

**A Qualitative Exploration of the Social Construction of Identity of Black Male  
Zimbabwean Refugees Currently Living in South Africa**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explored the social construction of black male Zimbabwean refugees' identities as they experienced becoming refugees living in South Africa. A review of refugee literature revealed that Zimbabwean refugees demonstrate an exceptional nature that sets them apart from what most definitions of refugees assume. Refugee theory focusing on deficits and disorder promoted a view of refugees as helpless victims. As a result, refugees have come to be viewed as state burdens. Immigration practices characterized by the herding of refugees into spatially segregated areas, deportation and neglect continue to endanger the livelihoods of refugees. The manner in which government and media conceptualise the identity of a refugee has significant consequences for foreigners and locals. It is therefore important to explore the social construction of black male Zimbabwean refugees' identities by investigating their own experiences through the telling of life stories.

A process of in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with four black male Zimbabwean refugees between the ages of 18 and 50, all currently living in South Africa. A self told life story outlined a narrative of their past migration, present circumstances and future deliberations. Results showed that participants bore great suffering in search of a stable existence. They were subjected to political abuse and an immense economic downfall in Zimbabwe, and experienced a great shock of self-confidence upon leaving their home. They came to bear a painful sense of 'otherness' living as a foreigner, and had to develop new understandings of themselves. Race and religion became important signifiers of identity, and participants were said to undergo a posttraumatic growth in the aftermath of their turbulent experiences.

A study such as this offers valuable insights into the aspects of a Zimbabwean refugee's existence and needs. Research may also inform bureaucratic practices as to conceptualising

more appropriate refugee relations in the future, as well as media campaigns capable of rehabilitating the image of the refugee.

### **KEY TERMS**

Zimbabwean refugee; Identity; Life story; Social constructionism; Posttraumatic growth; Xenophobia.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Overview

African refugee groups are markedly different from refugees in other parts of the world, specifically in their character and needs (Beyer, 1981). In 2004, Refugees International reported that 80 percent of the world's registered refugees are made up of women and children (Martin & Lari, 2004). As a result, refugees are often viewed as helpless victims (Kushner & Knox, 1999). News items highlighting floods of refugees entering South Africa also serve to emphasise the burden of the humanitarian crisis which refugees are often characterised by (Maneri & ter Wal, 2005). African refugee crises during the 1970's and 1980's promoted this perception that refugees are passive and weak (Zetter, 2007). Politicians have also made it a habit to blame ineffectual service delivery in host nations on the burden of shouldering refugees (Keely, 1996). This has caused locals to take action against what they perceive to be a foreign invasion encroaching on their service delivery generally (McKnight, 2008).

Today, a core focus of refugee studies centres around the concepts of livelihood and self-settlement, diverging from a pathologized medical model to that of a psychosocial model. Fallacies regarding the nature and experience of being a refugee, however, continue to linger in government policy and everyday practice (Ryan, Dooley, & Benson, 2008). Most Zimbabwean refugees living in South Africa are primarily male. They are healthy, able to work, and have overcome great odds to become self-reliant in South Africa. These succinct differences exhibit their unique nature, and set them apart from what most definitions of the term refugee imply (Martin & Lari, 2004).

The aim of this study is to create a more comprehensive, contextualised view of Zimbabwean refugees living in South Africa, by focussing on personal life stories of black male Zimbabwean refugees currently living in South Africa. These life stories will focus on personal accounts of the process of becoming a refugee, and ultimately allow for a rich qualitative exploration of the critical incidents that have impacted on their identity (Kazmierska, 2003).

## **1.2 Research Problem**

The manner in which a government conceptualises the identity of the refugee has a significant impact on millions of people's lives. In Western Sudan crude categories of refugees as being 'drought migrants', migrating due to a fear of famine, precipitated great disparities between refugees and locals, who viewed this influx of migrations as an unwarranted move to exploit resources. The incident was to the detriment of more than 120 000 Chadian people (Zetter, 1991).

A perception in South Africa that Zimbabwean males reside in South Africa simply as voluntary migrants promotes the belief that Zimbabwean refugees are here only to take advantage of the country's resources (Maneri & ter Wal, 2005). As a result, refugees' rights are frequently not upheld (McKnight, 2008), and they are subjected to presupposed notions of what their needs are, including the herding of refugees into spatially segregated locations. Refugees in Tanzanian settlements lived at the mercy of immigration authorities, police and security officials (Kibreab, 1999), and Zimbabwean refugees suffer similar circumstances (McKnight, 2008). These discrepancies necessitate a revision of current day refugee categorizations.

Three primary theoretical models informing refugee studies today are the medical model, the psychosocial stress model, and Berry's 'acculturation framework'. While each model provides useful insights into refugees, predefined notions of a refugee's nature and needs are imposed on the refugee by external parties (Ryan et al., 2008). There also exists a larger focus on the state of the refugee, rather than the experience of becoming one.

This study therefore aims to investigate the experience of becoming a Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa, focussing on the social construction of their identity through the telling of a life story. This focus on narrative allows for a depth of understanding into the manner in which a refugee perceives their past migration, their present circumstance, and their future expectations.

### **1.3 Justification**

People today are less inhibited by political borders (McDermott Hughes, 1999). The ongoing process of globalization has hastened the movement of people across state lines, and nations are struggling to uphold adequate regulatory systems (Jordan & Duvel, 2003).

The refugee then constitutes a central figure of the globalised world's current political atmosphere. The circumstance of a refugee's statelessness, together with their transnational identity, represents a slow progression towards a world of statelessness. Our wishes to sustain an absolute world of state borders and regularity are played out in the relationships we share with refugees (Kibreab, 1999). An increased control of visa and passport applications is a testament to this trend (Campbell, Kakusu, & Musyemi, 2006). When cultures go through such significant times of transition, they no longer present a unified set of authoritative identity stories. Instead, they are confronted with multiple conflicting stories (Polkinghorne, 1996). Research investigating the experience of becoming a Zimbabwean refugee currently



living in South Africa would shed light on the original experience of a Zimbabwean refugee's existence, as well as inform political policies focussing on improved refugee relations in the future (Campbell et al., 2006).

#### **1.4 Research Question**

Due to the qualitative and explorative nature of the study, several questions may constitute the core of the study's intentions. Some relate to describing the experience of becoming a refugee in order to gain perspective as to such a unique group's perceptions, while others relate to describing the strengths refugees display in the face of their victimization. The primary question is:

How does a black male Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa experience becoming a refugee?

Clarifying questions will also be dealt with in order to illuminate the underpinnings of participants' experiences:

How does a Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa become a refugee?

How does a Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa experience being a refugee?

What are some of the challenges a Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa faces?

How does a Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa make sense of being a refugee?

It is important to note both how someone experiences being a refugee, as well as how this is made sense of over time. It is not only the experience of becoming a refugee, but also the ongoing process of making sense of the experience, which serves to inform a person's identity, and as such both should be dealt with thoroughly.

## 1.5 Research Goals

The primary goal of the study in question is to produce a research project capable of providing a contextualised view of Zimbabwean refugees living in South Africa, focussing on personal life stories depicting the process of becoming a refugee. The secondary goal of the study is to review current-day literature regarding refugees in order to illuminate misconceptions of what it means to be a refugee, how these misconceptions serve to lower refugees' quality of life, as well as how these problems could be dealt with.

## 1.6 Thesis Structure

The following outlines a general thesis structure subsequent to the first chapter. A literature chapter will detail current understandings with regard to the modern refugee's social circumstances and condition, as well as provide evidence for the justification of a qualitative study regarding Zimbabwean refugees. This will be argued on the basis that Zimbabwean refugees living in South Africa are such a unique group that good comparisons in other studies are difficult to find, and that a qualitative perspective may be useful in producing more contextualised results. A methodology chapter will then outline the aim of the research, the sampling method and size, recording equipment used, as well as the research design followed. In this case, in-depth interviews were used as the method of data collection, while four black male Zimbabwean refugees of middle to low socio-economic status currently living in South Africa, between the ages of 18 and 50, were sampled for the study. A results chapter will provide a full outline of the outcomes of the explorative interviews. A discussion chapter will report on the findings of the final interpretation in a summarised perspective of all interviews, where after recommendations and conclusions will be made.

## 1.7 Conclusion

Research with regard to Zimbabwean refugees may provide sound opportunities to re-evaluate the current day perspectives psychology holds of refugees in South Africa, with an increased emphasis on the resilience, life story and characteristics of the refugee. The improvement of refugee relations, specifically regarding xenophobic attacks in South Africa, would be of huge benefit to many people's livelihoods. By ensuring that perspectives on the value and strength of refugees for host countries are represented more sufficiently in academics and media, research outputs of this kind may encourage a healthy transformative effect, changing the way both the layman and the policy maker view the modern refugee in the future.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Overview

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1979, two families launched a joint escape from the horrors of daily living in East Germany. Over a long period of time while living in squalor, the families sewed together small patches of nylon cloth, creating a homemade hot air balloon. Under the cover of darkness late one night they spread their balloon in a field, filled it with hot air, and set sail for the promise of freedom over the Berlin wall (Cheney, 2005).

History is littered with incredible stories of human perseverance, with few of those as transformational as that of the refugee's. Within the following literature review and theory chapter, this study will outline a definition of the concept 'refugee', and undergo a review of past and current literature on refugees so as to justify the need for a qualitative study relating to black male Zimbabwean refugees' life stories. Theory relating to social constructionism and the formation of a refugee's identity is considered, where after the study proposes that the narratives of refugees provide an opportunity to understand how a black male Zimbabwean refugee constructs both their identity and their experience of being a refugee.

#### 2.2 Defining 'Refugee'

Refugees are often viewed as hopeless victims, and treated as burdens of the state (Kushner & Knox, 1999). Refugee studies in the second half of the twentieth century saw researchers emphasising theoretical approaches based on the 'medical model', pathologizing refugees in categories of disorder or sickness (Ryan et al., 2008). The inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* created an upsurge in interest regarding refugee trauma and sickness

studies. This created a portrayal of refugees as being generally ‘sick’ people thanks to a focus on pathologization. Similarly, owing to the large scale African refugee crises during the 1970’s and 1980’s, a culture of viewing refugees as being passive and weak was formed (Zetter, 2007).

As a result, popular negative definitions of the concept ‘refugee’ became apparent within literature. A definition of a refugee is proposed by Blavo (1999), where he states that

...a refugee is a person who flees into a neighbouring country for refuge in the face of persecution of a major conflict such as civil war. Once inside another sovereign state, he (sic) seeks protection of the government of the country in which he has sought refuge, and no longer has the protection of his own government. His needs for protection and material assistance rest on the host government and on the international community. (p.12)

Relating a refugee, seeking refuge, and the country in which refuge is sought, provides a linguistic turn worth noting. The assumption that a refugee must be defined in terms of the protection and social support sought from a host government sets the stage for a relationship akin to an employer-employee association. In this relationship, the agency for social transformation is said to lie with the government, the refuger, while the refugee is relegated to a dependent cost. An alternate definition of refugee is given by Martin and Lari (2004), proposing that

A refugee is a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his (sic) nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

For the purposes of this study, the latter definition will be used, since it provides a definition not specifically including a definite need for resources or humanitarian intervention from a host government, as well as not specifying a definite current location as being a neighbour state. This definition serves to illuminate the current state of refugee crises, moving away from a victim centred, pathologized nature.

Current day emerging perspectives of refugees and refugee crises have developed around the concepts of livelihood and self-settlement, moving from a medical model to that of a psychosocial model (Ryan et al., 2008). The world's population changes attributed to globalization have made for what is described as a sociology of forced migration, where speed and frequency of human movement calls for a re-evaluation of what it means to be a refugee in the twenty-first century. For this reason, current-day refugees' states of being need to be documented in a more culturally sensitive, holistic manner. The intended population for research within this study, then, cannot relate to global historical refugee trends, with most Zimbabwean refugees living in South Africa being male, generally healthy and capable to work, and being generally self-reliant in a country foreign to them (Martin & Lari, 2004).

### **2.3 Reviewing the Field of Refugee Studies**

In the following sections, current understandings with regard to the modern refugee's social circumstance and condition are detailed, as well as evidence for the justification of a qualitative study regarding Zimbabwean refugees, owing to the lack of generalizability within quantitative refugee studies.

Upon review of current day refugee studies, several key concepts come to the fore: That of refugees' assumed dependence upon state and charity, inappropriate assumptions made of refugees' best interests, the framing of refugees as a problem or burden within a

state, as well as neglecting to view refugees as being instrumental in their social movements and social processes leading to their current state of being.

A useful departure point for refugee studies lies in the description of the needs of refugees, specifically regarding refugees from underdeveloped countries moving to more westernised, first world countries. A study conducted in the United States of America (USA) emphasised the need for more consistent and more culturally sensitive mental health services and care for refugees staying at refugee camps, owing to the high frequency of depression and PTSD diagnosed at the time (Gong-Guy, Cravens, & Patterson, 1991). Although mental health is a core concept needed to provide holistic service delivery, the article assumes a medical model emphasising personal pathology, while underplaying current social circumstances as a mitigating variable. Placing such a large emphasis on mental disorders identifies refugees as being weak and susceptible to becoming dependent on external resources within their host state. This negative emphasis ignores the incredible resilience that brought them through their journey to begin with (Ryan et al., 2008). An emphasis is placed on past experiences of trauma within home countries as influencing mental health problems in individuals, while current social adaptation problems, loss of identity, and cultural shock are largely ignored.

Social living circumstances within refugee camps are also underplayed. Hovil (2007) proposes that refugee camps are maintained to serve the protection of the government. The false notion that it is in refugees' best interests to remain in camps for safety merely increases refugees' exposure to violence and social stagnation. It is argued that governments should keep refugees under close surveillance since they are a flight risk, able to disturb neighbouring communities, and that the label of refugee affords them safety within that country and camp. Ironically, Hovil (2007) showed that keeping refugees in camps creates a collective target for xenophobic violence, depicted in the killing of 100 refugees in a

Ugandan refugee camp. Despite the humanitarian disaster, little change in government policy took place, at which time a second attack occurred. Similarly, refugee camps are generally placed in remote regions of countries, forcing refugees to choose a solitary survival over staying in overpopulated, unreasonably distant camps (Horst, 2006). This lack of social service essentially negates any cooperation refugees may have had with government organisations, with many opting not to be registered for fear of being kept isolated from work opportunities and family. Horst (2006) proposes a reformation of the standards and practices of aiding refugees in one's country, emphasising the need for the development of livelihoods in the process of assisting refugees to assist themselves.

Despite the Geneva Convention guaranteeing refugees the rights to rebuild their livelihoods, they are still forced to work for exploitative wages, while being refused right to land and capital (Horst, 2006). Owing to the nature of these problems, marked unease within host countries' citizens regarding refugees may form, as is shown in a study in Indonesia. An increased cheap labour force creates a marked drop in wages for citizens, as well as an increase in housing costs owing to the greater demand for accommodation. Citizens of the host country may resent aid to refugees while the general population continues to suffer. More so, inadequate service delivery for refugees inevitably leads to a distrust of government (Duncan, 2005). Social tension such as this only serves to marginalise possible cohesion within a country, with violence breaking out in extreme circumstances. Many times, governments also place what they believe to be homogenous groups within the same boundaries, destroying what chance they had of integration by merely subjecting them to planned segregation. Similarly, misguided stereotypes of these homogenous groups are then used to build inefficient policies in an attempt to aid them, eventually creating a lack of adequate service delivery (Duncan, 2005).



The inefficiency of current refugee service delivery as well as governments' delays in adjusting bad policies must then be reviewed. In a study focussing on Congolese refugee livelihoods in Nairobi, it was found that refugees who refused to live in camps were able to become relatively self-sufficient by integrating successfully in Kenya's capital city by themselves. Unfortunately, bad policies forcing refugees to register before they were given legal status meant that those refugees who were successful in resettling were not able to gain the rights they required to build a suitable livelihood (Campbell et al., 2006). The article, however, focuses on the economic success of the Congolese refugees, and as such social change may have been somewhat ignored.

Dealing with resettling possibilities, many refugee perspectives assume that resettlement is the ultimate goal for most refugees. A study focussing on the psychosocial and financial strain Sudanese men were affected by while living in Canada successfully depicted the social strain a new environment places on a refugee bread winner, described as the primary financier of a refugee family. The article, however, pathologizes the men to such an extent regarding depression, PTSD, psychosis, alcohol abuse and general mental incapacity, while ignoring the important concept of a possible return to their families living in their home country (Stoll & Johnson, 2007). This lack of understanding stems from the assumption that integration is a more positive change for refugees than returning home. Arguments against local integration coming to the fore are based on the notion that integration discourages refugees from returning home. On the contrary, Hovil's (2007) interviews with refugees living in Uganda showed that the majority of the refugees longed to return home, despite financial success within the host country. Exceptions were found in persons having lived there for more than 20 years or having been married there. This supports the presumption that refugees having lived more than 20 years in a country should no longer be classified as

refugees. This assumption ignores the positive aspects of their home country, and underplays their sense of cultural loss (Kushner & Knox, 1999).

When positive integration is possible, there are many influencing factors to consider. Ager and Strang (2008) proposed several key factors promoting successful integration to be considered as possible methods of promoting integration within a population. They are employment, housing, education and health. Ager and Strang (2008) highlight citizenship and rights as being a difficult social factor to work on, since integration as a construct has different meanings to different organisations, as well as having extremely different rules for gaining citizen rights.

Opposing possible integration is the growing trend of aggressive national sovereignty. In “Migration: The Boundaries of Equality and Justice”, Jordan and Duvel (2003) propose that globalization, a trend normally attributed to creating interdependence of states, also serves to divide them. Globalization serves to accelerate the movement of people across political borders, and as such, nations are finding it significantly more difficult to create a safe system of control. In so doing, Jordan and Duvel (2003) put four global changes forward, namely that of 1) The need for stronger national sovereignty in the increased policing of political borders, 2) The need for more effective international governance, as seen in the increased importance of international organisations regarding political and social issues, 3) The emergence of new systems of membership, as seen in the formation and strength of organisations such as the European Union, and 4) New vulnerabilities and new needs for social protection, as seen in the increased reluctance of international welfare for asylum seekers, and the increased control of human movement regarding visas and passports.

Possibly one of the worst areas affected by these changes relate to our target population for study. Zimbabwean men seeking asylum, whether due to political strife or

social welfare issues, are repeatedly denied access, due to the stereotyping of at-risk refugees only being women and children (Martin & Lari, 2004). In 2004, of the 5 000 asylum applications Zimbabwean men had filed, less than 20 had been accepted. Delay in service delivery is said to be due to a lack of adequate facilities and staff at border posts where the men are forced to cue for days on end. It is believed that the stereotyping of male refugees as economic migrant workers guides policy makers to continue sending refugees away. An interview with a non-government organisation based in Zimbabwe reiterated the social problem, stating that the women and children are left in their homelands to continue their traditional roles, while the men jump the border in search of illegal employment to support their families back home (Martin & Lari, 2004).

Having reviewed current trends in refugee studies, an emphasis for a qualitatively based theory is most applicable, reiterating the importance of personal representation and social construction from the refugees themselves.

## **2.4 Theoretical Paradigm**

Having identified the importance of creating an avenue of personal experience within refugee studies, theories applicable to the exploration of subjective experience are fundamental in gaining the required insight into the realities of marginalised refugees. As such, perspectives popularised in refugee studies are reviewed, evaluated and critiqued, ultimately proposing for the inclusion of social constructionism as a theoretical paradigm for this study.

### **2.4.1 Social constructionism.**

Social constructionism originates from the combined influence of a number of Northern American, British and continental theoreticians dating back more than forty years

(Burr, 2003). Many of its fundamental assumptions are found in sociology, including the essential understanding that it is through symbols that human beings derive meaning within personal interactions. This process is said to construct our own and others' identities through our everyday encounters with each other within symbolic social worlds. Arguably the largest social constructionist contribution derived from sociology, Berger and Luckmann's (1967) book, *'The Social Construction of Reality'*, provides an argument for the manner in which human beings sustain all constructed social phenomena through linguistic social practice. This perspective also relates well to Richard Rorty's conception of solidarity in conversation (Rorty, 1991). The conception of reality as a socially constructed linguistic expression instead of a predetermined objective truth provides a sound theoretical framework with which to explore refugees' constructed life worlds.

Social constructionism sits at the heart of exploring human existence in detail (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). It allows the researcher a personal insight into the experience of the refugee and is generally grounded by the principle of allowing the person being studied to lead the methodology and course of the research. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) propose that social constructionism has gained its popularity due to the current dissatisfaction with the emphasis on procedural modernist approaches. This emphasis has become popularised by rigid testability and objectivity. Due to the open and inclusive nature of social constructionism, the interviewer and the interviewee are both significantly influenced by the knowledge they collectively create. In so doing, qualitative theory such as social constructionism aids to inform us about the human condition. This brings with it many ethical and moral issues, since the detailed study of such personal concepts within a public arena raises questions of privacy and cultural sensitivity (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005).

A tenet of social constructionist research, then, is to be able to view events as being culturally specific, as well as ethically bound. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) call this a

practical wisdom that the researcher must attain. In so doing, he or she is able to understand the importance of value-laden context within research, making qualitative research representative of the person being interviewed. The emphasis Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) are attempting to convey is that social constructionists should be wary not to view ethics and morality within psychology as universal principles to be applied to all subjects, but rather as general discourses created through verbal descriptions.

#### **2.4.2 The social construction of identity.**

People's concerns over who they are have endemic roots, and have taken many forms in humanity's history. Early art, theological scripture, and literature are but a mere drop in an ocean of self-discovery (Gergen, 1971). Since this self-exploration occurs in a world characterised by its context, any expressions of self are intrinsically bound to the current society's language of the time. Any contemplation of identity must function within limitations set out in the range of expressions and functions of the language of society (Gergen, 1991). It is within this social sphere that we create a reference to an imaginary singularity called the self, or one's identity (Eakin, 1999).

This subjective reduction of experience is constantly evolving, adapting to the progression of its context and the experiences found within it. The self may be seen as a fluid regeneration of form, constant in its presence, yet transitory in its definition (Gergen & Gergen, 1997). It is a reduction in the sense that a person's entire life is given meaning by selection. Determining who a person is necessitates emphases of some experiences at the cost of ignoring others. As a result, expressions of self are of great significance, since they call all that has been before them into question. The ongoing expression of self contains an inherent destruction embedded within its creative efforts, since each new expression of self demands a

new perspective of a person's past beliefs and considerations. It is the responsibility of each person to take on the role of the inventor of their own conception (Gergen, 1991).

Faced with the task of re-invention, it is understandable that an inventor would suffer a kind of performance anxiety when faced with life changing circumstances (Gergen, 1991). Indeed, anxiety may be considered a driving force behind this re-invention. Tension between what a person thinks of themselves and how they experience themselves in a new social context necessitates a re-invention of self, until the result is a resolution of identity (Gergen, 1971). The manner in which this crisis of identity is absolved is of great interest to social constructionism and to the understanding of a refugee's identity.

Refugees, who must live as a minority group in a foreign world, may find their identity to be continually in conflict with their current social setting. The disadvantaged position which society prescribes to minority groups such as refugees may not be readily accommodated by the group, since this position may be ascribed due to a past defeat, conquest, or in the refugee's case, forced assimilation (Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983). The inevitable result is such that the internal processes involved in the identity formation of a refugee must also be considered instead of simply those psychological traits ascribed to them by society. Baumeister (1986) identifies these two conceptions, that of internal identity processes and external identity roles, as the basic conceptions found in psychology and sociology when referring to identity formation. Together, the relationship these two share aid in the social construction of a refugee's identity through their linguistic practices. The identity which a person ultimately conceives of themselves will serve to influence both "what he chooses to do and what he expects from life." (Gergen, 1971, p. 2).

In order to understand a person's conception of themselves, it is then important to understand the nature of the relationship internal identity processes and external identity roles

are said to share. How a person determines the weight of others' conceptions of them relative to the validity of their own internal experience is of tantamount importance.

One factor which seems paramount to the construction of a consistent sense of self is that of self-esteem. Modern psychology emphasises the role self-esteem plays in cultivating happiness with oneself in life. Having a strong sense of self promotes confidence in the face of tragedy, and allows a person to develop a consistent sense of self (Gergen, 1971). Without a reliable basis from which to consider oneself, self appraisal may lose its impact, eventually giving way to a sense that one is composed of nothing at all (Gergen, 1991).

Studies undertaken to test the nature of self-esteem have shown that a person develops their own sense of self based on their perceived relational position to others in society.

Persons who were scored as having a consistent sense of self in a lab experiment were less likely to be influenced by appraisal comparison, the tendency to compare oneself to others, than persons who were scored as having an inconsistent sense of self (Gergen, 1971).

Refugees find themselves in situations conducive to the greatest loss of self-esteem, crippling any consistent sense of self. Without this foundation to stand upon, observation of self gives way to the influence of the appraisal of others. In a sense, a lack of confidence in a person's own understandings of themselves fails to counterbalance others' perceptions. Refugees may experience this loss of self in the wake of their diasporas. As their position shifts in their social world, they must find perspective in the differences noted over time (Gergen, 1971).

This shifting of position within a social matrix is said to serve as the vehicle for the continued formation of a person's identity, but the case of the refugee's identity becomes doubly complex. This is due to the fact that the refugee not only shifts positions in their social matrix, but also has their social matrix shifting around them in one of the most drastic ways (Breakwell G. , 1986). When faced with a multiplicity of conflicting foreign voices, defining

any concept of an ‘authentic self’ becomes a harrowing task. Everything a person ‘knew’ to be true of themselves is brought into question. The experience of an ungrounded identity due to the loss of once familiar social roles in life is compounded by the bewilderment of confronting new emerging relationships which are often largely incoherent, or that contradict one another (Gergen, 1991).

This fluctuation of social circumstance serves to illuminate a wide array of new assimilations the refugee must take in as their identity reacts to all these social changes. The inevitable result is such that the refugee is forced to undergo an important identity change from the time of being a permanent citizen of their state to a refugee in a foreign context. Creating a consistent sense of self in the wake of this change is an ongoing battle for a refugee’s stability and social aptitude.

When a refugee provides a narrative about the time of this geographical shift, the metaphor coincidentally aids in the constitution of this new identity. Taking advantage of this opportunity, it is possible to understand a refugee’s changing conception of their identity by attending to the metaphorical value of their narrative on becoming a refugee. Social constructionism emphasises this construction of reality through linguistic practice, allowing studies to form rich conceptions of the very exceptional social contexts a refugee may find themselves in (Ghorashi, 2008).

Verbal descriptions are then the tool with which social constructionists are able to study culture. Matsumoto (2006) proposes that verbal descriptions serve as observational points within which meaningful cultural differences and worldviews may be explored. He does, however, question the accuracy of verbal description in describing real world cultural ways of being. He states that different cultural groups have over the years developed a short-hand method of describing their culture, sometimes in a simplified, romanticized way. The



idea stems from the assumption that cultural worldviews are borne of an already existing collective idealised culture, written by a group's cultural elite within media, communities and culturally specific literature. This collective is said to influence the manner in which persons reflect and speak about their culture on a personal level. This criticism relates then to the problem of interviewees striving for cultural congruency within their cultural context, as well as seeking to conform to general social desirability, which may skew the authenticity of personal accounts within interviews.

Nevertheless, social constructionism provides a powerful tool within which previously marginalised communities are able to gain a voice. Studying humans and human experiences in terms of identity provides significant benefits to social research. Firstly, it casts the individual as an active agent of change, not only capable of affecting their environment, but even able to define it (Lock & Strong, 2010). This is a clear divergence from the deterministic assumptions of refugee helplessness which are evident in refugee studies (Kushner & Knox, 1999). Secondly, it promotes the idea that social research focussing on experience and social construction is more useful than research intent on defining characteristics and categorizations, since those characteristics are surely temporary (Gergen, 1994). Instead of a knowledge of 'what', it may be wiser to focus on an understanding of 'how' and 'why'. Research of this nature tends to be more generative, since it divulges a wider range of research investigations in the future, and remains useful throughout shifting contexts (Gergen, 1997). Social constructionism is then an appropriate theoretical paradigm for the study of personal life stories of Zimbabwean refugees.

### 2.4.3 The medical, psychosocial and acculturative models.

Despite the theoretical perspective social constructionism lends to refugee research, it is important to review a few theoretical models used within refugee studies to ensure a broad literary coverage of refugee research: Ryan et al. (2008) suggest three main theoretical models relevant to refugee studies in academia, namely the medical model, the psychosocial stress model, and Berry's 'acculturation framework'.

The medical model, already outlined in the literature review, serves to inform the researcher about the pathological, medical and mental problems a refugee faces. These problems are operationalised in the descriptions of disorders and medical conditions. The strength of the model lies in the testability of the concept it encompasses, as well as the comparative nature of results. The model, however, does not account for social and cultural influences in any significant manner, but rather focuses on describing and predicting trauma. The model also emphasises personal pathology, underplaying the importance of refugees' social circumstances, a factor of fundamental importance when studying refugees (Ryan et al., 2008).

The consequence of such a pathologization is obvious in characterisations of refugees as generally problematic members of a state. In *'Africa's Refugee Crisis'*, Cimade, Inodep, and Mink (1986) often refer to refugees as 'them', even outlining a chapter called 'The Burden of Hosting Them'. By a systematic negation of refugees' strengths and transformational abilities, approaches applying the medical model serve to form a public identity of refugees as being generally problematic for the state and its people. This raises cause for concern when considering the risks and losses that xenophobic attacks may incur in the future of South Africa.

This pathologization of the individual has been well supported by a great expansion of psychology's vocabulary regarding deficit in the last hundred years. The growth of psychological measures from the bowels of World War II testing eventually led to medical research emphasising pathology. As a result, this focus on deficit, in the western ideal of the self, has pathologized the individual (Gergen, 1991). Furthermore, western perspectives on the ultimate value of the individual have created an intrinsic and irresolvable tension between the individual and society at large. Instead of fostering a social solidarity between members of a society, a focus on individualism, when coupled with the pathologization of minority groups, may lead to social atomization (Allik & Realo, 2004). This is cause for great concern, since it places the modern refugee in a very unsympathetic light. All social deficits come to reside within the individual themselves, instead of being viewed as collective phenomena.

This study refutes the view of the medical model, owing to its distorted pathologization of refugees, as well as its biased emphasis on the individual as the source of disorder generally.

The psychosocial stress model emphasises refugees' current social and psychological well-being based on the manner in which they are able to cope with relevant stressors (Ryan et al., 2008). The emphasis here lies in changing the perspective from that of pathology to that of a normal reaction to social and psychological change. This is a step forward in understanding refugees in a context of culture. Ryan et al (2008) criticise the psychosocial model, however, by proposing that the influence of psychological process only has a significant influence if economic and environmental factors remain generally constant. Refugees are said to have serious fluctuations in their environmental capabilities, such as accommodation or ability to work. As such, the importance of psychosocial adaptability diminishes and can no longer be used as a reliable predictor of refugee health. Considering social constructionism's perception that psychological judgements of people are based on

solidarity and social agreement (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005), applying any blanket term for what is assumed to be ‘normal’ development only serves to provide a universal yardstick with which to relegate minority groups such as refugees. This pitfall diminishes the possibility to be well informed by a psychosocial stress model.

Borne of the psychosocial model, and perhaps the closest step towards social constructionism, is that of Berry’s ‘acculturation framework’, which places an emphasis on the cultural impact a new environment has on refugees, and their ability or lack thereof to integrate with that new culture while still retaining important aspects of their own (Ryan et al., 2008). At a fundamental level, acculturation is interested in the alterations of the individual’s sense of self in light of cultural shifts in their environment (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

The acculturation concept was introduced by American social anthropologists towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An influx of immigrants from third-world countries to first-world countries such as The United States of America (USA) and England prompted psychologists to publish a memorandum on the study of acculturation in the 1930’s (Navas et al., 2005). Since that time, many more acculturation frameworks have been disclosed.

Unidimensional models of acculturation were first posited, where a refugee’s native culture, called heritage culture, shares an inverse relationship with that of mainstream culture, the major culture of the new society. The two are seen to be at odds with one another, and the refugee must find a resolution somewhere between these two cultural poles. This assumes that cultural identity takes place along a single continuum over the course of a refugee’s life (Ryder et al., 2000), and reduces culture to a basic binary tension.

Bidimensional models of acculturation were proposed thereafter, where studies adopted the assumption that heritage culture and mainstream culture are largely independent

constructs. A refugee is able to adopt many facets of mainstream culture without sacrificing their own intrinsic norms (Ryder et al., 2000). Furthermore, efforts have been made to broaden the categories of acculturation, including key terms such as assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008). Efforts such as these have been made to adapt acculturation models to social context. Newer models such as the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) emphasise the need to view acculturation in segmented categories such as political, work, economic, familial, social, religious and thinking styles (Navas et al., 2005).

While an attempt to contextualise acculturation is certainly a worthy notion, it still suffers from the same fundamental flaw as does bidimensional and unidimensional acculturation. At the heart of the model, acculturation assumes that an inherent culture exists within different spaces in the world. This solidifies culture as an entity separate of human perception and action, and that in fact, culture may be seen as the driving force behind identity. This ignores the role identity plays as the driving force behind culture, and creates a presupposed notion of what culture is. Considering social constructionism's assertion that the world is an active construction through language and cultural practice (Lock & Strong, 2010), this study refutes the acculturation model's view of a largely static world in which the individual is forced to adapt to a pre-existing cultural norm.

Furthermore, the emphasis on culture is so great within this model that possible influences such as legal difficulties, lack of economic resources and separation of one's social network are ignored. As with the first two models mentioned, Berry's 'acculturation framework' only provides a fragmented view of a refugee's experiences.

## 2.5 Conclusion

These three models serve to describe three different facets of refugee life and strife often found in academia, moving from pathologized disorder to psychosocial adaptability, and finally to a model emphasising acculturation within a foreign culture. Due to the above mentioned criticisms of current refugee models' inability to facilitate a theoretical background enabling a rich, holistic construction of refugees' realities, this study proposes the application of social constructionism as its theoretical background in order to gain insight into the manner in which refugees construct their identities.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Overview

Once a theoretical background has been established, a research design congruent with the study's framework is outlined. Hereunder the study's methodology is presented, delineating the methods and step by step process applied so as to enable future research to replicate or critique the underpinnings of the study. The chapter firstly outlines the research question, after which the methodology, sampling, and research process is explained.

#### 3.2 Research Question

Since a qualitative emphasis to research is taken within the study, a research question is proposed instead of a hypothesis. The research question is posed as follows:

How does a black male Zimbabwean refugee living in South Africa experience becoming a refugee?

#### 3.3 Methodology

The methodology applied to the study incorporated a qualitative interviewing method. The study does not involve finding facts or universalities about refugees, but rather value driven understandings of how refugees experience their state of being and their identity. A large amount of refugee research has documented the state of refugees, as well as their social difficulties. This study promotes an emphasis of the refugee's personal experiences in order to gain a richer understanding of their social context. Social constructionism emphasises that

‘objective knowledge’ is historically and culturally dependent (Reichert & Zielke, 2008). As such, it is important to understand psychological phenomena as context bound cultural constructions, and that the aim of the study should be to produce a research output representative of a unique social phenomenon. A method including a concept of telling a life story is used as a narrative tool within which refugees are able to co-construct their personal experience and process of becoming a refugee with the researcher. Ghorashi (2008) supports the life story method in qualitative research by stating that it is a sound method within which the rich historical background of the refugee may be considered. It also incorporates layered facets of the person, enabling a rich interpretation of experience to be found. This interpretation includes pre-migratory impacts, current cultural and social issues, as well as future oriented influences.

In ‘Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research’, Eastmond (2007) discusses the importance and advantage of using narrative stories as methods with which to gain personal insight into forced migrant research. She explains that “...stories provide insights into how forced migrants seek to make sense of displacement and violence, re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and communities, or bear witness to violence and repression.” (p. 248). Furthermore, she proposes that a qualitative narration serves to make sense of the person’s experience, rather than typifying the norm for a refugee as many quantitative studies serve to do.

This study aims to gain an insight into all three facets of a refugee’s current existence: The trauma and hardships experienced in their home country, the current social loss and cultural difficulties experienced in their new living conditions, and the future prospects regarding options for their future livelihoods. It is also important to note whether they are manifested in integration or emigration to their home country once they feel safe enough (Ghorashi, 2008). Creating a lengthy story such as this serves to inform the researcher on a



multi-layer level, where interpretations may provide insightful meanings into the contextualised experiences of the current day refugee living in South Africa.

### 3.4 Sampling

Four black male Zimbabwean refugees of middle to low socio-economic status currently living in South Africa, between the ages of 18 and 50, were sampled for the study. Larger studies incorporating interpretations of life stories generally include six to fifteen participants (Breakwell, 2004). Due to this study's aim to create original knowledge through the exploration of an exceptional social group, allowing for a smaller number of participants ensures that each interview may be given more attention. Together, participant interviews covered more than 100 years of history collectively, including times of colonial rule, civil war, as well as pre and post-apartheid. Participant stories also originated from unique social settings, each from a different tribe or walk of life. While a larger sample would improve comparability with other studies, the low number of participants supports the study's original goal of documenting a rich interpretation of black male Zimbabwean refugees' experiences.

The sample focuses on Zimbabwean males for several reasons. South Africa's immigrant trends have changed dramatically since the end of Apartheid, and have seen a large influx of foreign nationals from Africa. Zimbabweans have become the largest group of migrants in the country, with more than a million Zimbabweans presumed to have fled to South Africa between 2005 and 2008 (de Jager & Hopstock, 2011). Their immigration has a huge impact on South Africa's social landscape, as well as on Zimbabweans as a whole. Including them in a study serves to create research capable of contextualising the largest group of foreigners in the country, and also allows for the largest pool of participants to be drawn from. Males were chosen since they were easier to reach due to the researcher's

contact within the service industry, and they comprised a unique subset of refugees (Martin & Lari, 2004).

A possible complication with regard to studying a group such as refugees is the difficulty to attain a suitable sample, since the inclusion of such a collective group brings with it many negative connotations, including that of illegal entry into a country. Therefore, a snowball-sampling method was used to gain participants, with original participants being approached on a convenience basis through employee contacts within the service industry in Gauteng. A snowball-sampling method aided in gaining the trust of participants, since the researcher was accompanied by a person who was known to the refugee. Some time was spent socially with each participant over the course of a few months before breaching the subject of an interview so as to build rapport and trust prior to data collection.

A minimum age was specified in order to make sure only consenting adults were incorporated in the study, while a maximum age was specified due to the nature of the sampling method. The researcher made contact with participants through work contacts in the service industry in Gauteng. Due to the taxing physical nature of the service industry, it was presumed that participants would most likely be younger than 50 years.

### **3.5 Research Process**

#### **3.5.1 Assessing the field.**

Prior to undergoing any interviews, the researcher spent some time immersing themselves in refugee literature, as well as the historical background from which the participants' stories rose. The researcher spent a great deal of time becoming acquainted with refugee literature in academic journals, books, news sources and online publications, gaining a greater scope of refugee theory and research practice, as well as reviewing research

publications with similar outcomes. Furthermore, paying close attention to the location and the time at which significant social and political events took place aided in gaining a contextualised understanding of participants' life stories and decision making when originally leaving their home country. Immersion in local tribal histories and colloquialisms shared in Ndebele and Shona served to improve understanding greatly, and may have put the participant at ease knowing the researcher interviewing them had somewhat of a knowledge base of their home. The researcher spent a great deal of time investigating the origins of tribal tensions between the Ndebele and Shona tribes, as well as accounts of genocide committed against the Ndebeles. The pre and post-colonial history of Zimbabwe was also explored, as well as a wide array of literature focussing on xenophobia in South Africa. This assessment aided in the formulation of the interview questions at large.

### **3.5.2 Administering interviews.**

A process of personal, in-depth interviews were used as the method of data collection. Interviews were conducted in a neutral setting, which is both convenient and safe for the participant. After several months of social meetings, interviews were recorded during the months of December 2010 and January 2011. During this time, a great deal of social unrest had taken place following the aftermath of the 2010 Soccer World Cup, hosted by South Africa. Growing fears of xenophobic violence erupting were common knowledge to participants, who were very motivated to share their stories as a reaction to these social tensions. Foreign nationals across the country reported that they were receiving threats of violence not only from locals in the streets, but also from public servants such as police, and medical staff (Johnston, 2010). Conducting formal interviews at this time provided a priceless perspective of Zimbabwean refugees' experiences and views of xenophobia and South Africa amid very turbulent times.

Owing to the personal nature of the interviews, all sessions included only one participant at a time, and since the nature of the interviews are specifically qualitative, a process of ongoing reassessment regarding time span was implemented. The nature of the interview involved a relaxed, interpretive recount of the participants' most influential life stories with regard to becoming a refugee in South Africa, with specific focus being paid to have allowed the participant to lead the conversation. This conversation, with the explicit permission of the participant, was recorded with a voice recorder for transcription and interpretation purposes.

While the participant is said to lead the conversation, a rough framework of questions aided the researcher in maintaining a view of the information covered throughout the interview. These questions would be referred to as the interview continued. If the participant was leading towards any theme within them, or if the question had not been covered at all, the researcher would refer to them at appropriate times during sessions.

The questions are as follows:

- Could you take a moment to introduce yourself?
- How did you come to be in South Africa?
- How was the move to South Africa?
- How has your life changed because of this move?
- Do you see yourself as a refugee?
- Would you wish to return to live in Zimbabwe if circumstances allowed for it?
- Looking back, how do you feel about having become a refugee?
- Is there anything important you believe I should understand about becoming a refugee?

### **3.5.3 Processing of data.**

Once data had been recorded and collected by voice recorder and notes, it was transcribed for processing purposes. The following section outlines the analysis and interpretation of data by a denaturalised transcription style and an ad hoc meaning generation.

At this point, data had been collected in the form of an audio recording. This allows for a return to the interview in as much detail as possible, but it is also useful to have a written transcription of what was said in order to allow for quick reviews of the narrative. There is a trend to attempt to record an interview exactly as it is, naturalised with all pauses, breaths, and involuntary vocalisations. Although this may seem to provide an exact account of what was said, it also creates a very detached systematised set of data to work with, ultimately detracting from the value a narrative may relate. Instead, denaturalised transcribing suggests that within an interview meaning and perceptions that construct our reality may be found such that exact transcription is not necessary, so long as the substance of what is being conveyed is upheld (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Due to the denaturalised process of transcription lending itself to social constructionist assumptions, the study emphasised the application of an informal denaturalised transcript.

### **3.5.4 Analysis of data.**

The study applied the use of an ad hoc meaning generation to guide the analysis process. This entails using a blend of different approaches and techniques such as reading interviews through to get an overall impression, returning to specific passages, allowing for limited quantifications of statements, and identifying metaphors to capture the meaning of the material. This allows the researcher to bring out connections and structures important to the research at hand, as well as providing an opportunity to bring new perspectives from the researcher to light before returning to receive the participant's evaluation of the

interpretations made (Kvale, 1996). In doing so, the qualitative process remains open to change when required, but still maintains a satisfactory theoretical function to guide interpretations.

The researcher chose to work with interview analyses collectively, phase by phase. Once all interviews had been recorded, each recording was reviewed at length. Thereafter, recordings were transcribed and re-read. Throughout readings, research notes aided in the slow emergence of patterns of experience identified within each interview, as well as general perceptions noted throughout all interviews. By synchronizing data processing and analysis in this way, each interview remained open to scrutiny and influence throughout deliberations of all data. Patterns of experience may have related to repeated sentiments of participants' beliefs or experiences individually, as well as experiences seemingly shared by all participants. These interpretations were categorized across three broad spectrums within the narrative: That of past migration biographies, every day present experiences, and anticipated futures (Valenta, 2010). The manner in which present experiences are made sense of when contrasted with a refugee's turbulent past was of particular significance.

Finally, once a draft interpretation was completed, the researcher returned to each participant to hear their opinion of the analysis. This not only allows for the participant's voice to be upheld, but also ensures that they are included in the process which would inevitably lay their narrative to bare in academia.

### **3.5.5 Ethical procedures.**

There are several ethical considerations which were upheld to protect the rights, interests and sensitivities of participants in the study:

Prior to any research undertakings, the study underwent a lengthy process of ethical approval through the University of Pretoria's Department of Psychology. After a first proposal was submitted to the researcher's supervisor for approval, a small internal committee was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 to review issues regarding the content of the proposal. The meeting included the researcher, the researcher's supervisor, as well as two other senior staff members in the department. After the required revisions were made to the proposal, the document was returned to be edited to the supervisor's satisfaction. Finally, the reviewed proposal was submitted to the department's ethics committee for final approval on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2010. The requirements for approval included a thorough review of the ethical procedures required by the university for research to be conducted, including requirements for the storage of data, as well as gaining informed consent from participants. Details of these ethical concerns are explored hereunder. After the proposal was approved by the department, the researcher was given permission to begin conducting research and begin sampling from June 2010.

The study asserts that all participants involved in research must have the right to privacy, the right to anonymity and confidentiality, the right to full disclosure about the research in question, as well as the right not to be harmed in any manner (Mouton, 2005).

Regarding privacy, participants have the right to refuse to be interviewed, to be interviewed at inappropriate times or in an inappropriate manner not supporting a sensitive interaction. Participants also have the right to remain anonymous. Although refugees' life stories are to be considered for research data, their personal identities are still kept secret. The use of any recording equipment, be it audio equipment, notes or note taking, must be made explicitly clear to each participant, who has the right to reject any or all of their uses at any time during the research process. Participants were well informed of their right to refuse recording, or to terminate the research at any point. The fact that the researcher had spent

some time with participants prior to formal interviews provided a greater sense of trust than if the researcher had simply requested a formal interview upon meeting, and participants were happy to accept being recorded. Furthermore, confidentiality rights ensured that any information gathered from participants was treated with the utmost of privacy so as to ensure the respect of the individual. As such, all data gathered was treated as confidential, and upon submission of the research will be kept in a safe storage unit specifically created for the housing of sensitive research information (Mouton, 2005).

Full disclosure about research ensures that participants are fully informed as to the process and outcomes of the research, as well as allowing participants to make informed decisions when signing consent forms. All research steps and considerations were relayed to participants as well as possible. Communicating the possibility for participants to opt out at any point during the research process ensures that they are always in control of their context. The psychological and physical safety of the participants was also assured, and a debriefing process was included in the final stages of each participant's interview so as to make sure that the highest ethical standards were maintained (Mouton, 2005).

It is important to note that the researcher's subjective influence will inevitably serve to mediate this interaction in at least some way. Although this may be considered a problem confounding data, post-modern perspectives within theoretical paradigms such as social constructionism consider it an original perspective instead of a veil detracting from clarity. In fact, Scheurich (1997) asserts that the final interpretation made by a researcher of an interview interaction is filled with a plethora of conscious and unconscious influences. This plethora of baggage is said to interact with an interviewee, who also brings his/her own baggage to the interaction. The final interpretation of the interview interaction being overloaded with the researcher's interpretive baggage is, therefore, inevitable. The final written representation of results may then also be considered largely, though not completely,



a mirror image of the researcher and his/her baggage (Scheurich, 1997). It may seem as if this problem is derived from a lack of structure normally found in more rigid quantitative interviewing methods, but in reality the subjective nature of the interaction provides it more strength than weakness. A quantitative researcher, despite structured methods, is led by their conscious and unconscious influences in the same way. Whether through choice of subject matter, research question formulation, paradigmatic assumptions applied, funding intentions, or simply personal stakes regarding the outcome of research, the quantitative researcher suffers on behalf of their subjective baggage in the same way a social constructionist would. By accepting that these subjective influences are present within the research interaction, the social constructionist arguably provides a more valid research output than if a more quantitative methodology were to be applied without accepting these subjectivities as part of the research process.

It is, however, important to consider the researcher's self-reflexivity as a constructing factor for ethics during the research process. Due to the inclusion of the researcher's subjectivity, an awareness of their contribution to the construction of meanings is required. The researcher is urged to explore the manner in which their subjectivity, historicity and position regarding the research at hand affects its outcome in order to ensure a personal reflexive accountability (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). For the purposes of this research, a process of self-examination took place before and after each interview session, as well as when considering content from sessions. This was done by taking extensive field notes during these times, as well as reflecting on their contents after sessions. By applying this exercise in self-reflexivity, the role of the researcher becomes subject to the same critical analysis or scrutiny as the research itself (Ryan et al., 2008). This promotes an ethical subjectivity within the research process.

As such, this study aimed to consider the researcher's subjective influences as an important facet of the interview interaction, while aiming to maintain a representative final interpretation by including each participant in the evaluation of results. Once interviews were recorded, transcribed and initial interpretations had been done, a return to each participant with their interview's results was made so as to allow the participant the opportunity to give feedback as to the researcher's influence, as well as the opportunity to preserve their biographical voice. The researcher returned to each participant for an informal meeting several months after the formal interview had taken place. During the meeting the results of the interviews were discussed, and any feedback from participants were noted. If research outwardly clarifies their subjective influences and these inclusive steps are taken, final interpretations' ethical accountability may be upheld.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodology the researcher followed in order to gain a rich final interpretation. By including in-depth interviews and considering life story theory as set out by Eastmond (2007), the chapter indicates how to support the study's paradigmatic assumptions in the best manner possible. Finally, an emphasis on ethics and the need to account for the researcher's subjectivities was relayed, allowing for a subjective, yet valid, final interpretation.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Overview

In the following section, the outcomes of four stories are presented. Each story outlines a participant's self told narrative of how they came to be where they are today. Some chose to start at the origin of their home life's fragmentation, while others presented a general account of a nation's downfall before relating their personal impacts. While each story is characterised by a unique flow of events and personal accounts, a shared reality encompassing political betrayal, economic downfall, and an inhibited future is present within each. All names have been changed to preserve participants' anonymity. The stories they related within the interviews plot the deliberations of their identity formation as their plane of reference, as if a ship on a turbulent ocean, is rendered uncertain and bewildering (Kline, 1898).

#### 4.2 Sindani

Sindani is 50 years old. He started his story in 1977, from when he was a young teen. Living in Tsholotsho, a small rural village in the West of Zimbabwe, the impacts of Rhodesia's civil war were great. Sindani found himself living in squalor with his mother and his younger sisters from when he was very small. He said that "In that time, we were staying like animals. Staying in the bush, sometimes sleeping there in the bush." Marginalised with sparse services, the guerrillas, armed rebels in conflict with the colonial government, would use him as an 'Impi', carrying messages and alerts across the land. He disliked the way they used him, saying "They tell us to do bad things, to hit people." This early contact with anarchic rebellion had a great impact on his beliefs about violence and political defiance, since the guerrillas who were abusing him did so in the name of liberty for their country.

It was not long when tensions between the locals and the rebels would atrophy Sindani's childhood. He recalled going to school one morning, to find no teachers at the school house. When they did arrive hurriedly, they told the children to leave the school and never come back again. While running away, he spotted seven men carrying guns. This was the first day he had ever seen someone carrying a gun, but it would not be the last. After this time, Sindani stayed home, looking after cattle and supporting his mother for three years. Conflict in the area left them with no transport, hospitals, or schooling.

One day, while Sindani was at the dip with his cattle, a group of guerrillas approached him. They instructed him to call his grandmother and a friend of hers, staying close by. He led the men to them joined by two of his friends. Sindani recalls the ordeal to come in great detail.

“We go to my grandmother and her friend. They say no, you must burn these ladies now. They say I will dig the hole. We dig the hole, and we put them in the hole. They say to collect the wood and then put the wood on top of their heads. I feel like that day, and that time I was, now, if I... If I think about that, it make me in my heart... so sad. Then I heard my grandmother screaming in the fire, screaming in the fire, and nothing I can do, because those guys they are forced us to do that.”

Afterwards, Sindani ran to his mother to tell her what happened. To his surprise, she was not angry with him. Instead, she told him “There is nothing we can do...”, and they continued their day. The notion that Sindani was involved in his own grandmother's death was a heavy burden for him to bear. Looking back, he understands that he was a young teen forced into a tragic situation, and that the guilt lay squarely in the hands of the rebels. Nevertheless, the thought that his life would involve the murder of his own people was an unspeakable future to consider.

The next day, all the townspeople were called to a meeting a while away from their homes. Again, the rebels had chosen three ladies to burn, and Sindani was forced to build a pyre in a hole he had helped to dig. While being pushed in, one of the ladies jumped over the fire and ran into the hills, while the men tried to shoot her. He said she ran until she reached Bulawayo. As a result, the people scattered and hid for a long time. His two brothers decided to join a rebel unit camping in the hills, while Sindani stayed with his mother with no word from them.

Sindani saw this fragmentation of family and unrelenting violence as a life in suspension. With an interrupted education, and no stable future to speak of, supporting his mother became his most significant responsibility. Given a choice to fight back, Sindani would rather avoid conflict, having seen firsthand the brutal realities of civil war.

After some time, Rhodesia's political atmosphere stabilised, and in 1980 a vote was called. Sindani said that they did not know about elections or voting; "They started to teach us to make, how to vote." He relates a story of great frustration and anger, introducing Robert Mugabe as the antagonist. From that time, Sindani remembers a great hope for Joshua Nkomo, an alleged supporter of equality and peace, to become president. Robert Mugabe, however, was said to have killed anyone who supported this vote. More so, Sindani told the story of how Mugabe tricked the people into voting him into power, first telling the British that they would lose their land if they voted for Nkomo, and later subjugating any locals opposing him. The disparity inflamed a conflict of tribalism, where in the Matebele living in the West of Zimbabwe would become victims of a well orchestrated genocide. Sindani believed this was largely supported by the Shonas, considered merciless supporters of Mugabe at the time. Borders originally drawn by colonialists ignored ethnological, tribal and national considerations, arousing a greater surge of clashes (Beyer, 1981).

Sindani internalised a great distrust for any political leaders from this point on. An immense political betrayal had been brought on, and the vote that was intended to free Zimbabwe from tyrannical rule had failed to bring any notion of democracy or peace to his life. He reserved himself to support his family and avoid conflict, but the Gukurahundi, a military wing of Robert Mugabe's government trained with North Korean support, would finally force Sindani to flee from his home and abandon his familial responsibilities.

One morning, Sindani saw several soldiers with red berets marching to his home. They ordered the people to assemble in the school hall. Sindani recalls, "We sit down, a crowd of people, many many people sitting down. They say no, now we want to tell you a new law. I want all the people who was a soldier for Joshua Nkomo, they must stand up." Many supporters stood up and were led outside, while others stayed seated with Sindani in the crowd. One of the soldiers issued instructions in Shona for the crowd to sing. "They say we must sing. How can we sing, we don't understand what they are saying. So well we try to sing, and then I hear a gun hitting." Sindani recounts the massacre which he was to bear witness to. The soldiers brought the crowd out to show the example they had made of dissidents and betrayers.

"When I get there, I found maybe more than thirty something dead. Blood, flowing down like a river. The people start crying, and others start to run away. And also me I run away like that. And they shooting everybody, everybody is shooting, shooting. And I run away. I think I take two days to get in Bulawayo. And in Bula I got no relatives. When I get in Bulawayo, I was so worried. My mother, who was alone at home now. I thought my mother, where is my mother?"

The last of Sindani's hope for a stable home and family life would finally be shattered by the genocide that was wrought upon the Matebele people in the 1980's. Most humbling is

the focus Sindani had on his responsibility to his mother in the face of his own demise. Just a young youth, Sindani would enter into an independent life of work for the rest of his life, with hopes of reuniting with his family marred by violence and subjugation. The ordeal brought upon the Matebele people would only serve to further solidify an identity of tribalism in Zimbabwe. As a result, Sindani sees himself in tribal terms, and holds a quiet grudge against Shona people. He says, “Even to us, we are staying in the same country, but we are not friendly with Mashonaland. I can say well, ‘Halo!’, but in my heart, if I saw a Shona, I’m thinking about that story down in Matebeleland.” The loss of his cultural roots, and his right to customs and language due to the encroachment of Shona rule in Matebeleland were also felt. Sindani noted, “The Shonas think that everything can be for them. You can get school, you can go to school, as long as you are Ndebele, you can’t get a job.”

After reaching Bulawayo, Sindani avoided road blocks and local groups who sought to murder him. A few days later, he met a white land owner who Sindani said, “...took me in.” He worked on her land for two months before breaching the subject of returning home to check on his mother. Sindani became incredibly homesick. Kline (1898) states that a refugee may grow homesick or fearful soon after fleeing. Their resolution to stay away from home may break down. They are afraid ‘mother might die’, something at home might go to ruin, or that they may never see home again. After receiving word that his mother was still alive, and that she had instructed him not to return fearing he would be killed, Sindani stayed away another three months before risking the journey home. Avoiding road blocks and gangs, he finally met her at home, overjoyed to see her well. She was happy to see him, but did not want him to stay. On his second day home, more soldiers arrived. Sindani took his uncle, who was blind, to hide him in the hills. The soldiers found him and told Sindani to run away and not look back. To this day, Sindani has never seen or heard from his uncle again. Back at home, he was deliberating as to how he could help his family in their struggle to survive.

“I stayed home, then I hear one of the guys say, no, in someone’s, like in another village, they take another man and his wife and his son, put them in the hut, and then they burn them inside. My mother say, no better you must go back to Bulawayo. And then I was thinking, my mother, my... my... sister then was so young, you understand. So mom, what can we do now, because I was just helping you just to get milk from the cattle. Ya, to herd. So what must I do, you can’t manage to get the milk yourself. So I go back, no, hard time now. I go back to Bulawayo, I start working for Mrs Smith.”

It is evident from Sindani’s conversation that he was torn between his responsibility for his family and his own safety. Had it not been for his mother’s insistence and approval for him to leave them, Sindani would most likely not have fled. Once he felt his leaving was not seen as a betrayal of his responsibilities, he started to view his migration as an economic endeavour. If he stayed, not only would his life hang in the balance, but he would also not be able to sustain an income sufficient for his mother and sisters. Now with his Uncle’s wife and five children to bear also, Sindani returned to Bulawayo in the hopes of saving money to support them. Unfortunately the situation in the city had worsened, and Sindani failed to save enough money each month. He decided his only option was to jump the border in hopes of securing a stronger income.

His first attempt was to sneak into Botswana. He was caught and deported. On arrival in Zimbabwe, he saw his country in a frightening new light. “I find people staying in... in the stocks, like in jail. The people are just dying there, and then they say to me, let’s go to the mortuary.” This stark change from what was once his country left Sindani shaken to the core. He was made to wash dead bodies, was tortured, and later became a slave to soldiers searching the rural areas on the alleged suspicion that he, a young youth, was a dissident. He remembered, “I can do the washing for them, the cooking for them, until my mother heard about that by one of the guys who told my mother.” His mother searched for him in the bush,



and later convinced the soldiers to give him up. “They say no, we are trying to kill you. You are lucky, because you are getting away. I say no, I’m not a soldier, I’m not a dissident. They say okay, you can go, you can go.” After a failure to enter Botswana, and a great deal of pain endured returning to Zimbabwe, Sindani decided to try make his way to South Africa.

Sindani jumped the border with a friend and settled in Pretoria to look for employment. He recalls “I came here and then I find a job, and I see my life is making a change.” Although he experienced great marginalisation as an illegal immigrant, prejudice and fear for authority were commonplace occurrences for him and he took it in his stride. He drew his main source of self-esteem from his possibility to build a future for his family across the border. With his family’s approval, he considered his distance from them as an act of love. “In Ndebele I can say, ‘Impi lu yami, lapa eh South Africa’. If I’m in South Africa, my impi is protecting me, because if I’m here I can get something for my kid to eat, but if I’m there I cannot. I say that, I protect here in South Africa.”

Sindani would come to live in South Africa long enough to become naturalised, but still sees himself as a Zimbabwean. He finds himself engaged within two political spheres, affected by South African foreign policy and authority, as well as by political instabilities within Zimbabwe. At all times, he plays a kind of balancing act, avoiding conflict and saving in South Africa, while attending to any needs his family may have in Zimbabwe. For a refugee living in a host nation with familial ties and future aspirations in their home country, a sense of ‘betweenness’ exists, wherein an ambivalence of identity must be consolidated (Linstroth, Hall, Douge-Prosper, & Hiller, 2009). To return to his family also costs a great deal of money, not only in the loss of income while not working, but also for bribes needed to pay corrupt police officials.

Generally, when Sindani contrasts South Africa with Zimbabwe, it is considered bearable:

“We can say that it’s better here because you can get something to eat, sometimes you can get a job, but whereas the South Africans they hate us now. They thought maybe if we are taking their jobs, you see, so the South Africans hate us. So now we don’t know where must we go now.”

Sindani views his experiences of the antagonistic locals as part and parcel of his stay in a foreign country, and a necessary burden in order to support his family. Locals may believe they are forced to take action against what they consider to be a foreign invasion, due to the inaction and inactivity they experience from police and service delivery generally (McKnight, 2008). Unfortunately this creates a very brutal reality for refugees, despite having proper documentation and legal rights.

Sindani now has a wife and two children who live in Zimbabwe, and he takes on the same role as a grown man as when he was supporting his mother and sisters. Sindani spent very little time explaining how he managed to meet his wife and foster a family, although it is assumed large parts of his life returning to Zimbabwe were not explored in the interview. Despite violence and unrest in Zimbabwe today, Sindani has found a way to balance family life with his immense economic migration.

Sindani’s determination to continue working in South Africa is primarily due to his beliefs relating to a future of instability in Zimbabwe. He firstly comments that in Zimbabwe life can be much easier than in South Africa. “You can do what you want, you can grow anything, like mielies, everything. You can grow in your own place.” Conversely, in South Africa, everything requires currency. “Here, everything you must buy... If you open your mouth, you must use the money.” Despite these advantages, Sindani cannot return to a life in which his family’s future is unstable. He says that “You can’t stay under pressure like that. You can’t do anything, what you want to do, you can just do what that man wants.” He puts

the blame squarely on Robert Mugabe, and sees no hope to return to his country for good until political stability can be assured. “The Shonas, another few guys, they come to take our place, they say no, we want to take all the cattle, because they are for us... So that thing, you can't say maybe those guys will stop.” The notion that his wealth is not secure in his own country has left Sindani only hoping for a future where he can live safely with his family in Zimbabwe. Until such a time, he is determined to continue his work in South Africa.

Sindani has also adopted a more significant sense of racial identity due to the downfall of Zimbabwe's economy. After white farmers were ousted from Zimbabwe by Robert Mugabe's war veterans, farms and agricultural industries fell into ruin. Sindani ascribes this downfall due to black people's lack of skills and experience, and emphasises a need for white people to teach black people how to farm. He comments:

"Ya, the blacks are stupid sometimes, ya, I can say that. I'm a black but I can say that, we are stupid sometimes. In the country if you use your medulla, your common sense, you must think, the whites, yes we know they come from very far, but well because they've got, they're clever and to think and to make 'imilo', to make life easy. They teach the people how to make planting... Me, I don't know maybe I can do that. Now the farms look just like a desert."

It is ironic that a move on Robert Mugabe's part to promote independence from white authority would elicit a response in his people to ascribe a dependence on alleged white superiority in the aftermath of land repatriation. The outcome has left Sindani to view white people as social supporters in his life, not only in the economic sphere but also in his daily work activities.

Sindani's journey has left him with vastly new perspectives on people and on himself. He remembers a time in his youth, during Rhodesia's civil war, when he and his friends would destroy cattle dips for amusement. Frustrated with white rule at the time, these acts of

destruction were commonplace in his past, and were happily condoned by him at the time. He remembers how he would watch guerrillas shoot stadiums down with bazookas, and set fire to public buildings. He now considers these acts of ignorance, fuelled by irreverent anger.

Sindani asserts:

“If you think that thing is also for you, you break it down. Like now, if you want to rule this country, today, you can rule today. You can get those guys without getting school, without go to school. You say now, here’s a gun, I want this country today. And then you get it, because those people they fight, they just fight. For anything they kill, they kill. Because there’s no common sense. They shooting everything, breaking everything. So how can you solve a problem with another problem?”

Having lived through a civil war, an ethnic genocide, and the economic collapse of his home country, Sindani now holds an incredible reverence for the sanctity of life. His personal accounts of violence and oppression have engendered in him a great appreciation and love of peace. A sense of collectivism and equality abounds his thoughts about people, wherein he asserts a need for all to share land and wealth. No doubt his experiences of homelessness as a refugee have informed him as to this consideration, and his religious faith has instead become a home of sorts. Despite his reservation towards Shonas, Sindani depicts the disparity between Shonas and Ndebeles as wasteful. He also holds education in high regard, considering it a safeguard to violence and ignorance. He cites politics as the source of problems for people, and maintains an absolute distrust of any political will.

Sindani hopes to return to his home in Zimbabwe, but will not do so until Robert Mugabe steps down. In accordance with research, if people have abandoned their countries against their will, the desire to return to their homeland is invariably powerful (Kibreab, 1999). Sindani believes this would not only guarantee him a life of stability with his family,

but also an opportunity to find resolution from a life of great injustice. Over several decades, the fates of many family members and friends were left unanswered. Whether dead or alive, it is as if they disappeared from Sindani's life, with no hope of reuniting or seeking justice on their behalf. There is an urban legend in Zimbabwe Sindani shared which personifies this profoundly:

“My girlfriend said no, she said her uncle is working there, somewhere in Harare. She says there's a place there called Gumaramonde. That place is where Mugabe kills the people there. There's a big tank, that tank got acid inside. If they take you, they put you in there, smelt, smelt. No trace. So I was thinking, maybe my uncle, they put my uncle there. Because we did not see the body, we did not see the graveyard, anything about my uncle. So I thought maybe they put him there.”

Sindani's faith in his future requires a resolution of his past before he is able to consolidate a migration back to his home. Until such a time he continues working in South Africa as a personal assistant, driver and manual labourer in order to provide a stable life for his family.

### **4.3 Kurai**

Kurai is a 34 year old Zimbabwean who has been staying in South Africa since 2003. He started his story with a reflection on his childhood. He recalls a firm value of education instilled in him by all Zimbabweans in his community. Although he dismissed school as nothing more than a time to play and be with friends, as he grew up he started to realise education was an important rite of passage in his development. He remembers feeling embarrassed if he did not hold to this ideal:

“If you wake up in the morning and you stay around the place, not going, however you look at it, you ask what is going on. Why aren’t you going to school? You actually feel very ashamed if you do not go to school, especially if you have the opportunity to go to school and you just don’t take it.”

He described the formalities of his school life, and the community prestige that a person is awarded when they reach their ‘A’ levels: “Once you’ve reached that level people look at you and say, ya, this person, this person is learned.” It was at this time when Kurai was starting to consider his future career. He emphasised the motivation that career opportunities brought with it, and the need to “...pull out all the stops...” to reach the targets he had set himself. A higher educational qualification generally determines a higher expectation for job satisfaction (Portes, Mcleod, & Parker, 1978), and Kurai was determined to achieve a rewarding career.

Kurai was still accustomed to his relatively carefree life as a minor finishing school, and it came as a shock to him when, at this very pivotal time in his life, his parents refused to support him anymore. Somewhat insulted, he moved out of his family home to find a job and a rental space elsewhere. Looking back, he reaffirms the value this lesson instilled in him, saying “Believe me, this is how we do it at home, this is how we do it in Zimbabwe. “He begrudgingly accepted help from his sister by staying on her and her husband’s property for six months. He stressed the fact that he never stayed in the house itself with them. The knowledge that he, a young adult now with legal majority, was leaning on his sister was a shameful thought to bear. As soon as he found a job he moved out and started living by himself. At 20 years of age, Kurai’s new found independence was a great source of confidence for him. He started realising the magnitude of responsibilities that came with freedom were great. He worked as a receptionist at a river lodge and did not have a care in the world to leave his country. He recalled, “Believe me I didn’t have my passport back then,

and my sister used to tell me, no you must get a passport. It's important that you have those documents. I was like, what do I need a passport for?"

In 2002 Kurai took part in his first presidential election. He saw it as an important responsibility and a powerful act, but was greatly disappointed. "I went to vote and it was very important to me, it meant a lot. I felt like, yes, this vote is really going to make a difference. But just like every other Zimbabwean, I was very disappointed. I felt very let down." With turbulence marring the election process, and an unpopular outcome sighting Robert Mugabe as the clear victor, Kurai realised that his vote could do no more good than the hands it resided in after election day.

In 2003, Zimbabwe took a turn for the worse. Kurai remembers how a speedy economic downfall forced industries to a halt, and companies could no longer keep their staff. One of his friends, who had lost his job and could not find another, had come to South Africa illegally for work. Kurai phoned him to ask what life in South Africa is like. By his friend's impression, it was quite tough here too. Kurai couldn't believe it: "If I get in my car and drive to Zim right now and I sit with the guys, drinking beer, they will look at me and say, 'You guys must really be living life,' and if you tell them, guys, life is hard, they won't believe you. They won't."

Kurai did not believe life in South Africa could be worse than in Zimbabwe. Although he had still kept his job, the economic situation he found himself in became unbearable. "There was no target anymore, it was a hand to mouth situation. You get paid the money now, you get it, you use it immediately. It got to a point where you could not keep the money for hours in your pocket... It was changing in your pocket." None of his career plans and future motivations could be realised in such a state. Kurai's motivation to attempt a dangerous migration was also fuelled by his beliefs regarding the independence and strength

an adult man should demonstrate in his life. He recalled, “Our parents weren’t very comfortable about the idea of us coming over here, so we decided to be brave. We said look, we’ve been doing things alone all this time.” He finally decided to risk a venture to South Africa without telling his parents. After a six month delay processing his passport, and three failed attempts to secure a visa, he accepted help from an agent to forge documentation allowing him entry on a two week visa. Kurai only met some resistance at the Zimbabwean border, which was quickly absolved with money for a cold drink, and entered South Africa on a two week visitor’s visa. He soon found a job as a waiter at a restaurant in Johannesburg with his friend, and was making money.

It was not long when Kurai would have his first run in with South African police. He was immediately arrested and sent to the Lindela Detention Centre. It was clear thoughts of Kurai's incarceration evoked great distress in him when relating his experiences. He commented, "You don't wanna know about that place, If I start talking about Lindela maybe one of us will end up in jail." Kurai firmly stated that he would rather risk a prison stay than a return to Lindela due to the harsh conditions and treatment he was subjected to. He shared a small cell with up to twenty men. They also shared a single bathroom in the corner of the room, and the sewage regularly overflowed and flooded the floor where they all slept. On his first night, Kurai woke up freezing in a pool of water.

He spent ten days in the centre, before he was to be transported by train for deportation to Zimbabwe. Kurai emphasised the fact that these trains were especially designed for 'them', the Zimbabwean foreigners. Each compartment maximised space for seating, and had only one door. On the trip towards the border, one of the security guards solicited Kurai and several other men for a bribe in return for an escape opportunity. A couple of Rands bought their freedom, and he let them off the train somewhere along the track.



Kurai had already decided that he was going to return to Zimbabwe immediately. His unexpected arrest and demeaning treatment brought with it a shocking realisation of his sudden 'otherness'. Within less than three weeks, he felt he had become no less than a pest in a foreign land. The denial of his human rights and his freedom had shifted his context so suddenly, leaving his confidence rocked to the core. It is typical for an individual having positive plans for a better future in a new country to experience a shocking disappointment due to the circumstances and difficulties they meet on arrival (Kazmierska, 2003). On returning to Zimbabwe, he remarked, "At least it's my own country, I have freedom, I will never find myself in that situation again." Despite his assertions, a little convincing from his friend soon swayed his decision to leave. The thought that his return to Zimbabwe would mean a return to a dormant future made going home seem futile. Kurai's health had also deteriorated significantly due to the harsh conditions he was subjected to during his stay at Lindela. He was diagnosed with pneumonia and had to be admitted to hospital. "I stayed in intensive care for three weeks. I couldn't walk, I couldn't talk, I couldn't eat, I couldn't do nothing. Because of pneumonia. The doctor who treated me said I was very lucky to survive."

Soon after Kurai was discharged, his uncle came to find him on behalf of his parents, who had heard about him leaving from his sister. The fact that Kurai had undertaken a move to South Africa without their permission weighed heavily on his conscience. He worried that his misfortune was due to his dishonesty, commenting "I felt when I experienced all these problems, it might have been because I didn't tell them. They are very angry with me, they are unhappy with me, maybe this is why things are not really working out for me." A refugee may selectively avoid interactions and relationships that undermine the validity of their former self-image. This 'honouring' of the past migration biography affects how their present identity is considered (Valenta, 2010). It is clear Kurai wished to honour his past self-image of a strong, independent man who did not need to flee in order to secure an income, and had

avoided contact with his parents for fear of judgement. After explaining his ordeal to his uncle, he felt much better about staying in South Africa. With his parents' blessing, he endeavoured to return to work. He secured a working visa through family contacts in the South African Home Affairs Department, returned to his work, and has never been without proper documentation since. Today he continues to work in a prominent position as a manager at an upmarket restaurant in Pretoria.

Kurai's experience of South African living has instilled in him a great distrust of locals, government policies and police. He resents the manner in which the label 'foreigner' is constantly ascribed to him, and begrudgingly bears a feigned contentment of his circumstances in his social life:

"It's very painful, it's very difficult. Now I'm a foreigner, I feel like I've given up a lot of things to adapt to the situation. First I have to pretend to be the person I'm not, you understand where I'm coming from. The friendliness and language sometimes... I find that very difficult to do."

He maintains that he does not feel like a refugee, but that being treated like an unwanted foreigner is something he has come to accept in order for him to secure a suitable future. His social standing is eroded, and the lack of respect he experiences in his workplace is unbecoming of his responsibilities as a manager who has many South Africans working under him. Social groups such as Zimbabwean immigrants, who are relegated to a low social status and low social reward, may develop a negative group image in daily life as a result (Porter & Washington, 1993). Despite these difficulties, Kurai seems resolutely inclined to take every day in his stride. He says "I'm beginning, year by year, I'm feeling more comfortable, because I'm getting used to the system. Now I don't get scared, I'm not scared of the cops anymore." Despite his documentation, Kurai still experiences constant harassment

from police. "If you are a foreigner, it doesn't matter whether you have got your papers in order, they always want to get something out of you. They pull you over, or they stop you, or you just happen to run into them, the moment they realise you are a foreigner, they just want to take advantage of you. That is the biggest problem."

Kurai's early experiences have also entrenched in him a feeling that he is exploited politically. He believes that the South African government is in cahoots with Zimbabwe's ruling party, and that new permit agreements given to Zimbabweans only serve the interests of government. He believes South Africa benefits by gaining a cheap labour force who also pay tax, and the Zimbabwean government are content in the knowledge that any Zimbabweans who would vote against Zanu PF in upcoming elections would be kept in South Africa. Kurai even mentioned that when crossing the border into Zimbabwe to visit family, he has been harassed to return to work. "They tell you, you know what, you can't go over there for thirty days, you've got work to do here." Underdeveloped host nations may look at the pool of refugees as a manpower source which they can exploit to their own advantages. This informs asylum application reviews to select the healthy and young while rejecting the old and ill. The state comes to view refugees as permanent economic immigrants, and tend to be highly unsympathetic to homeward oriented refugees who believe their displacement is a temporary affair (Kuns, 1981).

The manner in which Kurai perceives local and police attitudes of Zimbabweans has emphasised an identity rooted in geographical and racial terms. Kurai abhors the manner in which the label foreigner seems loosely interchangeable with the label Zimbabwean, and the manner in which Zimbabweans have become scapegoats for South Africa's social inadequacies. He says "We are just innocent people, we are victims of these bad governments and all these things, but the South African government and the Zimbabwean government are playing a big role in this." Anti-immigration policies have become the norm among

politicians who wish to rally votes to their political cause (Keely, 1996), promoting a culture of prejudice against foreigners who come to be blamed for inadequate service delivery.

Kurai also perceives a great disparity regarding how white and black Zimbabwean foreigners are treated. A white Zimbabwean friend of Kurai's secured travel documents and bank accounts with ease, and does not endure the same police harassment that he does. Discrepancies such as these inflame his perception that race in South Africa seems more important than ever. Kurai related a frustrated story when a friend of his was turned away at a police station while trying to report a case of assault. He remarked, "The guy at the station said there's nothing much we can do to help you. Now leave. If you keep hanging around here we'll charge you with trespassing. How can someone trespass at the police station?"

The attitude Kurai shares here best sums up the present state he feels he resides in. Despite a commendable educational qualification, a successful, stable work position, and all proper legal documentation in order, he is still not afforded the basic human rights he is entitled to. Police harassment and local resentment of foreigners have left him unhappy in his current position, and stunts his freedom to speak up and be himself. The isolation South Africa experienced due to Apartheid has caused it to become a largely closed society (McKnight, 2008), and as a result Kurai is relegated as a trespasser on foreign soil. 'Foreign' implies a distance from, or lack of entrenchment in something. Contrary to the idea of a home, filled with a history of personal experience, being 'foreign' places a person in a distant unknown (Alsop, 2002). Consequently, being frequently distinguished as a foreigner has reified Kurai's lack of permanence in his environment, as well as his right to remain. When asked about his future plans, he is determined to return to Zimbabwe within two years, and hopes to settle down and grow a family. Looking back on his experiences, Kurai depicts his time in South Africa as a harsh reality littered with absolutes:

"South Africans are difficult guys to get along with. They are people who really don't care about a lot of things. Firstly, they don't have remorse, they just believe, look, if you can't live with us, it's either that or leave. If you're sitting at a bar and people are getting on this and that, it gets to my nerves but then I can't show it to them. I can't say, who am I to say, I'm a foreigner, remember. So what I do in the spirit of the beer, I say everything is fine, but that's really giving away a lot of my values. I really don't enjoy doing that and it's my life. It's one of those things we just have to do. I know well, after ten years, I know I will be sitting at home with my children. I'll tell them, South Africa, this place is beautiful to visit. You come do your shopping and then you go back. That's it. It's the longest a person should be in this country if you want to enjoy yourself."

#### **4.4 Nashe**

Nashe is a 30 year old man who comes from the South-East of Zimbabwe. He started his story with a seething denouncement of Robert Mugabe. It was clear that he held a great hatred for the political betrayal he believed his country had experienced. His disdain originates from the many abuses he and his family have been witness to in his home province. The agricultural ruin in which he lost all livelihood is ascribed to the removal of whites in Zimbabwe. He remarked, "Mugabe chase all the white people... You see, and the black Zimbabweans, we are here. No industry, no jobs, no funding. Everything is not going well. On the farm, we plough with a donkey. What is a donkey, a donkey has got blood inside." Despite race beginning to disintegrate as a primary source of human identity due to globalization and modern world living (Smedley, 1998), race in Africa is still used as a significant distinction for social class. Nashe went on to relate other stories of African countries, such as Mozambique, where the loss of a white-run industry was said to have caused a great economic downfall. Instead, Nashe says they are supported by other nations.

"Everything, we get everything in America, in Britain, and here in South Africa. We get jobs here."

Despite his anger towards the ruling party, Nashe bears a great love of his land. He spoke about its beauty and its richness, and beamed with pride when speaking about his home, Chipinge. Although he said he originates from the Ndau people, he is proud of the fact that he is fluent in Shona. He said, "I know Shona, I speak Shona better than the Shona people." He holds his family heritage in high regard, and maintains a great confidence in his standing at home. Talking about his home, Nashe proudly asserted, "I live in Nduduma village, my father is a chief, my father is the chief. We are kings in Zimbabwe." Nashe's identity is informed by genealogical history. As research shows, the lineage of a person becomes intrinsically linked with the homeland of their forefathers (Smedley, 1998). Nashe related a time of great battles fought to secure this land. "Our ancestors bled, from hundreds of years ago. They kill, they fight against to get that land. Nduduma, it's like a heap of dead people... If you're going to kill people, you kill thousands, or you going to kill hundreds, and then you put it on heaps, then you call it Nduduma."

Nashe recalled the political changes in his province from 1980, when Robert Mugabe was said to have tricked his way into power. Nashe condemned his actions, and spoke about how his country is crying while the politicians fill their pockets. He was pleased to be able to recite a long political history of power changing hands between leaders, and found it important to relay the manner in which the presidency was taken from honest leaders by force. Eventually, with a damaged agricultural industry, jobs became more and more scarce. Nashe remembers, in 2002, how he would travel on foot more than 20 kilometres per day looking for work, but that he had suddenly become unwanted. He found his situation utterly ridiculous. With all the white farmers gone, he believed there was no one looking out for him,

and that black people had, quite unnaturally, turned on each other. "There is nothing now, but the war veterans don't care. You are going to fight black to black."

The notion of race became a primary identifier for Nashe. He believed a hypocrisy had taken place, where a black nation had turned on itself in the face of bankruptcy. He sniggered, "Mugabe uses American dollars but he hates the whites... Now, if you are not working, you can't even drink tea." He went on to relate the lack of services available to his family, from water sanitation to hospitals, and laughed at the absurdity of his situation. He commented how his newborn son would never know what an aeroplane is if they stayed in Zimbabwe, since a flight over the country is such a rarity. His belief that there could be no quality of life in his home country led him to consider undertaking a migration alone. With a wife, a child, as well as his widowed mother to support, Nashe jumped the border to find work in South Africa.

In 2005, Nashe swam across the Limpopo river, and trekked through the Kruger National Park alone. Throughout his journey he encountered dangerous stand offs with crocodiles, lions, elephants and rhinoceroses. He credits his knowledge of the bush and the grace of God as his safeguards. He made the trip three more times in 2006 and 2007, returning to his family in Zimbabwe with the little money he had made doing small manual labour jobs, before making his way back through the bush again. His migration story is clear evidence that many people are less and less constrained by permeable political borders (McDermott Hughes, 1999). Today he works as a car guard at a shopping centre in Pretoria with full asylum privileges. Due to the economic circumstances in Zimbabwe, he has located his wife and two young children to the squatter camp where he stays.

Nashe's experiences of poverty have fostered a belief in the humbleness of daily living, and a great veneration of God. He asserts that he now lives for Jesus, and that all his

actions must be honourable and without waste. Spiritual notions on Nashe's part should in no way be downplayed or dismissed as illusions (Wren-Lewis, 2004), but rather exemplify the incredible adversities which he has been amazed to have overcome.

When contrasting South Africans with Zimbabweans, Nashe paints a conflicting picture. He believes South Africans do not appreciate their circumstances, and that they waste their livelihood. He spoke about how drinking, smoking, and thoughtless spending of money are root causes of a negative life. He remarks, "...The South Africans, they drink, they drink beer, but the Zimbabweans, they budget. They know, they know the situation, you see." Instead, he stresses the importance of budgeting for family by steering clear of all unneeded consumption or gluttony. He says, "There is a difference between South Africans and Zimbabweans. They budget, and they support their family." This comparison shows well the consequence that Nashe has experienced as a result of his life story. His focus has shifted from that of a present hedonism to a focus for the future. This is evident not only in his assertions about saving and fostering a good future for his family, but also in his new found focus on the afterlife.

In his state of homelessness, Nashe has found a home in Christ. The image of a suffering man, working for a greater good on earth and in heaven, appeals greatly to his story of suffering. It allows him to find meaning for his struggle, as well as an ability to understand the many pains he has endured in his life. Religious ascriptions allow a person to find security in a clear-cut truth. This sense of certainty provides them with solid ground on which to stand, rest and consider their futures (Kinnvall, 2004). Due to the atrocities that Nashe has been witness to in his time, he has nurtured a belief of people rooted in the absolute terms of good and evil. This allows him to compartmentalise the violence that has overrun his beloved nation, while retaining a sense of goodness and justice in the world. Judgement after death is also a great solace for him. Speaking about Robert Mugabe, Nashe commented, "It's a long



time for one man. 30 years, since 1980, and I've got beard now... But Jesus is the answer. He's going to die." The thought that Robert Mugabe will face judgement after death brings a sense of righteousness to Nashe's life, and the fact that Mugabe has no legitimate successor by blood brings him great relief.

Speaking about his present life in South Africa, Nashe is happy that he can provide for his children. He joyfully proclaims that his son is healthy and eats well here. He believes that this would not be possible in Zimbabwe now. Nashe makes significant distinctions of race regarding all his deliberations of South Africans. He sees black South Africans as jealous people, angry at the work ethic of Zimbabweans, and sees white South Africans, as in Zimbabwe, as supportive role-players in his life. He went on to describe how saving for a secure future evades any risk of poverty. Nashe also related how black policemen take advantage of his refugee status. Impersonating a policeman speaking, he said, "He's going to ask, 'Where's your I.D, where's your permit? Let's go, where's your papers, let's go. What shall we do? Give us money, give us money, give me plan...' Corruption all the time."

Nashe ascribes his cunning and knowhow as the best safeguards to problems in South Africa. He also emphasises a positive attitude as the best solution to all troubles, saying "You must be ever smiling.". He intends to stay until such a time as Robert Mugabe has stepped down. Nashe optimistically says this will only take one year, and that he will be back in his home in a very short time. Until this happens, he continues to budget in order to grow a large herd of cattle in Zimbabwe , and endeavours to honour his parents, his family and his God.

#### **4.5 Londisizwe**

Londisizwe is a 33 year old Zimbabwean man who came to South Africa in 2005. Prior to his migration, he was staying in Bulawayo with his parents, his sister and her children. In that time, Zimbabwe was already undergoing a vast economic collapse, and it

became Londisizwe's sole responsibility to provide for his family. His parents could no longer work, leaving him to secure a strong income to support them all. He remarked, "I was the one fending for those kids, you understand what I'm saying. So I was really shouldering a heavy burden... I was working at home. Although I was struggling, I was managing to put food on the table." Londisizwe had to make great sacrifices to find the means to provide for so many people in an economic climate which was crumbling away day by day.

Londisizwe was apprehensive to speak badly of his country, or of anything in his life. He tended to steer clear of personal details by speaking in generalisations. He said:

"I mean, with the passage of time, all this political instability, and all those things happening at home, there was a time and moment when I could not manage to absorb all the pressure that was visited upon me. I sat down and told myself, let me try to see if it's gonna work out. There were times when my salary couldn't even manage to take care of myself, never mind taking care of my house."

It was clear that Londisizwe was enduring a great deal of pressure from work to maintain his household. He mentioned that he worked at home, however, he later spoke about earning a salary. The source of these discrepancies, and this social pressure, would emerge in his conversation.

Londisizwe soon admitted, "Back home I started with the accounts but I didn't go through the proper approach of what I just told you. I have a secret, I'm not gonna go into it. I was actually... an officer in the army, but I resigned, I resigned. Following all these things happening here, I just resigned." It was clear that Londisizwe harboured a great shame of his time in the army. It had been common practice for decades that the Zimbabwean army had committed great abuses on behalf of the ruling party of Zimbabwe, Zanu PF. Army officials were expected to search for people in opposition to Zanu PF, and use whatever force

necessary to silence resistance and force a positive vote during elections. Many people were beaten, kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by army officials. In an effort to support his family, Londisizwe had joined the army in this time, and must have shouldered the burden of witnessing, or enacting great atrocities on behalf of the army in order to sustain his family. He would not disclose any details as to the commands he was ordered to follow, but it is certain the indignity was too great to bear. With the approach of turbulent elections in 2005, Londisizwe decided to flee to South Africa. Within this context, his generalisations bear a great significance. He commented:

“There is always some question of exile at hand. You know, there are times when you can’t even manage, like if you stay in a place where certain things are really pressing you, and putting you under pressure. Like political instability and so. Certain times of the day I’m left no option and no alternative. That is how I managed to come to South Africa. I actually thought maybe what I’m running away from, me, I’m going to get a good life.”

After resigning from the army, Londisizwe couldn’t stay in Zimbabwe for fear of being named a deserter. If he was caught he would be arrested or killed. He decided to jump the border to look for work in South Africa.

Although Londisizwe knew the change to a foreign country would be difficult, he was not prepared for what he faced. Having no proper documentation, he breached the fence and slipped by border patrols. Again, he was very uncomfortable about the ordeal, saying, “Very painful, very painful, it’s something else. If I talk about it I feel like crying you understand. There were a lot of things I underwent when I was making my way here the first time, so I don’t want to talk about it.” Survivors of genocide, or great political subjugation, may be wary to speak about their painful experiences with others, although this should not be construed as an indication that they have forgotten their past (Kibreab, 1999). Despite

difficulties and unexpected circumstances, Londisizwe was looking forward to being accommodated and finding a better job. He remarked, “It never went the way I expected, though I managed to make a living better than at home. That’s how I’m surviving up to now.” Today Londisizwe works as a waiter at an upmarket restaurant in Pretoria under political asylum. After paying his rent and transport, he sends all his income home to his family. He describes it as a difficult life, but one in which he is at least able to provide for those he loves.

Considering day to day life in South Africa, Londisizwe relates a great loneliness that he has had to accept and make part of himself. He mentioned, “It’s always painful, especially if you grow up with your parents, or you grow up with your family. But you know the truth, I just told myself, where I’m going I don’t have parents, I don’t have a sister, I don’t have a brother. Whatever I’m gonna come across where I’m going, I’ve just got to take it. There’s no use. A few months here, then I’m managing. It’s now part of me, it’s now part of me.”

Londisizwe also spoke about a sudden realisation of ‘otherness’, a feeling that he was not aware of while living in Zimbabwe. He recalls growing up, saying “You know I am Ndebele. I couldn’t understand when I had friends in Zimbabwe. I know people who were KZN [Kwazulu-Natal], Eastern Cape. I socialised with those guys, even up to today some of my friends are from South Africa.” Due to his migration experience, Londisizwe has come to understand being labelled a foreigner can be a derogatory term. He went on, “Ya, I definitely see myself as a refugee. We are now destitute. There are certain things that happen. When they happen, you tell yourself, for sho I am a refugee. When I grew up before things went bad, in my youth I saw people from South Africa, who are Tswana, and I never knew those guys were foreigners.” To have his identity primarily based on his ‘otherness’ has caused Londisizwe to feel relegated to an unwanted minority. As a result, he realises his rights are not seen as legitimate and deserved, nor his presence in South Africa. In most host countries, neither governments nor their citizens imagine refugees as being members of their society.

This understanding leads to geographically territorial behaviour and raised tensions between locals and foreigners. As a consequence, territorially-based identity has become a scarce resource which is jealously guarded by those who perceive themselves as having this ‘right to remain’ (Kibreab, 1999). Londisizwe stated, “Ya, there are certain things I’m not exposed to. There are certain things which I cannot have access to. If I was back home I would have access to almost everything that I feel, like food and this and that. I mean, everything, without people asking me endless questions.” As in Londisizwe's case, a refugee’s perceived standard of social status shifts dramatically after migration (Park, 2007), and causes a wearing away of one's confidence.

The relegation of Londisizwe’s social standing, as well as his clashes with authority throughout his migration, have caused him to become a largely reserved person. He avoids conflict wherever possible, and maintains a humble demeanour in all his actions. Ever smiling, he prefers to uphold his job security, and so too the safety of his family, than cause any kind of trouble. Londisizwe also recognizes South Africans’ discontent with his presence is warranted by their own social needs from government, and rather blames his own government’s failures for his situation than expecting equal rights in a foreign country. Speaking about the South African government and the locals, he remarked, “Like I tell you, I can’t look much from them. I can’t accept much from them, but my government failed to take care of me, I mustn’t hide from that. They failed me. So what more can I expect from a foreign government. It’s the least they can do for us than back home.”

When asked about returning home, Londisizwe clearly states his wish to return. “No, home is always there. If only our government can manage to restore the conditions in the environment for people to live. I miss my parents, I miss my mother, my father, I wish to be with them. If things get better that time, that will be nice.” Londisizwe would love to return home, but cannot do so until the economic and political instability which forced him here has

stabilised. Not only does he require the promise of a secure and stable income, but also surety of his safety at home. When revealing his history in the army, he said:

“I still have my resignation letter with me here. The reason why I think I like generalising is because of this. For my own standing. If there’s a person working for a government organisation, there are lots of things you know about government, that you know what happened. If they come across me they can arrest me. They’ll say, ‘We’ve been looking a long time for you, you’ve run away.’ I’m gonna say, no I didn’t run away. As proof to show, I’ll produce my resignation, and I’m gonna give them that. I have them with me here, wherever I go they are here with me. The day or the hour or the minute that I go back, they are coming back with me. I always have them with me. This is my secret. Even here no one knows about it... That’s why it’s good that I’m gonna keep them where they are. They are very safe.”

As Londisizwe’s resignation paper follows him wherever he goes, so too does the knowledge of his past and the apprehension of his demise should he return to unfavourable conditions. Until such a time as he feels it is safe for him to return, Londisizwe continues working in South Africa to support his family, preserving his secret past in the hopes of resolution in the future.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Having completed four in-depth interviews with black male Zimbabwean refugees, many substantial implications have come to the fore. It is clear that each story had an individuality in its narration and life course, while still sharing many common elements. Narrative approaches reduce the risk of tailoring factual generalisations about minority groups (Marcia & Strayer, 1996), while still allowing for related associations to be made. Analysing shared elements of refugee life provides explanations of events shared in host

countries such as South Africa, and enables research to predict the course of future events and refugee relations (Kuns, 1981). The goal of social constructionism, however, is not to create universal truths about any subject of inquiry, but rather to create local understandings valid to the context in question (Reichertz & Zielke, 2008): How does a black male Zimbabwean experience becoming a refugee? The experiences and identities of refugees may then be understood in light of their past migration biographies, present everyday experiences and imagined futures (Valenta, 2010).

The study showed that participants fled because they perceived a situation to be intolerable and lacking any positive future (Kuns, 1981). Experiences in their home country left them feeling betrayed, and cultivated a great distrust for government. Most participants chose to blend into the social landscape illegally than declare a political identity which would sooner provide negative consequences than positive benefits (Zetter, 1991). Severe life crises had positive outcomes by virtue of shattering taken-for-granted assumptions about life, the world, and personal identity (Wren-Lewis, 2004). This notion that great good can emerge from great suffering is ancient (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Participants' life stories demonstrated immense feats of courage that became catalysts for positive personal transformations. Many participants reported a renewed affinity for life, and significant meanings were found in their struggle to attain harmony in existence.

In daily living, participants experienced a great feeling of 'otherness', and a constant relegation of their right to search for a positive future. At times, there are anticipated futures which are lost forever in the diasporas of a refugee's existence. Every new crisis or local subjugation reopens these wounds, and reminds the refugee of that loss (Zabaleta, 2003). As a result, daily confrontations with locals or police served to reify refugees' social difficulties.

All participants perceived their involuntary displacement as temporary, and consider a permanent return to their home state as a success (Kibreab, 1999). An invitation to represent their stories with the utmost faith that the final result would do justice to their experience was a considerable motivating factor in the participants' story telling (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). There were many instances in which a participant would suggest an undertaking of a research project, or some kind of inquiry, into a specific phenomena they found significant. It was important to view the participants as collaborators throughout the investigation, deserving of power and agency within the interaction (Yardley, 2006). After a thorough investigation of the life stories participants shared, it is possible to build towards an interpretation of their identity formations.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Overview

The following chapter integrates participants' life stories into a discussion exploring the social construction of the identity of black male Zimbabweans becoming refugees. Many experiences are shared between participants, while other facets of participants' stories represent succinctly unique circumstances. The discussion intends to weave patterns together that are reflected throughout interviews, while observing unique derivations throughout.

A person's identity is created in the ability to keep a particular narrative going (Marcia & Strayer, 1996), and the narrator is said to reconstruct the process of logical events leading up to the state of their identity today (Kazmierska, 2003). When dealing with narrative, rigid method gives way to a space in which the character and atmosphere of the telling may be conveyed (Yardley, 2006). By considering the telling of a life story, a person's explorations regarding critical incidents that impacted on their identity, and significant differences in their past and present perceptions, are laid bare. Exploring a refugee defining the past in the present moment of an interview allows the researcher a perspective on that perceived contrast of character (Kazmierska, 2003). The study's interpretations thereof are outlined in two sections: Exploring the process of becoming a refugee, and describing aspects of refugee identity.

## 5.2 The Process of Becoming a Refugee

### 5.2.1 The emergence of a crisis of identity.

Identity emerges from the important question, ‘Who am I?’ When it arises, it is answered within a social context. It becomes an ongoing force, persistent in its presence yet temporary in its form (Motyl, 2010). Its privileged position as the sense of a person’s reality affords it the opportunity to rewrite history in every new moment, at the cost of never having anything written in stone (Gergen, 1971). As participants’ environments changed, so did their identities and their identifications of their worlds. These sudden shifts begged a radical revision of the question, ‘Who am I?’, examined hereunder.

People are consequently doing three things simultaneously: Exploring their physical environment, themselves and their identifications (Alsop, 2002). Status markers, or points of reference for perceiving social class, are also employed in order to make sense of their social context. For participants, the notions of family, children, traditional monogamous marriage and education were significant determinants in conceiving their social reality (Park, 2007). When their homes became threatened, their environments and their points of reference fluctuated erratically. They lost their continuity of self, and any thought or action in the present could not be carried out with fair coherence (Lewis, 2001). Participants described this as a great pressure visited upon them which they could not bear. As a result, their lives took an unexpected turn for the worse, and they were forced to respond to it.

Within times of dramatic transformation, a good life story is one that values openness to change and a tolerance for ambiguity. The tensions within these multiplicities of understandings are ultimately resolved within the construction of an ever changing identity (Marcia & Strayer, 1996). Since identities remain fluid (Mosselson, 2006), participants had to build an original belief of selfhood while concurrently searching for it in the identification

of sameness. Participants experienced a great disparity between what they identified with in their past life in the wake of their dramatic present day changes. Their ability to build positive futures for themselves in Zimbabwe, and their ability to support their families in terms they would define as successful all came into question. These changes demanded a revision of how they saw themselves, and the actions they would need to take in order to find a remedy to this great disparity. There exists a constant shift between change and permanence within this paradox. As the person experiences new life events and changes, they are forced to re-evaluate the sameness they identified with before, while still retaining an identity that integrates the two (Roth, 2003).

Given this sudden shift in context, a crisis of continuity emerged. This crisis was sustained by the difficulty to differentiate between a consistency of identity and a consistency of context (Lewis, 2001). Participants could not develop a consistent sense of self amid a radically shifting context, nor could they identify what to expect from their futures without a knowledge of who they were and what they were capable of in this unknown territory. Participants therefore experienced not only a loss of livelihood but also a loss of self. They were affected by a large range of personal losses all at once. The significance of loss experienced related to the emotional significance they had invested in the circumstance (Harvey & Miller, 1998). Certainly, the loss of one's home and family is of great significance, yet each participant experienced their circumstances in a unique manner. Even among seemingly similar immigrant groups, vast differences are present (Portes et al., 1978). A search for meaning found through an experience of loss allows a person to cope and adjust to new circumstances. Contextualising the experience in this manner provides a platform from which a person can understand themselves and how they perceive their loss (Harvey & Miller, 1998). In the case of participants, they contextualised their loss as a failure on the part of their government, and took it upon themselves to secure a livelihood for their relatives and

for themselves. They all chose to abandon their homes in order to redeem them in the future. The same can be said for their identities.

### **5.2.2 The flight from home.**

A nation-state generally produces forced migration for three primary reasons: It contains more than one nation, the population are in conflict regarding the structure and authority of the state, or the state implodes due to a severe lack of resources (Keely, 1996). All three of the above may be said to be true of Zimbabwe. Participants related stories of ethnic genocide, political subjugation and economic downfall, all of which negated a sustainable future and necessitated a flight from Zimbabwe.

The expulsion of minority groups, whether due to political or economic conflicts, is often due to a marked hostility between the majority rule and the marginalised minority (Beyer, 1981). In the case of participants, an economic downfall precipitated a need for migration for both majority and minority groups alike, however, persons were largely characterised by political ascriptions in conflict with the governing party.

People perceive themselves as a nation when they are seen to share unique characteristics, or are collectively responsible for a positive continuity. Should this continuity collapse, the collective group fragments into smaller homogenous groups within the whole. Ethnicity and political standpoints become primary categories of division (Keely, 1996). Even before leaving Zimbabwe, participants' perceptions of their group image started to wane, and gave way to a focus on personal characteristics and future hopes. Participants started to view their nation as a failure, or as a place that had become deeply damaged. When their belief in the stability of their nation had eroded entirely, they started to deliberate how to resolve the exhaustion and failure of their food supply (Kline, 1898).

The folk-lore of many tribes, and the genesis of many great nations consist of migratory legends and myths of wandering (Kline, 1898). A refugee's migration story may be seen as the genesis of their new identity. While participants saw this new beginning as a source of hope for a better future, they also braced themselves for a life of marked suffering.

Expectations for a refugee's stay in a host nation are not only determined by their past skills and opportunities, but also by their need to believe what they can do in the future. Normally this entails building a sustainable income to support a family (Portes et al., 1978). Most participants had relatives that required their immediate support. Securing a stable income became the first goal when they left Zimbabwe, and was experienced as an immense pressure to succeed in their endeavours swiftly. If they failed in their quest to secure resources for their dependents, or if they could not support themselves, their flight from Zimbabwe would be reduced to an act of exile. This fear of abandoning their families could only be resolved if that abandonment could absolve their suffering.

Once they entered South Africa successfully, the shock of the sudden change of context and their new unfamiliar environment breached a conflict of identity. Familiarity provides a basic sense of orientation in moments of utter confusion (Alsop, 2002), but in this new state, participants had no plane of reference. The great many shifts experienced within their lives necessitated a reconstruction of the past in order to consolidate a modification of their anticipated futures. This allowed for a better fit with present day actions and circumstances (Valenta, 2010). They entered this foreign world as foreigners to themselves, unsure of their social standing and their abilities to cope. Normally, a person could estimate their sense of worth by comparing themselves to others, and taking note of how others perceive them (Gergen, 1971). In this case, however, participants had no direct experience of South Africa, or even of being out of their own country. As a result, they had no social compass with which to gauge their social position, or what their social worth was in this new

place. They were subject to a very abrasive and largely incoherent introduction into their new lives as they searched for economic opportunities.

One of the primary components of refugee coping is economic adaptation. The ability to secure a safe and constant working environment is the first step to bridging a platform for social change. Once a refugee has secured an income, they are able to find some frame of reference for themselves. Becoming entrenched in the native language of a host nation also improves the security of a refugee, but not necessarily social welfare and wellbeing (Montgomery, 1996). Participants showed this need to adapt economically. In a sense, this would be the first major test of character in their new circumstance. If they failed to succeed in securing some kind of income, their choice to move to South Africa would start to be viewed as a grave error in judgement or character. In order to review the changes in their lives, they would first need to prove their economic stability. They established themselves in the activities of their new lives, and started to deliberate who they were in this new world.

### **5.2.3 Self esteem and confidence.**

Participants contended with a great amount of turmoil throughout their transition from home to host country. Facing such a large social change brought with it a large change in how they viewed themselves, as well as their social group.

Many ethnic paradigms assert a reciprocal relationship between group self-esteem and personal self-esteem. Group self-esteem refers to how a person feels about their membership to a group, whereas personal self-esteem refers to how a person feels about themselves (Porter & Washington, 1993). Given a loss of confidence in the one, the other would experience a similar erosion of esteem. This does however depend on how the person feels they are aligned to that group. Tribal histories may play a mitigating role in the case of Zimbabwe. Participants who were Ndebele had already undergone a great subjugation in their

past, or their families had suffered greatly under the Gukurahundi whilst under Shona rule. Their disparity with their nationality seemed to have been experienced earlier than participants from other tribal areas, and their tribal heritage became a much more significant identifier for them. Whether due to tribal genocide, political subjugation or economic collapse, all participants' collective social group as Zimbabweans had undergone great chaos and political upheaval. As a result, they experienced a shocking loss in self-esteem, and had to undergo a process of re-evaluation. In order to regain a sense of self worth, participants had to identify new underpinnings of personal self-esteem (Porter & Washington, 1993).

A characteristic reaction after flight from Zimbabwe was that participants experienced a great sorrow for the loss of home. They experienced a great longing for a life that could have been. This longing began by feeling lonely, desolate and forsaken. Their plane of reference was rendered unstable, emphasised by their inability to interpret or to enter into familiar relationships with the new world about them. This crisis of identity pervaded as a severe loss of self-esteem. The greater the unfamiliarity, the greater the shock and stress of the event (Kline, 1898). The majority of the participants interviewed experienced an immense fragmentation of family. They recounted the pain of separation from family members, or the guilt of leaving them. In the face of their isolation, they had to make sense of their situations. Some participants gave meaning to their suffering by viewing their separation as an act love for their family. A sentiment that this suffering was a test of one's manhood was also present. Because each visit to family required a break from work, as well as a hefty travel cost, isolation for the benefit of family income became a very literal battle. Eventually, participants became accustomed to a solitary existence, which ultimately became part of their identity.

Soon participants had to definitively gauge the attitudes of their hosts, and attempted to find a niche for themselves in which they could find the stability required to realise their expectations (Kuns, 1981). Status markers provided a platform from which they were able to

judge the social counterparts of their host nation (Park, 2007). The manner in which locals treated them informed them of their own social standing, and allowed for a reassessment of previously taken-for-granted assumptions of themselves. Participants generally experienced locals as hostile, but recognised there were exceptions throughout their stays. They recognised this hostility and general indifference as a sign of their low social position in South Africa, which was reified by the great lengths they had to go to in order to secure their most basic human rights.

Past literature regarding self-image and self-esteem considered the contact within one's own community to forge an ethnic awareness of oneself (Porter & Washington, 1993). Contrary to this belief, it is argued that it is in fact contact and competition with outside groups that leads to ethnic awareness. An ethnic solidarity solidifies self-esteem during times of tension, leading to greater understandings of how a person views themselves and their social group (Porter & Washington, 1993). Speaking to their lecturer in the US, a foreign student once noted, "I became Japanese, she said, after I left my country to relocate..." (Alsop, 2002, p. 8). Similarly, participants generally became more aware of their identity when it was considered in this new foreign context. They noted how there were numerous foreigners from many countries in South Africa, but that the word 'foreigner' had become completely synonymous with 'Zimbabwean' in South African discourse. When their nationality came into question, it would normally be accompanied by presupposed notions of failure. In reaction to this, many participants emphasised the great potential their country has, opposing the negative connotations that Zimbabwe had picked up over the years.

A vast incompatibility between participants' anticipated identities and their present day identities came to exist (Zabaleta, 2003). Throughout their childhoods they had dreamed up futures for themselves, or held hopes for a happy home in Zimbabwe. Their expectations were confronted with vastly unforeseen circumstances, and they needed to make sense of



these changes, and of themselves. There exists a complexity and range within this empowerment process which unfurls over a significant period of time (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), and cannot be said to ever be completed. In time, participants started redefining the underpinnings of their self-esteem, allowing them a platform from which to consolidate their identity. A significant factor aiding them in this venture was securing a stable income or supporting their families at home. Once participants felt their responsibility to earn a living was taken care of, they felt much more certain of themselves. This may be linked with notions of manhood. Traditionally, males of the house would take on the role of breadwinner. Whether to support parents, spouses, sisters, siblings or children, Zimbabwean men may view their economic success as a reflection of their manhood. Self-esteem was also manifested in religious beliefs, which will be explored in greater detail in the aspects of refugee identity.

#### **5.2.4 Becoming the “other”.**

One of the most painful experiences participants underwent was the transformation of their identity to that of a foreigner. There is an assumption that there are ‘natural’ places from which people construct their identities (Kibreab, 1999). A person’s story being generated elsewhere creates the condition to be categorised as ‘other’ in a foreign state. This stems from the belief that since a person has a right to take up residence in their home country, safely and securely, the converse should also be true. Any persons taking up residence in a foreign country are thought to infringe on the rights of the local people to live in relative safety and security. If they consider the inclusion of those persons into society as detrimental to their economic, environmental or cultural stability, this ‘right to remain’ as a fundamental human truth can be heavily abused. Instead, it can become the justification to restrict people’s rights to freedom of movement and residence, or the possibility to escape persecution, indignity and insecurity (Kibreab, 1999). This abuse rings true for the case of participants,

who became relegated to a blight on South Africa. Participants sighted prejudiced state authorities and abusive locals as clear evidence of their newly attained foreign status.

Ordinarily people hold multiple identities of themselves, be it student, son, father, professional, man and the like. From the moment a refugee loses their sense of home, their multiplicities so too collapse. Loss of employment, economic status, familial interactions and educational aspirations create the condition for a disheartened singular identity; that of foreigner or refugee (Zabaleta, 2003). Some participants experienced a great shock at the loss of their familial identities, be it father, husband, brother or son. Some participants also experienced a kind of educational atrophy, silencing any thoughts of tertiary education in the future. In sight of their now one-dimensional identity of 'refugee', participants became relegated members of society. The term 'refugee' then constitutes one of the most powerful labels in modern society. Participants' identities were transformed and manipulated by others within the context of public policy and bureaucratic practice (Zetter, 1991). Eventually, they became marginalised to a distant and undeserving 'other', through daily confrontations with disturbing refugee policies and local aggression. When conflicts regarding housing, employment, or social welfare arose in their communities, participants became the most undeserving of protection, and so too the most deserving of harassment.

As a result, participants experienced harassment in their daily lives, at times leading to violence and suppression. Facing xenophobia became the norm for their lives. Xenophobia may be defined as a fear and hatred of foreigners, strangers, or any foreign or strange entity. Fear stems from the notion that locals' jobs, women and resources are threatened by the presence of foreigners. A misconception that all immigrants are illegal aliens fuels this perception (McKnight, 2008). Negative portrayals of asylum seekers also promotes prejudiced behaviour towards Zimbabwean immigrants and refugees. A focus on immigrant deviance and criminality forges a belief that foreigners reside in host nations to take

advantage of the country's economic opportunities. Conversely, focussing on immigrant helplessness and the state's burden to shoulder them emphasises the social loss a host nation experiences due to refugees and immigrants seeking asylum within it (Maneri & ter Wal, 2005), and misrepresents the needs a Zimbabwean refugee requires from South Africa. Whether participants were seen to be failing in South Africa, or succeeding fantastically, it could be construed as negative for locals. Xenophobic attacks on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May, 2008, in Alexandra, Johannesburg, left 62 people dead. Considered one of the worst acts of civil violence experienced since the end of Apartheid, military troops were deployed and Johannesburg was declared a disaster zone (McKnight, 2008). Disasters such as this are fuelled by the misrepresentation of refugees in media and public policy as detrimental burdens of the state, or as devious criminals taking advantage of the South African economy.

Media plays a significant role in the emphasis of Zimbabwean refugees as a foreign invasion. Because media functions as a window to the outside world, its social landscape may become people's perceived realities (Anastasio, Rose, & Chapman, 1999). Media items citing waves of refugees entering a country often become instruments for consensus regarding refugee policies and agendas. As a result, solutions committed to upholding refugee rights and safeguarding the wellbeing of a host society are informed by distorted exaggerations found in mass media (Maneri & ter Wal, 2005). It inevitably provides biased information of social groups by placing an emphasis on inter-group differences (Anastasio et al., 1999), and promotes a harmful local opinion of Zimbabwean refugees. Consequently, the term 'foreigner' has become directly interchangeable with that of 'Zimbabwean' in the lives of many Zimbabwean men who have come to be viewed as a harmful problem for South African prosperity. Participants noted locals' unjust perceptions of Zimbabweans as migrating only for economic reasons. Those who had experienced severe political subjugation or tribal genocide seemed to take this notion personally, since it plainly ignored

their social plight. In order to avoid violence, most participants would avoid talking to locals about political issues, rather maintaining pleasant conversations and sharing easy agreements when possible.

In post-Apartheid South Africa, pivotal elections for parties in 1999 meant that any rights-based arguments in favour of immigration reform was considered dangerous political territory. The risk of losing votes heavily outweighed the need for sound immigration policy changes at the time, and were pushed aside. Former victims of Apartheid now take on the role of victimizers of the vulnerable who come to South Africa in search of a livelihood (Kibreab, 1999). Today, the Zimbabwean refugee is marginalised to become an economic leech of sorts. The manner in which their social group was degraded weighed heavily on participants' sense of self, and ignored the legitimacy of their flight from their home country (Porter & Washington, 1993). South Africa's democracy upholds the ideals of social justice and equality, while concurrently promoting ethnic and racial privileges within its borders. This contradiction serves to fuel competition, confrontation and resistance between perceived ethnicities (Allahar, 2001). Consequently, refugee rights in South Africa are often not realised, due to a delay in processing asylum applications, rife corruption or simply a perception in civil society that refugees are simply voluntary migrants (McKnight, 2008). This was evident in participant accounts of police officials, medical staff and border crossings.

Reception strategies employed by host governments then primarily aim to prevent refugees assimilating into host societies. The herding of refugees into spatially segregated sites is a classic example of this behaviour, and are common practices in most third world countries (Kibreab, 1999). The South African government has thus focussed less on upholding refugee rights and more on containment (McKnight, 2008). The perception of the helplessness of refugees in South Africa and the need for government intervention is

contradicted by the incredible financial and social adversities participants overcame with more hindrance than help from government. It clearly shows that many refugees do not need, or want to live in camps (McDermott Hughes, 1999), and would fare better without government interference.

Immigration authorities, police and security officials retained total power over refugees in Tanzanian settlements (Kibreab, 1999). From the accounts within this study's interviews, it is clear Zimbabwean males suffer a similar misfortune, whether herded in the Lindela Detention Centre or simply in day to day confrontations. Through police abuse of authority, local indifference, and neglectful bureaucratic practices, participants were constantly reminded of their lack of rights. Refugees have been known to be forced to pay upwards of R400 simply to enter Asylum offices. Some are sold fraudulent papers. Police officials are also seen supporting criminals in the victimization of foreigners (McKnight, 2008). The fear of loss of income bridged the need for participants to develop an agreeable reservation to the abuses they were subjected to. Since the security of their families at home depended on the stability of their incomes and their stay in South Africa, they inevitably exchanged their values and rights for their families' welfare.

### **5.3 Aspects of Refugee Identity**

#### **5.3.1 Race and ethnicity.**

Race became a primary identifier for the self-perception of participants, from the time of their economic downfall. Before racial class became the foremost factor for delineating identity, religious ascription was a primary influence on a person's self perception (Smedley, 1998). Race in Africa has now become a significant distinction for social class originating from colonial times, and racial identity has become emphasised due to prejudiced bureaucratic practices thereafter. Participants attributed the downfall of their country in a

large respect to the loss of white-run businesses, after white-owned farms were repatriated by Robert Mugabe's war veterans. From the time of their flight from Zimbabwe, they would come to view themselves in significant racial terms. A large proportion of their employers in South Africa were white, promoting the idea that white people play supportive roles in their lives. This belief in white superiority was also emphasised in the manner in which police officials singled black Zimbabwean refugees out while largely ignoring white Zimbabweans.

The notion of blackness had now become a significant identifier for participants whilst living in South Africa. In 2008, a 14 year old South African boy was harassed and arrested on the way to school because police officials believed his skin was too dark for him to be South African (Venter, 2008). Participants experienced similar issues regarding their race when confronted by prejudiced police practices and local bias. This has forged a focus on ethnicity very much akin to Apartheid deliberations of race. An ethnic slur, 'Makwerekwere', is often used to belittle Zimbabwean refugees. Its meaning varies, but is primarily intended to relate a disgust regarding the darkness of a foreigner's skin, and a pungent smell that surrounds them, consigning them to a sub-human level (Magolego, 2008). The result is such that participants' thoughts of identity have become heavily entrenched in notions of race, primarily due to racist authoritarian tendencies.

### **5.3.2 Religion.**

Current day trends of globalization, economy and politics have created an insecurity among social groups who perceive their existence as being threatened. Participants faced a vast number of threats, both in their home country and in South Africa. As a result, many turned to religion to associate themselves to a group where their social security and sense of certainty can be upheld (Kinnvall, 2004). The person is said to find a home in God at a time when the prospect of a stable home is most uncertain. It is evident from participants' life

stories that religiosity had become a larger part of their identity in the aftermath of their diasporas.

Religion provides strong stories and beliefs entrenching a picture of security for those who have lost the safety of their homes (Kinnvall, 2004). It also allows for a belief in a greater good in the world, despite the evils one has been witness to, as well as an emancipation from suffering. More so, subscribing to a religious belief embracing judgement in the afterlife permits a sense of justice to be upheld in a life which has been marred by injustice. Religion thus became a bastion of strength and righteousness for most participants. It came to inform them as to their responsibilities as a father of a household, or the duties of a faithful husband to his wife. It also allowed them to find a sense of justice when considering Robert Mugabe. For most participants, he had become an effigy of evil whilst at the country's helm, but he had experienced very few repercussions as a result of his actions. The thought that Mugabe might finally meet his fate at the end of his life may have been a great relief to participants.

### **5.3.3 Posttraumatic growth.**

A significant reaction to the stories described by participants is a renewed value for life. Unexpected crisis situations throughout their lives shattered previously easygoing self-perceptions based on taken-for-granted assumptions that the world is a fairly safe, predictable, and controllable place. This sudden change in perspective drew out hitherto undiscovered strengths in the struggle against adversity (Wren-Lewis, 2004). Faced with incredible suffering throughout Zimbabwe's economic downfall, marked by political subjugation, participants were forced to reassess what was important to them, and what meanings they attributed to their lives. Having faced many near brushes with death, it may be said that participants underwent a posttraumatic growth.

Posttraumatic growth is the experience of positive change resulting from a struggle with highly challenging life crises. Consequently, persons may experience an increased appreciation for life, more meaningful personal relationships, a sense of personal strength, a vast shift in priorities, and ultimately, a richer existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). A characteristic result of posttraumatic growth is finding a surprising new skill in coping with difficulties and feeling greater warmth towards people (Wren-Lewis, 2004). Participants related a great wish for equality and peace among people, and emphasised a need for a humbleness of daily living. They have prevailed despite incredible odds, allowing for a strengthened sense of self. Subjected to great trauma, they were able to emerge bearing a love of life previously unknown to them.

In developing literature on posttraumatic growth, reports of positive growth far outweigh reports of psychiatric disorders (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This is contrary to the common sense notion that great suffering leads primarily to inner conflict and dissonance, a notion perhaps reified by a focus on disorder in mainstream clinical psychology (Gergen, 1991). Instead, we may consider that psychological distress and positive growth coexist, forming one from the other (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Finding freedom from suffering and anxiety is the common factor in a large majority of near death experience descriptions (Wren-Lewis, 2004). While participants experienced a deterioration of their political freedoms, they were able to embrace a renewal of personal liberty. Post traumatic growth may be considered an ongoing process (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). In due course, participants' encounters with great tragedy constituted a renewed depth of meaning and beauty in the smallest of things (Wren-Lewis, 2004).

#### **5.3.4 Future deliberations of home.**

The core of the narrative self is bound by the lived past and the anticipated future (Yardley, 2006). After consolidating their past life with their present, participants had to



contend with the notion of their imagined home. All participants proclaimed a strong wish to return to Zimbabwe when circumstances allowed for it. It is clear the relationship between a territory and an identity are significant (Kibreab, 1999). The thought of living a life among loved ones again, in a familiar territory one has a right to, brings a feeling of resolution to the crises a person has faced. The love of home is an archaic theme in literature, as well as within this study's interviews. The sincerity and naturalness of home life, the feeling of being home, the freedom it epitomises, and relatives and friends encompassing it all account for this great longing (Kline, 1898).

The identity people gain from their association to a particular place, however, is not nearly as fundamental as their rights and access to civil liberties within it (Kibreab, 1999). Participants noted how being home affords them all the freedoms they are not privy to as a foreigner, and how simply having the peace of mind that they are in their rightful place brings a great hope to their existence. Socio-political identities are also situational and flexible. A symbolic identity, being from a place, guides many people to identify themselves as nationalists, despite great difficulties in their nation states (Allahar, 2001). Participants had to contend with great governmental difficulties, yet still held onto the notion that Zimbabwe is their home.

Kuns (1981) delineates three types of refugees: Majority-identified refugees, events-alienated refugees, and exiles. Majority-identified refugees side patriotically with their home country, though not with its government. They firmly believe in their conviction that their opposition to events in their home country are shared by the majority of their peers (Kuns, 1981). Half of the participants in this study may fall into this category. They reserve a great hatred for the ruling party, Zanu PF, but remain loyal to the notion that Zimbabweans comprise a great nation. Events-alienated refugees derive an ambivalence towards their nation and peers, possibly due to a past discrimination imposed upon them. The realization of

their rejection by a large section of a nation has relegated them to identify themselves as an unwanted minority within a larger whole (Kuns, 1981). The remaining half of participants may fall into this category. The discrepancies they bore towards their country were primarily rooted in their tribal histories. It was found that participants from Ndebele descent were more inclined to feel alienated from their nation due to a past marked with ethnic genocide and social marginalisation. Lastly, exiles have no wish to identify themselves as part of a nation. They may retain some attachments to the natural scenery of their homelands, though due to some ideological considerations and past disparities their departure and distanced existence seem the logical result of their expulsion (Kuns, 1981). While none of the refugees interviewed presented such a strong feeling of distance from their home, it may be possible that some Zimbabweans ascribe to this feeling.

Due to the strong wish of participants to return to their homes, political solutions emphasising repatriation as a primary goal would serve to respect their desires and quality of life (Beyer, 1981). Repatriation requires great political cooperation in order to convince conflicting parties of the senselessness of their conflicts, and the need for efficacy and political accommodation (Keely, 1996). Interpretations from participants within this study showed that repatriation represents one of the most important solutions to refugee struggles (Kibreab, 1999).

#### **5.4 Reflexivity and the Researcher**

When stories are shared in a conversation or interview, they become shaped by the questions and responses of the person who is listening (Polkinghorne, 1996). Personal and social factors therefore dramatically influence the research process. Instead of upholding the fiction of objectivity, a declaration of the researcher's subjectivities provides an avenue within which to deal with them soundly. This allows the researcher to meet their

subjectivities proactively instead of defensively (Breuer, Mruck, & Roth, 2002). Therefore, for an open, qualitative approach, a reflection of one's own involvement as an interpreter is crucial (Brautigam, 2000).

The experiences we understand as internal or private are attributed to socially constructed social practice and everyday talk (Reichertz & Zielke, 2008). Researchers who study other cultures should therefore explore their homes, wishes and fantasies it provides them in order to gain a context for their understandings (Alsop, 2002). On the researcher's part, it was important to reflect on their presupposed norms of what they consider home. Doing so allowed for a greater understanding of the manner in which the concept of home is constructed, and the blessings of being home which are so easily taken for granted. So too, the significance of the loss which participants experienced when they had to flee theirs may be better understood.

A continuous examination of the researcher's own motivation for the study in question was very important (Brautigam, 2000). The research was conducted in partial fulfilment of a master's degree in research psychology. It was therefore important to keep in mind that the academic discourse the researcher was used to may influence the final interpretation.

Researchers working within social constructionist theory must retain the integrity of the discourse they are involved in while employing their own unique language in order to do so (Motyl, 2010). For these purposes, results primarily focussed on the life stories of participants, while discussions thereafter were more rooted in academic discourse. This allows the reader to gain an understanding of the background in which academic analyses originated from, avoiding the loss of character and richness which thick academic descriptions may suffer from.

When dealing with traumatised persons in research, the examination of one's own feelings of shame or guilt, unconscious sensations and rage that are produced when dealing with traumatisation in research should be looked at closely. The occurrence of counter transference reactions, transposing the researcher's assumed reactions of traumatic events onto the life story of a traumatised person, should be a constant awareness during interviews and interpretations (Brautigam, 2000). The researcher made every effort to avoid presupposed reactions of shame, pity or sadness during interview sessions, but rather attempted to follow the subtle cues of the participant's tone and expression of the time. Indeed, there were many laughs shared throughout the interview process, regarding both comedic and tragic experiences. Many of the most painful stories relayed were considered more as contemplative moments than sorrowful exchanges, and allowed the participants to retain their dignity, instead of experiencing a demeaning exchange of pity while sharing their life stories. While it is inevitable that the researcher's presupposed conceptions filtered through into the final interpretation, being cognoscente of the issue ensured that participants retained maximum control over their stories' narration.

In every conversation power is being negotiated. At times, it may be difficult to represent the views of a participant if those views are directly in conflict with the researcher's assumptions and understandings (Riley, Schouten, & Cahill, 2003). The most significant conflict of interest was the perception several participants held that placed white people in a presupposed position of power. Since the researcher is a white male living in post-Apartheid South Africa, it was difficult to accept these assertions. The notion of relaying results which reified the prejudiced assumptions of a dictatorial regime was an uncomfortable thought to bear. Due to the inclusive nature of the research to allow the active participation of the researcher, declarations of white superiority were probed repeatedly in interviews. Despite challenging these perceptions outright, participants were very happy to defy the wishes of the

researcher in considering race as merely incidental distinctions of social class. They displayed a great deal of power within the interaction, ultimately leading to a better understanding of their context when relaying justifications for their beliefs.

Disagreements between the researcher and the participant may then be seen as positive points, since they are opportunities to resolve conflicts. Instead of viewing these disagreements as pitfalls, a positive identity may grow out of the experience such that the researcher gains an understanding of the context in which the participant has accepted his perspective based on his life events (Riley et al., 2003).

Shaping a story also imposes a kind of framework within which twists and turns, themes and metaphors are identified. This framework is governed by the researcher's intentions they have towards their audience, as well as their participants. It informs future judgements of what to retain in the final interpretation and what to discard (Yardley, 2006). It was therefore imperative that the researcher interrogated his reflexive accounts of research interviews. This allows for an exploration of the multiplicities found in experiences. Celebrating contradictions in this manner serves to elucidate a wider range of considerations, and ultimately a richer final interpretation (Riley et al., 2003). Notes and interpretations were repeatedly returned to for reflection throughout the research process. One of the primary contradictions identified was the belief that participants experienced a great loss of self-esteem, yet were also seen to undergo a significant posttraumatic growth in which a greater awareness of self was attained. Upon further reflection, the disparity of this loss and subsequent gain of self-image was of great benefit to the final interpretation. It not only highlighted the turbulence of participants' experiences, but also the significant strengths required to emerge from such perplexing circumstances with a positive outcome. It reminded the researcher of the length and depth of the life stories shared, and that each story encapsulated many years of contemplation prior to the telling.

## 5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The strength of psychological research lies in its ability to explain our personal experience (Roth, 2003). It was the purpose of this study to create a research output which would illuminate the multiplicities of the refugee's personal experiences from their past migrations through to their future deliberations. A pitfall of the study was that all these considerations took place in English. While participants' English skills were very strong owing to their time in the service industry and their sound educational backgrounds, future studies should focus on creating research interactions in their mother tongues. Not only would this allow for more direct interpretations from participants, but also open research up to millions of Zimbabwean refugees who are not fluent in English.

Labels assume considerable power within institutional settings, justifying the nature of people considered as refugees, and assuming their best interests on their behalf. Institutional assumptions such as these may have severe consequences in the lives of both the refugees and the locals residing in host nations. The manner in which governments stereotype the identity of the refugee have traumatic results in many people's lives (Zetter, 1991). Xenophobic tendencies and continued violence targeting refugees shows there is a significant need for improved immigration policies and bureaucratic practices (McKnight, 2008). Classifying refugees primarily by the needs of the country they are residing in ignores their experiences of a whole life in their home country and their future wishes for it (Portes et al., 1978). This study proposes that redundant immigration policies be reviewed. Not only are concepts such as refugee camps and deportation excessive in spending, but also ineffectual in alleviating any difficulties refugees or governmental institutions may experience.

The study also recommends investigations into the nature of public discourse regarding refugees. Cultures are dynamic and capable of change (Roth, 2003). Political rhetoric, mass media, and local deliberations within South Africa relating to refugees are

significant points of departure for negotiating positive changes with regard to the perceived effects refugees have on South Africa. Media is a powerful creator of public opinion, able to influence great changes on the ground with the smallest of cues and representations from private and governmental relations (Anastasio et al., 1999). Future research into marketing strategies focussing on rehabilitating public opinion of foreigners in South Africa should be considered as pivotal research opportunities for social change. Bureaucratic practice is also capable of transforming refugee identities for the betterment of public wellbeing (Zetter, 1991). Research which is able to identify discrepancies in political rhetoric disregarding the rights of refugees or using them as scapegoats for inefficient service delivery should also be investigated.

Lastly, early warning systems for potential influxes of refugee flows should be considered as a primary prevention strategy to the health and safety of millions of Africans. It is common practice for refugee migration to increase during amplified political turmoil, election years and increased economic hardships. Identifying these social shifts and relating them to anticipate increases in migrations across borders allows for host governments to be much more prepared to uphold human rights set out for refugees (Keely, 1996).

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The refugee may be considered as the central figure of our current political atmosphere, since its symbol epitomises the drive towards statelessness fuelled by globalization today. Our desperate desires to return the world to a state of rigid borders, alignments and symmetries is played out in the relationships we share with refugees (Kibreab, 1999). Black male Zimbabwean refugees currently living in South Africa have undergone incredible migration histories wrought with economic and social crises, and have

overcome significant difficulties to take up residence in their host country in order to escape persecution and support themselves and their families (Martin & Lari, 2004).

At first they were affected by a great loss in self-confidence when their futures were impeded (Kline, 1898). After entering South Africa, they also experienced a new sense of ‘otherness’, consequently demanding for a reassessment of what it means to be a black male Zimbabwean. Race and religion became significant signifiers of identity, and interpretations observed participants undergoing a constant process of posttraumatic growth due to the adversities they had faced and overcome. Recommendations relayed a need for the revision of refugee policies and practices generally, as well as an investigation into the positive benefits mass media campaigns could play in rehabilitating the image of the Zimbabwean refugee (Zetter, 1991).



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## **Appendix A: Consent Form**

### A Qualitative Exploration of the Social Construction of Identity of Black Male Zimbabwean Refugees Currently Living in South Africa

Thank you very much for considering taking part in this study. This letter of informed consent will provide information about the research, what it is about, why it is being done, and what it means for you the participant. If there are any other questions please do not hesitate to ask.

#### The purpose of the study

This study is about understanding what it means to become a refugee. Information about refugees is normally only about the suffering and problems of the refugee or about the problems a country has with refugees. Instead, this study would like to hear the whole story of what it was like for you to become a refugee, from when you were a citizen of your country living in Zimbabwe to where you are now living as a refugee in South Africa. It is important that you are in control of your own story so that this study can inform the government and its people better when it comes to understanding refugees.

#### Procedures

The study will be using interviews to hear your story. At a time and place that is good for you, the researcher will sit down with you, listen to your story and record it with audio tape. He will then go home and write it down exactly as you've spoken in the interview. He will then try to interpret what you have said to understand what it is like to become a refugee in South Africa. When he is done with this, you will meet with him another time to tell him what you think of his interpretation. This will be the last time that you will have to meet together, to make sure that you agree with what the study will say about your story. Including this first meeting where introductions are made and informed consent is agreed to now, you will then meet three times with the researcher in total: Today to meet and agree to the study, a second time to meet and record your story, and a third time to hear what the researcher thought of your story. This will all take place in the next two months. When the study is complete, it will be published and printed in an academic journal for other researchers to read.

### Potential risks

Because the study is about you and your story, the main risk is your feelings when you are telling it. Your story might be a difficult one to tell or might be very personal, so telling it to a researcher might be somewhat uncomfortable. Because of this, you are in control all the time and can stop the interview or leave at any time. You can also ask any questions, phone the researcher at any time or cancel your agreement to take part in the research.

### Potential benefits

To thank you for your help and participation, the researcher will provide you with a small sum of money to cover possible transport and to thank you for your time. The story you tell will also help future researchers and Government officials to understand what it is like to become a refugee so that more services are given to refugees living in South Africa. Your story will also help to show the strength of refugees instead of only their weaknesses in research.

### Your rights

The study will do its utmost to make sure that your rights are upheld. You take part in the study on a voluntary basis which means that you can withdraw from it at any time for any reason without any negative consequences. You also have a right to voice any problems or issues at any time, either in interview times or by telephone.

### Confidentiality

All the information that comes from the study will be treated as confidential. This means that the records and work that come from the study will be handled by the main researcher only, will be stored in a secure safe facility, and that your identity will always remain anonymous. If you should choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all your information will be destroyed so that your privacy may be kept.

### Access to the researcher

If there are any questions, problems, or anything else about the study, you can contact the main researcher at any time for any reason. This is your right of access to the researcher, which means you will always be able to have control over your participation.

Name of Principal Researcher	Signature	Date
Place:		
Name of participant	Signature	Date
Place:		

If you are happy with what has been explained so far, you are happy that you understand what it means and you are happy with the first meeting with the researcher, then please sign above showing that you agree to give informed consent to take part in this study.