*'. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Nader, L. (1969) 'Styles of court procedures: To make the balance'. In: L. Nader, ed, *Law in Culture and Society*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2000) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pels, P. (2000) 'The trickster's dilemma: Ethics and the technologies of the anthropological self'. In: M. Strathern, ed, *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. London: Routledge.
- Pottier, J. (2002) *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, survival and disinformation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pype, K. (2006) 'Dancing for God or the Devil: Pentecostal discourse on popular dance in Kinshasa'. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, **36**(3), pp. 296.

Rajkotia, R. (2008) *The migration and transition of Sierra Leonean refugee girls in England*. PhD Thesis edn. University of Sussex, Department of Geography.

Refugee Council Briefing (2007) *New Asylum Model*. August.

Reynolds, P. (2005) 'Forming identities: Conceptions of pain and children's expressions of it in Southern Africa'. In: De Boeck, F. and Honwana, A., ed, *Makers and Breakers: Children and youth in postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Robbins, J. (2004) 'The Globalisation of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **33**, pp. 117.

Rose, N. (1998) *Governing the Soul*. London: Routledge.

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2000) 'Guidelines for the ethical conduct of medical research involving children'. *Archives of Diseases in Childhood*, **82**.

Ruch, G. (2005) 'Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: Holistic approaches to contemporary child care social work'. *Child and Family Social Work*, **10**(2), pp. 111.

Save the Children and Separated Children in Europe Programme (2007) *Focus on Children in Migration: From a European Research and Method Perspective*. Save the Children: Sweden.

Shukla, H. (2003) 'Census 2001: Health and society in Hillingdon', Health Information Report 2003, Hillingdon PCT

Shanley, M.L. (2003) 'Towards new understandings of adoption: Individuals and relationships in transracial and open adoption'. In: Macebo, S. and Young, M., ed, *Child, Family and State*. New York: New York University.

- Simmel, G. (1950) 'The secret society'. In: K. Wolf, ed, *The Sociology of George Simmel*. London: Collier MacMillan.
- Spiegel, A. (1987) 'Dispersing dependants: A response to the exigencies of labour migration in rural Transkei'. In: J. Eades, ed, *Migrants, Workers, and the Social Order*. London: Association of Social Anthropologists.
- Stevens, D. (2004) *Asylum Law and Policy: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. London: Thomson/ Sweet & Maxwell.
- Strathern, M. (2000) *Audit Cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*. London: Routledge.
- Styan, D. (2003) 'La Nouvelle Vague? Recent Francophone African Settlement in London'. In: K. KOSER, ed, *New African Diasporas*. London: Routledge.
- Summerfield, D. (2001) 'Asylum seekers, refugees and mental health services in the United Kingdom'. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, **25**, pp. 161.
- Tapsfield, R. and Collier, F. (2005) *The cost of foster care: Investing in our children's future*. London: British Association for Adoption and Fostering.
- Thomas, S., Nafees, B. and Bhugra, D. (2004) "'I was running away from death": The pre-flight experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK'. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, **30**(2).
- Trefon, T. (2002) 'The political economy of sacrifice: The Kinois and the state. *Review of African Political Economy*, **29**(93/94), pp. 481.
- Trefon, T., Van Hoyweghen, S. and Smis, S. (2002) 'State failure in the Congo: Perceptions and realities'. *Review of African Political Economy*, **29**(93/94), pp. 379.

Turner, V. (1976) 'African Ritual and Literary Mode: Is a Comparative Symbology Possible?'. In: A. Fletcher, ed, *The Literature of Fact*. New York: Columbia University Press.

UNHCR, 1999. *Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs*. Geneva: UNHCR.

Van Acker, F. and Vlassenroot, K. (2000) 'Youth and conflict in Kivu: *Komona clair*'. *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*.

Van Dijk, R., (2002) 'The soul is the stranger: Ghanaian Pentecostalism and the diasporic contestation of 'flow' and 'individuality''. *Culture and Religion*, 3(1), pp. 49.

Van Dijk, R. (2001) 'Time and transcultural technologies of the self in the Ghanaian pentecostal diaspora'. In: Corten, A. AND Marshall-Fratani, R., ed, *Between Babel and Pentecost*.

Van Dijk, R. (1997) 'From camp to encompassment: discourses of transsubjectivity in the Ghanaian Pentecostal diaspora'. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 27(2), pp. 135.

Van Wyk, I. (2008) 'A church of strangers: On continuity thinking in anthropology'. Seminar Presentation edn. LSE, Department of Social Anthropology.

Villers, G. and Tsonda, J. (2002) 'An intransitive transition'. *Review of African Political Economy*, 29(93/94), pp. 399.

Wa Kabwe, K. and Segatti, A. (2003) 'Paradoxical expressions of return to the homeland: Music and literature among Congolese (Zairean) diaspora'. In: K. Koser ed, *New African Diaspora*. London: Routledge.

Wade, J., Mitchell, F. and Bayliss, G. (2005) '*Unaccompanied asylum seeking children: The response of Social Work services*'. London: British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

Wallin, A.M. and Ahlstrom, G. (2005) 'Unaccompanied young adult refugees in Sweden, experiences of their life situation and well-being: a qualitative follow-up study'. *Ethnicity and Health*, **10**(2), pp. 129.

Ward, H. and Holmes, L. (2008) 'Calculating the costs of local authority care for children with contrasting needs'. *Child and Family Social Work*, **13**, pp. 80.

Watters, C. (2001) 'Emerging paradigms in the mental health care of refugees', *Social Science and Medicine*. 52 (11) pp. 1709

Wellman, B. (1981) 'Applying network analyses to the study of support'. In: B.H. Gottlieb, ed, *Social Networks and Social Support*. London: Sage.

Whiteford, L.M, and Manderson, L., ed, (2000) *Global Health Policy, Local realities: The fallacy of the level playing field*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Wolf, E. (1980[1966]) 'Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations in Complex Societies'. *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*. London: Routledge, pp. 1.

Young, A. (1982) 'The anthropologies of illness and sickness'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **11**, pp. 257.

Zarowsky, C. (2000) 'Poverty, pity and the erasure of power: Somali refugee dependency'. In: Whiteford, L.M, and Manderson, L., ed, *Global Health Policy, Local realities: The fallacy of the level playing field*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Appendix Summary of Key Informants
Unaccompanied Asylum seekers

Pseudonym	Country of origin, ethnicity	Year of arrival in the UK	Date of birth	Refugee status/form of protection in 2007
1 Tesfay	Iran, Kurd	2004	1987	Discretionary leave
2 Hanna	Somalia	2004	1989	Indefinite leave
3 Lillian	DRC, Bangala	2005	1989	Discretionary leave
4 Rachel *	DRC	2005	1988	Discretionary leave
5 Micah *	DRC	2005	1988	Discretionary leave
6 Rafael	DRC	2006	1989	Discretionary leave
7 Miriam *	DRC, Kikongo	2005	1988	Discretionary leave
8 Kole	Nigeria	2006	1992	Discretionary leave
9 Emmanuel * **	DRC	2004	1987	Discretionary leave
10 Muhammad * **	DRC	2004	1987	Indefinite leave
11 Angelica	DRC	2005	1988	Discretionary leave
12 Hussein	Afghanistan	2006	1988	Indefinite leave
13 Ali	Afghanistan	2006	1989	Indefinite leave
14 Dani	Iraq	2005	1989	Discretionary leave

* have had child since arrival in the UK

** married since arrival in the UK

Case studies

Joining a Pentecostal church

Lillian – ‘First I went to church because of biscuit!’

Lillian started going to Sunday school (*ecoledime*) when she was five or six years old. Two sisters from the church, *seur* Pauline and *seur* Clementine recruited children in her street, Mangwembo. She said children went to the church because ‘after they give biscuits and treats, we eat, and fanta, coca, we eat, we go back home. We went to the church because of biscuit.’ At the church, the sisters taught the children about the coming of Jesus and how to be a good person. This included things such as that one should not steal, not speak badly about one’s mum if she had beaten you. The teaching, Lillian said, concerned the ‘small, small things in life’:

‘They were teaching, [No, don’t do that if the mum is cooking, don’t go open to eat, it’s no good, Jesus doesn’t like it. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, da, da, da], the small things. And in my street, if someone did something bad, [Eh! I will tell *seur* Pauline, sister Pauline, I will tell her!] Yeah. Everybody changed, everybody changed.’

The children and a few adults were the first to attend the church. Over time, it grew into a bigger congregation. More and more young people were recruited and then the adults started going. Lillian joined another church, but returned for a visit to the church of her early childhood later on. Some people were surprised at how grown-up she had become. Nobody remembered that it was she and her friends who were the first to attend the church. Lillian’s parents were Catholics and did not want to attend the Pentecostal church. However, Lillian’s mother converted to Pentecostalism at around the same time that the parents split up. Before that her parents had no issue with her attending the church alone. She said where she grew up there was nothing unusual about young children spending much of the day away from the family home. It was later, at the age of fourteen, that church life became a more serious issue, as she was seen to be old enough to understand the message that was preached. At that time, her mother had also started to attend the same church.

Lillian started attending a different church at the age of fourteen, called *Nouvelle Jerusalem*, the New Jerusalem. It was in that church that Lillian first realised the significance God would play in her life.

‘One day one pastor came to that church. He was prophesising. He said in the future, when I’m older, God will bless me. He told me a lot of things about my life. He said I will experience a difficult time, but after that God will bless me forever. He spoke and spoke and spoke. He said I have to carry the *benediction* with me, by praying, doing the righteous thing and keep my *fois* (faith).’

The first day that Lillian went to the church in Brixton in South London, a different pastor repeated the same thing to her.

‘They said the same thing. That God would keep me as long as I keep my *fois*.’

Lillian said that churches in Kinshasa had a much bigger impact on one’s daily life than they do in the UK. She said that people had more time as they rarely had to worry about appointments and often did not have jobs.

‘The church in Africa starts nine o’clock to four thirty. Or maybe seven o’clock to twelve, or to one pm. Like on a Friday it will start at five o’clock and go on until ten or eleven. Because we don’t have problems with time, we don’t pay tax... in Africa we don’t have it and people pray a lot more. Like a person in Africa, she doesn’t have a job. She will do other things, to cook in her house. She will wake up in the morning, go to cook in the pastor’s house, come back to her house, sleep, go to *intersession* to pray, stay there, stay there. From Monday to Sunday. She doesn’t have the time to sit at home, you know. Monday, maybe you go to *intersession*, Tuesday, there is prayer, Wednesday maybe *evangelisation*, to go to another house to listen to preaching. Thursday maybe *evangelisation* again, Friday there is prayer, Sunday maybe in the night you go and pray or you sleep somewhere in the night where you pray. Sunday, church again.

Lillian said that church life had a larger impact on people’s lives in Africa, not because people were more ‘holy’ in some way, but because life there is different and

harder than in Europe. The prayers helped people to know how to get through the hard times. Lillian also talked about the role Christianity played in her life in prison and during life in exile. Without praying, a person might get led astray, to become 'like crazy' or give in to the evil ways of the devil.

'In Africa the people pray so much because they suffer. And they cry. Because of *sorcière* (witch). There are too many bad things in Africa. Sometimes, people go to church to say thank you. Other people go there maybe because his *uncle* or aunty or mum she's an *ndoki* (witch). That's why they go there to pray for protection from God, you see. I wake up in the morning and I say, I pray for *fois*.

'If you've got a lot of problems, you don't know how to manage, you might behave like crazy.

'Faith, is like you say thank you for something you didn't see, this is I have *fois*. Sometimes I wake up in the morning, I say thank you God because You protected me in the night. I left my family, I left my friend, I left everybody. My paper is there at the Home Office, I know maybe today when I come back I will see a rejection from them.

The praying and keeping one's faith could have an impact on one's future life.

'Whatever happens, bad or good, God knows why I'm here. Lot of people they suffer in Africa, a lot of people when they come here they are arrested. A lot of people they are in the prison now. You know, when I was in the prison in my country, one dad told me, 'maybe he will die', I said, 'Why?'. He said life is very difficult. Just God knows what will happen to me. But you know, maybe they killed that daddy. I don't know, but God blessed me, I'm here. I don't know if it's because of the blessing, I don't know. But just He knows why I'm here.'

In London, Lillian started to attend a church in Brixton. At the church she met a pastor she knew from Kinshasa. A sister in the church gave her several recordings of his preaching. She said she often listened to them and that it helped her to do so. She went to church in Brixton every Sunday with her friend Miriam, although the journey

took them more than two hours. I invited her to come to the church in Hillingdon, which would have been much closer for her, but she said she could not change her church to one she did not know. Lillian introduced Rachel to her church in Brixton.

In April 2008 Lillian started attending a church in Uxbridge. She said she liked it because it was close and because there were many English people there. She said she had been going to the church in Brixton because it was the first church she had attended in London. She did not like going to the church in Hayes because there were too many people there from her country and she needed 'to integrate' and improve her English. She had started a course at Uxbridge College in Ticket and Tourism and she had to study twice as hard as everyone else in her class because her English was poor. Lillian said she loved her course and she got merit and distinction on all her assignments. She had had a boyfriend for a few months who she broke up with because she found out that he had a child with another woman and he had not told her about it.

She had been in love with him. He was a good man who tried helping her to get a job, bought her a sound system, shoes and gave her money. She had had 'episodes' when he was with her and she explained to him why it happened.

Lillian had decided to 'try' to have a boyfriend because people were telling her that it was not good for her to stay alone. But now she learnt again that it was best to keep herself to herself and focus on looking out for her future. She said she was tired on depending on the Social Services. It was no life. With £45 a week one could not save any money.

She had been praying, meditating and fasting for three days about her 'paper'. Now the Home Office had said that they had a backlog of cases and she was granted stay in the UK until further notice. This was good news, and it was because of her prayer, but the time limit was not unknown. She wanted a passport, to work full-time, to have a good husband and children. Depending on the Social Services, one could not go there to ask for anything extra for one's children. She needed to work to provide this herself. She wanted to be able to travel, to go to France, to Belgium.

As far as she knew, Miriam and another Congolese girl, Lidi, had also received a similar granting of stay in the UK. Miriam, however, had to go to 'report' to a reporting centre every week.

Miriam was four months pregnant. She had gone to stay with her boyfriend for three months, leaving Lillian many of her shoes to use while she was away. When she came back she was pregnant. Miriam did not want to talk about it. 'You know, Miriam likes to listen to other people. She does not like to talk herself', Lillian said. The girls were still good friends, but Lillian knew she had to accept that they chose different paths for themselves and she could not tell Miriam what she thought was best for her. She did not know how long they would live in the same house. Miriam had only said that she would not stay there. Lillian also said that Miriam had told other people about 'her secret' (her past). She had confronted Miriam who had said, 'I don't care!'

Lillian was very excited about the new church she was attending. It was Bernadette who had introduced her to it. There was a white pastor who preached and prophesied for her. He had a vision of her among a crowd of people who were talking behind her back. ('I told you before that people from my country they don't like me'.) But also that there was a good future waiting for her. Lillian was upbeat and chatted a lot. She said to be depressed, quiet, contemplating about one's suffering all the time, were practices that tempted the devil to enter. She said she could speak to a psychologist, to a special psychologist [psychiatrist], the GP, the solicitor, but the best psychologist was God. Like the pastor in her new church had said, God had the ultimate power over everything. He had the power to change the past, the present and the future. Like at a time when she had wanted to take all her tablets and the Holy Spirit entered her and told her a verse from the bible. She looked it up and she understood; She was not to end her life.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Genesis 12: *The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing..." So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there... At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who appeared to him.* Lillian had not told anyone else about this verse, because it was between her and God and anyone else who read it would not understand its meaning. I have left out passages so that the particular verse she was referring to will not be identified in respect of the importance Lillian attributed to keeping it secret.

We ate rice, bean sauce and fish on her bedroom floor and she put on tapes with preaching that she particularly liked. In that preaching too, the pastor said God had the power to change the past. Lillian nodded in agreement and underlined what was being said by pointing in the air and saying ‘Amen!’

Rachel – ‘I was Muslim in my country’

Rachel had escaped from Kinshasa with the help of a Catholic priest. She had come from a Muslim family – her parents, an older sister and two younger brothers. Rachel had run away from a ‘problem’ that I never learnt the nature of, but she said she had been in fear of her life. There was a Catholic church near where she lived and when she was running for her life, it was the nearest place of escape – the mosque was further away. At the church a priest got her in touch with another priest who was due to travel to the UK and who offered to bring Rachel with him as his own daughter. Rachel did not know the name of the priest she travelled with – she only knew him as ‘father’. She also said she knew nothing about how passports and travel documents were arranged.

As Rachel and the priest arrived at Heathrow airport the priest told her to wait for a few minutes while he went ‘to do something’. She waited for a long time and eventually started looking for him. A policeman came to talk to her, but she did not know any English and did not understand what was being said. She was brought to a room for an interview. She worried that the priest might be looking for her while she was with the immigration officers.

Rachel said that had it not been for the priest she might not be alive and she thought it was Christianity, not Islam that had saved her.

‘It is not my religion, Islam, that helped me. It is the Christian religion that helped me. [When I came here] I thought ‘I need to find the church to say thanks.’

Rachel explained in the following way why she decided to convert to Christianity.

‘Now I am safe. Like before in my country I was not safe. I was scared. I was very scared for my problem, for my life. And when I came there, to the church, they protected me. That’s why I am saying, was it not for that priest I would not have been protected. I couldn’t protect myself, but it was because of him I was protected. I need to be praying very well for my God and give thanks.’

Rachel was initially placed in the same house as Lillian. Lillian introduced Rachel to her church in Brixton. Rachel went twice, but said she did not understand what was going on, because nothing was explained to her. (‘I didn’t understand it. I didn’t think it was good’). She later met a person in a Congolese shop who invited her to come to his church in Seven Sisters (Northeast London). At that church a deacon explained about Jesus Christ. ‘They taught me about Jesus Christ and I listened until I understood and believed.’ Rachel said about the first meeting with the deacon: ‘We were sitting down together. Afterwards, he took my hand and prayed for me.’ In the summer of 2006 Rachel was Baptist in the sea in Brighton.

Rachel later attended the church in Seven Sisters with a girlfriend, Angelica.

Life in exile in London

Rachel had arrived in the UK 15 November 2005. She had first been placed in the same independent house as Lillian, although they were both under 18.⁹⁷ When Rachel was placed in the house the landlord showed her room, the kitchen, the fridge full of food and the bathroom. She was given some money from the Social Services, but she did not know where to buy food and she did not speak English. She shut herself away in her room for several days, only leaving it to use the bathroom and take coke and bread from the kitchen. She did not understand that the food in the fridge was not for everyone to share. After two days, an Eritrean girl in the house shouted at her for stealing her food, so she guessed. Rachel apologised and wanted to give the girl money, but the girl did not want to accept it. Lillian lived in the same house, but it took them several days to discover that they were both Congolese. Someone told

⁹⁷ Separated children are supposed to live in ‘supported’ accommodation if they are under the age of 18, see chapter 3. The large ‘semi-independent’ house near Heathrow airport was closed at a time, due to a fire.

Lillian that Rachel was Congolese. She banged on Rachel's door and shouted, 'Open the door' in Lingala. The girls were delighted to discover that they were both from the DRC and spoke Lingala. Lillian showed Rachel where to buy food and introduced her to her church in Brixton.

After four months, Rachel was moved to the semi-independent house near Heathrow airport. It was there that she met Angelica. She was referred to the multi-agency support team of the Borough in March 2006 because of her key worker's concerns about her low mood, headaches, moments of absent thought, and suspicion of PTSD following trauma in the DRC. After her 18th birthday and having lived at the semi-independent house for eight months, Rachel was moved to independent accommodation in October 2006. I visited her there a few weeks after her move.⁹⁸ Now that she had turned 18 her weekly allowance was reduced from £89 every two weeks plus extra money for clothes (£50 twice a year) to £79 every two weeks with no extra allowance for clothes. She received her money from the Job Centre (and no longer the Asylum Team). The day I visited her she was suffering from a bad cold and said she had caught a cold because she did not have a warm enough coat. Last year's winter coat was torn, she said, and she had put it in the bin. She could not afford to buy a new one. The Job Centre had suggested that she get a job, but it was not clear whether she was entitled to work. She said that in her country, at the age of 18, 'you are still young' and she had never worked before. Additionally, she had 'many problems in her head' and it was hard enough to manage studying English (ESOL) at college. If she did too many things she got 'very confused'. Her mental health worker had said that she needed to relax as much as possible when she was not at college.

I looked around Rachel's room and complimented her on making it look nice. There was one wardrobe, two small rugs on top of the carpet, a sink, a big refrigerator, a small plastic shelf unit with glasses and cups, cuddly toys, a TV, two DVDs, and a sound system. She had bought some of it at the 'Sunday market' in Hounslow, other things had been given to her. One DVD was broken so she had bought a small one from Argos. There was also a big floor fan. She told me it was given to her by the Social Services because they 'locked' her window in the last house where she had

⁹⁸ 7 November 2006.

lived. ‘Something happened’, Rachel said. In August she had tried to kill herself by jumping out of the window. She was in hospital for five days. She said she had felt lonely, ‘very confused’, and *kraké*.⁹⁹ She was seeing a psychologist at the time, but only once a month or less. After the incident she started seeing a mental health worker every week.

I asked Rachel if Angelica was her best friend. She replied that she did not have a best friend, but that her best friend was God.

I met Rachel several months later in a Congolese Pentecostal church in Hayes, the Glory (*La Gloire*). She was pregnant and because of her pregnancy the travel to the church in Seven Sisters was too much for her. Rachel attended the Sunday service up until the very end of the pregnancy. On a Sunday in late May she told me she had contractions.

Upon falling pregnant Rachel moved to a house for ‘mothers and babies.’ It had taken her four months to realise that she was pregnant and she must have been pregnant without knowing it when I met her in her previous accommodation. I asked her if she thought she was pregnant at the time when she tried to take her life, but she said she did not know. Her period was not regular and she only went without it in the third month of her pregnancy. When she started to suspect that she was pregnant, someone told her that she could buy a pregnancy test at the pharmacy. When the test was positive she became very upset and rang her key worker, crying. Her mental health worker said that the test might be false and that she should go to the GP. She waited two weeks for the GP pregnancy test result and was told that it was positive. She rang the father of the child who ‘did not want to accept’ and hung up the phone on her. Rachel’s key worker discussed the option of abortion with her. Rachel said she could not go through with an abortion. She said ‘my mother gave birth to me, and I have to give birth to a child. I thought that if it is a boy it will be like my brother and if it is a girl it will be like my sister. I told the key worker that and she said I was very intelligent. Then thanks be to God I gave birth to a boy and he is like my brother.

⁹⁹ French slang for feeling stressed.

Now I am not alone.’ She named the boy a combination of words which she translated as ‘my family’.

I visited Rachel at the house for ‘mothers and babies’ 27 July 2007. It was a small flat where she had a small room facing a busy road. There was one other bedroom where a South African mother lived with her baby, a box room that featured as a lounge, and where the other mother’s boyfriend and friend often stayed overnight, taking turns to sleep in an armchair and on the floor. There was also a small kitchen and a bathroom. Rachel’s room was cluttered with her possessions, now including the baby’s cot. She was happy to be a mother for her baby, saying that she was no longer alone. However, she was stressed that day because the Social Services had told her that she had been overpaid and needed to repay them £1680. She was also to go to the court a few days later for her asylum tribunal hearing.

During her pregnancy Rachel had made friends with a woman, ‘Samantha’, who had children of her own and attended the church in Hayes. Rachel said that Samantha was her closest friend and ‘like a sister’. During her pregnancy, Rachel sometimes went to visit her friend who would cook for her while Rachel rested or slept. Samantha was Rachel’s birth partner, but when it came to the birth, the midwives said that there were too many people present together with the interpreter and Samantha was not allowed in the room. However, the interpreter acted well as birth partner. She too was Christian and prayed with Rachel that in the name of Jesus the baby would come out. Rachel shouted ‘In the name of Jesus’ and at that moment, the boy was born.

A few weeks after the birth of her child, women from the Church in Hillingdon went to visit her. It was a group of twenty, most of who had children themselves. They all gave Rachel £10 each for costs of nappies and other things for the baby. The £200 would have been a welcome sum of money in Rachel’s situation. She said her boy was very hungry and that she did not have enough milk for him and needed to buy formula milk – and that was expensive. A woman who sang in the churchwomen’s choir had a particular role within the church to pray for the women of the congregation. She led the praying over Rachel’s child and instructed Rachel on how to look after herself now that she was a mother.

I watched Rachel sing in church one Sunday in July. She said she wanted to sing for God. She became very moved during the song, sobbing and being quiet momentarily. She stopped singing before it was finished. She told me later on about how she felt when she was singing:

‘I don’t know how to explain it. I just felt like I was about to... like I could fly. I was about to fall down any moment. I felt like that. That’s why I stopped. Like I was loosing control. I like to sing for God. It is important. If I have no Jesus Christ I have no life. I need Him to have my life. Everybody said to me: [You don’t know how to sing, but you sing very well].’

It was not so important in the church in Hayes to have a beautiful voice, but rather that in singing, one had the ability to be touched by the spirit.

Light House (Greenford)

Pascal

↓

Micah → Your first step with God (Walthamstow) →

The Glory (Hayes)

Emmanuel

↓

Micah (drummer)

↓

Rafael (singer)

↓

Rachel, Lidi and other girls

Micah

I first met Micah at Miriam’s place in October 2006 and then not again until December 2005. He came from the Tipka area in Kinshasa where he lived with his aunt and uncle. His mother was on a prolonged visit in the Bumbashi province where her husband’s family lived.

When Micah grew up, the family attended the *Arme de l'eternel* (Eternal Army, referring to the battle led by Joshua) church in Kinshasa. Micah's mother was a singer there. The church had a huge congregation of thousands of people and even its own TV channel in the DRC and Nigeria. The services would start seven in the morning on a Sunday and people would start queuing at four am to get a seat. There was also a screen outside the building for people who could not get in.

Micah was a drummer and learnt to play drums by a young man who played profane music. Micah preferred to learn drums rather than going to church. Although there were plenty of church bands around, he felt that those bands played the same songs repeatedly and the musicians did not have the same chance to progress as those who played at other events. Micah's family could not comprehend that he did not want to join the church and play Godly music. Micah said: 'I was the only one in the family who didn't go to that church. It was impossible for them. I wasn't into God stuff and all my family were, so my family was angry with me for deciding not to play Godly music. Sometimes I felt I should run away from home.'

Micah's father went to South Africa for long periods of time during his childhood. He brought Micah and his siblings with him for three months at a time during ten years. It was a businessman and good friend of the father in the Province who paid for them to go. Micah said that the father's long stays away led to the parent's divorce. Micah, his father and his siblings stayed with relatives in Pretoria. Micah did not like being in South Africa in the beginning because he did not speak the language, but when he learnt English he enjoyed being there. He made friends: 'We went to the park, playing on our own.'

In between the visits to South Africa he went to a Catholic school in Kinshasa for four years. His mother got married to another man when he was thirteen. She went to the Province for long stays after that. Micah would also accompany his mother to the Province for long periods of time. It meant disruption in his schooling. There was a school in the area, but when Micah arrived it was full and he had to wait until the following year to start.

In 2005, Micah went on another visit to his mother and stepfather in the Province. He stayed for a few days with his stepfather's family. When he returned to his mother's house she was not there. He thought she had gone to Kinshasa. His uncle came to see him and told him that his mother and stepfather had been attacked. The uncle arranged for Micah to leave the DRC. They went to take his picture, to different places where he signed papers, there were people asking questions. One day the uncle told him that he was going to England. Micah said:

'I didn't understand. We thought they were attached, so that's why he told me to go. I was crying.

'But I have a feeling they are alive. I told Home Office I didn't know anything. They said they didn't believe me. I don't have contact with my uncle or my mum. I had to prove I don't have a contact number. I don't know how to prove that. The Home Office refused my application. They say I have to prove everything. I have to prove that my mum is dead.'

Micah said about his travel and coming to the UK:

'There was a person next to me all the time when I changed airplanes and things, so I think he was on the same plane with me as well. But there was nobody that I recognised on the plane. When it was time to change airplanes, he showed me where to go. He spoke to me in my language. He said he knew my uncle. I trusted him. I arrived at Heathrow at 1 pm. I went to the bathroom and when I came out, that person was gone. I was wondering what would happen when I came out from the airport. One guy was saying, 'where is your passport'. I said I didn't have one. He asked whom I had come with. I said I came with a guy from Congo. He said I had to talk to the airport people and that the man had taken my passport. I remembered that I had given it to him along the way. The people working in the airport did an ID for me, for someone who has no paper. They made me walk to different places, I had to take my clothes off, my jeans, my top. They were not friendly. Not rude, but in my heart, I'd say they were racist. My English was not good. A woman said: 'Shut the fuck up and sit down.' From that day being in England was not easy. Then they called the Social Service. I think a guy called Chris came to get me. People say that they are friendly,

but I didn't see it. When I asked questions, he said he was busy. 'Where are we going right now?' He didn't want to answer. We went to a Social Services house. A house for boys that had a bed available. There were four or five other people. There was a woman who said, 'It's better you tell them the truth. You have to tell them the truth.' I said I didn't know and she said I was lying. I stayed there for two nights. They put me in a house in Southall. Miriam was there. She said I had to be here and there at different times. She was helping me. In the boys' section there were Congolese boys, Pascal and Emmanuel. Pascal was Miriam's boyfriend. They introduced me to a church in Wembley (or Greenford, the *Light House*). I lived in Southall for three or four months. I waited four months to start English language course. I was just sitting at home. Then I started playing music in church. Then I was moved to a different house where I lived for eight or nine months.'

Micah met Cindy in Hillingdon. She was a girl he had known in Pretoria. They got together and Cindy fell pregnant at sixteen years of age. He lived at her place for two months. The Social Services would not put them up in a place together. She lived with her mother and he moved back to his previous place. Micah also met his distant cousin (his stepfather's sister's son) in Hillingdon, who had also arrived as an unaccompanied minor. He often spent time with Cindy and the baby in his cousin's room, which was bigger than his own.

After having attended the church in Greenford for two months he went to a concert where a man playing drums the style that he admired. That man attended a church in Walthamstow and Micah went there for five weeks. Then he met a man who said they needed a drummer in his church in Hayes. He decided to stay at the church because the church in Walthamstow was too far away and he enjoyed the preaching by *Papa Tinou*. He thought the musicians in Walthamstow were more professional than in Hayes, but he enjoyed the preaching a lot more in Hayes. Micah said:

'In Hayes church they were preaching about the mistakes people do in this world. There was a prayer group on Tuesdays and it was easy for me to attend and understand. They were showing us the mistakes that we do. If we ask about things we don't have, we don't know how to ask God. I found it so interesting. The way *Papa Tinou* preached, I really, really liked it. It was the kind of things I really wanted to

hear. He said you can't ask about marriage if you are not ready to have a wife in your house. Like me I am a student. That's why we don't see change and get our prayers answered. It is a matter of knowing how to ask. There were different singing groups and they asked people to come to sing individually. You could sing any song you liked. I thought they told everyone to be free, the fathers, mothers and the children.'

Micah met Rafael, a Congolese boy at college. The boys became good friends. Rafael started going to the church in Hayes and quickly joined the church band as a singer. The boys later had a fall-out when Micah decided he did not want to devote all his time to church music. Micah said that most church bands play the same songs time and time again and being a musician in a church does not let you progress. Lindy went to the church in Hayes a few times, but because the preaching was in Lingala she did not feel welcome and stopped going.

After the birth of their child, Micah spent his time working at two different jobs, as a shop assistant in a clothes shop and as a waiter. The £45 a week he received from the Social Services was not enough to provide for his daughter and Cindy. He also went to college and played in a band that played popular music.

Micah had chosen not to be a 'born again Christian' (using South African English), but Christianity was still central in his life. Prayer helped him to dispel his anxieties about his future in the UK. He said about his worries:

'Many boys that I trusted and became good friends with, they have been sent back [to their countries]. And I've got a baby. If I leave this country, my baby will forget me. Many people at the church in Walthamstow have been sent back to Ghana and Congo. When the immigration comes to deport you, they only come to get you. You don't even have time to pack your clothes. Tomorrow I might see the police when I wake up, to be put in detention centre.'

Rafael: 'the music is like an irrigation system'

Rafael came from the Gili township in Kinshasa.¹⁰⁰ I never learnt much about his past life in the DRC and his reasons for seeking asylum. He did not want to discuss these issues with me. What he did want to talk about, however, was his role as a Christian musician in the church he attended.

Rafael was directly placed in the house near Heathrow airport upon his arrival. When I met him for our first interview 2 October 2006, he was studying physics at a local college, but not at the level he would have wanted, because of his English. He had very few possessions in his room, not at all cluttered with stuff like Lillian's and Rachel's rooms. He suggested that girls were given a lot of things whenever they had boyfriends. Rafael mentioned health problems at the first few occasions that I interviewed him. He had problems breathing and often felt tired. His GP said that it was probably due to stress and advised him to drink lots of fluids. Rafael felt that his health problems were not investigated properly and medicated himself with malaria prophylaxis that he obtained from a friend. When this did not change his health status, he was convinced that he carried a parasite in his blood. Almost a year, and with pressure from a social worker, a thorough medical examination was carried out, showing that Rafael had developed a serious chest infection.

Rafael made many friends among the other young people from the DRC who lived in the same house as him. One of them, Micah, introduced him to the Pentecostal church in Hillingdon. Rafael, in turn, introduced Rachel and her girlfriend, as well as two other girls to the church. When Rafael was moved out of the house near the airport to independent accommodation elsewhere, he was very sad to leave his first house behind.

At our first interview, Rafael mentioned that he was singing in the church in Hillingdon and invited me to come. His invitation came to lead to a new focus in the research on the role of Christianity in the young people's lives. I had not until then paid much attention to it, mostly due to the little attention I gave to church activities in my personal life.

¹⁰⁰ The same area that Bakato, mentioned in chapter four, came from. Bakato was a passionate football player and dreamed of becoming a professional. Rafael had seen her 'playing football with boys' in Kinshasa, but he had never met her directly before their arrival in London.

Tesfay

Tesfay arrived alone to Heathrow airport in February 2004. His uncle had paid an agent to arrange passport and flights.

Tesfay came from a close-knit community in rural, Kurdish Iran. His father had never registered him at birth to prevent his sons from entering military service. If a family had only one son, the Iranian government pardoned that son from military service. Tesfay had no birth certificate and did not go to school. When he arrived in the UK he could not read or write. His father and older brother were members of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). Everybody knew each other's business in the village, and it was well known that the two men were active in an illegal association. However, this knowledge remained latent for many years until the day came that neighbours became enemies.

Tesfay and a neighbour girl were in love with each other. They had few opportunities to speak to each other, but there were looks that said more than a thousand words. One day when the girl was home alone, she invited Tesfay to come in. Overcome by passion, they had sex. They were not even cautious enough to close the door. The girl's mother returned unexpectedly and caught the lovers red handed. Tesfay ran home. He heard the girl being beaten next door. His father told him to run away. He jumped out of the window and took a bus to the nearest town. From there he travelled to his uncle in Teheran. In Teheran he was looking for work. About twenty days after his arrival to his uncle, some men from the girl's family tracked him down. They stabbed him in the street and left him in the gutter. Tesfay's uncle, a wealthy man, paid for his hospital treatment. Meanwhile, the girl's family informed the authorities that their neighbours were members of the KDPI. Tesfay's father and brother were arrested and put in prison. It was not safe for Tesfay to stay in hospital. The authorities would find him there. Arrangements were made for Tesfay to leave Iran. On the airplane, Tesfay destroyed his passport and flushed it down the toilet. Tesfay was not sure about his exact age. The Asylum Team worker who made the initial assessments advised that he should claim to be under eighteen and put his age a 17 and nine months.

I met Tesfay in February 2006. I was volunteering at English tutoring classes for young people at a local college that Tesfay was attending. He was friendly and chatty and at one lunch break I told him about my research and asked if he would like to talk to me. He said that he was happy too. He had learnt, and come to love, that the UK was an open society. He sometimes went to Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, taking in the scenery and atmosphere of people standing up to say whatever they liked. There were no secret police about, noting what people said and who was there. Here in England, he was also able to come and go after dark as he pleased. There was nobody stopping him, asking for identification papers, wanting to know where he lived, where he had been, where he was going. He was able to say, 'I don't know' without any punitive consequence in any given situation. In England, people were polite. They asked, 'Can I help you?' They said 'sorry', 'pardon', 'excuse me' to you even if you were not rich or well dressed.

Tesfay's asylum claim was refused. Two years after his arrival the asylum claim process was still on-going. He let me accompany him to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal for his appeal in May 2006. I went to his flat that he shared with two other Kurdish boys and we took the bus to central London together. He was nervous and studied his papers closely on the way. He needed to rehearse the narrative of his asylum claim that had been put down on paper previously. His personal advisor, Imtiaz, came to the Tribunal too. Sitting in the waiting area waiting to be called into the courtroom, I chatted to Imtiaz while Tesfay talked to the Barrister and the interpreter. Imtiaz was very fond of Tesfay, saying that he was 'one of the best young people we have in the asylum service.' Although Tesfay had arrived illiterate, Imer said, he had made great progress at college. He was hard-working and sincere. 'He has already made a contribution to this country', the advisor said. 'I wish the court would recognise that.'

In the courtroom the Home Office representative questioned Tesfay and the asylum claim story was evolving into a disjointed and confusing narrative. The discourse that took place between the judges, the Home Office, and the Barrister disowned Tesfay of any real say, imbued as it was with juridical terms, omitting or misunderstanding small, but seemingly crucial details. There was a game going on with rules and a

purpose Tesfay had not been instructed on. He thought, as did I, that the important thing was to answer honestly, and that the purpose of the interview was to help elicit the simple, plain truth. However, the purpose and rules of the game was to create a ‘truth’ during the interview in relation to which what had been said previously could be discredited.

An initial immigration-screening interview had been held at Heathrow airport upon Tesfay’s arrival. The interview was not in-depth. Many questions were left blank. That was common with minors arriving alone (see Finch 2005): as children they were entitled to discretionary leave to remain, on the grounds that they were children. Their reasons for seeking asylum were handled at a later date.

The Home Office representative hit the jackpot when asking Tesfay whether there had been previous arrests of the father and brother. Tesfay said that there had been, when he was about 15 years old. Because this evidence had not appeared at any other point in time since Tesfay had made his asylum claim, the Home Office representative said this was an ‘embellishment’ of the story and showed that the story was not credible. The representative also said that because illicit sexual relations were against *Sharia Law*, such a relation could not have taken place.

Exactly a week later, Tesfay told me that he had dreamt that he got a refusal letter from the Home Office again. Life as an asylum seeker, he said, was like checking in to a Hotel and other people telling you when to get out. The place you stayed was not your own, you got moved to different places all the time.

Between February 2004 and February 2008, Tesfay lived in six different placements. He was first living in supported accommodation near Heathrow. However, having arrived only a few months prior to his 18th birthday, he was soon moved out to independent accommodation. Initially he did not like this change at all and used to sneak in at the supported accommodation during the night to a girl he was seeing there. When I got to know Tesfay he was sharing a dilapidated flat on a council estate with a boy from Afghanistan and a young man from Iraq. The boy from Iraq was almost never there, as he preferred to live with friends and just keeping his things in the room allocated to him. There were also two brothers from Iraq sharing a flat on

the same estate. The four young men spent time together every day. They would take turns in cooking, spread sheets of newspaper on Tesfay's floor and ate there. Tesfay was the oldest, had been in the UK longer than the others and spoke better English. He took on an older, brotherly role to the others, advising them to learn English, go to college and stay away from another Kurdish man that was known to the Police. When Mustafa had serious problems himself, he was reluctant to share this with the other boys because he wanted to be a positive influence to them and appear a stable person they could rely on.