

# SANS PAPIERS

**The Social and Economic Lives of  
Young Undocumented Migrants**

*Alice Bloch, Nando Sigona and Roger Zetter*

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# 1

## *Researching Everyday 'Illegality': An Introduction*

On 15 June 2012, standing in the garden of the White House in front of a crowd of journalists, the US President Barack Obama announced that he had signed an executive order to suspend deportations with immediate effect and to grant renewable two-year residence permits to young undocumented migrants brought up in the United States. The executive order benefited undocumented migrants under 30 who arrived in the US before the age of 16, lived in the US continuously for five years, had no criminal record and had graduated from high school or served in the US military. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme is an interim solution which came at a strategic time in the run-up to the presidential election and after over ten years of unsuccessful attempts by the legislators to find a compromise, firstly on the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors) Act and, more recently, on a comprehensive immigration reform. With all its limitations – including the underlining politics of deservingness that excludes a large segment of the undocumented youth population – the measure, in its first year, benefited over 500,000 young migrants, and more will become eligible as the programme operates on a rolling basis. DACA gives undocumented youth an opportunity ‘to remain in the country without fear of deportation, allows them to apply for work permits, and increases their opportunities for economic and social incorporation’ (Gonzales and Terriquez 2013: 1). To explain his decision to the American people and his voters, Barack Obama then said:

These are young people who study in our schools, they play in our neighborhoods, they're friends with our kids, they pledge allegiance to our flag. They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper.

Other undocumented migrants, however, are met with a much tougher approach. In fact, under the Obama administration, the forced removal of unauthorised residents has reached an unprecedented level: 2 million since Obama took office (Gonzales 2013).

Meanwhile in the United Kingdom, Prime Minister David Cameron, in a speech at the Institute for Government in London in October 2011, announced his intention to crack down on illegal immigration, stating that he ‘wants everyone in the country [to help] reclaim our borders’, going so far as to urge people to report ‘suspected illegal immigrants’. The latter invitation led to thousands of allegations – 28,243 in the third quarter of 2012 alone (Home Affairs Committee 2013: 7) – to the launch of the National Allegations Database, which went live on 30 September 2012, and to a record number of forced and assisted removals. However, in parallel, through the Case Resolution Programme established in 2007 to clear the backlog of pending asylum and non-asylum cases, the UK government has also regularised the position of tens of thousands of unauthorised residents, in particular families with children and young people (Sigona and Hughes 2012; Sigona 2012a).

Moreover, despite the use of forced and voluntary removal increasing significantly over the 2000s in both countries (in the US +110 per cent and in the UK +120 per cent), the stock of undocumented migrants was affected only marginally or not at all. Over the same period the population of undocumented migrants in fact grew, which, as Sigona and Hughes argue (2012), indicates that undocumented migrants are more likely to stay for good – or at least for a long time – in the country of residence in a situation of legal precariousness, particularly if they are children or young people. The phenomenon of undocumented migration and undocumented migrants is not going to disappear, making it increasingly important to understand their heterogeneous experiences. This book sets out to fill a gap in the literature by offering an in-depth insight into the everyday lives of young undocumented migrants. The book uncovers, through the voices of these young migrants, the ways in which they exist in a protracted limbo and how, as young people, they are largely unable to develop personally and contribute more broadly to society in the positive and productive ways they imagined and sometimes longed for.

In this introductory chapter we set out the book’s aims, highlight the significance of irregular migration by presenting data on the scale of undocumented migration, provide an explanation of the methodological and empirical basis of Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, and finish with an outline of

the book's contents. Starting with the aim of the book, we offer original insights into the lives of young undocumented migrants living in England about whom little is known. While the focus is on experiences in one country, their experiences echo those of undocumented migrants in other Western democracies and globally. In reality, though, irregular migration – once a phenomenon of the wealthier countries of the global north and west – is now a global issue, with most irregular migration occurring between countries in the developing world (Koser 2005). It is a global issue also because nation-states co-operate at the national, regional and supranational levels to try to control immigration flows, including flows of irregular migrants.

The causes of irregular migration are complex and multi-faceted. Uneven development, economic opportunities, survival migration, social networks, family reunion and exile are all included in the constellation of factors that result in irregular migration or in individuals becoming irregular. Some people are born into irregularity and enter their adult lives occupying this precarious situation; others enter into it as part of a migration project and some fall into it without ever realising it or out of desperation due, for example, to their need to avoid returning to a country where they fear persecution. Most irregular migrants initially enter countries legally (e.g. on visitor or student visas) and then overstay their visas or breach their conditions on entry (Koser 2005). Whatever the routes to irregularity, being *sans papiers* (without papers), as this book will demonstrate, permeates all aspects of migrants' lives, significantly reduces their access to economic and social opportunities, and renders individuals vulnerable to different forms of exploitation, exclusion and marginalisation.

Within the academic literature, irregular migration and irregular migrants occupy spaces in a number of disciplines, including sociology, geography, politics, social policy, anthropology and law. The literature that emerged from North America in the 1970s focused mainly on migration from Mexico to the US and identified 'structural determinants' (Portes 1978: 477) as precipitating irregular migration – both the sending and the receiving countries benefiting from it; it also stressed the paradoxical impact of immigration control and enforcement practices which, instead of reducing in-flows, produce enforced immobility and trap unauthorised migrants in the country of residence (Massey and Espinosa 1997; see also Carling 2002). Migrant-receiving countries benefit from cheap and flexible labour while migrant-sending countries benefit from the partial

alleviation of social and economic uncertainty and inequality (see Bloch and Chimienti 2011; Portes 1978). As time has progressed, there is a greater diversity in terms of who irregular migrants are and their routes to undocumentedness. Moreover, migration, with or without papers, has also become a rite of passage and/or an adventure not structurally but, instead, socially determined and perpetuated by migrant chains and new geographies of migration (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011; Chavez 1992; Hagan 2008; Koser and Pinkerton 2002).

The complexity of motivations, causes and consequences results in tranches of literature in different academic disciplines with multiple orientations (Ambrosini 2013; Bloch and Chimienti 2011; Bosniak 2006; Joppke 2010; Shackar 2009). However, in spite of a burgeoning of literature in this area in the last few decades, little is known about the specific case of young adults as undocumented migrants. Instead, research has focused on children, unaccompanied minors and the 1.5 and second generations, or merges undocumented migrants into one group, rather than differentiating by age. Age is important in terms of aspirations, ambitions, family formation, education, training and careers. This book sets out to address this gap in knowledge by examining, in detail, the experiences of young people aged 18–31 who are living as undocumented migrants. Throughout the book, we contextualise people's experiences and the ways in which they frame these experiences, through the lens of young adulthood.

### *The Scale of Undocumented Migration: Counting the Uncountable*

Posing the dilemma of 'counting the uncountable', Vollmer (2008) captures many of the contradictions about who the undocumented are and thus how many there are. Inevitably, given the complexity of immigration categories and of residence and work statuses, evidence on the numbers of undocumented migrants is unreliable and contradictory (McKenzie and Siegel 2013). The UK government adopted a standardised system of measurement (Woodbridge 2005), but this is problematic not only because of the categories used, but also because it relies on data sources which are proxies for immigration status. By definition, accurate data cannot exist for a hidden population, the more so for undocumented *young* migrants for whom no data have been found. Only Sigona and Hughes (2012) have attempted to disaggregate by age; they have offered an estimate of 120,000 irregular migrants aged under 19 living in the UK, of

whom 60,000–65,000 were UK-born. However, we know nothing about the numeric or demographic profiles of the young people aged 18–31 who are the subject of this book. In this section we build a picture of the numbers of undocumented migrants, both in the UK and globally, and critique the methodologies used for estimating these numbers.

In her multi-national survey of unauthorised migrants, Levinson (2005: 28) cites Home Office data on *enforcement* statistics as a proxy for undocumented/unauthorised migrants. The estimate given is 123,300 irregular migrants in 2002, an increase from the 1996 statistic of 56,000. However this figure is certainly a very large undercount, since it includes over 50,000 persons who were refused entry at port and removed, but does not include overstayers, other irregular categories or those who are undetected. Levinson cites International Organization for Migration (2003) estimates of 'anywhere up to 1 million' in the UK (2005: 28).

The Home Office, under political pressure to respond to the strident anti-immigration lobby, developed a complex methodology to estimate the undocumented migrant population. Based on the study by Woodbridge (2005) for the Home Office and the Office of National Statistics, it was estimated that the *unauthorised* (note that this is not necessarily the same as being *undocumented*) population in 2001 lay between 310,000 and 570,000, with a central estimate of 430,000 (Woodbridge 2005; see also Vollmer 2008). The methodology used was problematic in several respects. First it was based on Census rather than on immigration data. Secondly, it did not include children born in the UK to irregular migrant couples. Thirdly the Census is cross-sectional and therefore only records the stock of residents/migrants at a single point in time. Finally, departures are not recorded and so the data fail to capture the flows and fluidity of migration, which have been particularly significant given the intensity of migration to and from the UK in recent years.

In addition to the figure of 430,000 given as a central estimate (Woodbridge 2005), there were, at that time, 175,000 quasi-legal migrants whose right to remain depended on the future determination of their asylum status, and might account for some 50,000 to 80,000 additional unauthorised migrants, as well as the category of illegal entrants (other than asylum-seekers). Conversely, as a later study pointed out (Gordon et al. 2009), statistics for the number of asylum-seekers present in the UK in 2001 would account for 286,000 failed asylum-seekers in the country, almost two-thirds of the total central estimate offered by Woodbridge (2005).



Using a different methodology, the study by Gordon et al. (2009) reviewed and updated the Home Office figure, adding an estimate of UK-born children of irregular migrants. This study produced a central estimate of 618,000 and a range of between 417,000 and 863,000 undocumented migrants at the end of 2007, of whom the largest single category are thought to be visa overstayers. We can conclude that the numbers are quite sizeable, although the tightening of border controls and visa requirements, together with the increasing level of removal in recent years – some 93,500 from 2008–13 and 135,000 voluntary departures over the same period – suggest that numbers may not necessarily be increasing.

Estimates also exist about the numbers of undocumented migrants at the global level. The International Organization for Migration (2010) estimated in 2010 that, of the 214 million international migrants in the world, 10 to 15 per cent (21.4–32.1 million) were in an irregular situation. However, calculations of these global flows of irregular migration vary widely. The Council of Europe estimated in 2002 that 30 million people crossed international borders without authorisation every year. By contrast, a 2004 estimate by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) put the flow of irregular migrants at between 2 and 4.5 million every year; this is equivalent to between one third and one half of the world's 6 to 9 million annual migrants (cited in Koser 2005). Within Europe, the Clandestino Project's (2009) findings suggest a decline in the numbers of irregular migrants during the first decade of the 2000s. The reasons for the decline are threefold: firstly, EU enlargement by default regularised some Eastern European migrants who had been living without status; secondly, national regularisation programmes again legitimised many migrants; and, thirdly, increased international policing and co-operation halted some unauthorised flows (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler 2009; Kraler and Rogoz 2011; Triandafyllidou 2010). By 2008, estimates of the numbers of undocumented migrants for 27 European countries were between 1.9 and 3.8 million, which represented between 0.39 and 0.77 per cent of the total population (Clandestino Project 2009).

The Clandestino Project (2009) highlights the emphasis placed on unauthorised and/or clandestine entrants within policy and public discussions of irregular immigration flows – that is, migrants crossing borders without authorisation. There are, in fact, at least three different types of flow: geographic, demographic and status-related. *Geographic flows* are those that dominate the public and political arena – people moving across sea or land borders without authorisation. However, they

also include outflows of irregular migrants leaving countries, a trend on which almost no data exist. *Demographic flows* include the birth and death of those with an irregular residence status. *Status-related flows* indicate the movement between legal and irregular status. However, the Clandestino Project report also notes that the flow from irregular to regular status has been more significant in the EU than the opposite flow (regular to irregular) largely due to the regularisation effect of enlargement (2009: 6–7). In Chapter 2, we provide a detailed overview of the legal and policy frameworks in operation and of the focus of policy-makers on curtailing unauthorised entrants through in-country sanctions that include high-profile raids and deportations.

The data suggest that large variations in the methodologies used are all problematic. Apart from the speculative nature of these estimates, a key point to be stressed is that they refer to the *total* undocumented migrant population, with the exception of Sigona and Hughes (2012), not to the number of undocumented *young* migrants (however defined) who are the subject of our study.

### *Methods and Methodology*

The book draws on data from 75 in-depth interviews and testimonies with young people (aged 18–31) living irregularly – that is, without any legal rights to reside in the UK at the time of their interview. Interviews were carried out with migrants from China, Brazil, Ukraine and Zimbabwe, and with Kurds from Turkey. The five countries were selected because they provided variations of experience based on colonial linkages (Zimbabwe); migration from a discriminated-against minority (Kurds from Turkey); long migration histories and more-established community organisation in the host setting (China, Zimbabwe, Turkey) and new migrations – consequently with fewer community-based activities and networks (Brazil and Ukraine). Moreover, a variety of motives for migration were evident alongside the different routes and strategies for coming into the UK, including seeking asylum, the use of visas, using forged documents and clandestine entry.

Interviews were carried out in London, the North West and the West Midlands by interviewers with the appropriate first-language skills. Language was important either because a number of interviewees did not speak English or were not sufficiently proficient in English to participate

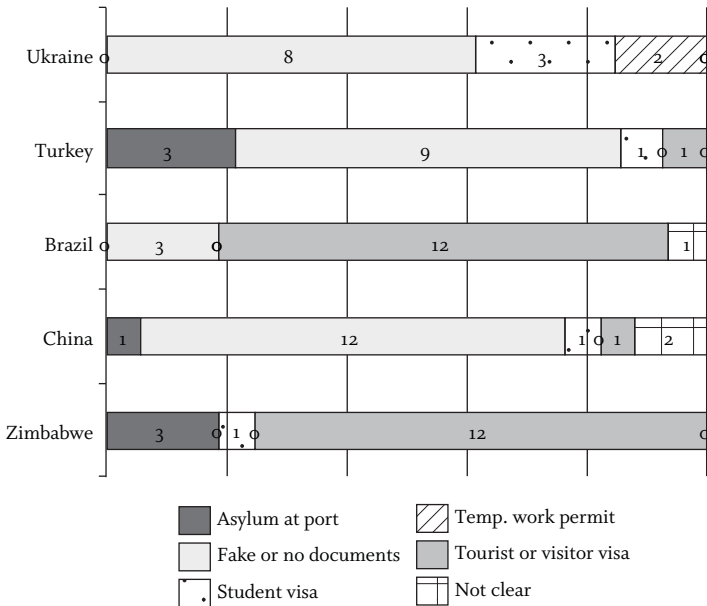


Figure 1.1 Entry routes into the UK by country of origin (N=75)

Source: Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2011: 1293).

in an in-depth interview or because they preferred to use their first language. Therefore belonging to the same language community enabled access to people with differing levels of English, which was important for our understanding of the impact of language on the experiences of irregular migrants. We were also aware of the complex issues involved in the positioning of the community researchers as ‘insiders’. For our research, in addition to linguistic imperatives, community researchers from the same linguistic and often ethnic group enabled access to research participants and a level of trust and openness that may not have otherwise been achievable (Chavez 2008; Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

Within the concept of ‘insider’ there are different relational positions that include ‘total insiders’ – those who share multiple identities of race, class or gender and/or profound experiences, such as war, with the interviewees – and ‘partial insiders’ – who share one or just a few identities with the research participants and so maintain an element of separation from the research participants (Chavez 2008; see also Carling, Bivand Erdal and Ezzati 2013). Although the positioning of the researcher in relation to participants varied – in some interviews there was shared

gender, in others shared experiences of discrimination and/or political persecution, some shared ethnicity, some shared class backgrounds – they significantly did not share an undocumented status and, as we shall see, this had a profound impact on identity and kept the community researchers slightly separate, regardless of other shared characteristics and identities, from the research subject.

Employing interviewers from within the 'community' to carry out the fieldwork enabled us to diversify our routes to potential interviewees and thus to depend less on the more formal and visible community structures and organisations accessible to the university-based research team. The aim was to diversify the sample by using multiple access points for snowballing in order to obtain a more heterogeneous sample than would have been possible had it derived from fewer networks (Bloch 2007; Penrod, Bray Preston, Cain and Stark 2003). The different routes into communities were more accessible to those with the relevant language skills and a greater awareness of cultural specificities. However, using 'insiders' for fieldwork is not without its limitations, as the work by Song and Parker (1995) and Gunaratnam (2003) demonstrates. On balance, though, for our project, interviewers who were from the same ethnic community and spoke the same language not only solved the practical difficulties of communication but also provided an essential interface for the research in terms of network-building and trust among a group that is not only hard to reach but potentially extremely vulnerable.

The undocumented status of our participants makes them particularly vulnerable (Düvell, Triandafyllidou and Vollmer 2010). Ethical considerations informed all aspects of the data collection and subsequent dissemination. Throughout the project we complied with the British Sociological Association ethical guidelines and the Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice developed by the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. Participants were fully informed about the study and the use of the data. The interviews were recorded but it was made clear to interviewees that they could stop at any point, ask for the recorder to be switched off or decide not to continue with the interview. Extensive training was carried out with the community researchers, including sessions devoted to ethical issues to ensure the maintenance of the highest ethical standards – informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Trust was an important aspect of the process and high ethical standards created trust and therefore facilitated participation in the project.

In the absence of a sampling frame, we set quotas for key explanatory variables, including gender, age and length of time in the UK. Table 1.1 shows that, in the final sample of 75, we achieved a reasonably even distribution.

Table 1.1 Main characteristics of the sample (N = 75)

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Number</i>
Gender	
Female	35
Male	40
Country of origin	
Zimbabwe	16
Brazil	16
Turkey/Kurdistan	14
China	16
Ukraine	13
Region of the UK	
London	42
North West	17
West Midlands	16
Age	
18–24	34
25–31	41
Length of time in Britain	
3 years or less	36
More than 3 years	39

As Table 1.2 shows, ‘region’ was less evenly distributed than the other variables. One reason was that, for some groups, there was relatively little residence outside London, which corroborates with Gordon et al.’s (2009) estimate that two-thirds of undocumented migrants lived in London. The second possible reason was that the networks were so hidden outside London that we were unable to access them, despite persistent efforts, partnerships with organisations, snowballing and cold-calling.

In the final sample, 12 interviewees – six men and six women – had children in Britain and three women were pregnant at the time of the interview. Four people had children elsewhere and one had a child in Britain and one in Brazil. Moreover, the age of arrival varied, as Figure 1.2 shows, though most people had arrived in the UK aged between 18 and 24.

The non-probability basis of the sample does not allow us to generalise to the population of young undocumented migrants as a whole. However,

Table 1.2 Regional profile of the sample by country of origin (N=75)

	<i>London</i>	<i>North West</i>	<i>West Midlands</i>	<i>Total</i>
Ukrainian	10	3	0	13
Brazilian	10	6	0	16
Chinese	7	0	9	16
Zimbabwean	5	6	5	16
Turkish/Kurdish	10	2	2	14
Total each region	42	17	16	75

Source: Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2009: 117).

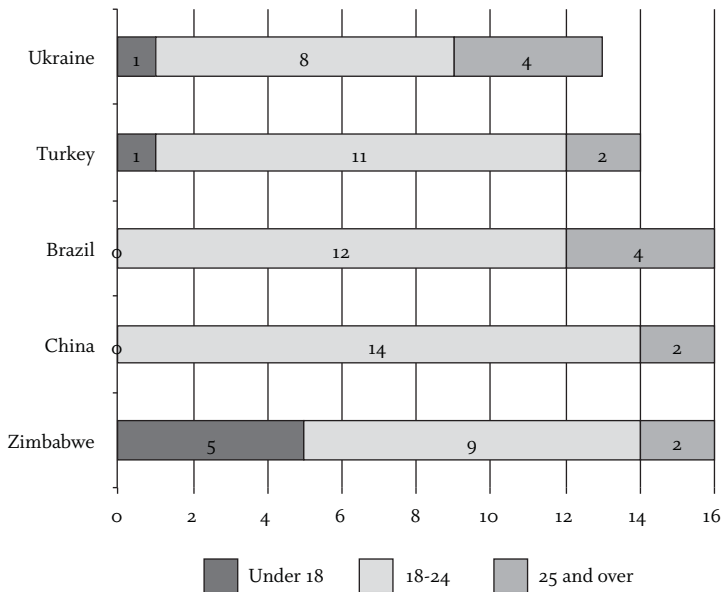


Figure 1.2 Age on arrival in Britain by country of origin (N=75)

this is a sizeable study for a qualitative project and the largest of its kind to date in the UK. Moreover, because sampling was based on the use of diverse networks as starting points (see Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2009 for more details of the methodology) we were able obtain a more heterogeneous profile of interviewees than would have been the case had we used more limited starting points for our sampling. Table 1.3 illustrates how we accessed our Zimbabwean interviewees in the three regions where fieldwork took place and illustrates the varied range of access points to research participants.

Table 1.3 Contact routes for Zimbabwean interviewees by UK region

<i>London</i>	<i>West Midlands</i>	<i>Manchester</i>
MDC Central London	Pentecostal Church	2 via Reach North West
Yarlswood Befriender Network	Faith-group networks	2 via interviewers' community contacts
2 via Zimbabwe Association	African Community Council for the Regions	Faith-group networks
London Borough of Islington – Social Services	African Community Council for the Regions/Barnados	Zimbabwe Association
	African Community Council for the Regions/Red Cross	

Source: Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2009: 118).

Access points among Ukrainians and Brazilians included community organisations, social networking sites, faith groups and community researcher contacts. For Chinese undocumented migrants, cold-calling on street-sellers was an additional successful route, alongside community groups, interviewee contacts and community research leads. Among Kurds from Turkey, approaching people at a festival led to research interviews, as did approaching community groups, a human-rights organisation and snowballing through community researcher contacts. The diversity of starting points, in our view, enables us to present a methodologically robust account of the experiences of young undocumented migrants in England.

### *How the Book is Organised*

This book provides a rare insight into the lived experiences and everyday lives of young undocumented migrants, from their own perspective. In taking a qualitative approach, we recognise the importance of individual framings and interpretations and the ways in which personal biography shapes experiences. In the substantive chapters of the book we shed light on the intersections of young people's narratives with the policy frameworks that shape their experiences, and outline the broader theoretical concepts that inform the field of study. In this section, we outline the key areas covered in each of the remaining chapters of the book.

*Chapter 2* provides part of the book's overall contextualisation. Drawing on the academic and policy discourse, mainly from the United States, Australia, Canada and Europe, it examines the globalisation of migration within which the phenomenon of irregularity has been framed. The chapter explores the label 'undocumented', the mechanisms through which some forms of mobility are irregularised, and how 'illegality' has been constructed in Western liberal democracies. Building on these themes, the chapter then discusses the emerging global governance of irregular immigration flows, placing UK policy and practice within the wider context of the European Union's immigration regimes.

*Chapter 3* further develops the conceptual and contextual framework of the book. It expands the previous discussion on the legal and political production of 'illegality' by focusing on how migrants experience being undocumented and how immigration status intersects with social characteristics such as age and gender. It also lays the basis for the analysis of migrant agency in the condition of irregularity and the significance of youth as a factor shaping migrant agency at key moments in the migration project.

*Chapter 4* focuses on arrival and settlement and examines the ways in which young people become undocumented and are then socialised into irregularity. The chapter draws out the diverse ways in which these processes occur and their intersections with other experiences, particularly the role of youth as a factor for migration; a way of shaping the circumstances and characteristics of migration projects is also explored.

*Chapter 5* has as its focus the labour market and, more specifically, the experiences of work and the strategies or tactics of young undocumented migrants within the context of the economic environment, policy climate and status implications. Key themes here are the lack of choice and the uncertainty in the labour market, migrants' dependence on work within the ethnic enclave or ethnic-minority niches, and the centrality of social networks, both in terms of job search strategies and support during periods of unemployment. Issues of exploitation and racism also surface in several migrants' accounts, though there are also examples of individual agency and incremental changes.

*Chapter 6* explores the social lives and networks of young undocumented migrants, both in the UK and transnationally. The issue of trust surfaces in most accounts, in relation both to the fear of betrayal, which inevitably makes people diffident and cautious in their social interactions, and to the sense of guilt that affects their interactions with other people, with whom



they cannot be completely open. Trust also shapes migrants' relations to space and mobility. From the narratives, a map of safe, more or less accessible and forbidden places – that is, geographies of undocumentedness – emerges, whose shape varies in relation to different individual experiences and positionalities. In this chapter we also explore the role of different community and faith groups in the lives of young undocumented migrants, showing how the size and settlement patterns among the five groups researched affects the extent to which community and faith-based groups exist.

*Chapter 7* focuses on youth, legal status and futures. In this chapter we address the ways in which young people see their future, and how they express their aspirations, hopes and fears. One central concern is the way in which immigration status intersects with young lives and narratives of their future, and the extent to which being undocumented erases the idea of the future.

*Chapter 8* concludes the book and looks both backwards and forwards in assessing past and current policies. In this final chapter we situate the experiences of young undocumented migrants within the wider policy frameworks and political discourses in the UK, and in relation to the broader issues of employment and human rights. We consider the ways in which policy and the inability to access rights has left this group of young people marginalised, excluded and unable to obtain the basic protections offered to others in society. In the conclusion we highlight the differences and commonalities in the everyday lives of this group of undocumented migrants and reflect on the ways in which youth is one of the aspects that defines their experiences.

## 2

# *Migration Dynamics, Irregular Migration and the Governance of 'Illegality'*

The context of this book is defined by a new era of global migration. Highlighted in two UN High-Level Dialogues (UN 2006, 2013), this phenomenon is propelled by complex processes and patterns of people on the move, demarcated by both a volume of migrants and a diversity of ethnic and national origins (Vertovec 2007) unfamiliar even a decade ago, and notable for its profound impacts on the destination countries and localities. This chapter explores this broader context and the emerging global governance of irregular immigration flows in which the stories and experiences of young undocumented migrants are situated.

First, the chapter considers the wider academic and policy discourse on the globalisation of migration within which the phenomenon of irregularity has been framed. The second part of the chapter, and core to the book, seeks to understand the mechanisms through which some forms of mobility are irregularised and the production of 'illegality' in Western liberal democracies. It discusses the label 'undocumented' – how it has emerged from these broader global trends, the vocabulary associated with the label and how it has become inscribed in immigration regimes and, more specifically, within immigration policy and practice in the UK.

### *Globalisation and Re-Bordering: Migrating Into Irregularity*

Highly differentiated patterns and processes of international migration, and a new political discourse on migration, form the starting points for this chapter. The shorthand terms 'new migration' and 'mixed migration flows' are often used to capture the complexity of contemporary international

migration and, within this frame, new labels and typologies – such as ‘the asylum/migration nexus’, the ‘asylum/development nexus’ and ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’ migration – are established to designate more specific categories and forms of the ‘new migration’ (Castles and Van Hear 2005; Zetter 2007). Indeed, particular features are the fluidity of categories and statuses and the relatively large number of ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’ migrants compared to previous episodes.

Three interrelated dimensions of this global perspective, somewhat in contradiction with each other, are pertinent to this book. First, increasing international migration is a salient feature of globalisation: it is both a product of transnational social networks and a platform for the transformation and consolidation of these networks (Castles and Miller 2009; Duany 2011; Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Faist and Özveren 2004; Garip 2008; Jordan and Düvell 2002; Smith and Johnston 2002). Rather than intra-regional, the ‘reach’ of migration is increasingly global (south-north as well as south-south and north-north, but relatively little north-south), and it is stimulated by the progressively more complex and sophisticated interplay of social and economic decision-making (Duany 2011; Haug 2008).

New ‘migrations’ mostly, but not exclusively, originate in the south, but they have substantially impacted on the countries of the ‘north’. Thus, while much research focuses on the developmental impacts of economic globalisation on the global south, in terms of structural adjustment, brain drain and poverty alleviation, the impacts on developed and post-industrial receiving economies are equally diverse and profound, but are manifest in different ways (European Commission 2006; Jordan and Düvell 2002; Schierup, Hansen and Castles 2006). This book investigates particular features of this spatial reconfiguration of the new migration – the presence of young people and the impacts of irregular legal status on their lives, livelihoods and social relations.

Second, the conjuncture of globalisation and international migration is both the cause and the consequence of a fundamental restructuring of the world’s economy, framed around neo-liberal political-economy priorities. The linkage between economic and migratory processes of globalisation has had significant consequences for the immigration/labour-market nexus in post-industrial societies. Challenging traditional models of labour-market structure, the contemporary characteristics across all post-industrial economies display a strong tendency towards ‘segmentation’, more fluid structures and a reliance – at least in part – on low-wage,

unskilled labour mainly supplied by migrants prepared to work under increasingly exploitative conditions (Castles 2011).

Within Europe, the 're-bordering and de-bordering' of the European Union (De Giorgi 2010) in order to facilitate the free movement of (migrant) labour within the Union following the Single European Act 1986 (SEA), the Maastricht Treaty on European Union 1993 (TEU), and the Schengen Agreement/Convention 1990/1995, represent the early stages of this opening up of intra-European labour markets to conform to the 'new economic realities' (European Commission 2006: 5, 9).

However, the freeing up of Europe's labour markets had immediate and paradoxical implications for immigration and immigration policy. The flexibility and segmentation of the emerging labour markets constituted an entry point for migrants from outside the European Union who were prepared to supply the increasing demand for unskilled, low-wage labour which Europeans were reluctant to satisfy, but which was required to fuel the economic boom during the first decade of this century. The interplay between restructured labour markets and increasingly complex immigration controls and categories created the interstices within which undocumented migrants found space. Replicated in – some might argue, led by – the UK, labour-market restructuring had a dramatic effect not only on the opportunities for migrant labour, but also on the diminution of their working conditions and wages. As we shall see later in the chapter, these circumstances provided the context within which undocumented migrants situated themselves. Indeed, and notwithstanding the reforms to labour-market conditions that it had actively promoted, in 2001 the European Commission acknowledged the problem of 'illegal immigration' into the European Union. Significantly, the European Commission, rather than address the wider structural conditions which gave rise to its presence, proposed measures to curtail the phenomenon (European Commission 2001).

The third perspective on globalisation and migration is central to the themes within which this book is situated – the governance of migration (Betts 2011; Geiger and Pecoud 2010; Koslowski 2011; Rother 2013). Transnational social networks, and the dynamic social capital that often underpins them, facilitate a degree of population mobility which is increasingly challenging the capacity of states, citizenship regimes, sovereign authorities and national identities to manage and regulate these movements in ways that accord with a political discourse – in post-industrial societies at least – which, in the main, perceives immigration as a

threat to sovereign interests and identities. These challenges, evident in the increasing regulation of migration and the consequential expansion of undocumented migration, constitute the setting for this book.

A new political discourse on migration has emerged which places immigration policy, particularly efforts to ‘manage migration’, high on the agenda of countries in the global north. The crux of the migration issue in Europe has not, fundamentally, been about how to handle the intra-European movement of nationals within a borderless Europe – resistant though countries like the UK have been under the conditions of the Union in the last decade. Rather, a borderless Europe raised concerns about the governance of migration – how to control the movement of Third-Country Nationals (TCNs) within or arriving at Europe’s borders, especially at a time when very large numbers of asylum-seekers were also applying pressure on the capacity of member-states’ immigration systems. The twin strains of migrants and asylum-seekers resurrected, and gave a new intensity to, the political discourse on migration and its governance seen in an earlier era of immigration, which was mainly from ex-colonies to Western Europe from the late 1950s – for example, to Britain, France, the Netherlands and, in a different context, Germany, with labour migration from Turkey.

In these circumstances, the ‘new migration’ has profoundly affected the political landscape of many advanced economies – above all, the UK, where nine major immigration statutes since 1993 indicate the saliency of the subject. Issues of sovereignty, national identity, security and ‘fear of the other’ continue to dominate the political discourse on migration (Markaki and Longhi 2013; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2006). Thus alongside de-bordering *within* Europe has been the opposing tendency – the ‘re-bordering’ of Europe’s *external* boundaries (De Giorgi 2010; Geddes 2005; Lahav 2004). This is the driving force behind a raft of initiatives constructed within the framework of the European Union’s trajectory towards common immigration and asylum policies. Despite the final agreement on a Common European Asylum Policy in 2012, there is little evidence that member-states are willing to implement common standards, and declining evidence that they are willing to entertain asylum claims to any meaningful degree.

How have the governance of immigration and the agenda of ‘re-bordering’ been instrumentalised? For most countries of the global north, the machinery to regulate and control migration generally comprises a threefold typology of policy instruments: (1) pre-frontier

measures, (2) measures relating to border management, and (3) post-entry measures (Koser 2005). First, pre-frontier arrangements comprise visa requirements, pre-boarding documentation checks in countries of origin and transit, information campaigns, carrier sanctions, liaison officers, interdiction and interception, extra-territorial and regional processing and punitive measures against human smuggling. Second, border management comprises strengthened physical borders, including fences and electronic surveillance, strengthened border controls and inspections, documentation with enhanced security features, bilateral return agreements, biometric data and the training of border guards. Frontex, Eurosur and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) exemplify this set of instruments. Finally, in terms of post-entry controls, states may implement measures such as detention, workplace inspections, internal ID inspections, accelerated procedures, employer sanctions, dispersal and restrictions on mobility, restrictions on the right to work, on access to housing and on legal advice, social welfare benefits and return policies. Detention and, especially, deportation (removal in policy parlance) are on the rise (Anderson, Gibney and Paoletti 2011; Flynn 2005; Gibney 2008; Inda 2005), a particularly pernicious manifestation of the re-bordering agenda. In 2011, for example, 41,482 foreign nationals were removed from the UK (Blinder 2013).

The desire to manage migration in the UK and across Europe was driven initially as much by the perceived need to sustain 'good community relations' amongst an increasingly diverse mix of ethnicities – the legacy of earlier episodes of immigration that began in the post-war era – as it was by the economic imperatives to manage domestic labour markets (Düvell and Jordan 2003; European Commission 2001; Geddes 2000, 2003; Jordan and Düvell 2002; King 2002; Lavenex 2001; Soysal 1994; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2006). However, as the severity of the economic recession precipitated higher and higher levels of unemployment, the economic imperative of protecting labour markets took hold. The aim, now, of these control measures has been to shape the demographic and occupational make-up of migrant flows through visa requirements that favour highly skilled incomers, most of whom are financially secure.

Yet these objectives have been superseded again, or at least reinforced, by the 'securitisation of migration', a more-recent propensity to control international migration against the perception of existential threats by so-called 'extremists' transmitted through migration channels (Bosworth

and Guild 2008; Buzan, Waever and De Wilde 1998; Crépeau and Nakache 2006; Geddes 2000; Koser 2005; Lavenex 2001; Zetter 2014).

Lying behind the politics of migration control is a paradox. Despite regulation, large-scale, low-wage immigration from outside the European Union (both 'legal' – i.e. regulated – and 'illegal', i.e. undocumented) has still taken place. While professing to regulate and suppress this type of immigration against the backcloth of an anti-immigrant political discourse, governments such as that of the UK have perversely facilitated the arrival of this type of migrant labour necessary to fuel economic growth (Castles 2003; Düvell and Jordan 2003). Indeed, as May et al. (2006) emphasise, this has indeed driven down labour costs but with severe negative impacts on the working, health and social conditions of the migrant workforce – especially, of course, of undocumented migrants. Moreover, the not-unsurprising outcome of systematically blocking the channels for regulated, 'legal' immigration is recourse to irregular channels of entry (Bloch and Chimienti 2011; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011; Düvell 2011).

It is not just in Europe that the globalisation of the world's economy has, to use Duany's meaningful metaphor (2011), 'blurred borders' for transnational migration and has been counterbalanced by the restriction of international migration. Although the European/UK context is the most germane to the subject matter of this book, similar measures to control and to deter immigration, as well as increased detention and deportation, now feature in most, if not all, post-industrial countries. Similarly, undocumented migration accompanies these trends and, alongside the 'securitisation of migration', infuses the political discourse. Other examples of the turn in territorial 're-bordering' are the post-9/11 wholesale reconfiguring of US 'homeland security', visa and border regulation, the security fence between Mexico and the US – which seeks to limit expansion of the estimated 11 million undocumented migrants from Latin America (mainly Mexico) already present in the US – and Australia's increasingly draconian attempts to intercept migrants at sea and implement offshore processing instruments to prevent asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants from landing on the mainland (David 2000). Behind the fences and the sea patrols lies the same formidable armoury of regulation, detection, punishment and control in order to protect labour markets, 'securitise' migration, and 'manage' multicultural societies in the face of increasingly hostile domestic populations. As in Europe, the impact of these measures in the United States (Cornelius 2005) and Australia (Koser 2005) has probably reduced flows, but has also prompted

smugglers to divert flows to more-dangerous routes, increasing the risk to migrants crossing the borders.

In Canada, traditionally a country with receptive and efficient policies on immigration – selecting labour immigrants in order to fill skill shortages in the country – and characterised by a compassionate stance towards asylum-seekers, the restrictive turn is also increasingly evident. In contrast to the US focus on patrolling the Mexico–US border, Canada’s southern border remains comparatively un-policed as, rather than unauthorised entry, other pathways to irregularity and precarious immigration status are more common – such as temporary workers overstaying and losing their status, failed asylum claims and so on (Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009). The familiar battery of carrier sanctions, interception and interdiction in countries of origin and transit, deterrent measures such as an increase in detention, the elimination of most forms of appeal against visa refusal or refugee status rejection, and the imposition of tougher penalties for organising irregular entry are all familiar in Canada, as elsewhere (Crépeau and Nakache 2006).

In summary, ‘fencing and gatekeeping’ (Clandestino Project 2009) are now the defining contours of migration governance in the post-industrial world and three conclusions about policies designed to regulate migration and, in particular, to control ‘irregular’ immigration are pertinent. First, many of these policies are ineffective and there is evidence that irregular entries have increased despite these controls (Koser 2005; Levy 2010). Second, many of the policies, such as detention and deportation, are of themselves controversial (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Schuster 2004), and the consequential effects – such as the rise of smuggling and the human tragedies of migrants dying in transit – are now contested features in political discourse. Third, as we shall elaborate on in the next section of this chapter, ‘illegality’ and/or the precariousness of the immigration status are policy constructs, the result of a drive to regulate immigration in a global environment, not an *a priori* or objective condition (Bloch and Chimienti 2011; Düvell 2011).

With its richly symbolic name lending political credence to the ‘re-bordering’ agenda, the creation of the UK Border Agency in 2008 was symptomatic of the way in which immigration policy was reframed to meet hardening political resistance to international migration. Its rapid demise, five years later, is symptomatic of a different state of affairs – the gap between political will, institutional capacity, and the dynamics



of international population mobility, best illustrated by the challenge of undocumented migration.

### *Who is Undocumented? The Governance of Migration and the Vocabulary of Irregularity*

Drawing on De Genova's work (2002) on the legal production of 'illegality', Willen (2007), in her research on labour migrants in Israel, examined how 'illegality' is the product of converging global, regional and national factors and how it is three dimensional – as a juridical and political status, a socio-political condition, and a status that creates 'particular modes of being-in-the-world'. The previous section defined the converging contours relevant to the book and highlighted the socio-political conditions that give rise to the phenomenon of undocumented migration. This section turns attention to the juridical and political dimensions of the status of being undocumented and, in the final part, examines the links between the juridical-political and the 'particular modes of being-in-the-world' – in other words, the negotiated or liminal reaction of young migrants to their shifting status between legality and illegality which underpins the empirical chapters of the book.

Migration, as a field of research and, even more so, as an arena of policy, is infused with labels and categories (Zetter 2007). The increasing scope and complexity of international migration has spawned an expanding conceptual and policy vocabulary dealing with this phenomenon, as we have seen above. Thus the question of what we mean by 'undocumented' and, more importantly, how it is constructed, interpreted and politicised, is central to this book.

Our thesaurus could include, *inter alia*, 'undocumented' (our preferred term), 'irregular' (IPPR 2006; JCWI 2006; Jordan and Düvell 2002), 'illegal' (European Commission 2001; Levinson 2005), 'clandestine' and 'unauthorised' and 'illegally resident' (Woodbridge 2005). The politically charged nature of some of the terms is clear and probably deliberate. What is also clear is that the simple illegal/legal dichotomy is neither obvious in practice (with more than 80 different routes of entry to the UK identified by Ruhs and Anderson 2006), nor does it conform to the migrants' own conceptions of their status, as we shall see in later chapters. However, although 'undocumented' avoids the potentially pejorative connotations of 'illegal' and 'irregular', it inadequately captures the complex variety of

statuses and routes into this status, as Chapter 3 explains and as much of the research literature highlights.

Jordan and Düvell offer a working definition of undocumented or irregular migration as ‘crossing borders without proper authority, or violating conditions for entering another country’ (2002: 15). While offering a valuable starting point because of its simplicity, the definition masks both the techno-legal complexity of the process and the constructed nature of the label.

How, then, is the identity of the ‘undocumented’ migrant created? To answer this question we must interrogate both the statutory and the policy frameworks governing irregular immigration on the one hand, and the conceptual apparatus that underpins it on the other.

#### *Official Status and Categories: Policy and Practice in the UK*

Studies of UK immigration policy have consistently demonstrated increased border controls, fewer regular routes to migration, and a gradual curtailment of access to welfare rights (housing, social-security benefits, health care) for migrants entering Britain. Incremental changes to immigration rules mean that there are few legal routes for arrival and settlement into the country. Over the decades since the 1950s, concerns have shifted, as the profiles of new arrivals have changed. In the post-war period up until the 1980s, policy restricted entry to citizens from Commonwealth countries and the racialised nature of these restrictions has been documented (see, for example, Solomos 1993). From the 1980s until the end of the twentieth century, the focus was on controlling the arrival of asylum-seekers. The agenda shifted from the start of the twenty-first century to managing migration – labour, asylum and undocumented – and social cohesion (Bloch, Neal and Solomos 2013; Sales 2007).

Within the UK, raids on businesses thought to be employing undocumented migrants, early-morning incursions from the Home Office to properties where undocumented migrants were thought to be living, and public deportations were (and still are) all part of the highly politicised arsenal of weapons used to create the appearance of the state ‘fighting’ against those who circumvent procedures and policies. Immigration policies, since as early as the Aliens Act of 1905, have also been conflated with welfare rights and the notion of ‘no recourse to public funds’ (Sales 2007; Spencer 2011). For irregular migrants, excluded from welfare, there is no option but to work or to have alternative means of support, leaving them potentially vulnerable and open to exploitation

in the labour market. So, while states – in theory – are concerned with controlling migration and are committed to human rights and minimum standards in the workplace, the reality is that these commitments are ignored. The situation is accepted because undocumented migrants offer cheap and flexible labour that is easily exploitable and therefore meets the needs of contemporary capitalism (Castles 2000, 2011).

The focus of this book is not explicitly on policy but, instead, on the ways in which policy plays out in the lived experiences of young undocumented migrants as they go about their lives on an everyday basis. The intersections, as subsequent chapters will show, are numerous and permeate economic lives, decisions about social contacts and community participation, engagement in activities, use of place and space and – significantly for young adults – their hopes and dreams for the future. The empirical chapters (4–7) show that the fear of being caught and deported – what De Genova (2002) terms their ‘deportability’ – permeates, to varying degrees, their narratives, decision-making, hopes and dreams.

The official discourse emphasises the operational categories which are needed to inform the design of policy instruments: key examples from the UK are set out in Table 2.1 below. Noting that ‘illegal migration’ is a ‘collective term’, two Home Office studies (2005a; 2007: 8; Woodbridge 2005) have developed a typology of unauthorised migrant populations based on three categories.

While the 2005 Home Office study was more concerned with status once inside the UK, the 2007 study tended to focus on entry routes and illegality; however, in practice, there are only minor changes in terminology. Significant is the introduction and definition of the term ‘illegal’: this invokes a pejorative association with being undocumented and links to a vocabulary of criminality which, as we shall argue later in this chapter, is highly problematic.

Moreover, as we shall see in the empirical chapters, all three ‘official’ categories appear in our own study and, counter to the implication of the Home Office studies, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, Kurds from Turkey tended to be refused asylum applicants but might also be ‘overstayers’; some had also arrived ‘illegally’. Conversely, young Brazilians and Ukrainians tended to be ‘overstayers’ though a number had also arrived ‘illegally’ (see Chapter 1, Figure 1.1). Indeed, our evidence confirms Jordan and Düvell’s (2002: 80) findings from their study of Brazilians, Turks and Poles – that ‘open channels’ are by far the

Table 2.1 Official typologies of unauthorised migrants in the UK

<i>Home Office (2005a)</i>	<i>Home Office (2007)</i>	<i>Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR 2006)</i>
Illegal entrants (clandestines, those with false documents)	Clandestine entry Document fraud	Entering by avoiding immigration inspection (often with assistance of smugglers) Entering using false documents (wittingly or unwittingly)
Overstayers (without valid leave to remain)	Legal visitors overstaying	Overstaying visas or otherwise violating visa conditions, including students who work more hours than is allowed – described as ‘semi-compliance’ (Ruhs and Anderson 2006)
Failed asylum-seekers	Unfounded asylum claims	Rejected asylum claim but remaining in the UK (failed asylum-seekers) <i>Sans papiers</i> (e.g. passport may have been destroyed or taken by employer) Already having applied for asylum elsewhere

most common form of entry for economic migrants rather than ‘illegal’ or ‘asylum’ routes.

Expanding the Home Office typology, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR 2006: 5), drawing on the work of Koser (2005), delineated a more nuanced account and vocabulary for what they describe as ‘routes into irregularity’. In addition to the three categories deployed by the Home Office studies, they include a fourth mode of irregular entry, as Table 2.1 shows.

#### *Status Mobility: Undocumentedness as a Process*

These ‘official’ categories, enshrined in residence and in some of the employment rights afforded by UK immigration statutes, paint an essentially static picture of irregularity and the status of being undocumented. In contrast to the official discourse, our evidence draws on the migrants’ own perceptions of what it is to be undocumented.

What this reveals, as we shall elaborate on mainly in Chapter 4, is three salient characteristics of their status. First, as noted above, they may fit within several types of undocumentedness at any one time; second, and linked to this, they may ‘migrate’ between the different categories of being

undocumented at different times. Third, and also linked to these two conditions, they may move between a regular status and irregularity at different times. In other words, being undocumented is a *process* not a fixed status, at least in the experience of the young migrants themselves. Confirming and building on this contention, our research uses concepts of status mobility and fluidity of status to explore how the room for manoeuvre – in reality, the *limited* room for manoeuvre – determines the lives and livelihoods of the young migrants. Consistent with this view, we argue that migrants may move in and out of official statuses by design as much as by default.

Thus, in contrast to the official imperative to define different legal categories of undocumentedness, a central feature of our study is what Schuster (2005) has termed ‘status mobility’. This concept is nested in the wider discourse on the agency of migrants in which migration status can be perceived as a dynamic and continuing, rather than an end-state, process which is mediated by transnational interests and affiliations (Castles 2003; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2006). Framed within this broader representation of process and mobility, our study is similarly premised on a conception of undocumented migrants as social actors negotiating and mediating space within and between the boundaries of complex social and economic categories and differential employment, work permit and immigration statuses. While these ‘spaces’ may be prescribed, and mobility within and between these ‘spaces’ highly constrained by the scale and diversity of government immigration legislation, regulatory visa and employment categories (as Schuster 2005 and King 2002 point out), mobility between categories over time and space is a prevalent feature of the new migration.

The question, then, is not the saliency of the categories *per se*. Rather, the questions are how these categories condition the economic and social aspirations and day-to-day circumstances of undocumented migrants, and how and why they move in and out of certain categories. Since increasing restrictionism, and more categories – as the means to manage migration – have perversely enhanced rather than constrained status mobility, these are significant questions for our study.

Status mobility is informed by a number of complementary perspectives. Morris (2001, 2002) and Kofman (2002) draw attention to status mobility through the lens of packages of rights attached to different immigration statuses. Düvell (2011) and Ruhs and Anderson (2006) reject the conventional, static, dichotomous status of being either legal

or illegal. Düvell (2011) argues for a concept of ‘paths into irregularity’, while Ruhs and Anderson (2006) speak to the notion of different levels of ‘compliance’ – compliant (i.e. fully legal in relation to residence and work entitlements as immigrants), semi-compliant (i.e. legally resident but working in violation of some/all conditions of immigration status) and non-compliant (i.e. without rights of residence, and therefore also without the right to work). The concept of compliance is valuable in our study because it opens up the exploration of the levels of knowledge (or ignorance) that undocumented migrants possess about the regulatory frameworks for immigration, highlighting the ‘room for manoeuvre’ which migrants might exploit.

Schuster’s research in Italy (2005) emphasises that rights (i.e. legal statuses), notably the protection of residence rights offered by various amnesties and the rights afforded by the different work-permit categories, play a significant role in status mobility. The examination of rights-based approaches to the study of young migrants’ lives and livelihoods in the UK would be a brief undertaking, not least because migrant amnesties are not a significant feature of UK policy (although, in contrast, there have been limited amnesties for asylum-seekers). However, what Schuster stresses is that status mobility has been as much conditioned by factors such as opportunism, geographical mobility within Italy and to other EU member-states, conditions in countries of origin, the role of traffickers and the presence of social networks and community groups, as it has been by the governance of migrants. As we shall see, commencing with the first encounters in the UK elaborated in Chapter 4, these variables are equally dominant parts of the process of the, albeit limited, status mobility of young undocumented migrants in the UK. We explore how these variables condition status mobility and the extent to which the agency and motives of the undocumented migrants enable them to shape their status mobility.

#### *A Constructed and Criminalised Identity*

Distinguishing between official statuses and the migrants’ subjectivity about their ‘positionality’ with respect to the official discourse is a core theme of our book. This dialectic takes on particular power and significance in the lives of our young undocumented migrants when we consider the legal, political and populist construction of an ‘illegal’ identity. Here there is a valuable body of theoretical and empirical research on the construction and criminalisation of migrant identities (for example:

Cvajner and Sciortino 2010; De Genova 2004; Calavita 2005 on Spain; Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009 on Canada; Menjívar 2000, 2006 and Mountz et al. 2002 on the US; Schuster 2011 on Europe and the UK; and Willen 2007 on Israel), to which our own study adds.

While a young person's lack of technically valid immigration documents may be undeniable, what is also evident is, firstly, that this 'non-status' is located in the interstices of a complex statutory and policy framework which regulates and increasingly restricts immigration and, secondly, that its significance and what it entails are highly variable and far from clearly defined, in law as much as in practice. Immigration and border controls thus bring with them new problems, including an increase in clandestine entry and the greater use of forged documents. State policies therefore contribute to the prevalence of 'illegal' immigration which complex bureaucratic practices and machineries further inscribe. In other words, being undocumented is a constructed identity, not an *a priori* objective status. It is the outcome of the discursive practices of receiving states like the UK (and indeed all the European Union member-states) which have constructed and reconstructed the identity of migrants in their sustained attempts to label and distinguish between, and then regulate, the complex yet fluid motives, patterns and processes of contemporary international migration and modes of entry (Zetter 2007). As Calavita argues, immigration law 'actively and regularly "irregularises" people by making it all but impossible to retain legal status over time with changing categories and regulatory practices' (Calavita 2005: 531). Paradoxically, differentiation and conflation may often go hand-in-hand, an outcome reinforced by the point that seven of the UK statutes since 1993 contain immigration and asylum in their titles (only the word order changes), although recently nationality has been added to reinforce the concept of the migrant 'other'.

Deportation is an increasingly prevalent instrument with which governments demonstrate control over migrants whom they determine to be illegal (Gibney 2008; Peutz 2006; Peutz and De Genova 2010; Vasta 2011) and this results in migrants adopting strategies to remain hidden. Needing to be hidden can create further vulnerabilities, notably in the workplace, as we shall see in Chapter 5, and leaves people powerless through their inability to access rights and justice, as Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate (Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009; Ruhs and Anderson 2006). This has led Khosravi (2010) to argue that the state sanctions collude with exploitative working conditions by criminalising informal work. Thus irregularity, and its intersections with (non-)

citizenship, produce vulnerable migrants who are living their status or lack of status every day and are, as we will see in Chapters 4 and 6, all too aware of this criminalisation and their lack of access to the rights associated with citizenship (Golash-Boza 2012).

Citizenship and illegality are historically specific and changeable; this is demonstrated in part through regularisation programmes that give states the power to construct migrants as either legal or illegal (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler 2009). Citizenship is relational and so the unauthorised population is constructed in contrast and in relation to the 'citizen' (Calavita 2005). In response to global migration, transnational lives and multiple identities, new concepts of citizenship based on universal notions of personhood rather than on nation-state citizenship have emerged, bringing notions of citizenship into the international human-rights arena (Basok, Ilcan and Noonan 2006; Jacobson 1996; Soysal 1994). However, the reality is that it is citizenship within a nation-state which still offers migrants the principal means of accessing rights; new modes and concepts of citizenship do not, in fact, enable migrants, whose irregularity may have been conditionally removed, to access rights, and this group generally remains outside effective rights provisions and protection (Bloch 2010).

Alongside the historical specificity of 'illegality' and its mutability, legal status impacts in different ways and at different times. Abrego (2011) compares the experiences of undocumented migrants in the US according to the age at which they migrated. Those who migrated as adults live in different social contexts to those who migrated as children. Although both are undocumented, they experience this 'illegality' in different ways due to the work-versus-school context and the role of life-stage at the time of migration. While fear dominates the legal consciousness of adults or first-generation migrants, stigma dominates that of younger migrants – the so-called 1.5 generation. As we shall see in later chapters, young Zimbabwean migrants are particularly vulnerable to such stigmatisation.

As Mountz et al. (2002) argue in the case of Salvadorans in the US, for young undocumented migrants in the UK the state has the power to narrate immigrant subjectivities and produce identities through its statutes, practices, policies and the popular discourse on immigration. In this way, states create excluded or marginalised populations, such as young undocumented migrants, and guarantee their vulnerability through the constantly shifting boundaries between legality and illegality that create grey areas of uncertainty and precariousness. Against the backdrop of these shifting boundaries, it may make little sense for the migrants themselves



to draw distinctions between being legal and illegal – as the narratives of the young undocumented migrants in the following chapters describe. Indeed, as our study shows – often in poignant detail – these subjectivities are constantly questioned, negotiated and reinterpreted by the young undocumented migrants (see e.g. Collier, Maurer and Suárez-Navaz 1996; Coutin 2000). However, in other cases this liminal situation induces dysfunctional and psychotic behaviour, as we shall see, especially since the identity of unauthorised immigrants is constructed on *who they are not*, a negative identity in contrast to the ‘citizen’ (Calavita 2005) for whom immigration laws and policies positively delineate membership (Gibney, Anderson and Paoletti 2011).

The policy discourse and rhetoric on migration are also reinforced by the increasing criminalisation of ‘illegal’ forms of immigration, including that of being undocumented. States thus engender illegality not only by the creation of irregular migrants but also by criminalisation (Aas 2011; Reeves 2013). Mass deportation increasingly criminalised West African and Filipino migrants in Israel and, in so doing, shifted the framework from one of tolerance to one of ‘something that needed to be removed’ (Willen 2007) – see also Kubal (2013). Similarly, research by Mountz et al. (2002) makes the link between deportation and criminalisation. Examining the experiences of Salvadoran asylum-seekers given Temporary Protection Status in the US, Mountz and her colleagues argue that the state, by granting only temporary status, maintains migrants’ ongoing vulnerability due to the threat of deportation and subsequent criminalisation. States are therefore active agents in the creation of illegality and the criminalisation of migrants (Aas 2011; Schuster 2011).

Yet ‘illegality’ is a constructed concept, not an *a priori* or objective condition. Since it is not possible to prevent immigration altogether, increased restrictions on migration, almost by definition, will result in an increase in the breaches of migration laws and thus an increase in the ‘crime’ of ‘illegal’ immigration (Favell and Hansen 2002; Jordan and Düvell 2002). The criminalisation of undocumented migration is therefore only rarely a reflection of particular behavioural characteristics; rather it is contingent on it. Criminalisation is politically and legally constructed, the result of specific regimes, contexts and a multitude of power dynamics (e.g. Luibhéid 2008). Undocumented migrants or asylum-seekers who enter ‘illegally’ are not increasingly criminal *per se*, as the ascribed identity implies. However, the tightening of entry routes, visa requirements and the machinery of deterrence has created conditions

whereby migrants are rendered illegal: even asylum-seekers who have a powerful claim to protection risk being identified as ‘bogus’ and forced underground (Zetter 2014). The construction of an identity of the migrant as ‘illegal’, as clandestine and criminalised, resonates powerfully with a highly politicised public rhetoric on migration.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has located the concept and the category of the undocumented migrant within the wider landscape of the globalisation of migration and the specific framework within which migration is governed. It has argued that recognising the dualistic burden – an identity that is constructed and then criminalised – helps in understanding why the young migrants seek to escape this ascribed stigma and prefer to see their status as a mobile commodity and as a process, not an official formulaic condition. This distinction, and how the young migrants are both heavily constrained by, yet seek to survive outside, their official status, are crucial in appreciating their narrative accounts of life in Britain in subsequent chapters.

# 3

## *Migrant Agency, Youth and Legal Status*

The key concern of this book is to present a nuanced account of the lived experiences of undocumented migrants. The legal or undocumented status of migrants can and does shape: identity formation; social and family relations; transnational ties; participation in community and in political activism; participation in the labour market; conditions of work and wages; access to health care; the social and civil rights associated with citizenship; fear and decision-making (especially in relation to deportation); and more. In short, the lack of documents pervades all aspects of a migrant's life and decision-making. This chapter complements the previous one by turning the focus from the production of 'illegality' (macro level) to everyday 'illegality' (micro level). It further develops the theoretical toolkit we draw upon in the empirical chapters; in particular it reviews the scholarly literature on everyday 'illegality', the intersection of migration and youth, and migrant agency.

### *Immigration Status and Everyday Lives*

In the previous chapter we outlined a three-dimensional framework for understanding the experiences of undocumented migrants and the multiple ways in which the lack of status can affect their lives. After having discussed the conditions that determine the increasing irregularisation of some immigration flows and groups – what can be termed the political-economy of 'illegality' – we turned our attention to the legal production of 'illegality' as a juridical and political status (De Genova 2002) and eventually outlined the ways in which 'illegality' as a socio-political status creates particular modes of being-in-the-world (Willen 2007).

Undocumented migrants tend to remain hidden and to limit their social interactions and use of social spaces to those people and those areas considered to be safe or low risk, a theme that we explore in more detail in Chapter 6. Unauthorised migrants often limit their social ties to co-nationals and often further restrict their contacts to others of similar immigration status. Within this context, family, friends, community and faith organisations can become key resources for some, while others opt to distance themselves from these networks. Nevertheless, being an undocumented migrant requires the mobilisation of social networks in the form of social capital in order to avoid detection, to find a job or to access information and advice. So decision-making in terms of social and other interactions is often carefully evaluated for its risks and benefits (Cvajner and Sciortinio 2010; Sigona 2012b).

Existing scholarship in this area points to individuals on the margins of society, living 'shadowed lives' (Chavez 1992) and in a state of liminality, with the uncertainty associated with their lack of status permeating most areas of their everyday life most of the time (Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009; Sigona 2012b; Willen 2007). Menjívar (2006) draws on her ethnographic fieldwork with Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants in four US cities to illustrate the 'liminal legality' experienced by those with in-between statuses, moving beyond the simple dichotomy of legality/illegality. These migrants are neither documented nor undocumented, but are occasionally granted temporary reprieve from deportation without being given access to rights and benefits. Considering the effects of liminal legality in different areas of a migrant's life, Menjívar highlights the negative impacts on family and on children and young people's educational prospects. Additionally the negative impact she identified on participation in religious activities was significant not just in terms of migrants' spiritual lives but also in terms of the social and material assistance, information and advice which churches provide; thus churches play an even more important role in the lives of those with an irregular or temporary status. Moreover, churches provide transnational spaces where migrants can meet others from the same country of origin and thus maintain their transnational ties (Hagan, Rodríguez and Castro 2011; Menjívar 2003, 2006). Importantly, though, places of worship can be safe spaces for undocumented migrants – spaces where status does not matter or matters less within lives that are lived in fear of being caught and deported.

The fear of deportation shapes the lives of irregular migrants; this is explored in detail in Chapter 5. ‘What makes deportability so decisive in the legal production of migrant “illegality”’, De Genova argues (2002: 439), ‘is that some are deported in order that most remain (un-deported)’. Deportation permeates whole communities (Hagan, Rodríguez and Castro 2011) and the fear of it can also translate into migrants’ *avoidance* of public places. Which places are considered safe and which not depends on specific immigration enforcement practices, which vary across countries. The significance of being undocumented varies depending on context (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010) and so the ‘condition of illegality’ is felt the most acutely in those contexts where documents are checked (Khosravi 2010: 96). In the US context, strategies are developed to avoid detection and deportation, such as reporting ethnicity as ‘White’ rather than ‘Hispanic’ (Rodríguez and Hagan 2004), or moving to jurisdictions where immigration controls are less likely to occur (Capps et al. 2011). Deportation can have a lasting social and psychological effect on families who live in fear of separation. In the US, more than 1 million families experienced separation due to deportation in 2009 and the consequence is the increased likelihood that deportees will attempt to return to the United States (Hagan, Rodríguez and Castro 2011). Coutin (2000) notes the ways in which, post-deportation, Salvadoran youth engage in transnational activities that maintain cultural ties with the US and, in some instances, even attempt to make the difficult journey back to the US. Similar patterns of deportation and return have been found in research in Europe (see, for example, Schuster 2011; Schuster and Majidi 2013).

Housing and work represent two main sites where lack of legal status surfaces and the impacts are felt acutely, as we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5. However, irregular migrants, as Cvajner and Sciortino note, ‘generate income through work, find places to sleep, fall in love (and sometimes reproduce and raise children), establish personal relationships, buy household appliances and even represent themselves in the public space’ (2010: 398). Although the effects of not having a legal status are often negative, the empirical chapters in this book also demonstrate that undocumented migrants are not always passive victims but are sometimes able to use the agency they have in many aspects of their lives.

In the following section, we discuss the intersection of youth and migration in the literature and focus in particular on two aspects: youth and migration decision-making, and youth and settlement.

## *Migration and Youth*

Central to this volume are the concepts of migration and youth and, more specifically, the intersections of youth at key points, including the decision to migrate, the choice of destination, their integration and their aspirations. The concept of 'youth' is not simply about chronological age; it also intersects with structural conditions, the life-course and characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and class (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005). It can be hard to unpack the significance of any individual factor in understanding the experiences of young people as migrants with an irregular status. However, in this section we examine the limited literature that explores these areas, beginning with migration and destination choices, and will return to a number of the themes emerging in the literature in the empirical chapters, in particular in Chapter 7.

### *Migration, Destinations and Youth*

Any decision to migrate is complex and often involves a number of intersecting considerations. Moreover, being young can, in itself, be a reason for migration – a rite of passage into adulthood (Hagan 2008; Mai 2007; Monsutti 2007). Some young people migrate out of personal choice, some as part of a household survival strategy – with remittances and other contributions driving the migratory movement – and, in some cases, children and teenagers move either as unaccompanied minors, or to join parents and other adult family members. Destinations will depend on the migration journey and ease of travel, migrants' financial resources, their perceptions of the destination country and any pre-existing kinship and social networks in the different destinations.

Migration is an experience that shapes and transforms identity and social relations (Mai 2007; Rattansi and Phoenix 2005). However, there is limited literature on how being young influences the decision to migrate or on the agency that children or teenagers have in shaping migration decisions. Ackers (2000) argues that the lack of meaningful analysis of children's role in the migration process is a function of the tradition in migration research (until more recently) of subsuming women and children into families and therefore rendering them mere appendages of the traditional male economic migrant. This has changed, however, and women as migrants, rather than as simple dependents, now occupy a much more central place in the literature (see, for example, Dhar 2012; Kofman 2000; Kofman and Raghuram 2012). Similarly the literature

on children and migration challenges the notion of children as passive dependents. In reality, experiences are diverse and are reflected in pre-migration experiences, the journey itself and the things that occur post-migration (Crawley 2010; Hopkins and Hill 2008; Yoshikawa 2011). For example, a trafficked child is much more likely to experience trauma than a non-trafficked child, an unaccompanied minor faces different insecurities to those who are joining family members, while a stable and secure immigration status gives the potential for settlement and identity formation in a way that being either an asylum-seeker or an irregular migrant – with their associated insecurities of ‘deportability’ – does not.

Little is known about the situation of children as undocumented migrants, the exception in the UK being the study by Sigona and Hughes (2012). This illustrates the multiple challenges faced by undocumented children and families in accessing public services and the vulnerabilities that are produced by the unresolved tension between the legal and policy commitment to the best interests of the child and associated international obligations, and the policy and practice of immigration enforcement. Sigona and Hughes identify birth – for those born in the UK – and coming-of-age as the two stages in the life-cycle of undocumented children when the lack of status may surface and affect them more dramatically – for the former, because of parents not accessing maternity care due to a fear of detection or being charged for medical assistance and, for the latter, due to the loss of any protection deriving from the UK’s child-protection framework (Sigona 2013). In the US context, there is increasing political debate over the inequality, differential outcomes and lack of access to education and other services among undocumented children and young people who have lived their lives without status and who, due to their liminal citizenship, have ‘in-between identities’ (Torres and Wicks-Asbun 2013). This group comprises around 1.8 million or 15 per cent of the undocumented migrants living in the US (Gonzales 2009). The next sub-section considers the impact of being undocumented on children and young people, with a focus on integration and identity.

### *Integration and Identity*

The immigration status of parents affects not only their own lives but those of their children. Yoshikawa (2011) focuses on the social and educational consequences for children who have undocumented parents, noting the ways in which the parents avoid interactions with officials who could offer resources such as childcare and food subsidies in an attempt to avoid

detection. Moreover their undocumented status also means they often have fewer social ties and are likely to encounter more exploitative work conditions and greater poverty. This precarious context results in parents who are stressed, have a heightened risk of disease, and have less energy to engage with their children. In turn, this can have a negative effect on the children's early skills development and their subsequent performance at school and in the job market. Other research has found similar negative consequences of an unauthorised status on children and youth, discussed mainly in Chapter 4, because it can lower educational performance and lead to economic stagnation, blocked mobility and ambiguous belonging (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco and Todorova 2010). Experiences inside and outside the family shape children's sense of identity and their ambivalent relationship with their new host country. In the context of US research – a country so diverse and full of contradictions – 'Americanisation' is impossible to achieve, or even to define (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2002).

The focus of this book is on young adult migrants, though some of our interviewees either arrived in the UK as children or young teenagers and so completed their compulsory schooling in England, or have children with them in the UK, some of them UK-born. The timing of migration can be significant because children and teenagers rarely make the decision to become irregular – it is just something that happens to them. Abrego (2008, 2011) examined how being young and undocumented affected the identities of Latinos in the United States. Those who were older at the point of migration expressed greater levels of ownership and agency over the decision and thus took more responsibility for the consequences. Younger migrants, on the other hand, felt that they did not deserve legal exclusion based on their status, because migration was not their choice.

One of the significant moments for young people without status is when compulsory schooling ends. This, argues Gonzales (2011), means that, in the US context, at this point young people move from a *de facto* legal status to an illegal one; they must 'learn to be illegal' – a process requiring new daily routines, new survival strategies and new social patterns. These changes profoundly affect their identity formation, life-cycle, friendships, aspirations, and social and economic mobility. In our study, the young people made similar and sometimes turbulent transitions as they moved from school to being truly undocumented, with all the associated restrictions, fears and anxieties – which we explore later in this volume. However, being undocumented is not a homogeneous



experience, and integration and identity, though intersecting with status, are instead complex and multi-faceted. As Abrego (2008) observes, undocumentedness is experienced differently depending on social position. Thus much of the literature on undocumented migrants focuses on the moments or the points at which being irregular is the most acutely felt – when attempting to access employment, housing, citizenship, rights and political mobilisation, for example (see Bloch and Chimienti 2011; Sigona and Hughes 2012). Consequently little empirical analysis focuses on the integration experiences of undocumented migrants more broadly, which is an area with a large body of research in relation to other migrants and subsequent generations. However, some of the key concepts relating to social capital, ethnic-enclave employment and the development of human capital in the form of language and other skills – seen as crucial for the adaptation of migrants more generally – are also applicable to undocumented migrants, who can make incremental, albeit small, improvements and changes in their lives in many of the same ways as those with regular status, as the chapters in this book show.

Influential research and scholarship on migrant and refugee integration and assimilation emerged in the US in the 1990s with the development of ‘segmented assimilation theory’ (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Portes and Zhou 1993). This theory allowed for a greater understanding of the complexities and the range of different integration outcomes, in contrast to earlier academic work that presented assimilation as a linear process (Gordon 1964). Portes and his colleagues instead argued that migrants might experience upward assimilation, downward assimilation or a combination of upward assimilation with biculturalism. These three forms of assimilation correspond to the three processes of consonant, dissonant and selective acculturation. Consonant acculturation occurs when both children and their parents assimilate into a new culture at relatively similar speeds, leaving behind their ‘old-country’ ways and language. Dissonant acculturation occurs when children’s adaptation to a new language and culture outstrips that of their parents. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that this process can lead to downward assimilation, as young people face racism and bifurcated labour markets without the support of their parents. Selective acculturation occurs when parents and children learn ‘American’ ways gradually, while remaining rooted in an ethnic community. This is an important process, especially for those who are subject to discrimination. The empirical reality is that the children of migrants do not all follow similar trajectories; experiences and outcomes

can vary and are contingent on the segment of society into which they are being incorporated (Greenman and Xie 2008; Kroneberg 2008). This resonates with the arguments of Abrego (2008) about the diversity of ways in which lack of legal status is experienced depending on social position. As a consequence, 'integration outcomes' differ within and between groups in the same national and local contexts, and are determined by a complex set of economic, social, cultural, environmental and political factors (Alba and Waters 2011).

While the issue of status pervades everyday life among undocumented migrants, we show here that it is negotiated in a number of ways, with different aspirations and individual agency. In the next section, we examine agency as a theoretical concept that frames our empirical chapters.

### *Migrant Agency*

Migrant agency can occur at different stages of the migration process, in relation to the decision to migrate, the journey, the choice of destination and entry route, the settlement, and even after deportation. Agency can also exist during acts of individual and/or collective resistance and within the mundane everyday acts of migrants. As noted earlier, age at the time of migration is a signifier of the agency which an individual might have in making their decision (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of the age of migrant interviewees). Elsewhere (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011) we have explored in detail migration routes and strategies, including the decision to migrate, the destination, and the significance of age in relation to choice.

The spaces for migrant agency are limited, and the exercise of agency occurs in a highly structured legal and policy environment defined by changing government agendas and global and national labour markets (May et al. 2006). Social networks and other forms of social capital may facilitate the agency of migrants within different contexts. In this section we explore some of the existing research and scholarship on migrant agency, first during the migration process, including issues around the decision to migrate, the journey and the choice of destination and entry routes, and then in terms of individual and collective modes of mobilisation and resistance in the country of residence. Within the substantive chapters of the book, the ways in which agency intersects with choice of destination,

employment, social networks and everyday decision-making will be explored, with links to the literature.

### *Agency in Migration Decision-Making*

Why do migrants choose the destinations that they do? How do they arrive? How do they access the country? The reasons why people choose to migrate are complex and their motives are most often mixed (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2013). The decision to migrate may be an individual one, but migration might also be the outcome of a household survival strategy, with migrants sending remittances to family members in the country of origin or elsewhere in the diaspora. These micro-economic explanations of international migratory decisions (principally from poor to rich countries), conceptualised as the new economics of migration (NEM), have shifted attention from the individual to the household as the unit of analysis (Lindley 2007; Savage and Harvey 2007; Taylor 1999). International migration is also facilitated by a complex network of social and economic transnational connections which intersects conditions at home and at the destination. Castles argues that it is transnational social transformations interacting with the globalisation of migration, both voluntary and forced, which define the distinctive character of the contemporary era of migration (Castles 2003; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2013). Migrant and transnational (and diasporic) communities no longer live in atomised clusters around the world (Zetter 2007), but are part of the network society in which their social and material worlds are adapted to the virtual, but deterritorialised, world of electronic communications (Castells 1996). The networks cover political and economic interactions, as well as social ties such as clan, ethnicity and religion, in a complex ebb and flow of people, resources and information (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001a, 2001b; Levitt 1996). As Arango puts it, 'Migrant networks can ... convey information, provide financial assistance, facilitate employment and accommodation, and give support in various forms. In doing so they reduce the costs and uncertainty of migration and therefore facilitate it' (Arango 2000: 291).

In this context, social network analysis and the concept of weak and strong ties (Granovetter 1973) mediating the functionalist, micro-economic calculus of the NEM, offers scope for an enriched understanding of the motivations of young migrants and the dynamics of household social relations. This is not to deny the importance of economic factors such as the role of remittances. Nevertheless, as Lindley points out, kinship

links, social norms such as gendered roles, and traditions can all shape, in powerful ways, the migratory process and must be carefully scrutinised (Lindley 2007: 17).

The thesis of transnational social transformation and networks is crucial to our study. The empirical chapters that follow illustrate the many reasons why this is so in terms of the ways in which these networks underpin arrival and immediate settlement (Chapter 4), access to employment (Chapter 5), and the social world in which the young migrants locate themselves (Chapter 6). Not only does this thesis remind us of the complexity of factors which explain migration, it also signals that being an undocumented migrant may be an important additional variable in the migratory complex, rather than just a bureaucratic and political problem for receiving countries. On the one hand, this indicates that 'official discourse' has not caught up with the social reality of international migration, which goes to the heart of the politics of understanding and 'managing' migration. On the other hand, it suggests that 'undocumentedness' may well be an important part of strategising the process of migration.

Economic factors arising from global inequality, the lack of sustainable livelihoods and uneven development contribute to the reasons why people migrate. In addition social and kinship networks as well as conflict and oppression are significant features of migration and the migratory project (IFRC 2012; UNHCR 2012a, 2012b).

Thus, overall, our research corroborates this complex picture of the factors which impel migration and confirms their relevance to the specific demographic category of young people. But, as each of the chapters emphasises, the motivations and aspirations of the migrants in our study must be framed and understood in relation to their 'youth' (Hall 1992; Rose 1996). As we shall see, their narratives powerfully describe the conjuncture between the range of factors that impel and facilitate migration for all migrants, and the specific representation of migration as a 'youth project'. For many young undocumented migrants, migration is a rite of passage in the transition to adulthood and to a new social role (Margolis 1994) and may be influenced by factors unique to this age group (see, for example, King and Wood 2001).

There is little literature on agency during the actual migration journey, though one exception is Van Liempt and Doomernik's (2006) analysis of human smuggling, which offers a critique of Salt and Stein's economic model, arguing that it is limited by its failure to consider non-profit motives by all actors in the process and by its presentation of migrants as passive

actors. Instead Van Liempt and Doornik (2006) maintain that migrants *do* have agency in some aspects of the smuggling process. Similarly, for Andrijasevic (2010) the human-trafficking narrative consigns women to the position of agency-less victims and is ultimately 'inadequate and might even be counter-productive in terms of addressing the abuses migrants might experience' (2010: 142). On the contrary, she argues that migrant women in the sex industry have the capacity to respond and negotiate, or fail to do so because of the restrictions imposed on their mobility by the social and legal position they occupy and by the relations of power through which this position is sustained.

Others have also argued against the economic model of smuggling, positing that it can, instead, be a negotiation that takes place between the smuggler and the migrant, based on a combination of financial resources and smuggling routes, and regardless of the desired destination (Koser 2000, 2008). Although power relations are unequal, smuggling is not always a highly organised criminal activity and there are reciprocal interests between the smugglers and the migrants who use their services – who may, for instance, be part of the same community in a country of origin. In these cases, trust is an important criterion for both actors (Van Liempt and Doornik 2006).

Just as the migratory decision and process represents a complex of factors, so, too, is there a complex of factors influencing the ways in which migrants select particular destinations, as well as the timing and the channels they deploy (Koser 1997; Koser and Pinkerton 2002: 10). Particularly important in relation to our study is that, as some of the research cited above indicates, the majority of undocumented migrants do, in fact, enter legally and then default on visa or employment conditions.

The evidence base on undocumented migrants' choices of destinations and entry routes is, not surprisingly, sparse. Based on somewhat old data (drawn from a survey in 2000–01) from a sample of 83 detainees, a Home Office (2005a) report provides valuable pointers to the heterogeneous variety of reasons for coming to the UK. Nearly half of the sample claimed to be asylum-seekers and cited the perceived safety from persecution in the UK as the main attractor. The next most common reasons were the availability of employment and the presence of family – two-thirds of the sample cited these. Nearly a fifth of the sample arrived through an agent and 60 per cent *arrived* illegally. But a significant minority (40 per cent) arrived legally and became illegally resident by overstaying.

Traditional migrant entry routes – for those seeking asylum, family reunion or specifically identified labour-market gaps – have been severely constrained by policies of deterrence, restrictionism and tighter border controls, notably intensified in the last decade or so (Home Office 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2005, 2006). These processes may have tended to drive immigration underground but there is a dearth of recent evidence to confirm this.

### *Migrant Agency in Destination Countries*

Some of the literature on undocumented migrants demonstrates that, far from being passive victims, they have individual and collective agency. Sites of agency are numerous and can serve as collective mobilisation to resist state policies and to push for regularisation, and as a mechanism for collective bargaining over wages. The *Sans Papiers* movement in France and Belgium, and the DREAMers in the US, exemplify migrants' capacity to mobilise and act collectively. Individuals can demonstrate agency when they embark on their initial journey, in resisting/evading deportation, in organising return after deportation, in deciding what jobs to take and when to move for safety or for incremental improvements in pay and/or conditions, and in decision-making about who to trust, whether and which faith and community groups to participate in, and what public spaces to occupy and when. In short, there are many points at which undocumented (and other) migrants effectively use collective and individual agency to empower themselves. Additionally the literature suggests that social capital in the form of networks might empower and facilitate agency, an area that is developed in the following chapters of the book, particularly in relation to job search and employment.

The literature on migrant agency emerges from a number of social science disciplines. Issues of state, sovereignty and citizenship have been investigated using theoretical frameworks drawn from political science (see, for example, McNevin 2009; Nyers 2003; Squire 2011). Sociologists have explored the intersections of agency within a number of substantive areas, including the decision to migrate, mobilisation, the negotiation of borders, deportation and return, access to social and welfare rights, and labour-market strategies (see, for example, Ambrosini 2013; Chávez 2011; Chimienti 2011; Hagan 2008; Laubenthal 2011; Schuster 2011; Vasta 2011). Drawing on anthropological perspectives and methodological approaches, academics have engaged closely with the everyday lived experiences of undocumented migrants and have identified acts of agency

within the micro realms of social and economic spheres, uses of space and the migration processes itself (see, for example, Coutin 2000; Reeves 2013; Willen 2007). In this section we provide an overview, rather than a comprehensive review, of some of the research and scholarship in this area, by way of an introduction to the themes that will be developed empirically and theoretically in subsequent chapters of the book.

Within political science, the role of the state in creating 'illegality', and the ways in which campaigns and migrant movements contest notions of state sovereignty and political belonging, are among the areas examined empirically. Exploring the campaign to stop deportation and have status regularised among Algerian 'non-status refugees' in Montreal, Quebec, Nyers (2003) argues that, through migrant agency, the traditional conceptualisations of political community, identity and practice are re-shaped. Such action challenges a key aspect of the sovereign power of the state – namely inclusion and exclusion – and, in so doing, enables global 'cast-offs' to reclaim acts of citizenship and to question the sovereign order. Other researchers explore the ways in which migrant movements contest traditional conceptualisations of citizenship and thus imply new modes of political belonging (Anderson, B. 2013; Bosniak 2006; McNevin 2009, 2011; Sassen 2002).

Migrant agency around status and citizenship has been examined from different perspectives. As discussed in Chapter 2, status is not static; instead it is fluid and people move between statuses where necessary and expedient and so experience periods of status regularity – such as being in the asylum system – between times of undocumented status or moving from a visitor's visa, to being an asylum-seeker and then an undocumented migrant when the asylum case is refused (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011). In Italy, Rigo (2011) noted the ways in which migrants are able to strategise by using child protection legislation to gain residential benefits, though such loopholes were subsequently the subject of restrictive policies.

Like political scientists, sociologists have also explored migrant acts of resistance and collective social movement, though most of the literature on mobilisation has focused on migrants with a 'regular' status (Koopmans 2004; Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008; Squire 2011). Drawing on a comparative study of migrant mobilisation in London, Paris and Copenhagen, Chimienti (2011) concluded that, for collective public action to be successful, migrant suffering has to be at a high enough level to cause the moral indignation that results in mobilisation. For the situation of irregular migrants to be made public, they and their supporters

must have access to structural opportunities. However, the outcomes of mobilisation are limited, resulting in, at best, regularisation that amounts to individual recognition rather than to policy changes (Chimienti 2011; Chimienti and Solomos 2011).

In reality, many acts of agency are individual micro acts rather than collective ones; this relates to visibility or wanting to be invisible (see, for example, Chapter 6). Decisions about employment, whether to use forged documents to improve opportunities, or what Vasta (2011) terms ‘irregular formality’, and the development of social networks with their links to social capital, all form the mundane ways in which irregular migrants acquire and use their individual agency to make improvements to their lives (see Chapter 5). Qualitative research has also explored the daily routines of irregular migrants, and the ways in which they interact socially and attempt to stay outside the gaze of the state; in so doing, individuals are protecting themselves against the possibility of deportation (Sigona 2012b; Willen 2007).

## Conclusion

This chapter has developed further the conceptual toolkit on which we draw in our analysis of the everyday experiences of young undocumented migrants. It has added to the previous discussion on the legal and political production of ‘illegality’ framed in the context of concurring agendas and factors operating at global, regional and local levels, by shifting the focus onto how migrants experience being undocumented and how immigration status intersects social characteristics such as age and gender. It has laid the foundations for reflecting on the room for manoeuvre among young migrants without status, and on the significance of youth as a factor shaping migrant agency at key moments in the migration project.

We successively reviewed the existing scholarship on migrant agency, first during the migration process, and then in terms of individual and collective modes of mobilisation and resistance in the country of residence, and pointed out that, although the spaces for migrant agency are limited, and the exercise of agency occurs in a restrictive policy environment, *agency does exist*. In the next four chapters, we draw on empirical data to show how young undocumented migrants negotiate their social and economic lives, starting with their arrival in the UK.



# 4

## *Visibility and Invisibility: Arrival, Settlement and Socialisation into Irregularity*

In this chapter we explore the conjuncture of youth, migration, being undocumented at the point of arrival, and the early stages of adjusting to living as a young undocumented migrant. While some of the struggles which these young people face are common to other marginalised social groups in Britain, what this chapter shows is that being undocumented rapidly manifests itself as an all-encompassing experience which produces distinctive and unique forms of marginality.

So what is the day-to-day reality of being undocumented? How does the juxtaposition of being invisible but necessarily visible in, for example, the workplace or in social meeting places, shape both the experience and the identity of the young migrants? How do the young people navigate their way through the insecurity of being '*sans papiers*' and what coping strategies do they adopt to handle their immigration status and the marginality that comes with it? To what extent do these processes vary between the different ethnicities, countries of origin and genders? What are some of the longer-term implications for their development as individuals and their social worlds? These are some of the questions which define the complex interplay between being young and being undocumented in Britain, and which this chapter seeks to answer in four main sections.

Providing the obvious entry point for the chapter is 'Confronting the reality', the stage of arrival where migrants' aspirations now appear to be naïvely optimistic in the face of the unfamiliar and the initial sense of isolation. The discussion then proceeds along two further lines: 'Undocumentedness in everyday life – encounters and consequences' of having to suppress one's identity, and 'Coping in the public realm – mobility and

communication'. The chapter concludes with some wider reflections on the substantive analysis.

Overall, the narratives demonstrate the means by which young undocumented people navigate their way through considerable uncertainty and the manner in which their status very quickly structures those key aspects of their lives which render them in a liminal state at once transitory and insecure.

### *Confronting the Reality*

Perhaps surprisingly, it was not so much the lack of a documented immigration status, on arrival in Britain, which generated the most immediate anxieties for the young migrants. Instead, it was confronting the unfamiliar, the unknown, and a reality that fell far short of what they had imagined and of the expectations that had propelled their migratory adventure. The migration literature has little to say either about the significance of these immediate, personal, micro-level reactions at the point of arrival – and indeed about the journey itself (Zetter and BenEzer 2014) – or about how these transitory stages might shape subsequent adaptation and settlement experiences. Yet, as the reflections of the young migrants reveal, the arrival process is both a very challenging encounter in itself and a formative experience.

Serhado (28, M, Kurd from Turkey), captures something of this sense of despondency and failure when he says 'I came here and I faced the reality'. The terseness and finality of his statement is a bleak summary typifying the initial reactions of many young migrants in our research. Reinforcing the disjuncture between expectation and reality, other young migrants went further by declaring their shock when they realised that their hopes and assumptions had been dashed. Eight years after arriving in Britain at the age of 13, Ray (21, M, Zimbabwean) can still recall his feelings:

To be honest I was shocked. ... I came here thinking 'Oh! London, such a great place.' Well it wasn't a great place...

Jiyan (23, F, Kurd from Turkey) also expresses her shock: in this case it is not the shock of finding a reality far removed from her imagined world, but the specific realisation that her expectations of a generous asylum

system had been false: 'I came here, I saw how refugee things work and I had a shock and I am still in shock.'

The reality and emotional shock on arrival were reinforced by the physical conditions that they encountered. Victoria (24, F, Ukrainian) relates how she had to cope with the interplay between the dehumanising environment and the sense of isolation in the first week. Devoid of emotion, her matter-of-fact account suggests both a sense of despair and the suppression of her true feelings:

When we arrived in London, we lived in a place where there were eight people sharing two beds. This was the first week. The reason for that, I think, was that we didn't know anything about London.

Others, such as Daniel (28, M, Brazilian), offer a more poignant reflection that 'The wonderful things are left at the airport when you get on the airplane.' In this response, Daniel inverts the expectation that he would find the 'wonderful things' at the end of his journey, not left behind at the beginning of the journey in his home country. In this way, like Ray, expecting to find the 'great place', Daniel intimates that migration, as a youthful adventure, had been based on false aspirations and information.

Youthful migration, as the search for contrasting and more fulfilling experiences than those available at home, almost without exception ends up with shattered illusions – at least initially. This outcome is more prevalent amongst female migrants and something of the bitterness of this realisation is expressed by Carol (24, F, Brazilian).

I wasn't aware of how much we create such a big illusion in Brazil. The people who are there say, 'Go to England...'. the number of people [who tell you], 'Come, it's wonderful here, come.' I'm one of them. You have to come, then they'll taste the same as you and they will see how England is hard.

Whereas Carol is quick to blame her friends for a sense of betrayal, rather than her own personal responsibility, Victoria, like Daniel, is more prepared to face up to her own role in creating illusory expectations: 'I didn't believe [what I was told], just like everyone else in Ukraine. We live in some sort of illusion.'

Instead of excitement mixed with anxiety – normal reactions to a new and very unfamiliar environment – this overwhelming sense of

despondency on arrival is compounded, as we have seen, by isolation, fear and also concern at the lack of escape. These emotional feelings are prevalent in many of the narratives, as the examples of Fang Ping and Zhu Chen illustrate:

I didn't like it when I first came. When I first came ... I came with several other girls ... I used to be homesick and often when I became homesick, I'd cry. It continued like this for months. I didn't even feel like eating. ... I used to cry when I was having my dinner. (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese)

Back in China, anything that makes you not happy about it, you can just go home. Here in the UK you can't just say 'I'm not happy, I wanna go home.' (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese)

Uliana's (29, F, Ukrainian) reflections reinforce the strength of these reactions, capturing the sequence of sensations which left her in a dejected and desolate state, emphasised by the feeling that she had to suppress and keep her emotions and anxieties to herself.

We went there, in Hackney. 'Beautiful' [*ironic expression*]. When I first saw it ... Autumn. Those leaves. And all that rubbish. Windy. I felt so disgusted. I thought 'Oh my God, is it London?' And then, we went into this house and there were so many people. I just sat there at the end of a bed. [*laughs*] I thought, 'You are in trouble.'... I had that feeling that I was there alone, that no one wouldn't even move a finger to simply help you.

In some cases the experience of arrival may be contingent on how the young migrant came to the UK. Five years after she arrived, Avashin (29, F, Kurd from Turkey) still reflects on her first few days:

I was in the truck with the five other people ... I didn't know where to go or nothing so the first couple [of] days I stayed at one of their houses, and after that I have just been staying around, each person would send me to a different place and it just goes on. ... I look back at the past five years, I think to myself ... 'How did it happen?'

To what extent these reactions are conditioned by the different motives for migrating is not clear. Yet it is tempting to think that the Kurds from

Turkey, whose main motive was to seek sanctuary, were the most affected by the sense of betrayal, evident in the four following responses from Kurds: 'all lies. They told us their lies. Nothing same as told' (Amed, 29, M) or 'completely untrue' (Serhado, 28, M). 'There was nothing true in the information given by him to me' (Botan, 29, M). 'How did it happen?' (Avashin, 29, F). Of the different nationalities we interviewed, Kurds did, indeed, seem the most extreme in their unremittingly negative reactions. By contrast, Daniel's and Victoria's reactions perhaps recognise the self-delusion that might have propelled young people like them to migrate, but given their original motives for migration, far less is at stake if their expectations are unmet. If the objective of migration to the UK was – for Brazilians like Daniel, and Ukrainian and Chinese migrants – to make a better life, then, for the majority, the moment of arrival and the immediate aftermath were depressing times.

Are young people more severely affected than older, more mature migrants by the negative experience of arrival? To what extent is youth a factor in explaining these conditions? Given the lack of comparative research evidence on this stage of the migratory process, it could be argued that their reactions were probably little different to those encountered by other 'adult' migrants entering an alien country. However, these accounts do reveal indications that youth mediates distinctive reactions to these circumstances. Both Zhu Chen and Fang Ping, for example, reprise the lack of home and the value that it – implicitly the family – has in providing security and stability at times of unhappiness. Uliana's statement that 'no one wouldn't even move a finger' also implies the lack of support from family or friends. Thus there are indications of how the absence of the familiar social institution which encompassed their lives before migration, and the impossibility of recourse to family support, may be particularly significant for young migrants.

The response to arrival offers other indications of the mediating role of youth. This is revealed in the different ways in which the young people are prepared to take responsibility for creating their own (often distressing) situation – a responsibility associated with maturity and life experience that they may not have had fully to exercise before they left home. While Daniel and Victoria seem to accept their responsibility and the consequences, Carol was reluctant to confront some of the illusions she had created for herself. Moreover, in many of these accounts there is also a sense of impetuosity and volatility underlying the migratory decision, which might also be more associated with youthful aspirations

and inflated expectations. Although only 13 when he arrived with his mother, Ray's reflection that 'Oh! London, such a great place. Well it wasn't', and Carol's 'Come, it's wonderful here, come', reveal something of the youthful expectations that underpinned their migration and the inevitable let-down.

Thus, the evidence suggests that there are distinctive elements pertaining to the arrival of young migrants. Arrival required many of them to grow up very quickly, cope as independent adults, and dispense with the 'illusions' of youth: they were no longer in a transitional phase from youth to adulthood. Overcoming the first impressions of disillusionment takes time, if indeed it is ever forgotten. We have seen in Avashin's narrative, above, how she looks 'back at the past five years' and thinks to herself 'how did it happen?' Diana (28, F, Brazilian), after seven months in Britain, feels that

This magical thing of being in London, being in England, it's gone, I don't feel like getting to know it. I don't have anybody to share [this experience] with.

Experiencing not just downward socio-economic mobility working as a cleaner (compared with her work in an engineering company back in Brazil), for Diana, the initial loneliness and isolation that many of the young migrants describe still constitutes an all-encompassing milieu. And yet, alongside these narratives of despondency, isolation and shock, the young migrants also demonstrate resilience and the capacity to rapidly adapt. Interestingly, while the literature emphasises the significance of migrants' social networks as sources of social capital in facilitating the settlement process – and these are, indeed, essential resources, as we shall see shortly – what our evidence highlights, in addition, is the importance of personal resilience in adjusting to the largely negative experiences of arrival. Little attention has been paid to date, in the research literature, to the personal assets and attributes on which migrants draw when they arrive and seek to adjust and make sense of their new environment. Although, as one might expect, there is a time-related adjustment process, and the acquisition of basic language skills and finding work both contribute to 'settling in',\*

\* We use the phrase 'settling in' in preference to 'settlement' – which is, of course, widely used in the migration literature – because the latter word conveys a sense of certainty, strategy, purpose and process which we feel does not accurately represent the experience and intentions of many of the young migrants.

resilience and determination are equally evident in the migrants' personal traits and coping mechanisms. For example, both Tatiana and Lesya reveal how they had to dig into their personal resources to cope with their fear and isolation.

You are afraid of everything, you are afraid to move. But ... With time. I learned a bit of English so I could find a job myself and not to beg 'Please give me any job.' I realised that I have to get [things] myself because no one will bring it to you on the plate. (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian)

Well, at the very beginning, I thought, 'Oh God, why did I come? Why did I come? No job. Must pay for everything. Children are in the other end of the world...'. Then, I went to work. ... Later I felt very good. I was much better. (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian)

Like Tatiana's resolution and reliance on her own resources to 'get [things] for myself', something of this personal determination and persistence is also implicit in Sipuwe's narrative although, in her case, the process was far more protracted. She was a hospital doctor prior to arriving in the UK and had lived there for five and a half years when we interviewed her. It had taken many years' perseverance and resolve to get to the stage where she felt she understood enough about Britain to be able to cope with everyday life.

I think I had a lot of misconceptions and I also find that ... for me to understand how the system works here, it has taken me all this time to really get to grips [with] how things work! (Sipuwe, 31, F, Zimbabwean)

To what extent the presence, or the degree of, resilience may be more evident in younger than in more mature migrants, where less is perhaps at stake for the former group, is impossible to say without comparative research. However, as we shall see later, the young migrants continued to draw on their resilience as a vital resource with which to cope with their undocumented status when this became the dominant variable in their lives.

The tension of moving between inner and outer, and personal and social worlds, and acquiring the awareness, skills and presence of mind to adapt to the complex and uncertain dynamics of the arrival and immediate practical aftermath – finding accommodation, a job and social networks

– posed many challenges for the young migrants. Thus, on the one hand, the shock and despondency generated in the aftermath of arrival were handled in a largely introverted, personal way, as if the young migrants did not want to betray their delusions and lack of self-awareness of what migration might entail. For the majority, on the other hand, an important key to the initial settlement process was the way in which social networks, relations and/or co-national intermediaries were invoked or relied upon for practical support.

The evidence from our study of young undocumented migrants corroborates the extensive research literature on the value (and, sometimes, the limitations) of social networks and social capital in the migrant settlement process – finding accommodation, employment and providing support systems (see, for example, Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Lancee 2010; Ryan 2011; Ryan et al. 2008; White and Ryan 2008; Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2006). These networks were, indeed, valuable mechanisms in providing a first base, in smoothing access to more permanent accommodation, or in finding ways into the workplace.

However, it is the limited value of the social networks and the fragility of the social capital which are particularly evident. Thus, there is the keen awareness amongst the young migrants that families and friends who provided support and assistance were sometimes no better placed to do this than were the arriving young migrants themselves who needed help. In these situations, the newly arrived migrants were reluctant to overstay their welcome; at the same time, their youth may have made them more willing to accept the need for mobility and displacement. Something of the contrasting nature of these experiences is exemplified by the following narratives:

When I first came, I would normally spend my time with friends who had come earlier. They have relatives here. I stayed with them. It was OK to stay with them then. (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese)

I survived through the assistance of friends, but it was very difficult for me and it was difficult for other people to look after me as well without any contribution from myself. (Trish, 25, F, Zimbabwean)

Another indication of the limited strength of social networks in facilitating settling in and adjustment is that many migrants found it very difficult to engage with their communities or other support structures and some



lacked any knowledge of them (see Chapter 7). This exposed them to early experiences of vulnerability and exploitation. Trish, who arrived in Britain aged 20 as a school leaver, illustrated how this void in community backing left her unsupported and let down:

It was because I arrived and sought asylum at point of entry ... it was because I lacked legal support and I was rushed through without that support. I never had a lawyer. There were no Zimbabwe-community support groups, I did not know where to find people of my own community. The asylum interview was ... handled in a very interrogative manner.

While the basic need for survival inevitably characterised the early stages of settling in, another dimension of this stage is the often introverted lifestyle that the young migrants felt forced to adopt, contradicting an expectation that they would want to explore their new environments. The explanation for this reclusive behaviour is two-fold. On the one hand, it was partly conditioned by the internal dynamics and specific cultural precepts that characterise the social networks. Although not confined to them, in general Chinese migrants tended to lead more isolated lives than the other ethnic groups in the early stages after arrival; this consisted of a basic, functional support structure which, by ensuring little more than physical survival, tended to reinforce their sense of isolation. In the case of Fu Chenming (22, M, Chinese), his bleak narrative portrays the very minimal level at which his social network operated; beyond basic sustenance, it provided no social support or emotional help in adjusting to the fear and the isolation:

I stayed with a friend during that week [of arrival] ... who picked me up when I came here. During that week I just stayed home; I normally ate instant noodles, bread. ... I asked the friend to get me some instant noodles and things like that. ... I cooked the meals for myself. ... It's a foreign country for me. ... And I'm afraid to go out. ... You can't communicate with people.

On the other hand, for other young migrants, this early-stage reclusiveness was determined by the powerlessness of their undocumented status. Their isolation and vulnerability were defined by the nature of official controls and regulation, or by their mode of arrival, or the way their own

social networks dealt with these exigencies – or a combination of all three factors. Firat's evidence illustrates exactly how this combination of issues could generate a feeling of helplessness, dependency and necessary isolation, caught as he was between the immigration authorities on the one hand and the fear of possibly being found out as a smuggled migrant on the other:

When I arrive here they took my ID from me. ... They told me that [they] will release me now and then I need to make an application. They have explained to me that I need to find a lawyer and other procedures. ... Smugglers had contact with my brother-in-law so I think they have informed him about my arrival date and time. The officials ... they gave me some papers ... then we went to a lawyer. We prepared a statement with lawyer. I gave them my statement. Then we have applied to Home Office then legal procedure has started. I got refusal at court. (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Zhu Chen (25, F, Chinese) had an even more frightening experience of the way in which her undocumented status necessitated that she remain hidden:

They sent a person to pick us up at the airport. ... I stayed in the snakehead's place for two or three days and moved out to the place where my friend's friend stayed. I had to stay with her because she could not find accommodation for me immediately. They [snakeheads] gave us support for the first two days. They said to us that if we needed further assistance from that point, we had to pay for it.

However, not all the undocumented young migrants struggled in these initial stages because of their irregular status, their mode of arrival, or the limited value of their social networks. Others had clearly been very well prepared. They availed themselves of a sophisticated and efficient 'tour-operator' process that brought them into the UK and immediately provided them with accommodation and employment; Uliana (29, F, Ukrainian) could thus confidently assert that this was quite normal.

Everything was normal, with documents. We were met. ... She didn't say anything at all about where we were going. Then ... she told the address where to take us to a taxi driver. They took us to ... When we

arrived, there was that house managed by a XXX [man]. It was like a hotel for those who came from Ukraine. They [Ukrainians] were first taken there, stayed overnight, and straight away, in the morning, another taxi and taken to that farm.

Others did not arrive as undocumented migrants but on visas or temporary work permits, or they claimed asylum at the border and so had a different range of options and experiences on arrival before becoming 'irregular migrants' (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011). For a minority this had also included being detained in a removal centre or joining family members who were already in the UK. For example, a minority of Zimbabweans had arrived as children or teenagers to join older family members, and had then stayed on once their visas had expired, going to school in England. In the following section we explore the ways in which, regardless of the initial entry route, undocumented migrants became accustomed to their status and learned to negotiate life within its constraints.

### *Undocumentedness in Everyday Life: Encounters and Consequences*

These contradictory, but largely negative, initial reactions upon arrival in the UK segue into the young migrants' realisation that their irregular immigration status is both very problematic and infuses their everyday lives in ways which either cannot readily be resolved by personal resilience and/or support from their social networks, or which will merely diminish with time. Echoing much of the despondency associated with conditions of arrival, the chapter now moves beyond the immediacy of these experiences to explore the complexities of trying to settle in.

Given their status, young undocumented migrants must 'learn to be illegal' (Gonzales 2011), a process replete with ambiguities of visibility and invisibility and which requires new daily routines, social patterns, survival strategies or mere tactics to 'get by' (Datta et al. 2007). Moreover, beyond the functional and material impacts, the youngsters are also compelled to use their agency to avoid or subvert official procedures and legal requirements – forms of transgression which introduce ethical dilemmas that the migrants, because of their youth, may have little experience of handling.

Thus, this turbulent transition has profound implications for the initial stages of 'settlement' which may subsequently cast a long shadow over

their identity formation, friendships, trust, aspirations, and social and economic mobility. As we saw in the previous chapter, the experiences of lack of status and the associated 'deportability' (De Genova 2002; Sigona 2012b) are much more frightening for some than for others. These differential effects are contingent on gender, nationality and country of origin and, sometimes, a combination of all these variables.

In the daily lives of young migrants, the experience of being undocumented manifests itself in obvious and unexpected ways, and impacts on both material needs and functional activities – accommodation, education, health services and financial transactions are all discussed here. At the functional level, the young migrants described the many constraints on their day-to-day existence. Tracy (29, F, Zimbabwean), who has lived in Britain for two periods totalling ten years, summarised the impasse of being undocumented:

I can't do anything without papers. ... Not having papers you can't go to school, you can't do anything, you're not allowed to do anything. You're not allowed to work.

#### *Accommodation*

Finding more permanent accommodation, given the constraints on staying in temporary accommodation when they first arrived, was the first major problem the young undocumented migrants encountered. Dilan (23, F, Kurd from Turkey), who stayed with relatives on arrival, captures some of the issues that arose and narrates how her initial dependency on co-nationals inevitably gave way to tensions and the imperative to move out into separate accommodation with her family:

Yes we stayed in their house when we first arrived. They are valuable for you. ... We are thankful to them [relatives] that they have opened their house for us. We stayed there about five months. But if you live in the same house there are some issues. You have to share rooms with these people. Although you love them [it is] still difficult. It's not best option to stay with them ... In the end we said we should get our own place even it is a single room. When they put us in a hotel all of us stayed in the same room.

Yet moving on did not solve Dilan's unsatisfactory housing conditions. Overcrowding – clearly a continuing concern for her – was a widespread

reprise of many of the young people, alongside poor-quality small rooms, a lack of communal space, high rents, tied accommodation, and conflict with fellow tenants: these are familiar experiences. For migrants with families and children, the poor housing conditions were very distressing, as Jiyan (23, F, Kurd from Turkey), who was living in a small, damp basement with her partner – who was also undocumented – describes:

Very small house. Have to deal with the mice and bugs. ... Because I have a daughter. Living in such a place is bad for my daughter.

These inadequate conditions persisted for many. The example of Guo Ming (30, M, Chinese) illustrates the problems particular to those who lived in tied accommodation, often ‘over the shop’, like a number of the Chinese migrants: ‘I presently live in the [take-away] shop. Three of us share a room.’

How the young undocumented migrants responded to these unsatisfactory conditions reveals much about their levels of resilience and their agency, or lack of it. Many were resigned to the structural forces of housing markets which consigned them to this situation. They endured poor and often exploitative housing conditions, not through inertia, nor because – like other socially marginalised groups – they lacked the political or economic power to voice their grievances and demands or to find better housing. Rather, as undocumented migrants, they had to remain compliant, invisible, and were thus unable to access any formal means to redress these conditions. These early experiences of living with, and learning to be, illegal compounded their vulnerability and their unwillingness to organise resistance.

Housing, like employment, is one of the situations where being undocumented is particularly relevant because bank accounts, references and identification can be required (Khosravi 2010), and so most young migrants relied on others to assist them – for example, workmates, family, friends or acquaintances. Family groups or those whose accommodation was tied to their work – notably the situation of Chinese and Kurdish migrants – were especially susceptible to the structural pressures of exploitative housing-market conditions and their irregular immigration status, which suppressed their rights and voice. Proposals put forward in the UK’s 2013 Immigration Bill include the requirement for private landlords to check the immigration status of their tenants; this is likely to make undocumented migrants even more vulnerable to exploitation

and to the risk of homelessness (Travis 2013). Conversely, it was predominantly the younger or single migrants, or those in relationships without children, who were able to exercise some agency in their search for accommodation. They were more easily able to move in and out of different housing situations in the hope of alleviating some of the stresses of unsatisfactory accommodation, or of reducing rental payments. The desire to improve their housing situation partly explains the higher level of mobility amongst these migrants.

Although housing conditions were a widespread problem for many young undocumented migrants – especially families – this was not always the case. For some the type or quality of housing did not seem to be an issue. These migrants seem to have found accommodation of a reasonable standard, sometimes – as in the case of Custódia (25, F, Brazilian) – by sheer luck, given the irregular immigration status to which she alludes:

It was God's hand, we met this person ... who rented to us ... he didn't ask for any documents ... all is fine in this house.

For some migrants, avoiding the need for documentation may have made the accommodation seem more comfortable than it really was. Or, like Antônio (23, M, Brazilian), they realised that other co-nationals lived in far worse conditions and thus tolerated what they had:

There it was very nice because it was well organised. I visited my friend's house ... conditions where I was [were] much better.

Behind the manifest problems of finding accommodation and being constantly on the move lay the equally constant exposure to exploitation in the rental housing market. The demand for high deposits, the failure to return deposits, overcrowding and the implicit threat of exposure to the immigration authorities were frequently reprised, as these next narratives illustrate:

She refused to give my deposit [back] because she knew I was Brazilian. She said she was going to the police ... she asked for the copies of my documents. If I didn't give her a copy of my documents, she'd go to the police, then I felt desperate. (Beatriz, 24, F, Brazilian)

For example, like, she's got six houses, she puts, she puts too many people in her houses. ... She also threatens people, like, it's not that she threatens of calling immigration. It's that situation where you depend on her. ... You end up being in her hands. (Carol, 24, F, Zimbabwean)

It's very difficult to rent a house. Sometimes even to rent a room, people ask for documents. ... I've already lived in places where I've lost my deposit. Sometimes you have to give £200–£300. (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian)

While it is difficult to generalise, the Brazilian migrants appeared to be less negatively affected by poor accommodation and the associated conditions of exploitation. The reasons for this are not immediately obvious. However, one possible explanation may be that, as we see in other aspects of their lives, less seems to hang on their making a success of the migratory experience, or on the consequences of them failing and being repatriated, than for the other four national/ethnic groups. This conjecture might also be reflected in their initial motives for migration, which had more to do with self-realisation and aspirations to 'see the world' than among others who feared persecution or had economic imperatives, including survival migration (see Betts 2013; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011).

### *Education*

The difficulty in accessing education, noted earlier by Tracy (29, F, Zimbabwean) – 'Not having papers you can't go to school' – was another disturbing feature of the everyday lives of undocumented migrants. The barriers to education were widely experienced and constituted a particularly significant constraint on the developmental aspirations of young people. Without formal immigration status the undocumented migrants could not undertake education and training – notably access to higher education. Even if pursuing education was not initially a primary motivation for migration, it often became an ambition for many young undocumented migrants. As Rojhan (27, M, Kurd from Turkey), who had lived in Britain for nine years, and whose ambitions for education developed while he was there, put it: 'The biggest loss for me is education. I wanted to go to university but I could not.'

Educational ambitions thwarted by 'illegality' and thus an officially excluded identity were particularly keenly felt amongst Zimbabweans, and especially, but not surprisingly, amongst many of the younger,

undocumented migrants like Rojhan and Colin. They had both lived in Britain for a number of years so that the feeling of a blocked opportunity presented itself much more forcefully. Colin (23, M, Zimbabwean), who had lived in Britain for six and half years, having arrived as a teenager, developed an expectation of higher education. Implicitly comparing himself negatively to his 'documented' peers, he clearly articulated his sense of disempowerment, the liminal state in which educational exclusion had left him, and thus the potentially long-term sense of being unfulfilled:

I mean, at first it didn't really affect me until after I completed my A levels and I had to produce my documents to support my funding for university. I think that was when it really hit me, I mean about how bad the situation I was in really was. So I couldn't get into university – something that I knew I could easily get into. I mean from that point, I think that's when my life really changed. From that point – after leaving ... after completing my A Levels [you] know that [you] are capable of doing something and you can't do it. Sometimes you can lose hope and think 'What's the hope in this place?'

It is not just the failure to access education which diminishes the self-worth of the individual aspiring student like Colin. For undocumented parents, trying to find a way into education for their children, now or in the future when they reach school age, is equally difficult. Our research echoes findings from comparative research in EU member-states demonstrating that the right to education for irregular migrant children is highly problematic (Arnot and Pinson 2005; Carrera and Merlino 2009; PICUM 2008; Pinson, Arnot and Candappa 2010; Sigona and Hughes 2012: 30); since exposure to detection is always possible, access is denied without identification or at the discretion of individual teachers, and extra-curricular activity is often unaffordable. Jiyan (23, F, Kurd from Turkey) captures these concerns:

How long can we carry on like that? ... Soon, our child's situation will also be discovered. She will not be able to go to school. How long can we live here? I mean it is such a difficult thing. It is a very bad thing. This affects our relations at home. ... For my daughter's future. Because perhaps she will not study. She can go now [to nursery], but perhaps in future she will not be able to go. My child will have to sit at home. That's a very bad thing.



The poignancy with which Jiyan expresses her apprehension for her daughter's educational prospects intersects several characteristics of the ever-present insecurity of being undocumented. As we can see, uncertainty over their legal 'right' of access not only mediates the everyday life of the family as a whole, but also casts a threatening shadow over the future if her daughter cannot go to school. Although she recognises that it is their undocumented status that is the barrier, she evokes a pervasive sense of self-blame that, as a mother, she is letting the family down. It is legal processes, regulations and categories that determine these outcomes, yet they have become inscribed in the family's life-course by shaping an identity of personal and family failure. In addition, there is the unstated and sinister message that Jiyan is suppressing – that their own 'irregular' status will be exposed when her daughter reaches school age. Finally, this narrative reveals the significance of the intergenerational impacts. The consequences of being undocumented do not just produce a stigma for the migrants who arrived first but, through legal and institutional practices, also re-produce an inherited identity of marginality and disempowerment that reverberates across generations and whose impact is also felt beyond the country of residence – for example, in the separation of parents from left-behind siblings.

### *Health Care*

Another constant concern for the undocumented is what happens when medical care is needed, a concern which echoes other studies showing how, although government policies acknowledge the needs of migrant populations (Jayaweera 2010: 1; Phillimore et al. 2010), specific categories of migrants – such as refugees, asylum-seekers, unaccompanied minors and, especially, irregular migrants – receive significantly less attention (Oxfam GB and the Refugee Council 2005; Sigona and Hughes 2012: 34). Like the wish to access education just discussed, the most obvious fear lies in the process of accessing health services, unequivocally stated by both Fu Chenming and Amed:

You can't see a doctor when you are unwell. (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese)

I got ill few times but I could not go to the doctor. Why? Because I have no documents. I cannot go. What cannot I do? I try to cure myself at home. Although I am a socialist and I do not believe in any religion,

I am trying to get my health back by believing superficial ways [i.e., praying]. Why? Because I cannot even buy medicine. I cannot go to doctor what cannot I do? (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Fu Chenming's unemotional response typifies the resignation with which many of the young migrants presented their situation, as we have seen in other situations. Behind the immediacy of Amed's desperation and isolation were the more profound consequences of his undocumented status: he felt compelled to deny his non-religious principles and pray.

Their fear of detection and lack of resources to buy medicines causes the young migrants to suppress their illnesses, live with the sickness or, in extreme situations, take risks with their health. Mei Chen (24, F, Chinese) recounted the incident of a 40-year-old undocumented man, the father of a friend, who was taken ill at a tube station. Concerned about lying down in case he drew attention to himself, he refused treatment, but the consequences and the impact on friends and family remained very worrying: 'He is very ill. I feel [the situation] is very insecure.'

Young migrants have to cope with extreme anxiety when seeking medical assistance becomes unavoidable. Berenice (23, F, Brazilian), who had lived in Britain for four years, found herself in this situation and her account mirrors that of other young undocumented migrants – on the one hand, greatly fearing the need to seek medical help but, on the other, grateful to discover that the medical duty of care overrides the need for documentary proof of eligibility:

I've been in hospital, as emergency, so, they saw me quickly ... they didn't ask me for my documents, thank God, but, everything, you know, it wasn't too serious, thank God. It was only a fever that wouldn't go away, so, like, we had to go [to hospital].

That Berenice's emotional relief regarding her undocumented status comes, significantly, before her relief that the illness was not serious reveals much about the level of anxiety that 'irregularity' provokes.

Whereas young and single migrants took risks or found ways of coping with the stress of illness, for parents with young children and pregnant women, access to health services could often be an extremely desperate and stressful process. Different registration practices amongst GPs were especially problematic. Jiyun (23, F, Kurd from Turkey) had not encountered problems registering herself and her child with a GP but,

while the family's immediate health-care needs had been dealt with, Jiyan then had to live with the consequential fear that her undocumented status would eventually be revealed – which compounded the anxieties she already had over her daughter's education, as revealed above.

There is not problem in terms of bringing my child to GP. The chemist gives her medicines for free. I am afraid that there will be some problems about that. Because I am undocumented and I go to the doctor for free. There is no problem now, but there will be sometimes.

Like others in her situation, Avashin's (29, F, Kurd from Turkey) lack of knowledge of her (albeit limited) rights and fear of trying to establish those rights infused her daily life to the extent that she does not take her child to the doctor but instead relies on paracetamol and the advice of others with young children. Halyna (26, F, Ukrainian), meanwhile, describes her intense fears about the consequences of trying to access antenatal care as a pregnant mother without formal immigration status:

The most difficult was when I became pregnant. ... I needed a GP and they wouldn't register me anywhere because I didn't have a visa in [my] passport ... For me it was such desperation. Because I went from one GP [to another] ... I didn't have any antenatal care. I had to go to private establishments to get any antenatal care because I was very worried, well, how. ... But it cost me. And again, I was angry. Knowing that I can receive free antenatal care, I had to pay big money. I don't have a lot and had to fork out on that. This was the most difficult for me. In relation to finding a GP and all those [registration] 'procedures' and those walks [from pillar to post]. That was for me the most difficult to manage. But on the other side ... Well, how the most difficult? Because of the worries. First of all, you are carrying a child. You don't know. And what other fears I had that they frightened me that I'll have to pay. And that at the end, when the child will be born, an immigration officer will come to hospital. [They] frightened me with all those things like they will be asking for your status and this and that. They scared me a lot. Even that woman at GP's was trying to scare me saying that I have to be careful because, if I'm undocumented, an immigration officer can come to this, to hospital, asking you questions. That was frightening me a lot.

This lengthy narrative, as in the case of Jiyan's concern for her child's education, reveals the complex interplay of the practical and emotional

consequences of being undocumented: surviving as an ‘illegal’ intersected not only her day-to-day antenatal needs but the whole profound, emotional experience of pregnancy. The overwhelming fear of detection had a devastating impact at a major life-stage.

Another dimension of accessing medical assistance – not unique to undocumented migrants – was the need to use intermediaries to act as translators:

I’ve been here, let’s say, for three years and I’ve never really been to the doctor ... the worst thing is that you have to find somebody to accompany you. That’s what I find horrible. (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian)

Here we see how ‘illegality’ not only dominates day-to-day functional needs – Alice has had to deny herself medical attention – but also infuses even the most intimate personal aspects of one’s life when medical assistance becomes essential. Being illegal thus subjects the individual to degrading behaviour.

Even if a medical diagnosis can be obtained the problems do not stop there. Fernando ironically described how he had to conceal his lack of status when buying his medicines. Although costing more than the prescription charge, his lack of status and thus of a National Insurance number necessitated paying privately. Again, we can see different dimensions and levels of ‘learning to be illegal’. At the most basic level, there is the suppression of an ‘illegal’ identity. At another level it produces practical penalties – paying a higher charge. And, at yet another level, it governs the migrant’s disposition and personal behaviour: we can find this exemplified in the perverse obligation that Fernando (27, M, Brazilian) felt in having apologise to the chemist for the fact that he incurred a penalty, for his ‘illegality’, despite the hardship this caused.

When I bought the medicine, at Boots, the staff told me, if I had the GP, I should try to get it, because ... I’d pay £7 [the prescription charge]. She asked me why I don’t go to the GP and register ... I told her that my GP was private. She said, ‘Don’t do this, it’s too expensive.’ Poor thing, she didn’t know about my situation. I said, ‘That’s OK, it’s not a problem.’

#### *Finance*

Another situation where their undocumented status affected the livelihoods and well-being of young migrants was in handling money.

Whether or not the primary motive for migration was to earn money, being undocumented and thus working illegally was very problematic when it came to banking:

You cannot even walk into a bank and open an account easily. (Jamie, 30, M, Zimbabwean)

You try ... to open bank accounts because that's one other thing as well, without an ID in this country you can't open a bank account ... that's a basic thing that everyone needs, a bank account. You can't always live on cash. (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean)

The lack of a bank account creates other barriers, with the result that significant social needs cannot be met nor the necessary resources bought. Brígido (30, M, Brazilian) summed up this cul-de-sac, and the desperation that many like him felt, when he said:

I go to the bank, when I try when I try, like, to change my account I can't. If I try to get a mobile phone, I can't. If I try to get [access to] the internet but internet like 3 [a company], I can't.

While the problems of access to banking can usually be circumvented, this might be at the price of exploitation and exposure to higher levels of vulnerability. Thus some of the young migrants we interviewed had lost money and savings as a result of corruption or simply theft. The fear of betrayal or blackmail is ever present, notably for the Chinese and Kurdish migrants, although for different reasons. For the former it is because the snakeheads would still expect to be paid, even if the migrant is repatriated; for the Kurds, the fear is not of the loss of money but of persecution back home. Serhado (28, M, Kurd from Turkey) explains the dire (implied) consequences for him if he tried to recover stolen money:

Some people even losing their money in one second that they saved over the years. The person they leave the money with is not giving the money and you cannot take it back. You cannot argue or fight because he can spy [on] you.

Two Chinese interviewees narrate their similar experiences:

We were staying in the same accommodation. When wages were given, she [room-mate] said [to the foreman] that she (Yao Xiamin ) 'was

unwell with a painful leg and couldn't come to get [her money]'. No problem, we stay in the same place, she [room-mate] say 'I can take it back to her.' She then took it. But never gave it to me afterwards. (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese)

She went to gamble and gambled away all my money. Actually I had planned to send the money home that day. ... I had saved up nearly £2,000. She didn't tell me about it. She left there on a Sunday ... but didn't let me know. I called but she didn't answer the phone. Later others told me that she was a gambler ... with the exchange rate that time, would [send home] nearly 30,000 Yuan. (Gao Zeng, 24, F, Chinese)

Since they cannot hold bank accounts, undocumented migrants resort to unofficial money-transfer agencies that will charge them a substantial commission. Although still vulnerable to theft and extortion, they see this as a necessary price to pay:

You must have status to send money through a bank. So it's great if they (private bank) offer to help you send money whilst you have no status. If they want to charge a bit ... you'd let them do it. It would be much better than they just take your money and run; in that case all you can do is blame yourself to be unlucky. You may want to take them to the court if you want to; but you can't even find them anywhere. (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese)

### *Sexual Exploitation*

Financial exploitation was not the only encounter with an immoral world which the young migrants had to learn to deal with very fast. Although only one young migrant spoke directly of sexual exploitation, the fear of it, or of predatory behaviour due to their undocumented status, was ever-present. Resisting the almost inevitable sexual demands had to be balanced with the risks of being exposed to the immigration authorities. Handling their vulnerability and powerlessness in these threatening situations – which they would have been very unlikely to have confronted back home – demanded high levels of resilience and courage without the support of family or social networks. Tatiana's and Alice's experiences speak to the vulnerabilities of young female migrants and their coping mechanisms:

There were many of us. ... He proposed me to do cleaning in his house. I thought that this was very good because he knows that I'm illegal. ... He pays well. He harassed me. He wanted me to sleep with him and ... I simply ... I simply ... I didn't want to lose money but I felt I had to do it [refuse cleaning]. He simply blackmailed me. I know many girls who told me, they worked in that hotel too. ... How he solicited Lithuanian [girls/women] ... so he will keep quiet [about their status]. (Tatiana 22, F, Ukrainian)

My biggest problem has never been immigration or anything, it was always this [ex-] boyfriend of mine. Because I didn't know how to tell the police, how to do anything. He used to follow me, to threaten me. ... I had to constantly hide because he'd wait for me at the door. (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian)

### *Coping in the Public Realm: Mobility and Communication*

So far we have explored how being undocumented impacts on access to essential day-to-day needs such as accommodation, education and medical care, and how the status of young migrants demands often intricate and perverse patterns of 'learned' behaviour that become necessary in order for them to cope with their situation. We have seen how the intersection of 'irregularity' and personal bearing not only leads to demeaning and frightening experiences as well as heightened vulnerability, but also creates a need to resolve the complex functional and emotional contradictions that challenge the young migrants.

However, the ambiguity of being both visible and invisible affects not only the migrants' material needs and well-being. The functional needs of everyday life have to be connected, and this means learning to survive in a public realm which is not just unfamiliar but also potentially highly threatening. This is where different survival strategies have to be learned in order to remain as invisible as possible in an environment where one is exposed, but with less scope or ability to control the outcomes or gauge how to react than in more planned encounters, such as visiting a doctor's surgery or using an intermediary.

Exploring a new environment should be an exciting part of arrival and adjustment. Instead, the challenges of moving around in the public realm constitute continuing evidence of the young migrants' problematic

undocumented status. On the one hand, their precarious status demands frequent geographical, occupational and residential mobility. On the other, vulnerability and fear of being caught can create a sense of paranoia, limiting them to minimal movement in their localities and to very cautious use of public transport – even sometimes imprisoning them in their homes. Learning to live without papers in this way is clearly not only highly dysfunctional; it also prevents young migrants from engaging in a crucial aspect of youth as a life-stage – developing social networks and relations, and negotiating and shaping their identities and their place in society through peer association and support.

These complex and disjunctive experiences are evident in many of the young migrants' narratives as they seek to conduct their daily lives in the public realm. The uncertainty over their status and thus their paradoxical attitudes to, and experience of, mobility are expressed in their fear of being caught and their extreme cautiousness in using public transport. Something of the guarded uncertainty that permeates their lives – the fear of being detected, the implicit need to keep open 'escape routes' and the overwhelmingly dysfunctional behaviour this creates – is captured in these diverse accounts:

My friend was caught on the tube and now I avoid catching the tube. I've been travelling a lot by bus. I'm afraid, man. I don't want to put myself at risk. (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian)

Some say you get caught, some say [it's] safer but I hear and told that I should not get on the bus. Because they check very often. They raid buses very often. (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey)

We hardly go out; the [authorities] in the UK are getting strict on [illegal migrants] these days. I don't want to take the risk to go out. I stay at home basically. ... Here ... if you get lost, you won't be able to ask the police for help; you can't tell them what's happening. (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese)

Ironically, for Kurds from Turkey, living with the fear of detection in the public realm replicates exactly their fear of apprehension in Turkey – which was what brought some of them to Britain in the first place. This is exemplified by Avashin (29, F, Kurd from Turkey), who came seeking asylum. She dramatically expresses how her fear of persecution has now



been transposed from Turkey to Britain, reinforcing her physical and social isolation:

Yes I do get scared that [I] might get caught by the immigration officers, sometimes I don't leave house of my friends. I just stay in all day. I use public transport, and if I get caught without a card, they may send me back home so I feel scared.

For others, keeping one step ahead of the immigration authorities necessitated being on the move:

I was in Birmingham for over a year; and then I've come here for some months now. In February [when I was still in Birmingham] they [immigration authorities] began to round up people. They hadn't got me yet. But some of those that worked in the boss' other restaurant were arrested; the boss then quickly laid off all those who had no status working in the restaurant that I was in. That's why we got the sack. Then we came down to London and hired a room to stay and look for work. (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese)

Conversely, the potential for being apprehended, but without the fear from previous experiences of persecution or a repressive state apparatus, sometimes makes this into a familiar game which young people play – challenging or outwitting authority figures, in this case the police and the immigration authorities. For Brazilians like Custódia (25, F, Brazilian), for example, being caught had fewer direct consequences, since the impetus for their migration or the retrospective experience of state security were so different:

... you have, it's a bit of fear, caution of going to certain places, for example, 'Ah, we are not going to the pub because the immigration, not immigration, the police usually goes there from time to time.' Or 'I am not going to this pub because the police has closed it down and will do it again.' So you end up, you have to get streetwise to know where, which places you go. The best places are the English ones, you know [*laughs*]. They [the police] never go there [to English places].

Material needs and social conditions were also drivers of mobility. Poor accommodation, in particular, was a major factor in the young people's

mobility. Brígido said 'I've moved many times.' He had lived in Britain for over three years, whereas Carol had only arrived about two years later, yet their narratives are typical of their instability, and of their resilience in dealing with housing crises:

We arrived and lived with a couple ... we moved – more because they moved ... and the landlord wanted the house. After I went to live with this Brazilian girl. Then I moved to a far place, in a building, God, such a strange building. It looked like a prison, whatever, such a place. Then I went to live with all those people [seven]. Then I moved to another building with this couple, then they broke up and we left. (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian)

Once we had problems with a flatmate. ... So we moved because, I couldn't even look at her, so we moved. There are problems all the time. Like, I was the only one to tidy up the house. They didn't. So, there are these little clashes. (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian)

Evident is the way that their social and personal circumstances accentuate the dynamic pressures of settling in suitable accommodation. For Alice (27, F, Brazilian), the break-up of the relationship with her boyfriend and the need to change accommodation accentuated still further the instability and vulnerability of her situation:

He used to follow me, to threaten me. I had to take a month's holiday because, like, he'd go there all the time. I had to constantly hide because he'd wait for me.

The other main factor driving the almost constant shifting of accommodation was the search for employment. In the case of Huadi Zhang (29, M, Chinese) this was combined with the fear of detection by the immigration authorities. But, for many young Chinese migrants, it was the search for other employment that most frequently precipitated a change of housing, as Meixin He (24, M, Chinese) said:

I stayed in Manchester for a few months and then returned to London. I just felt that it was difficult to find work there so I came back to London.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the experiences of being young and undocumented in Britain from the perspective of the migrants' arrival and their early encounters with day-to-day realities. The importance of examining these initial encounters lies not only in the fact that they determine the migrants' longer-term disposition and strategies for settling in; more importantly, they also demand coping mechanisms and agency in highly challenging circumstances at a formative stage of these young people's lives that are likely to shape their social, emotional and personal values for the rest of their adult lives. This requires them to manage an ambiguous and often suppressed identity at an early stage of adulthood, in which they are paradoxically both visible and invisible and where security and insecurity, trust and mistrust, autonomy and dependency, vulnerability and self-reliance, are in almost constant tension.

The sense of powerlessness, fear and exclusion, and the frustrations which come from being undocumented and which limit access to perceived opportunities, are the prevailing reactions of the young migrants after their arrival and in their initial day-to-day encounters. Without recourse to the law or the police to remedy many of the injustices from which they suffer, and which have nothing to do with their undocumented status, they often feel humiliated at not being able to claim their rights for fear that their illegal status will come to light. Alice, who had been in the UK for three years, and Amed and Mei Chen, summed it up thus:

The lack of freedom due to being an illegal. ... You know it keeps you from things which I believe are essential to human beings: go out ... to travel around the country ... you can't do it. (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian)

We cannot have a proper life here. (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

But then he didn't dare to report this incident to the police, because he knew full well that he had no status ... I have heard of many such stories. (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese)

Yet at times the narratives also provide ironic asides on daily life, *sans papiers*:

The only thing you can do in this country is get a bus pass, that's the only thing you can get without being asked for papers, that's all. (Tanaka, 22, F, Zimbabwean)

Sometimes, when I want to buy myself a beer and I'm asked if I have any ID, it gets so funny for me because ... I have ... 29 years and they still ask me for ID [*laughs*]. That's when it gets funny. (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian)

What these excerpts, and indeed the chapter as a whole, tell us is that whereas much of the literature frames migrant agency in host states mainly in terms of collective support and the substructure of social capital and social networks, what emerges from our study – following Das (2006) and Sigona (2012b) – is that an irregular status requires the young people to deploy far more mundane, fragile and, most importantly, individualised acts of migrant agency in everyday lives in order to cope with frequently changing circumstances, precarious livelihoods, and the overshadowing fear of deportation. Underpinning many of the narratives is a sense of liminality and the need to remain invisible – or at least a perceived need to remain invisible in the early stages. For these reasons, undocumented migrants are reluctant to rely on existing networks, for fear of either exposure or exploitation.

While, in some respects, their undocumentedness, in challenging the authority of the state, could be portrayed as the agency of 'migrant resistance' – the focus of much of the literature on migrant agency (e.g. Nyers 2011; Però and Solomos 2010) – it is far from the resistance and political mobilisation through which documented migrants contest and reshape the state's monopoly over traditional conceptualisations of citizenship and identity. In these early stages, as Sigona concludes, youth and 'illegality' intersect the migrants' lives, creating a form of agency which mediates their emotional, socio-economic and legal *milieux*, as well as their expectations of the migrant project (Sigona 2012b). But this is the agency of survival, coping with isolation and growing into adult life in highly vulnerable circumstances, not the agency which situates an identity within the wider political discourse on migration and migrant political mobilisation.

# 5

## *Legal Status and the Labour Market*

Employment is one of the main areas that defines the experiences of young undocumented migrants. While economic factors act as a migration driver for some, for all undocumented migrants, whatever their reasons for migration, having paid work or having alternative support structures are crucial in the absence of welfare entitlements. Decisions about type of work, sectors of employment and potential employers are taken within the framework of being undocumented. Levels of human and social capital, routes to becoming undocumented and aspirations to, or fear of, return to the country of origin all intersect with decisions about employment. Additionally, gender, family and household circumstances, alongside the context of being young, all affect experiences. Labour markets are segmented by immigration status, ethnicity and gender, and while for some, being young provides the drive and energy needed to work several jobs, earning as much money as possible in as short a time as possible, for others the constraints of being undocumented lead them to reflect on wasted qualifications and ambitions and generate a sense of growing older without progressing. In this chapter, the work experiences of undocumented migrants will be explored. The chapter will show that undocumented migrants occupy very particular places in the labour market, clustered in the least regulated parts of the economy.

### *Situating Experiences of Employment*

#### *The Wider Economic Context*

Though migration motives are complex and varied, irregular migration is often precipitated by uneven development and differential opportunities. Within this framework, both the economies of the sending countries

and those of the receiving countries will have an impact on the choices, experiences and strategies of undocumented migrants in the labour market. In the UK context, and that of other developed countries of the global north and west, changes in occupational structures – from manufacturing to a finance and service-based economy – have resulted in a greater reliance on migrant labour to fill low-paid jobs in the service sectors. New migrants provide labour for the low-wage economy with workers clustered in sectors such as hospitality, cleaning, care work, construction and food-processing (Cobb, King and Rodriguez 2009; Wills et al. 2010). Wills et al. note the existence of employment cleavages by gender, nationality and ethnicity, and the greater propensity for women to be working in private domestic spaces, compared to their male counterparts. These cleavages, which also intersected with the migrant division of labour based on immigration status, resulted in differential experiences among new migrant workers. Those with an irregular status were more marginalised and vulnerable in the labour market than others, as their lack of papers – coupled with their lack of access to welfare rights – left them with few choices. Thus Wills et al. observe the ways in which migrants ‘are caught in the cross fire of contemporary capitalism’ (2009: 257) because it relies on cheap, disposable labour with workers enjoying few or no rights and lacking basic employment benefits such as sick leave, overtime payments or pensions because these all incur employer costs driving up the price of labour. Being easy to hire and fire is one of the hallmarks of the kind of casual work carried out by undocumented migrants, which can be seasonal in the case of agricultural work, daily for casual labourers in construction, hourly or by piece as is the case with cleaning jobs and work in the garment industry.

Segmented labour markets with similar cleavages and patterns of precarious low-paid work undertaken by undocumented migrants and gendered in nature are in evidence all over the world. Rutherford and Addison (2007), for example, found that Zimbabwean men were better paid as farm workers in South Africa than women. Moreover, they reported the more generic experience that ‘employers took advantage of their desperation and the fact that their legality was unclear’ (2007: 627). As a consequence of their status, workers had little recourse to making complaints because they were vulnerable to losing their jobs and to deportation. Holmes (2007) carried out an ethnographic study of Mexican workers picking berries and cutting tulips in the Skagit Valley in the north-east of the United States, painting a detailed picture of the

living conditions and lives of farm workers. Work experiences, conditions and opportunities were based on ethnicity and citizenship hierarchies, with indigenous Mexican undocumented migrants doing the most back-breaking jobs in exchange for the worst living conditions on the farms and the least pay.

Triqui strawberry pickers work seven days a week, rain or shine, without a day off until the last strawberry is processed. Occupying the bottom of the ethnicity-citizenship labour hierarchy, undocumented Triqui strawberry pickers bear an unequal share of health problems. (Holmes 2007: 51)

The 'ethnicity-citizenship labour hierarchy' observed by Holmes is, he notes, the norm in North American farming (2007: 48). The fear of border patrols and subsequent deportation, and a costly journey paying smugglers to cross the border back from Mexico to the United States, mean that this group – like Zimbabwean farm workers in South Africa – suffer from 'a lack of power to counteract mistreatment and abuse' (Holmes 2007: 49).

Increasingly the concept of precariousness is used to understand the position of those lacking the rights normally associated with residency and/or citizenship – including the right to work and to remain in the country of abode (Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009). The next section considers the linkages between precariousness, forced work and status as a context within which the data on employment experiences can be explored.

#### *Precariousness: The Case of Undocumented Migrants*

The lack of status leaves undocumented migrants the most vulnerable to forced labour and the least likely to be able to access 'decent work' (Dwyer et al. 2011; Skrivankova 2010). This group of marginalised workers are largely dependent on work within the informal, unregulated parts of the economy and can be vulnerable to employer exploitation and coercion (Dwyer et al. 2011). The precariousness of undocumented migrants in the labour market is created by the state and compounded by invisibility; these combine to create an 'underclass which is vulnerable on several fronts, including ... limited recourse in the event of abuse at work' (Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard 2009: 241). Anderson, however, is cautious about focusing on the 'evil employer', arguing that, for undocumented migrants, the key issue is 'the institutionalised uncertainty ... enforced by the state' (2010: 311–12).

The relationships are, of course, complex. States do produce precarious workers, located firmly within ethnic enclave employment – that is businesses located within the ethnic enclave where the employer is from the same ethnic group as employees – and hidden in kitchens or domestic settings, often unable to acquire wider social networks and English-language skills, and dependent on limited work options due to the vulnerability of their status. The data, as we will see, strongly indicate, from the perspective of the workers, a detailed knowledge of the hierarchies of immigration status within the workplace and of the ways in which it disadvantaged them in relation to documented workers. Labour markets and workplace relationships are complex and fluid, but it is hard to deny the tendency for undocumented migrants to be at the bottom of any work hierarchy as a consequence of the intersection with immigration status. While states produce precarious workers who are, for the most part, unable to access ‘decent work’, employers can and do capitalise on worker dependency in the face of their limited options. Exclusion from welfare provision enhances this vulnerability, as undocumented migrants either have to work, have people to support them or lend them money, or have accumulated savings to support themselves during periods of unemployment. In short, this means that undocumented migrants have a much greater propensity to precarious work and/or forced labour than other workers due simply to their lack of choices (Dwyer et al. 2011).

However, there are mechanisms used by undocumented migrants which can empower them in small ways against employers, such as choosing to leave a job. There are also tactics used to circumvent the restrictions of being undocumented such as acquiring documents that can be used to access the more regulated parts of the labour market (Vasta 2011). Undocumented migrants can and do use strategies or tactics, though these are finely balanced for their costs and benefits. Those with debts or a fear of persecution in their country of origin, or who are ‘survival migrants’ (Betts 2010; O’Connell Davidson 2013), are more constrained and less willing to take risks than those whose migratory project is an adventure or a short-term economic endeavour. This means that a number of factors must be considered when examining strategies and individual and collective agency.

### *Migrant Agency*

Undocumented migrants shape their everyday lives and adapt their daily routines, interactions and economic activities to reflect their



circumstances. Even within the constraints of being undocumented, individuals exercise differing amounts of power and control. Previous research provides examples of the ways in which both collective and individual action can have an effect on wages and other aspects of working lives. Rogaly (2009), for example, focused on temporary migrants working in the agricultural sector in India and the UK and noted the diverse and informal modes of agency in spaces of employment including in relation to wage demands. Though the changes were small and incremental, they had a significant impact on employment experiences. Similarly the ethnographic study carried out by Cleaveland and Pierson (2009) with undocumented Latino workers in the United States found that, by exercising choice over the jobs they accepted, workers were able to use collective action to ensure a minimum level of pay for everyone. Other modes of agency are more individualistic – such as buying, selling and borrowing documents to enable more autonomy and control within the labour market (Vasta 2011; Reeves 2013) – though such strategies are not without risk. In short, people exercise agency in collective and individual ways and these all intersect with labour-market experience, even among the most marginalised of workers.

For some migrants and their employers being undocumented can be a strategic choice, creating agency within the framework of the state's migration policies. Ruhs and Anderson (2010) explore the hazy and contested spaces of semi-compliance – when migrants are legally resident but working outside the conditions attached to their status – that allows migrants and their employers to maximise economic benefits while, at the same time, reducing the risk of state sanctions associated with violations of immigration law. This serves the interests of both employers and workers.

The following sections offer a more detailed qualitative understanding of the labour-market experiences and decision-making of undocumented migrants and the ways in which these experiences are mediated through the intersecting lenses of migration and migration motives, irregularity, youth, policy, aspirations, gender and individual agency. In the first section, we provide an overview of employment – particularly of job sectors and conditions of work – highlighting the location of undocumented migrants within the informal and most unregulated parts of the economy. This is followed by an exploration of the strategies used to find work and their intersections with social networks. Next we look at the extent to which undocumented migrants see themselves as exerting agency in their decision-making, before finally examining the ways in which people cope

when they have no work. Throughout the chapter, we see the important role of family and friendship networks in relation to work and during periods of unemployment.

### *Employment: An Overview of Labour-Market Experiences*

Employment was the main reason for migration among a number of our interviewees, so it was not surprising that the majority (55 out of 75) were in paid work. The pressure to find work was exacerbated by the lack of welfare entitlements and, for some, the debts they had incurred making the journey. There were differences in economic activity by gender and the reasons for migration. Women were less likely to be working than men, partly as a result of childcare responsibilities or pregnancy at the time of the interview. Nine of the 16 women who were not working or were working very occasionally had children. For the most part, these women had either close family members or a partner to support them. Refused asylum-seekers, who were either Zimbabweans or Kurds, were less likely to be working than those who had never claimed asylum – fewer than half and 84 per cent respectively. Some refused asylum-seekers had opted not to work as part of a risk-reduction strategy. This was only possible for those who were able to find alternative support. Some had relatives who looked after them, others relied on handouts from churches, community groups and other charitable organisations, and a minority exchanged unpaid childcare and cleaning for a room and food.

Among those who were working, the jobs were almost always in the secondary sector and there was virtually no mobility into primary-sector employment; the pattern was horizontal movement across secondary-sector jobs. Most people were working for co-ethnic employers in either ethnic-enclave businesses or in ethnic-minority niches. A very small minority had found work outside of these spheres but this depended largely on using constructed documents to facilitate access to more regulated parts of the economy.

The main sites of work within the ethnic enclave were restaurants, take-away shops, small supermarkets and off-licences. In ethnic-minority niche employment the main jobs were cleaning or other domestic work such as looking after older people in their homes. Zimbabweans were most likely to be working or to have worked in the cleaning or care sectors. Brazilians worked for the most part in cleaning and restaurants, while the

Chinese and Kurdish migrants were mostly rooted in co-ethnic enclave businesses – usually in the fast-food sector, restaurants, supermarkets and off-licences. Ukrainian men tended to work in construction and women in a range of jobs largely within the service sector.

Table 5.1 Main characteristics by employment status, frequencies (N = 75)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Working</i>	<i>Not working or working very occasionally</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	19	16	35
Male	32	8	40
<b>Country of origin</b>			
Zimbabwe	7	9	16
Brazil	15	1	15
Turkey/Kurdistan	8	6	14
China	10	6	16
Ukraine	11	2	13
<b>Region</b>			
London	31	14	45
North West	14	1	15
West Midlands	6	9	15
<b>Age</b>			
18–24	23	11	34
25–31	28	13	41
<b>Length of time in Britain</b>			
3 years or less	29	7	36
More than 3 years	22	17	39

Table 5.2 shows the employment situation of our respondents at the time of the interviews. A gendered dimension to work is evident – men were in construction and building and were more likely to work in take-away shops and restaurants. Within restaurants, men occupied the most physically demanding and hidden spaces of the kitchen, while women were more often found at the front of house, either taking orders or preparing drinks at the bar, though this required some English-language skills. Reflecting on her previous job as a waitress, Zhu Chen (25, F, Chinese) mentioned the gendered division of labour in restaurants and take-away shops:

There's nothing else to do, apart from waiting at the table ... they don't like hiring female workers to work in the kitchen.

A minority of people had more than one job and, where this was the case, both jobs have been coded, so that, in the table, the total number of jobs adds up to more than the number of interviewees. A few Zimbabweans were doing very sporadic work such as occasional cake-baking or hair-braiding – an hour or two a month – and have been listed as not working.

Table 5.2 Type of work by country of origin and gender (N=75)

Type of work	Brazil		Zimbabwe		China		Turkey/ Kurdistan		Ukraine		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Restaurants/take-aways:											
kitchen assistant, cook,											
taking orders at counter	3	1			4	3	3				15
Cleaning	3	5		1							11
Construction/building	1				1				6		8
Shop assistant/shelf-stocker		1					4				5
Sales and administration			2	1							3
Private teacher/tutor	1							1			2
Courier and food delivery	2										2
Street sales (DVDs)					2						2
Care work				3							3
Mechanic			1								1
Bar work	1										1
Hairdresser										1	1
Warehouse packer										1	1
Not working/working											
very occasionally	0	1	4	5	1	5	3	3		2	24

There was movement in and out of jobs, many of which were characterised by informality and insecurity. While Cobb, King and Rodriguez’s (2009) research with Mexicans in the United States found that informality was constructed as a necessary and positive thing, as it enabled work without questions and without having to produce documents, the reverse side of this was the precariousness of the job and the constant worry about when it might end. Fu Chenming (22, M, Chinese) sums up this feeling of insecurity when he says ‘You are constantly worried that you might get sacked.’ Being in such a precarious state removes any kind of stability and makes planning almost impossible. As another interviewee stated:

We never feel secure. We may work today, but we won't know what will happen to us tomorrow. (Lin Fei, 20, M, Chinese)

As a consequence of status, low pay and long hours relative to those of other workers were reported and, while they were an accepted part of being undocumented, this did not alleviate the sense of resentment and injustice. The lack of choice and the inability to contest conditions at work, as a result of being undocumented, framed the ways in which most people talked about their jobs. The following quotations from Serhado, who was working in an off-licence, Jamie, who was working as a mechanic, and Ray, who had worked in a number of different jobs through what he describes as 'dodgy agencies', illustrate some of these experiences:

The boss knows that you are undocumented and need to work, therefore he gets you to work more hours for less money. ... It's not an easy thing. You give the same effort but you get less. It's of course hard to accept. ... You are facing an injustice. (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey)

It's frustrating because I would think, for the type of job I am doing right now, having the right documentation would mean that I would be earning more than I am getting; it's more of a fact that, if you don't have much of a choice, you sort of have to take what you get, so its, so it's frustrating. (Jamie, 30, M, Zimbabwean)

... the people that give you these jobs take liberties because they know you can't complain, that's why I got sick of it ... err at one job 8 hour shift, no break, no break. A British citizen wouldn't take that, it's against health and safety, but they do that because they know you can't complain. It's not right, but [you know] it's – if you don't want to do it then go away. It's either you do it or you don't. (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean)

Being undocumented can also create vulnerability in the workplace and, for some, verbal abuse and bullying were features of their experiences. Others highlighted what they felt were unreasonable and unequal expectations of the kind of physical work that was suitable for undocumented migrants compared to others. This relational idea of the impact of status was very evident in the narratives. In the following quotations, Semen talks about his experiences in a factory and Huadi Zhang about his work in a take-away

shop, while Levko alludes to the differential employer expectations based on perceptions of national group characteristics and immigration status:

At the factory ... they were shouting at workers, the treatment was brutal. ... I am not saying that they were running behind you with whips. They would simply yell at you hysterically. (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian)

You work non-stop. If you pause, he'd say that you're lazy; he shouts at you every day. (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese)

... a lot of leaves falling now and ... there was a street that needed to be cleaned so we told the boss 'Bring us that Hoover to clean that all up.' He said 'Why [do] we need a Hoover, we have Ukrainians?' So I always faced crap like that at work, you know 'Why we need a tractor for digging, we have illegal?' (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian)

Vulnerability made some feel they lacked choices and this was most acute among those who had no relatives to help them and/or who had incurred large debts while making their journey to the UK. The pressure to pay back debts was most often faced by workers from China, who in some cases had spent up to £20,000 getting to the UK.

What if the police get you? ... I'm always worried. ... At the end of the day, we have no status. ... If I were arrested and sent back, the whole family would be finished. We'd be finished. Then whatever we do there is no way that we could pay back the debts. (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese)

Some undocumented migrants had experienced difficulties at work, in relation to money. A minority had been forced to accept compulsory deductions for accommodation tied to workplaces, food or transport to work, had experienced delays in payment and/or withholding of wages, or had line managers who had taken a cut of wages before paying workers. Being undocumented meant being unable to contest any of these infringements; instead workers had to either accept the situation or move on from the job. In the following quotations, Sipiwe explains how money was deducted at source when she was working at a bottling factory, while Meixin He refers to the foreman on a building site taking a cut of workers' wages:

What used to happen was that they provided us with transport from the city centre to work and back. It so happened that the transport cost was deducted from our wages. This money was being deducted without any arrangement or agreement – they did not even give us the option to opt out. (Sipiwe, 30, F, Zimbabwean)

The foreman will take some money from what you get. Say if you get £245, he will take £35. This means that, even though the boss is a British man, there is a Chinese person who is there to oversee the workers; this person will take some money from what you get. (Meixin He, 24, M, Chinese)

Some had been sacked and were still owed money, while others had undertaken work trials that were unpaid. In short, there were numerous ways in which employers and managers were able to withhold or limit payments to workers. Undocumented migrants are vulnerable to such exploitation and there is nothing they can do about it. In the following quotations, Guo Ming talks about work trials in take-away shops while Carol recalls her experiences of not being paid:

I have had many work-tries here and all of them were on Friday evenings. Friday evening is the busiest evening for take-away shops. It's the busiest time for take-aways. And they told me to go for a try. Then I went for a try. The busiest period for a take-away shop is between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. This is normally the busiest period. They told you to come for the try at that period. After the try, they sat down and said: 'Ah I think you can't do this, you can't do that' and then they let you have a meal, never gave you money and nothing else. (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese)

I've fallen a few times ... this same guy offered me a job again. I asked for my money and he said 'look, that money I didn't receive so I can't pay you' ... we cannot complain, we have to accept it in silence. (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian)

Clearly undocumented migrants experience precariousness and exploitative work within ethnic enclaves and ethnic-minority niches. Vertovec (2007) notes the presence of co-ethnic hierarchies based on immigration status; in reality these relationships are complex, and vulnerability and inequality are more than a function of immigration

status alone. Nevertheless, our interviewees tended to highlight the ways in which experiences of work were directly related to their status, and within this the hierarchies were observed not only by managers and owners but also by co-workers, as Yao Xiamin (25, F, Chinese) explained:

Those people who had residential status also working in the same restaurant really looked down upon me.

Similarly, Victoria (24, F, Ukrainian) talked about how documented Ukrainians ‘feel that they are better than you’ and use their position as supervisors to make additional money. According to Victoria:

This is what they do, they hire people for work, they take money off them, in two weeks’ time they make you want to leave the job ... working there becomes unbearable and you leave in two weeks. Then they call agents or their personal links, they hire new people because we have plenty of Ukrainians seeking work, take money off them and then in two weeks’ time they fire them too. It’s like a circle. It’s just horrible.

While co-ethnic employers were often identified as exploitative of their workers, they were also in many ways more desirable as employers simply because some were willing to employ migrants without documents. Even if the wages were disproportionately low and there was no job security, it was at least a job and, for the most part, people were paid. According to Kawa (25, M, Kurd from Turkey), there is work if you accept the disparities:

There is a lot of work, work is not a problem, because, everywhere there are shops, whoever wants to work, I mean whoever says there is no work, I mean the money is less, yes, you work long hours, its true, you don’t have a social life, it’s true, but still there are jobs, work is never a problem.

In this quotation, Kawa is referring specifically to work within the ethnic-enclave environment. While these jobs are available, evidenced by the work being carried out by our interviewees, they can be based on what Ram et al. describe as ‘autocratic social relations’ (2000: 44). The most vulnerable workers can be trapped within a mono-linguistic environment unable to acquire either the language of the country of residence or the social networks outside of the immediate ethnic community that are



crucial for facilitating integration within the wider society (Bloch 2013; Wills et al. 2010).

Huadi Zhang (29, M, Chinese) provides an example of someone trapped in an enclave business because he is undocumented and does not speak English. His working hours are long and his pay is low, even for a kitchen assistant working in a take-away. He lives above the shop, so accommodation comes with the job and he rarely goes out because he is terrified of being picked up by the police and being forced to return home. His difficulties are compounded by the large debts he has as a result of the journey to Britain, as noted earlier. He feels that he lacks choice – having been sacked from his previous job when the boss laid off everyone without a regular status due to a fear of raids on businesses employing people without the correct documents. In the following quotation he describes his current situation:

It's very poor accommodation. I'm not even allowed to wash my clothes there. He says he has to save on water. ... Work starts from 10.30 in the morning and finishes after 12 midnight. Sometimes we finish work at 1 o'clock. You work non-stop. If you pause, he'd say that you're lazy; he shouts at you every day ... he'd say that he pays you to work, and you're not doing the work for him! He'd then shout [at] you. He'd say things like 'People like you who have no status ... not many people, not many restaurants out there would dare to hire you; now that I hire you to work here, has meant that I'd already given you lots of respect. You should work harder and do a bit more for me' ... You know, I get very low wages. I don't know when I can pay back the debts.

This feeling of powerlessness within the context of their undocumented status permeated migrants' narratives. Labour was seen as disposable and replaceable and so conditions were not and could not be contested, as Sergiy (27, M, Ukrainian) observed when he said 'Basically you have no one to complain to.' Similarly, Wendy Wang (24, F, Chinese) states 'They want to sack you, they sack you.' The exercising of claims to employment rights and human rights is practically, if not theoretically, withheld from undocumented migrants, as rights depend on citizenship (Basok, Ilcan and Noonan 2006). Though human rights are 'person' rights, the reality is that undocumented migrants with their associated 'deportability' (Nash 2009) cannot realise their rights. Their position is further weakened because employers know that workers cannot contest the terms and conditions

of their work, the withholding of money or being laid off with or without pay and, while not all employers are unscrupulous, the power imbalance and the perception of economic needs render these workers seemingly powerless. As Bernice (F, 23, Brazilian) states, 'We have no rights at all.'

Undocumented migrants were aware of their options and looked for work in businesses where documents were not requested, which were basically ethnic-enclave or ethnic-minority niche businesses. Kawa (25, M, Kurd from Turkey), for instance, states that 'Kurds from Turkey work in kebab shops.' Similarly Serhado (28, M, Kurd from Turkey) notes: 'As an undocumented migrant ... Kurdish markets or restaurants. There is nothing else.' Though less specific about sectors, Diana (28, F, Brazilian) makes a general point about limited options, stating 'The jobs that don't require documents are the ones where you work for Brazilians.' Similarly Kawa (25, M, Kurd from Turkey) notes the divisions between employers in terms of who will and who will not ask for documents: 'If you go to English people they ask [for documents] ... The Kurds, Turkish, Chinese, they don't ask.'

While the lack of documents dictates employers, sectors of employment and jobs, a lack of human capital in the form of English language and skills adds a layer of restriction on top of immigration status, as the following quotation shows:

Apart from having no residential status, we don't speak English well, and we don't have any particular skills. That's why there is nothing we may do except restaurant jobs. (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese)

For those with English-language skills, there were occasional opportunities to obtain slightly better jobs for more money though, for the most part, these jobs were still within ethnic niches. Working lives are relational and, in comparison to ethnic-enclave jobs for non-English speakers, the jobs some English speakers could obtain were definitely seen as a step up. In the following quotation Alice (27, F, Brazilian) talks about the correlation between language and pay among Brazilian undocumented migrants:

There are many Brazilians who are managers, chefs, delivery people, where they get a lot of money. Everything because they speak English well and get jobs that pay well.

In reality, even those who were highly skilled and spoke English did not in any way fulfil their potential in the labour market as a consequence of multiple factors, of which status was the main determinant. There was a 'glass ceiling', though this was something that was also self-policed. For example, some had been offered opportunities for promotion at work but had turned these down or left the job before questions were asked, because of their status. Andrea (20, F, Brazilian) had been working as a cleaner and the site engineer had offered her a promotion, as she describes:

the engineer is the boss on the site, he has said, 'I'll move you to the reception but to work directly for us' ... I don't have documents. How was I going to get registered with them? How would I join the company? With fake documents? I don't know if they would check it.

Although many of those who came to the UK and stayed as undocumented migrants were not highly skilled workers, a small minority arrived with skills and qualifications that they had been unable to make use of. In the following quotation, Tatiana (22, F, Ukrainian) notes how being undocumented was a leveller and superseded pre-migration experiences.

Regardless of what professions they had [back] home ... they come here, they have no documents so they clean toilets too.

The next section explores the ways in which undocumented migrants find work and notes the importance of narrow co-ethnic social networks and informality in this process.

### *Finding Employment: Social Networks, Agencies, 'Middle-Men' and Paying for Jobs*

Social networks were narrow and strictly regulated, as Chapter 6 will show, but for job-seeking they were crucial and new arrivals set out to expand their networks with work opportunities in mind. Most work was found through informal word-of-mouth information about vacancies, and undocumented migrants mobilised their networks quickly and effectively in order to find work. Some undocumented migrants had used 'middle-men' and/or non-statutory agencies as part of their job-search strategy but, as this incurred a cost, informal social networks were

generally preferred. A minority had used 'cold-calling' to look for work, though this was done carefully and was restricted to co-ethnic businesses where documents were less likely to be requested.

On arrival in Britain, the two key things to secure are a place to stay and a job. Those with family members, friends or acquaintances used those contacts on arrival, as Gao Zeng and Yao Xiaomin describe:

I knew my *gufu* [aunt's husband]. He had been here several years before I came. So he went to pick me up when I arrived. He was the person who got me the first job. (Gao Zeng, 24, M, Chinese)

We generally need friends' help to find work. When we first came, we called friends and *laoxiang* [people from the same hometown]. The *laoxiang* pass the information on vacancies from one to another. They are also those who had come here illegally; they understand the hardships because they had experienced them before. (Yao Xiaomin, 25, F, Chinese)

Information about jobs is passed on and it is a reciprocal thing; people help each other, not for gain but just because they do, as Fedia and Guo Ming explain:

How do we look for jobs? Through people you know ... all Ukrainians ... they help each other. And in this way we find jobs. I came to see friends on site, asked if they have a job. When the job appeared, they offer me and I go to do [it]. The same everyone who comes, ask this one and that one, calling each other, calling, well, helping each other. Knowing no language, knowing no rules, having also no rights ... [we] simply help each other with jobs ... no one wants anything from another ... Simply helping each other. (Fedia, 29, M, Ukrainian)

Mostly friends sign-post possible work opportunities to each other ... So basically we rely on help within our network of friends. For example, someone may know some vacancy somewhere and pass on the information. (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese)

Friendship networks were crucial and were a route through which people could find jobs without paying, making them a preferred strategy for job-seeking, as Wendy Wang (24, F, Chinese) explains:

I only ask friends to find work for me; there's no need to pay them money. If you ask a job-agent to find work for you, they will charge you money. It's safer to ask your friends to help you instead. Worse still, you may be deceived asking a job-agent to find work for you.

There were varying gradations of friendships and these had implications for job-finders' fees. The experiences of Guo Ming and Victoria suggest that only close friends do not charge a finders' fee:

Normally you don't have to pay if they are a close friend. But if they are just an ordinary friend, you may have to give them the first two weeks' wage as the fee for helping you find the job ... you can only get hands on some cash after working for a few weeks. (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese)

I didn't have work. My friend's friend called me and said there was a woman who had a job, and when I went there she said I had to pay to work. I paid for that job, I don't remember exactly, but not less than £50. (Victoria, F, 24, Ukrainian)

Within the informal labour market there was a complex system of payment in different sectors, with employers, managers or middle-men taking money for the job in the form of wages or deposits, though on occasion this extended to friends too. In the kitchens of Chinese restaurants and take-away shops, hierarchies and recruitment practices were known and understood among undocumented migrants, chefs, managers and business owners. Head chefs controlled the recruitment to kitchen jobs; when there was a vacancy they asked the other workers if they knew someone suitable and, once someone was hired, the chef would take the first week's wages as a commission, as Yan Jing (24, M, Chinese) explains:

In the restaurants, it's the head-chef who decides who to hire. They will tell the workers that he is looking for someone, and these workers will tell their friends about the job and recommend them to the chef. When a person is hired, he will normally have to give the head-chef his first week's wage, which is normally one hundred and something pounds.

Agents were also used to find jobs in restaurants and variable fees were paid for these services, though they often amounted to around one week's

pay. However, the agents might also put forward jobs that the job-seekers had no chance of getting but had to pay for nevertheless:

For example, you tell them that you are looking for a job in the kitchen and you give £100 for this. They then give you information about a few vacancies. But these are often vacancies that demand a high level of English from the job-seekers. That means they get you something that you can't do because of the English level required. And then they'd say that it is not their business if you don't meet the requirements. They only care about the £100 fee. (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese)

Others alluded to paying 'deposits' for jobs in hotels and for cleaning jobs. Either the money was paid in advance or was withheld from the initial earnings, as Augusto (26, M, Brazilian) explains:

I did cleaning from 6–8 and I paid for it, you know. In this case the deposit was kept by the guy and one more week, so two weeks altogether. I started earning money in the third week.

Job-search strategies were not static but depended on where people were living and what their networks were in the locality. The creation of networks was deemed to be important because without them finding work was very difficult. You have to locate networks for your particular community, find the places where people meet, where you can get information, hear about jobs and buy documents. In the following quotations, Daniel and Sergiy both explain the need to communicate with others in order to find what you need:

... it's talking, approaching and talking, especially here, here if you don't communicate, you starve so, go after it, get up early and go out. ... I went to the Brazilian bar, there I looked around and thought, this is the place everything happens around here, what is good, what is bad, it goes [on] around there. There you find drug dealers, prostitutes, good people, people selling documents. (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian)

I found a job by communicating with people. I mean I started asking if there were any jobs [around]. I've met people who were good, right. They, literally all of them said that they know some jobs available, and,

if I want to do it. They gave me telephone numbers and linked me with those people. That's how I got that pub job. (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian)

For those who participated in faith groups and community-based organisations these networks were very important, not only socially (see Chapter 6) but also in terms of providing a safe space in which to find out about work, one where the unity of faith overrode immigration hierarchies or where solidarity and a shared heritage counted for more. A number of our interviewees had been signposted towards jobs or had been employed through church contacts or the contacts made through community associations.

For others, ethnicity was the key factor in searching for work, and involved understanding the nature of the informal ethnic-enclave economy. Kawa (25, M, Kurd from Turkey), for example, used his knowledge of local business and cold-calling on Kurdish shop-owners to find work:

I go to the shops and ask shop-owner whether he or she need any workers? And they say 'Do you understand the job?' And they say 'Come and work'.

Similarly Amed (29, M, Kurd from Turkey) describes the ways in which certain signifiers are used to identify safe places to ask for work when cold-calling:

We are a feudal society. We go through these contacts. When you go somewhere you see sign like 'Best kebab'. We understand the place belong to the Kurds. We know Indian, Pakistani or Chinese shops through their signs. We understand the Kurdish places through shop signs. We go inside and ask for job. If they don't have, they may recommend some people. It goes like that.

The quotations show the complex layers of networks and ethnicity and the ways in which these are mobilised in order to find work. Though the work was in the secondary sector, low paid and precarious, it was a job, and that, for most of our interviewees, was better than no work at all. Although undocumented migrants are extremely restricted, within their limited range of options, choices *are* made. In the next section, examples of individual agency and self-empowerment are explored.

### *Employment and Individual Agency*

Undocumented migrants can and do use a range of different strategies or tactics in relation to their working lives. As we noted earlier in this chapter, the use of social networks and an understanding of co-ethnic relations and informal working practices offered routes to work and employment in places where documents were unlikely to be requested. However, another strategy was to use borrowed or bought documents to find work and/or to gain access to jobs outside of the informal economy. This was one way in which undocumented migrants were able to combat paper-based labour-market exclusions (Vasta 2011). There were mixed views about using documents: some saw them as a routine and necessary occurrence and part and parcel of getting work; others were cautious but used them when necessary; and some decided against such a strategy because it represented an additional risk and greater criminality. In the following quotation, Brígido (30, M, Brazilian) talks about the routine nature of buying and using documents:

You have to buy fake documents to be able to work ... everyone knows that the companies, that any document you show them, they accept it and that's it. They don't want to know what it is. So I ... I ... I went through the same process as everybody else of making documents, I had documents made ... Every illegal migrant knows who does it, who sells, where, you know.

While some arranged documents within Britain, for others acquiring documents was essential for making their journey. Sergiy (27, M, Ukrainian) had travelled from Ukraine to London via Poland. While in Poland he obtained a Polish passport which he used to enter the UK and has used for work, tax, to open a bank account and any other official business ever since, as he describes below:

I got to Poland. In Poland I was given a Polish passport, put on a bus and told 'Go'. So I went ... I crossed the border with that passport. When I came here, I started arranging all documents on that passport. Bank account, CSCS, and self-employment ... I arranged it all on that passport. And when I go to get a job, I show these documents first. So, I go and show these documents. Passport basically ... I look like that [photo] in the passport. ... So that's how I live, paying taxes under



someone else's name ... Someone else's passport and I, yes, I pay taxes here with someone else's passport and try to be a law-abiding person. I know, of course, that I've broken the law but I try to be a law-abiding person. I pay taxes and everything, and that's how I live.

Rather than buying documents, systems were in place to borrow names and to pay for document loans. Fang Ping (22, F, Chinese) worked at a market stall on a Sunday and paid compatriots for the documents needed to set up a stall, as she describes in the following quotation:

We can borrow residential status [papers] from friends. They have residential status, even though we don't. We can pay them a certain amount of fee per day, depending on how much we earn.

Using constructed documents was a choice made by some though others made the decision not to use them because of the risks. Colin (23, M, Zimbabwean) had been in the UK since he was a teenager and had gained GCSEs and A levels and been offered a place at university. However, he was unable to take the place because he didn't have documents. Having used fake documents to register with an employment agency he preferred to have periods without work than to risk registering with additional agencies:

I was not working for a period of about 6 months because the agency I was registered with had no jobs and I was afraid to use the fake documents to register with other places, so I kept on hoping that the agency I was already registered with would get jobs and send me to work.

There were instances, too, when people had started jobs without showing documents, done them for a short period of time and then left when documents were requested. Sometimes this even resulted in a loss of payment, as Bernice (F, 23, Brazilian) describes:

Many times I went to work as a cleaner in companies to clean offices in the morning. I'd work for two weeks then, after two weeks, they would tell me that the payment was done every two weeks. Then in two weeks they'd ask me for documents, then I wouldn't take any, then I'd lose, lose the two weeks of work.

Ray was a young man from Zimbabwe who had been in the UK for eight years, from the age of 13. He was exceptional among our interviewees because he was one of only a few working in the regulated part of the economy within corporate sales. Having experienced working in ethnic-enclave environments he decided to buy a passport to 'open doors'. The document cost him £1,000 and in the quotation below he talks about how being able to speak with an English accent has really benefitted him:

If you get a [British] passport, you are pretty much sorted for a lot of things. I'm quite fortunate for having adopted English speech. I think it's difficult for an African person with a very strong African accent to be able to say I hold a [British] passport. I am fortunate that I've picked up on English speech and people do buy it when I say I hold a [British] passport, why would you think otherwise?

Regardless of his relatively advantageous position, Ray was often anxious and fearful. Always having to have a story and to remember it took 'a lot of energy'.

Clearly there were benefits to certain workplace strategies but there were also costs – not only having to remember what story had been told to which people, but also trying to safeguard privacy as much as possible. This need for secrets and lies permeated social lives too, as we explore in the following chapter. While undocumented migrants limit their social networks they are nevertheless necessary, as we have seen in relation to jobs. These networks are also crucial for those who have decided not to risk working and for those who have found themselves without work.

### *Managing Without Work*

Not everyone was working; some people had decided not to work as it was too risky. However not working was contingent on having alternative ways of surviving. Terry, for example, lived with his mother and three brothers. In the quotation below Terry (21, M, Zimbabwean) reflects on his decision not to look for work:

I don't even really try to look for work because [you're] going to be asked the same questions and because you don't have the answers, what's the point. For me though, because I've got my mum to support me, it err

sort of lightens it up. But in a situation where she was gone, [you know] that would be a whole different situation, so now we just thank God for what we have.

For those without close family members to support them, the assistance offered by friends was sometimes crucial for subsistence survival. During periods out of work, friends helped with food, rents and loans and in some instances even the payment of remittances. These arrangements were embedded within the immediate co-ethnic group and were based on trust and reciprocity. Though many of the friendships were new, less than two years old in the cases of Wendy Wang and Jess Chang, the importance of these networks and the trust that dictated these arrangements was evident. Jess Chang was living in a shared house and was sending money to China to pay off a loan incurred as a result of her migration journey.

I sometimes borrow money from my friends to send home ... we always try to help out among themselves ... if a friend doesn't trust you they won't lend you the money ... It's those who trust each other that offer support. (Wendy Wang, 24, F, Chinese)

I need to send money home. Normally each time I'd send £800 and this will get you 10,000 [RMB] back home ... If I haven't enough money I'd borrow from my friends. I'd give them the money back when I get my wage the following week ... Whenever I ask them to lend money generally they'd say yes. Of course I'd lend them money when they need help ... We help each other like this. (Jess Chang, 21, F, Chinese)

However, it's not always easy to rely on the support of friends and for some young people this dependency on others was very problematic:

There has been a period that I did not work. During that time my close friends supported me. I was under severe stress and suffering from that. (Necirwan, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Always aware of the precarious nature of their work and vulnerability bought about by being undocumented, most of those interviewed had saved money and continued to save money as an insurance against periods out of work. According to Fedia (29, M, Ukrainian), 'everyone tries to put something aside'. Not working means spending savings, as Levko (24, M,

Ukrainian) noted when he said, 'I had a little savings ... for rainy days.' The strain is evident in Natalia's account:

We are now working real hard ... you constantly work and work and work because you don't know what'll be tomorrow ... you are worried all the time. (Natalia, 26, F, Ukrainian)

This constant worry about the future also comes through in Tatiana's narrative when she talks about being out of work:

Well I worked before that and had that to support myself with. One has to think ahead and don't forget about situations like this. (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian)

The pressure on young people to stay in work, whatever the job and however poor the conditions, could leave them tied to particular jobs. Firat (30, M, Kurd from Turkey) described how he survived without work but also his strategy for holding on to his job in a supermarket even though he worked six days a week for 12 or 13 hours and was paid only £200, describing himself as 'a contemporary slave':

Friends were helping me. Some friends were giving me £30-40 per month. I have lend money from two friends. I paid them back when I found job. I had to reduce my spending to pay them back. That's why I don't want to leave this job. It's really difficult for undocumented person to be jobless. This is what I think. Being undocumented is really difficult.

Occasionally people found themselves without the safety net of social networks or without savings to buy basics during periods out of work. Fei Lin (20, M, Chinese) described having no choice but to sleep on the street outside a mobile phone shop shortly after he had arrived in London:

When there's no work, we will have no income. [Once] I even had to sleep in the telephone shop ... You'd sleep everywhere. When the shop closed at night, I sat outside and slowly, I fell asleep.

Fei Lin's circumstances, though they were not permanent, highlight the need to develop networks and support structures as part of a survival strategy.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, the labour-market experiences, strategies and 'tactics' of young undocumented migrants have been examined. The chapter shows the excluded and marginalised position of undocumented migrants who, for the most part, were working within ethnic enclaves or ethnic-minority niches in precarious jobs, characterised by low pay, poor terms and conditions, and no rights. There was a sense of taking what is metered out for the most vulnerable, especially among those without English-language skills. The withholding of payment, paying for jobs, and forced deductions from wages were all mechanisms used by employers, middle-men and 'friends'. Systems were in place and understood, and so all parties operated with an awareness of their position within the labour market and their relationship with employers and others from the same ethnic group. Many of these relations were determined by the vulnerability of status and the associated hierarchies among co-ethnic entrepreneurs and their employees.

Undocumented migrants knew what they could and could not do, and operated constantly within self-imposed boundaries around their perceptions of what was safe and what risks were worth taking. Within these boundaries social networks were an important route to employment and a way of surviving during periods without work. These self-policed boundaries were one of the key ways in which undocumented migrants asserted some kind of agency over their working lives, an agency which, as the chapter has shown, was achieved to different degrees within the limitations of their undocumented status.

# 6

## *Fragile Communities: Social Networks and Geographies of Undocumentedness*

Social networks play a crucial role in the lives of undocumented migrants, shaping their decisions over migration destinations, routes and entry strategies (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Haug 2008). Migration research has explored the role of social networks at different stages of the migration process, including the direction and persistence of migration flows (Hagan 2008; Massey et al. 1987; Portes 1998), the resilience of migration routes and systems (Macdonald and Macdonald 1974; Tilly and Brown 1967), transnational ties and diasporic practices (Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Levitt 2000; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Vertovec 1999), and settlement patterns and incorporation (Boyd 1989; Hagan, Macmillan and Wheaton 1996; Ryan et al. 2008). Research on immigrant incorporation into the US shows that immigrants settle in communities with well-established networks more easily than in communities with poorly developed networks (Browning and Rodriguez 1985; Portes 1981). In the UK, research has identified the contribution that formal and informal networks make to the integration of new migrants, particularly in the form of ethnic ties. However, these ties exist within social, economic and class hierarchies and are heavily conditioned by the broader race relations and multicultural frameworks in which they function (see, for example, Anthias 2007; Anthias and Cederberg 2009; Griffiths, Sigona and Zetter 2005, 2006).

Social networks provide newcomers with different types of assistance, including emotional, informational and instrumental support (Oakley 1992) as well as companionship (Ryan et al. 2008). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, kinship and friendship networks assist new arrivals in their search for accommodation, with information about job opportunities, or simply by offering a place to stay and a warm meal for the first few days

(see also Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Sigona and Hughes 2012). Social networks, however, are not static (Pathirage and Collyer 2011). Following Boyd's invitation (Boyd 1989) to consider how social networks change over time, Hagan (1998) shows the dynamic, contingent and gendered nature of immigrants' social networks, pointing out how they take on different forms and functions not only for women and men, but also for single people and families and low- and high-skilled migrants (see also Erel 2010; McIlwaine et al. 2005; Ryan and Mulholland 2013).

Migrants build networks over time and these networks form a vital part of the social capital needed to better maximise opportunities (Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2005). Those with a regular status can and do expand their social networks outside their immediate co-ethnic group and, in so doing, access vital resources (Lancee 2012). Thus, a key theme within the sociological literature has been the ways in which networks offer routes to financial, social and/or culture improvements (Erel 2010; Raghuram, Henery and Bornat 2010; Ryan et al. 2008). In contrast, those without a regular status, as we shall see in this chapter, for the most part remain entrenched within narrow kinship and co-ethnic networks, limiting their access to the vital resources that can assist with integration more widely. Nevertheless, these narrow social networks, as previous chapters demonstrated, have relevance to the everyday lives of undocumented migrants. This chapter turns the discussion of social networks on its head to investigate the ways in which a lack of legal status shapes migrants' formal and informal engagement with different types of network. We focus on relationships and interactions with family, friends and acquaintances, as well as with community and faith-based organisations. Our exploration of the impacts of a lack of legal status on the social worlds and social networks of undocumented migrants will focus on three aspects in particular: first, the impact of being undocumented on the way in which migrants choose who to interact with and how to do so in formal and informal settings; secondly, the range of social activities in which undocumented migrants participate and the places where they socialise; and finally the impact of legal status on transnational activities, in particular remittances.

### *'Here in England, You Need Other People': Family, Friends and Acquaintances*

Daniel's words capture the importance of social networks as a support mechanism for migrants with a precarious legal status. The uncertainty

associated with this precarious legality permeates many aspects of migrants' lives and delimits their actions across many spheres, such as job opportunities, housing, family and kinship relations, transnational activities, religious practices, use of public spaces and artistic expression (Menjívar 2006; Willen 2007). Legal status, Menjívar (2006) argues, impacts on immigrants' informal and formal networks, which are often weak and highly unstable. Although individual human agency is always at work in the decisions people make to help one another, 'structural constraints condition the resources these immigrants have available to help family and friends who are in need' (Menjívar 2000: 2). In a comparative study into the kinship networks of Mexican, Salvadorian and Vietnamese immigrants who had recently arrived in the United States, Menjívar (1995) illustrated the impact of immigrants' (over)reliance on support from these networks and highlighted the circumstances and factors that can mitigate, override or even reverse the role that such networks play in the settlement of newcomers, and how their capacity to provide support and assistance to new migrants results from the interplay of personal and group-specific characteristics and reception context-specific structures and resources. Similarly, Collyer's study of Algerian migration to the UK shows that, as a result of immigration restrictions, undocumented migrants use social networks differently, focusing on weaker ties rather than on stronger, France-based, family networks (Collyer 2005). Undocumented migrants face the greatest structural barriers to resources. Nevertheless, our research found that these young people were able to operationalise the limited resources available to them and often used their social networks effectively.

In all five country-of-origin groups in our study, family and friends were not only the main points of reference in young undocumented migrants' social lives, but also the main source of advice and support in case of need. Trust is central to the ways in which undocumented migrants develop and establish their social networks. Family and friends represented an invaluable resource, especially at an early stage of the migrant's life in Britain, particularly for Kurdish and Zimbabwean respondents. Brazilians and Ukrainians, in contrast, had less tangible pre-arrival contacts, if any, and their networks were established gradually while in Britain.

The reliance on kinship and friendship networks is, however, not trouble-free (Zontini 2010). Chapter 4 showed that family members in particular were invaluable on arrival but not always a longer-term solution to basic housing and other problems. In our interviews we encountered



cases of conflict and separation due, at least in part, to the position of dependency that the undocumented migrant was in because of his or her lack of status. Avashin (29, F, Kurd from Turkey) is a single parent and lives in a situation of extreme destitution, relying almost exclusively on the support of fellow Kurds. But the feeling of 'being a burden' on other people causes great distress to her and her child:

Nobody wants to see you. They perceive you as [a] burden. No one wants to look after you.

As Pathirage and Collyer (2011: 315) show in their ethnographic study of Sri Lankan migration to Italy, the 'social network work' – that is, 'the conscious efforts that actors make to foster social relations for their own future benefit' – is particularly pronounced among undocumented migrants. Among our respondents, most migrants felt the need to expand their network of contacts after arrival; however a tension underpinned their decisions over whom to interact with and how. On the one hand, migrants were aware and mindful of the risk of being stigmatised or even reported to the police because of their legal status; on the other, they were also aware of the importance of building a network of friends and acquaintances who could provide advice, support, information about jobs and help in case of need, as Diana and Yingying Cai explain:

If you meet people, you can't tell them much, you don't know if you can trust them or not. Sometimes, the few times I talked about it, I talked to people who don't have documents either, I joked, 'If you do something to me, I'll take you down with me. I know where you live' [laughs]. (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian)

I want to make more friends ... because living in a foreign land you can only rely on friends for support. (Yingying Cai, 27, F, Chinese)

How migrants negotiated this tension and the associated risks varied and depended on a number of factors and circumstances. For some, the solution was to close themselves off to the outside world in order to avoid risk, for others it was to limit personal contacts to a superficial level. More often, migrants looked for a middle way. It was in the search for this middle way that the decision about if and how to let someone know about their legal status became relevant. Among our respondents, some of the

Kurds we interviewed were the most cautious – a consequence of their pre-migration experiences. Ciwan and Serhado explain their position in relation to disclosing their status:

I hide it from everybody. Only my closest friends know that I am undocumented. (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Of course I don't tell anyone. You can't say that because you get scared that they will spy on you; or that their attitude towards you may change for the worse. (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Being undocumented can and does impact on social relations in several ways. Interviewees often mentioned the difficulty of liaising with others, especially if documented, and the burden of having to keep secrets and resort to lies on a daily basis to protect themselves (Griffiths 2012). Being forced to lie or to hide their name and identity made respondents feel 'uncomfortable', 'ashamed' and 'guilty'. Misleading friends and colleagues who put their trust in them raised difficult ethical dilemmas for respondents. Talking about his experience of performing at a singing festival recommended by his teacher, Brígido (M, 30, Brazilian) says:

They never asked me anything about my life [i.e. his undocumented status]. And my teacher never asked me either. She asked me once and even now I feel sorry for having lied to her.

Tanaka (22, F, Zimbabwean) also had to conceal her status from her friends. Her reaction was not the remorse felt by Brígido so much as a feeling that she had to deceive herself and deny her self-worth in order to protect her lack of status:

Especially when you are moving towards completing college, they'll be talking ... 'Oh I'm going Birmingham for my Uni', 'I'm going London', 'I'm going Leeds' ... you keep quiet, but at times it pushes you to also lie and claim you are also going somewhere, like eeh 'I'm going Luton for my Uni.'

Tanaka's concealment compares to the way in which Colin (23, M, Zimbabwean) describes how his relationship with friends affected his

demeanour and morality – ‘You have to lie to them ... just to survive for one more extra day’, he admitted:

People see you smile every day but they really don’t see what you really go through. You try to force yourself, you know you live a life that is not true, a life full of lies, you make a lot of friends, but ... the friends that you make ... they trust you in everything but you can’t really be who you really are because you are restricted by those things [i.e. your lack of status] and it feels bad because one day, if they do find out, you do not only lose a job, but you lose friends as well that you have made over the years because they think, ‘but we trusted this person’ all along.

Interacting with people and building meaningful relationships is therefore difficult. Interestingly, there seemed to be no difference among newcomers, as illustrated by the quotations from Diana and Sergiy, who had both been in Britain for less than a year at the time of the interview, and long-term residents like Uliana and Tracy, who had been in Britain for, respectively, nine and ten years:

I think a lot about answering many of the things I’m asked. We live well together, respect each other, are polite but you don’t tell much. (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian)

You try not to tell things to someone, telling them less. It’s all related. (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian)

What are the first questions when you meet someone? ‘How are you?’ and ‘What do you do?’, and so on. And when you tell what you do ... But they have more questions. And if you tell them that you are a student, then it is all clear. But if you are not a student, then you are ‘doing’ something. You tell that you are working at ... Well, it’s not always coming out nicely. Or you try to hide everything to make it look better. (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian)

The fact that I am undocumented means that I don’t feel comfortable socialising because I am conscious of my status and I do not want people to know. (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean)

This unresolved tension can lead, ultimately, to the break-up of partnerships and friendships (Sigona 2012b), as in the cases of Amed and Fernando.

Amed, confronted with a direct question regarding his legal status, was unwilling to live in deception and could see no alternative but to end his relationship with his British girlfriend, cutting all contact. Fernando likewise could see no way forward in his relationship, as his girlfriend did not want to be involved in issues concerning his legal status:

One day my girlfriend came and said 'Can I ask you a question?' She asked me my immigration status in this country. Then I think she realised that I am undocumented. Then I have finished the relationship with her, changed my mobile number. (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

I have a girlfriend who is from Germany; I've been with her for two years. She does not want to have anything serious with me due to whom I am. She said it, she made it clear ... I try to convince her but the situation is more complicated than the pleasure I give her. (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian)

Firat (30, M, Kurd from Turkey) was very unusual because he had been married in Britain. The marriage did not last due in part to the hostility and overt racism he faced from his in-laws, who assumed that his only interest was a passport:

I started having problems with her brothers. They knew that I did not have documents and they were telling me mean things when they see me somewhere. They were saying that I have married to their sister for the passport. I was working in [a pizza delivery firm] at that time and they came there to depreciate me in front of my friends. They were telling me to leave their sister and told me to 'Fuck off, you dirty man!', dirty Kurd or Turk. They were racist. They did not like foreigners. The sister was different. They did not even come to the wedding; [they] were looking at me as I was some sort of insect. They were saying 'You came and married to our sister for passport, what kind of person are you?'

### *Language and Time*

Among the factors that shape the social networks of undocumented migrants, language plays a crucial role. Speaking a common language is an essential prerequisite to starting a conversation. However, it does not

necessarily need to be one's first language. English or a third language – for example Russian for Ukrainian migrants and Spanish or Italian for Brazilians – is often enough to establish and maintain a connection. Most participants pointed out that being able to communicate better in English would help them to make friends outside their linguistic community and build more solid relationships. Ciwan (28, M, Kurd from Turkey), who had been in Britain for five years and worked in a supermarket owned by a fellow Kurd, illustrates the challenges he faced in forming friendships with non-Kurdish speakers:

I haven't got any British friend that I see or talk [to] constantly. There are people that I see sometimes on daily basis but have no friends. There was somebody that I have met during work and we have shared some conversation. But it did not go further as I can't speak enough English and sometimes we can't understand each other.

Among Chinese respondents, English proficiency was even lower, particularly among those working for Chinese entrepreneurs in the catering industry, and this inevitably affected their ability to interact with speakers of other languages:

On the whole, our circles are small. Mostly we mingle with people from our country ... Actually we mostly mingle with our relatives, friends or *laoxiang* [fellow village/country-people] ... As to people from other groups, presently ... first, we can't communicate really very effectively; secondly, we don't always share the same topics of conversation. (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese)

Opportunities to learn English were limited for those working within co-ethnically owned businesses, especially for those living 'above the shop' with other workers from the same linguistic group (Ahmad 2008). Speaking a common language is not enough to build a social network if there is no time, or place, to meet new people. As highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5, we found that physical confinement and long working hours were shared by many of our undocumented migrants. Moreover, the lack of legal status itself may have affected migrants' interactions with others, as the following quotation from Tracy (29, F, Zimbabwean) illustrates:

With British friends you have to be someone else, you can't say to them 'I'm depressed because "of issues with my status"' for example, you always have to be happy and perky all the time; it seems like extra work to me.

The distance that exists between undocumented migrants' experiences in/of Britain and those of British and other 'documented' people is such that it makes dialogue impossible or extremely difficult. Instead most interviewees found support and friendship among people from their own background towards whom they felt 'naturally' drawn, as the following quotation from Terry (21, M, Zimbabwean) illustrates:

You do tend to find that people will end up shifting or making their own little community where you find that Zimbabwean people are with Zimbabwean people [you know] you would rarely find that Zimbabweans are socialising with Europeans or something like that.

For some, to build 'real' friendship with 'documented' people from their own country was difficult, as the difference of legal status made their aspirations, plans and chances very different:

They [those legally resident] have a different view of life. They can make future plans about school, children, university, and things like that. But I can't plan those things. I live from day to day. (Natalia, 26, F, Ukrainian)

Additionally, though, the imbalance caused by a lack of status worked against social relations, as Sipiwe (30, F, Zimbabwean) explains:

When people are aware of your situation, when they have status, I feel the relationship is not balanced because they feel they are in a position of power.

Being friends with others who have gone through the same experience of migration and being undocumented was, therefore, much easier, as Dmytro and Trish explain:

All who I socialise with are all Ukrainians, all undocumented. Those who I socialise at work: they are Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians

or Romanians. They have also been, sometime ago, illegal and they understand us. (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian)

I have too much baggage, my problems are too much. ... I want to associate with people who understand my plight ... people who will be sensitive towards me when they see me behaving in a certain way. The British friends that I make do not understand so I end up being frustrated and the friendship becomes meaningless. (Trish, 25, F, Zimbabwean)

Necirwan (30, M, Kurd from Turkey) explained how difficult it was for an undocumented person to marry someone as there would always be an element of suspicion about their motives:

Here I am illegal. How much guarantee or trust I can give it to the woman, that I am going to marry this person for the sake of love not documents or residency? How much she can trust me? It's reasonable to have doubt about it.

Relationships were difficult for young undocumented migrants, due to the pressures and conflicts associated with their lack of status, especially among those working long and unsocial hours. Additionally, socialising required monetary resources and for some, such as Trish, a 25-year-old woman from Zimbabwe said, 'It's a luxury I can't afford.' Social lives and relationships were also hampered by accommodation; most people were living 'above the shop', staying in shared multiple-occupancy housing or with friends, acquaintances or family members. In such housing situations, it can be difficult or impossible to invite round friends or partners. Sipwie, for instance, a 30-year-old Zimbabwean woman, said she felt 'ashamed about showing people where I live'. Barriers to social interactions may be part of a strategy, but they are also a consequence of circumstances.

### *Negotiating the Boundaries of the Community of Trust and Reciprocity*

Opportunities to access support varied, as did the type of support sought according to the different stages of migration and the demography and geography of each community. The existence of community organisations and faith groups that provide support and advice to undocumented

migrants varied between the national groups and across the different localities. Often, where young undocumented migrants accessed community organisations and support groups, it was because family and friends had provided them with information.

For Brazilians and Ukrainians, there was little in the way of established communities and community-based organisations outside London and, even there, this was limited (Kubal, Bakewell and de Haas 2011). A sense of isolation was evident among some interviewees – more so among women and younger migrants. London-based Diana (28, F, Brazilian), who had been in Britain for seven months, conveyed this need for self-reliance:

I've created a skin to protect myself because, like, it's only me, if anything happens I have to deal with it by myself. Nobody is going to help me, so I kind of grew this skin, closed myself down not to be affected, to avoid problems as much as possible.

There are long-established networks of Chinese community organisations in the three areas of study as well as long-settled Chinese communities. However, undocumented migrants from China, mostly from the Fujian region and Mandarin speakers, appeared to have little or no contact with these community organisations, which are often led by Cantonese speakers.

For Zimbabwean and Kurdish migrants there are well-established and active community organisations (Bloch 2006; Griffiths, Sigona and Zetter 2006), although, for Kurdish migrants from Turkey, these are almost exclusively in London, reflecting the geographic clustering of this group (Holgate et al. 2012). The network of Zimbabwean organisations is nation-wide and reflects their geographic dispersal as a result of both asylum policy and the colonial legacy (Bloch 2006).

Community organisations seemed to provide not only an important point of reference for some undocumented migrants but also very practical assistance. However, not everyone wanted to use community-based organisations for fear of their status being disclosed or used against them, as this quotation from Amed (29, M, Kurd from Turkey) shows:

I don't want to go to community centres. You do not know who is there. It is dangerous to go to the Kurdish associations because they could be under surveillance. I know a lot of undocumented friends and they all think the same.



Community-based organisations tend to work more with asylum-seekers, refugees or those with leave to remain than with undocumented migrants. Our interviews also showed that those undocumented migrants who had been through the asylum process were more likely to access these organisations than others, and so, among our interviewees, they were used most often by Kurds from Turkey and Zimbabweans. These groups provided not only an important source of information and advice, and engagement in country-of-origin politics and culture, but also social interactions that helped to alleviate some of the loneliness and alienation that these young people experienced. Talking about her engagement with a local community group and the church, Sipwie (30, F, Zimbabwean) said:

My social life has improved since I joined the centre because I've made friends at the centre and I also go to church so that's improved my social life.

Faith groups, like community organisations, provided an important source of support although they were used more by Zimbabwean, Brazilian and Ukrainian young people than by the Kurds and Chinese. Churches offer undocumented migrants spiritual guidance and relief from the moral dilemmas stemming from their situation, a safe haven for them, and an environment in which they did not feel different or discriminated against because of their legal status (Glick Schiller, Caglar and Guldbrandsen 2006; Hagan and Ebaugh 2003).

Sometimes you feel suffocated because you don't open up to people, so someone comes out of the blue and says some things to you, as if you asked to hear that, and this is good, this is something from God. (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian)

In the following quotations, David recalls the positive experience of his cousin on his arrival in Britain, and Tanaka, a young Zimbabwean, explains how she met a lawyer at her church:

When my cousin arrived, on his first Sunday here, he went to the church because, in Brazil, he already attended it, he is a real church-goer. When the mass finished, the priest asked, 'Is there anybody here who needs work and needs help?' He [cousin] put his hand up. The priest said, 'Please come here. Talk to this man here.' The other man said, 'Look,

do you need [help]? Fine, my restaurant needs blah-blah-blah.' He got it. He went to the restaurant and it was the same restaurant where he found a job for me later. (David, 29, M, Brazilian)

At my church there's a member who is a lawyer, he updates us on a lot of issues. I talked to him about my situation and he gave me advice and said: 'Do this'. I went to the Mayor and explained all my problems to him and the problems I'm facing with my education. (Tanaka, 22, F, Zimbabwean)

Among Christian organisations, Evangelical churches, in particular, seemed to provide young undocumented migrants with the kind of targeted assistance they could not obtain from other, more mainstream, churches. While there was no difference in church attendance between men and women from Brazil and those from Ukraine, among Zimbabweans it was the women who were more involved in the church than their male counterparts. The community-bonding role of churches, which helps to foster and consolidate friendship networks, was seen as particularly important among Zimbabweans.

Among Chinese and Ukrainian migrants, it was mainly the more recent arrivals who went to church. There some accessed free English classes, informal job opportunities, accommodation and financial support in case of emergency. Our Kurdish respondents did not seem to participate in organised religion but, instead, made use of community groups and associations clustered in certain parts of London.

Organisations funded by religious groups offer drop-in centres where migrants in need can go for help, for example with clothing, food and sanitary products. There are also a number of emergency shelters where migrants can go if they have no place to stay overnight. Drop-in centres are also an invaluable source of information from peers and volunteers. Among those who availed themselves of the assistance of church-run or -funded initiatives, the fact that these places were trustworthy and unthreatening was important.

For non-faith advocacy and support groups, building trust takes longer. Some migrants come from countries where these kind of organisations either do not exist or have a different role, so they may not be familiar with the kind of help they are able to provide. More recent arrivals especially, and those who have not gone through the asylum system, are less likely to

access support from non-governmental organisations, not seeing them as a service which will meet their needs.

### *Social Activities and Where People Socialise*

This section explores the social activities of undocumented migrants and the venues in which they tend to take place. As shown in the previous chapter, the majority of our interviewees were in low-wage employment, often working long hours so that, by the end of the day (or night), they had little or no time or energy to dedicate to social activities.

I work in a company which makes books and newspapers and I also work as a cleaner in the middle of the night. Well, basically these are my days, everyday, boom-boom-boom-boom. (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian)

My day-to-day in England? Well, my name changed after I arrived here. I started to be called 'Work' and my surname is 'Overtime' [*laughs*]. (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian)

In the following quotation Rojhan (27, M, Kurd from Turkey) talks about his vulnerability in the workplace and its impact on his relationship with the employer:

I work at night. Ninety per cent of my friends are working during the day. They work between 9am and 5pm. My working hours [do] affect my activities. I have to work at weekends but they do not have to. ... I do not want to work at night but I have no choice. I am missing a lot of things. For example, a friend of mine married on Saturday because people around him and his relatives are not working on Saturdays therefore he arranged his wedding date for Saturday. I have to work on Fridays and Saturdays. We cannot take day off. It's not easy to take those days off even if you tell the owner 10 days in advance. You do not want to upset the owner. Because you have no documents and he does not need you but you need him and the work he gives you.

Debts, obligations and/or economic aspirations drove some migrants to send most of their earnings home, leaving little for money for leisure

activities in Britain. Celso (28, M, Brazilian) offers a poignant example of the relationship between undocumentedness and livelihood strategy:

I'm here illegally, for my safety, I became more reserved, keeping more to myself. It helped me to save more money because I couldn't go out.

After eight years in Britain, Semen (28, M, Ukrainian) had some very practical lessons to offer to those who 'want to live longer' in this country:

If you want to live longer in this country, don't *cruise* streets while drunk. Avoid ... well, walking at night when you are drunk or look for trouble. Don't shoplift in supermarkets and don't avoid transport fairs. This is I am saying like safety measures. Don't drive under the influence [of alcohol].

Learning to rely on no one but oneself resonated especially among female respondents. Tatiana's words provide an explanation:

You are your own boss here. That no one have the right to 'point' you and blame that you shouldn't have done this or that. But [here] it's not like at home, you are always told. Here you chose yourself, you making your choice. (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian)

Independence for some migrants was not a choice but a necessity. Their experiences as undocumented migrants affected their trust and resulted in independence, as Suku and Fernando, who had both been living in Britain for more than five years, explain:

I've learnt not to be too trusting, to make decisions for myself, not to sort of wait on others to do certain things and not to be bullied into doing certain things because I think I was a bit gullible. (Suku, 30, F, Zimbabwean)

I learned to walk with my own legs, don't depend on anybody. Everything here, it's a physical world, where people only want to take advantage of you, you have to be careful with people. Nobody helps nobody, I learned this. (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian)

Despite these constraints, most participants did have some limited time outside of work for a social life. Window-shopping, playing football or video games, surfing the internet, talking on the phone, visiting friends, having a barbeque, walking in a park, going to church or community organisations, going to the pub for a drink after work and sometimes to nightclubs were the most common social activities mentioned by our interviewees, as the following quotations illustrate.

I like football ... There is a Kurdish and Turkish football league here and I played for a team ... and I was able to meet my friends there too. (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey)

If it's good weather [we go] to the seaside or on weekends to visit friends, to have some beer in peace in the garden, chat. (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian)

I'd stroll around the streets in the area I stay and window shop ... If I get a ticket, I'd go stroll in the [city centre] and most of the time I'd go with [my] Chinese friends ... because we can communicate easily. (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese)

Young, undocumented migrants did feel excluded from participating in certain activities due to their status, and travel was frequently given as an example:

You want to go out but you are too afraid of being stopped by police; and without residential status you know that there are lots of things you simply can't do. (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese)

I am here but I am not here. I do not exist ... I cannot walk or travel around freely. I have the fear of being caught. (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

If you had the right to see the people you like, there would be no problem in being an illegal migrant. That's the only problem I've got. (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian)

Being unable to travel freely also exposed undocumented migrants to their 'legal' peers, affecting the way they related to others. Levko and Dilan came to Britain when they were teenagers, Levko at 16 and Dilan at 14. They had active social lives and 'many friends', nonetheless there were

moments and situations when they felt different from their peers because of their status:

If you think about it, many things would be different ... I have friends ... they all like 'Oh, we are going on holiday there, we are going on holiday here.' You can't even go to see something for two–three days. Where can you go? [You can] go nowhere. (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian)

I cannot socialise as much as I would like to. I would like to travel more. I would like to see different places and countries. For example, now we are coming to end of summer. People will get back from holiday and tell me where they have been to. They will ask where I have been too. I will tell them that I was here. (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey)

Everyday activities like joining a gym or going clubbing could also become difficult, if not impossible:

For an illegal person? There isn't anything. It's all closed. It's all blocked. You don't have access to absolutely anything. I joined a gym; I had to show false documents in the gym to join and run risks because you give a name. (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian)

Sometimes there are these clubs where DJs perform and they are kind of like famous DJs and I can't go so don't really get to see them because I don't have an ID and I don't have money. (Natasha, 18, F, Zimbabwean)

A micro-geography of undocumentedness would reveal cities patterned by check points, limited access areas, curfews and borders invisible to 'documented' people (Sigona 2012b). Our undocumented migrants soon learned to be cautions, to navigate through the city without being visible, to be 'streetwise', as Custódia (25, F, Brazilian) explains:

The fact that you have a bit of fear, caution of going to certain places, for example, 'Ah, we are not going to the pub because the Immigration, not Immigration, the police usually goes there from time to time.' Or 'I am not going to this pub because the police goes, has closed it down and will do it again.' So you end up, you have to get streetwise to know where, which places you go.

The perception of risk and fear permeated many narratives. This was most notable among Kurdish respondents, as the following quotations from Serhado, Firat and Jiyen illustrate.

Even if you want to do sightseeing in the central London, you have that fear in you when you take underground. (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey)

I am not scared of my flatmates but of people on the street. I am scared that they will know I am illegal. I have fears in my workplace. Because I work there undocumented, I am doing something illegal in a way. (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Getting on the bus is difficult. There are often controls on the buses. Just in case, I don't go out much. Police are checking everywhere. (Jiyen, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey)

This fear was due to a number of factors, in particular the migrants' experiences of state persecution by the police in their country of origin and previous negative experiences in Britain of either the interviewees themselves or of close friends and family.

The length of stay in the country also played a role, as migrants seemed to get used to the constraints and limitations in the way they interacted with society and the place of residence. The time this process took varied, though among younger respondents it sometimes took as little as a few months to adapt to the constraints, as we saw in Chapter 4. Pawlo, who had arrived in Britain just over a year before he was interviewed, Brígido, who arrived just over three years before, and Semen, eight years in the country, offer some insightful thoughts on the issue of adaptation:

Simply ... You so get used to this that sometimes it happens that I even forget that I'm undocumented. I now simply came to terms with that I simply can't go and that's all. I can't travel, I can't do this, I can't do other certain things. By now, I got so used to it. You fight, develop this immunity that we now, how they say, whatever stick was thrown in [our] wheels [barrier], we always find a way out. (Pawlo, 22, M, Ukrainian)

Life like this is very restrictive, very restrictive and you get used to it. I got used to it. It is not a problem any longer [to] live like this, you know.

In my case, it's actually good. It means I have more time to dedicate to what I want. But not everybody is like me. (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian)

Before, I was afraid. Well, afraid, I simply didn't want to go home. ... Now, it is more or less normal. I assess the situation realistically, with experience. Past anxieties, emotions ... to ruin your mentality because of all this [is] not necessary. (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian)

In Britain, racism was an experience that impacted on the lives of some of our young interviewees and differentiated experiences between and within the five country-of-origin groups. Migrants from visible minorities, notably Zimbabweans and black Brazilians, encountered a different reality compared to Ukrainians and white Brazilians that also affected their social life and perceptions of Britain, as the quotations below from Jamie and Daniel illustrate:

I have experienced racism here ... it's not as open but you can tell how people react towards you and the fact that you are from a foreign country; people have sort of got this perception about you that you're a black person and you're like that. (Jamie, 30, M, Zimbabwean)

I was humiliated many times because here, if you are not humiliated you are not in England. And, it's not by English people, most of the people who humiliate you are not English, they are immigrants, most of them are immigrants ... You hear so many things that are not logical. I have been called monkey and you have to keep quiet. (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian)

Research has highlighted the close relationship between racial profiling and immigration enforcement (Ridgley 2008; Versanyi 2008). Romero (2006: 469) observes how such practices produce a number of negative effects which extend beyond undocumented migrants, such as, for example, deterring political participation among targeted ethnic communities, racially identifying urban spaces, and 'establish[ing], maintain[ing], and reinforce[ing] second-class citizenship and limit[ing] civil, political, economic, and cultural rights and opportunities'. Daniel (28, M, Brazilian), in just a few months – he arrived in England eight months before he was interviewed – had learned a few lessons on how to avoid unnecessary risk. Taking a taxi instead of a short walk home after a



night out, in order to avoid the police, was one of the solutions he came up with to overcome the issue of visibility:

Sometimes it's possible for you to go on foot. Sometimes I'm here in the centre and I decide to go to a friend's house, sometimes I catch a taxi depending on how late it is, although I could go on foot. You are always worried.

Inviting people home, visiting them in their houses, going to a church or a community centre or walking in a park, were considered safe social activities by most interviewees. These were situations and moments in which most interviewees felt they were no different from others because of their status:

[My status] does not affect me under this roof of association. But if I go out it does. (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

The internet was another place where young undocumented migrants felt secure. Social networking sites (more often in their first language than in English), Skype, emailing and instant messaging were important components of the daily lives of several interviewees. Public libraries provided, for some, a safe haven where they could access the internet.

I am always in front of the computer. I have that kind of computer-mania. If there is no work, I would not leave the house. I wake up in the morning and directly turn on the computer. (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey)

I spend most of my pastime on the internet. When there is nothing else to do. (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese)

My life here is on the computer. If I don't have it, I die. (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian)

Among young migrants with families, social life was planned around the family and revolved around the children's activities. Both Lesya and Augusto had their family in Britain. Lesya had been in England for five years and had three children and a husband to look after. Augusto had been in England for three years and was living with his wife and his British-born son, while his older daughter lived in Brazil with his wife's parents.

I can't have a free minute. My free minute is at midnight when they are all asleep. I make myself a tea and then, I can really sit down, to see something on the computer, watch TV. After, I get things ready for tomorrow: children's uniforms and all that. (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian)

On Sunday, the only day [I've got free], I have to go out with my wife because she doesn't work. We have a small boy, he, she, she is taking care of him, right. So on Sunday I try to please her, we go out, even if I don't rest, but I try to do something, right. (Augusto, 26, M, Brazilian)

### *Remittances and Undocumented Migrants' Transnationalism*

Transnational obligations and family roles are not static but negotiated and renegotiated throughout the migration project. Transnational activities are shaped by the interplay of several macro and micro factors, not least time, spatial distance and immigration status. Time away from home, lack of time due to long working hours, different time zones and daily routines were mentioned by several migrants as factors affecting their relations with families and friends at home, as Alice's and Uliana's words illustrate:

I work the whole day, return home only in the evening. The time zone difference with Brazil is a complication. You lose contact with people, there's no way out, because I live such a different life. People don't know what it's like; sometimes you try to explain things that people don't understand. (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian)

I live in that time that I used to live in when I left home. I think that everything is the way I left it back then. But now, to think about it, and when I was home, it's completely, completely different. But somehow I still can't let it go. (Uliana, F, 29, Ukrainian)

Despite various constraints, contacts with close family members, especially mothers, were frequent, sometimes even daily. Skype, international phone cards and social media were the main ways in which people kept in touch, though phone cards could be prohibitively expensive. In the quotation below, Sipiwe (30, F, Zimbabwean) explains the dilemma of maintaining social contact versus sending remittances:

the few pennies I have, I have to pinch you know, save here, save there ... say, for instance, the debate I can have with myself about buying a phone card. It's very important for me to keep in touch with my parents and, because I do not have a regular income, I do not have a landline, so if I want to phone home, I need to top up my mobile phone, that's £5.00 and then I need to get a phone card, that's another £5.00 = £10.00, then there are times when I get into a quandary, should I ... not! Not phone them and send them the £10.00. I can get a headache, trying to decide what to do.

Over time, however, contact with home became less frequent and many interviewees described how they had gradually lost touch with old friends and how, without a determined effort to keep the conversation going, it was difficult to stay in touch with family members, including siblings, as in the case of Ciwan (28, M, Kurd from Turkey):

My siblings were young when I left. I don't know how to speak to them now. We don't know each other that much. We could not spend much time together. I have tried to be like a friend to them but it didn't work. There is disconnection between us now.

For some, the relationship with old friends, after the initial exchange of excitement and information post-departure, gradually became an empty exchange of greetings and routine questions and they felt less and less able or willing to share those aspects of their daily lives which were more intimate or painful. This gradual separation seemed particularly noticeable among male migrants. David and Semen vividly capture the transformation of their relationship with friends in Brazil and Ukraine:

When I moved, we talked so much that there is nothing else to say. They say, 'How is it there?' I'd say, 'It's all the same.' I'd ask, 'How is it there?' They'd say, 'I've been to the same places.' So we don't have anything to say, it's over. I've already told them about everything here. I've sent all the pictures I had to send. (David, 29, M, Brazilian)

The conversation halts after a minute or two. How can I say, there is nothing to talk about anymore. I don't want to appear rude or disrespectful; simply there is no [common] topic for conversation. It's

like this: 'How are you?' 'Fine'. 'How is it [going]?' And that is all the conversation. (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian)

Two main reasons for this detachment were mentioned by interviewees: their desire to shield their family from the hardships they were experiencing, and their not wanting to disappoint their friends' and relatives' high expectations. Carol and Jiyan explain why their relationship with people at home has changed:

It's because I'm away, because they don't know what I go through in reality. Many people think that, because we are here, we are rich, millionaires, right, but it's not true. I don't tell my family about my problems. I tell them that everything is fine. I don't want to transfer my problems here to them. (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian)

You can't really share something private now. You just talk like 'How are you? What are you doing?' You can't call that much, because you are far. I can't tell them how your life is here. Because they would get unhappy, they will be worried. You can't really share much. (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey)

Being an undocumented migrant means not being able to leave the UK. One of the most painful and challenging aspects of being undocumented, for several of our respondents, was being unable to travel and visit family members at home or in other countries, or conversely be visited in the UK. The significance of enforced immobility is vividly captured in the following quotations:

What kills me really, that for seven years you haven't seen your family. I came here when I was 16. I have changed a lot ... hugely ... And, do not to see them ... very, very, very much want to go simply and see ... Who, where and how.... (Levko, 23, M, Ukrainian)

My mother passed away while I was here, six months after I came I lost my mother and eight months later I lost my stepfather who had been a father for me. And I couldn't go to see them because if I had, I wouldn't be able to come back. (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian)

Negotiating obligations and roles in the transnational social sphere features prominently in the accounts of the young migrants in our study

and plays an important part in their everyday lives and in defining who they are. Young migrants embody multiple and complex belongings in different locales (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) which are not mutually exclusive – on the contrary, scholars have pointed out how intimately interconnected these worlds are and have highlighted the impact of immigration regimes and their time politics (Cwerner 2004; Dreby 2010) on migrants and their families in the country of origin or elsewhere.

Even when reunions happen, they often take years to arrange and are far from straightforward. This episode narrated by Rojhan (27, M, Kurd from Turkey) illustrates the sense of alienation he experienced when he met his parents for the first time in nine years:

I went to the airport to meet my parents. When they walked out of the door they saw a man in front of them. I was not the child that they saw last time. They sent me here as a child but met a mature person on their arrival. For me it was like not seeing your mother and father but more like seeing your grandfather and grandmother. Nine years have changed a lot of things. As a human being, you would like to spend time with your loved ones. But a nine-year gap was huge for me. I cried. I could not speak but also I noticed that I lost something inside, I felt empty because as if they were not anymore my parents. We are like alien now.

Sending remittances to family members in the country of origin and the diaspora more widely is one of the major obligations of global migrants (Lindley 2010). Remittance activities will vary according to the reasons for migration and ongoing engagement with the country of origin (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001a). Migration among some interviewees was economically motivated, and this included the helping of family members in the country of origin (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011). However, being undocumented with its associated low pay and precarious work adversely affects remittance activities (Bloch 2010). In Chapter 5 we showed how income was limited and volatile. Decisions about spending the limited money available were affected by a number of factors and obligations, including the need to send remittances to family members in the country of origin, to pay back debts accrued in making the migration journey, or to fulfil personal aspirations such as saving money to buy a property or land. There was variation between groups in terms of transnational obligations

and activities, with the sending of remittances being closely related to the circumstances within the country of origin and to kinship obligations.

Among Brazilian migrants, with the exception of three who sent funds to support children, all other money sent home was to save and plan for the migrants' own futures. This included saving to study, buy land or buy a house. As Beatriz (24, F) stated, 'I've bought a piece of land ... and I'm paying for my [beautician] course.' Ukrainians also saved money to invest in land and property in Ukraine. One young man explained that he sent 75 per cent of his income to Ukraine to build a house. He feels little hardship as the following quotation shows:

It does not limit me even a bit because this is my aim. That is why I came here. I wish to finish quickly that house and simply earn some money and go back home ... No one, parents or anybody, forces me or says 'Oh, send the money, we need to build the house.' (Dmytro, 22 M, Ukrainian)

Fedia (29, M, Ukrainian) explained how he sent money home because he was undocumented, noting that, 'If we were here legally we would probably do something here with the money ... we would think of our own place here.' Instead, he bought a flat in Ukraine, a place to return to if the immigration authorities catch him and send him back.

Among the migrants in our study, a minority of Ukrainians sent remittances to support family members and this was also a pattern in particular among Zimbabweans and Chinese young people. Zimbabweans sent money to family members for basics – fuel, food, medicine and school fees – and with this came an element of obligation and hardship for some, in terms of their daily lives in Britain, as the following quotation shows:

It does affect me because sometimes at the end of the month, I would not remain with money for my daily living expenses because [you] will have sent money home, but at the same [time you] don't have choice, because they will also be expecting [you] to send money because they are not working and things like that. (Pat, 27, F, Zimbabwean)

Some Chinese young people not only supported family members but were also paying back debts to the smuggling gangs, as described by Guo Ming (30, M, Chinese):

We spent lots of money for leaving the country to go abroad. Now we should do our best to send some money home to support the family ... Each of us, for leaving the country, at least paid roughly 300,000RMB [roughly £20,000].

Some, like Fang Ping (22, F, Chinese), will send back almost all of what they earn to support their family:

However low the wage may be, since I have arrived in a new place, I must face it. I have to eat, pay rents; and back home, my family may need my support. I need to send money home to support them ... My wage is £180 a week. There are four weeks in a month so I get over £700 a month. I will send £700, and keep £50.

Among Kurdish young people there tended to be more informal and irregular remittance activity, with people sending money occasionally or when it was asked for rather than routinely. Remittance activity varied between groups and was affected by country of origin as well as by individual circumstances. Having dependents in the UK, for example, limited the amount sent overseas to support family members or to invest in property or land.

Being able to send money was, for some, a way of overcoming the distance and reaffirming their position in the family. At times when this was not possible, the sense of separation and loss of role became difficult to contain, as Tafi and Sandra explain:

I haven't seen my family for such a long time. I feel sad because doing that [sending money] for them was something that made me feel close to them; it made me feel a part of the family, it made me feel like I am a big brother. (Tafi, 27, M, Zimbabwean)

I just don't want to phone when I'm not even giving them something for funeral expenses. My father understands I'm not working, but not everyone understands that. (Sandra, 31, F, Zimbabwean)

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has explored how the lack of legal status shapes undocumented migrants' relationships to their social networks in Britain. The range

of social activities in which they engage is the result of a continuous negotiation between their social needs and aspirations and the constraints due to their lack of status. These constraints affect young undocumented migrants differently, as they are the result of the intersection between their lack of status and their gender, country of origin, ethnic group and previous and current experiences. The English language was also a factor that influenced interactions with people from different countries of origin. Perceptions over safety shaped migrants' mobility in Britain and the places where they socialised. The focus on space, spatial practices and mobility, moreover, revealed a map of safe, more or less accessible, or forbidden places – a fractured and discontinuous geography of undocumentedness – in which young migrants developed their social lives. The issue of trust was central in their relationship to social networks. While kin and friendship networks were crucial in the lives of our interviewees, it was not without tension because their lack of status could disempower them, leading to dependency.

Interviewees often mentioned the difficulty of liaising with others, especially if these others were documented, and the burden of the secrets and lies on which they had to rely on a daily basis to protect themselves. We explored the role of different community and faith groups in the lives of young undocumented migrants. The size and settlement patterns among the five groups affected the extent to which community and faith-based groups were available. Even when they were present, not all young people elected to use them, preferring instead to remain hidden and separate.

Relations and interactions were not just UK-based. Among some, we saw an active transnational engagement through their remittance activities. These transnational linkages also extended to social contacts with family members and, to a lesser extent, friends. The internet helped some people to stay in touch, but this was not a substitute for participation in their daily lives and could also be a source of pain. Being undocumented can and does impact on social relations in many ways, both in the country of residence and beyond. One of the consequences of being undocumented identified by our interviewees was a sense of alienation, and this extended into feelings of loneliness and dislocation that could only partially be filled by social networks and community organisations.



# 7

## *Intersecting Youth and Legal Status*

This chapter focuses on migration and youth. Youth is socially constructed and the roles and expectations attached to being young vary across locations, time, gender, ethnicity and class. Globalisation has redefined how individuals envisage themselves as part of transnational spaces. Narratives of youth are neither static nor bounded to the borders of a given nation-state but develop in a transnational social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). They travel across borders through multiple media, one of which is the migrants themselves. The politics of youth is increasingly transnational (bottom-up) and globalised (top-down), resulting from the interplay of various agendas and actors operating at different levels. Media, and especially online culture, is an important forum where such transnational youth can transcend geographic distance and boundaries while engaging in practices that shape their sense of belonging (McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg and Costa Saliari 2007).

Youth is a theme that runs through all the chapters of this book. Here, we investigate in particular, firstly, how migrants understand and position themselves *vis-à-vis* existing narratives of youth and related expectations and roles. We then look at how 'youth' intervenes in migration decision-making, including the circumstances of migration and the characteristics of migration projects, before examining, thirdly, the experience of being a young person, but without status, in Britain. Finally, the young migrants' aspirations and anxieties about the future are revealed.

### *Myself as a Young Person*

Youth is a social construct and the social role of young people in a given context is the product of a wider network of social relations which stretch

beyond the borders of the locality and state in which they reside. Belonging to the same age group, therefore, should not be taken as suggesting a homogeneity of experience among young people, and even less among young undocumented migrants from different countries, as illustrated in earlier chapters. Youth does not exist as a single, neatly bounded group. Young people grow up in varied circumstances and different gendered contexts, with diverse priorities and perspectives. Therefore, how young people shape their sense of belonging and negotiate their place in society and within their family – including their role as migrants – varies considerably.

The concept of youth is problematic when it is used to categorise people by age alone. It can be understood, instead, as a social process involving a negotiation between the social significance of age, which gives young people a common status, and the significance of other social divisions, as well as a struggle for meanings between different social groups of young people and the more powerful definitions and constructions of other groups (Wyn and White 1997). How youth is conceptualised impacts on how young people may construct their lives and aspirations and position themselves within society (Ansell 2005). Furthermore, it also affects how individuals are able to negotiate their own transition to adulthood.

Amed (29, M, Kurd from Turkey) reflects on his experience as a young man in Turkey and juxtaposes it to that of other young people from less wealthy backgrounds, showing how age alone is not enough to ensure commonality of experience, even among people from the same ethnic group or country of origin:

My father was a wealthy man and I had better conditions in Turkey than here [Britain]. But when you look at the issue from a general perspective, people in Turkey become workers almost in their childhood. ... They have no chance to live their childhood and teenager time. I see some adults who are married and go to the playground with their children. They forget their children and play as if they are children because they didn't have a chance to live their childhood when they were children.

Young migrants' narratives are at once narratives of location and of positionality, located in the space 'at the intersection of structure (as social position/social effects) and agency (as social positioning/meaning and practice)' (Anthias 2002: 502). They capture snapshots of the continuous process of construction and redefinition of the self from resources and

imaginaries belonging to different and intersecting social and cultural realms (Mouffe 1994).

Amed's observation on the behaviour of Turkish young adults in British playgrounds also reminds us that, in the experience of migrants, Turkey and Britain are not separate and bounded worlds. On the contrary, Amed shows how migrants negotiate meanings and practices of youth between multiple sets of relations and localities. But, as Uliana (29, F, Ukraine) points out in the following extract, the meaning of youth is also transformed by the very experience of migration, which makes the migrant a different person – a transformation often explained in terms of gained maturity and the ability to take care of oneself:

In Ukraine, I felt more like youth. Here, I feel myself more like a responsible person, a grown-up person. The English used to tell me that I'm very mature for my age. ... That I am completely not like their children, say, who are now 18, and they wouldn't be thinking about things that I was thinking. ... They didn't have that responsibility and concerns that I had when I was 18, none at all.

However, not everyone experiences migration as a positive transformative stage in their life. For some the experience can be so daunting that it causes the annihilation of youth, as captured by Dmytro (22, M, Ukrainian):

To say the truth, yes, sometimes there are situations like as if people have forgotten about themselves. I have really forgotten about myself – that I am only 22 years old.

In the following sections we look more closely at how different narratives on youth, and their associated roles and expectations, intersect young people's migration projects, the ways in which they experience life in Britain, and how they imagine and plan their future.

### *Youth as a Driver of Migration*

The aspiration of a better life for themselves and/or their families was behind most, if not all, the stories we collected in our study. Victoria and Custódia provide us with an entry-point into our discussion of the intersection of youth and migration decision-making:

I think all people came here in search of a better life. And, I belong to those same people, young people who came here not just for a better life but to find out about another country, meet different people, to develop. (Victoria, 24, F, Ukrainian)

Most of the people who come here from Brazil, they are not coming, like, for no reason. ... Everyone come[s] here because they have a dream. (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian)

In order to fulfil their dreams and aspirations, young migrants are ready to undertake long and, for some, perilous journeys. According to Mai (2010: 73), the migration of unaccompanied or separated youth constitutes ‘a liminal practice through which the passage to adulthood is negotiated socially and individually’. Among the undocumented migrants in our research, their age was frequently referred to as an important factor in deciding the timing of departure. Life-stage plays a central role in guiding the decision to migrate and the kind of migratory projects that individuals pursue. As we discuss later in this chapter, age also appeared to affect other aspects related to the temporality of migration, such as the pace of the decision and the length of the migratory project.

Here we explore participants’ narratives around their reasons for migration and try to identify those elements which could point to some kind of youth specificity in migration decision-making and in their demeanour in the country of residence. We pay particular attention to similarities and differences between the two age-groups of young migrants (18–24 and 25–31 years) in relation to the motivations and aspirations associated with migration. Table 7.1 groups our interviewees by age and country of origin.

Table 7.1 Participants by age at time of interview and by country of origin

Age-group	Brazilians (N = 16)	Chinese (N = 16)	Ukrainians (N = 13)	Kurds (N = 14)	Zimbabweans (N = 16)
18–24	6	11	5	5	7
25–31	10	5	8	9	9

For some, migration marks a rite of passage to a different social role in their family and in society in general. It becomes a planned strategy of self-actualisation, a way in which young people may foresee how to

exit marginal positions by enhancing their socio-economic status and making the transition to adulthood (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011; Ensor and Gozdziaik 2010; Mai 2010; Monsutti 2007). On the one hand, while migration brings – to those who migrated alone – independence and autonomy from the family and some relief from social pressures to comply with the expectations and customs of the country of origin, on the other it also forces migrants to respond to a new set of transnational expectations and to recognise their new economic obligations and responsibilities towards the family. In Dilan's and Xiao Xue's words:

Everybody thinks that, if you live in Europe, then you are fine and you live well. (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).

I want to work here for a few years and earn some money first. I can't go home just yet. You'll lose face if you go home empty-handed. (Xiao Xue, 21, M, Chinese)

Through, and because of, migration, young migrants move into a different social role, and this transition marks their social position, identity and aspirations. Berenice (23, F) left Brazil when she was only 17 years old and got married in Britain. Her experiences of migration and of marriage were intermingled and defined a new stage in her life:

I came here and got married. That's when I started to live as a married person. In Brazil, even if I worked, it was always my mother the one who was responsible for the water [bills], the electricity [bills], things like this, you know. But here, it's me, like, me and my husband, we have our responsibilities.

Similarly, for Pawlo and Zhu Chen, moving to Britain meant becoming independent from family and taking control over their own lives:

In Ukraine, young people in my age [are] not so independent, depend on somebody. Here, I'm ... If I can provide for myself, means that I don't depend on someone. It's not like that back home. Because, even after graduating, the youth don't have a job that they can completely provide for them, not even basics; all the time they depend on parents. (Pawlo, 22, M, Ukrainian)

Once you decide to come, life has to be tiring. Back in China you'd stay with your parents and if there's anything that makes you not happy about it, you can just go home. Here in the UK you can't just say 'I'm not happy, I want to go home.' (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese)

For some, migration has an almost salvific value. In Levko's experience, migration opened up a new world of possibilities and optimism – 'Everything lies ahead', he said – and marked a U-turn in his life:

Since I was 14 years old, I can say that I lived without parents. Never asked mother or father for money ... I don't know ... I was brought up by the street. You know [how it is] like, young guys, racket, sort-outs and all that. Theft. We steal. But we were more or less gentlemen. We didn't use violence or ripped chains off kids [necks]. We stole aluminium pipes, tape players, things like that, metal. Making our own money. And, I'm very, very, very glad ... Grateful to the Lord that I've got to England. Well, I smoked 'the herb' from 8 to 12 times a day. During the day ... What ... Smoking, drinking, girls ... In the evening – stealing. Never know what is waiting for you tomorrow. Get locked up, don't get locked up. I came here [when I was] 16 years old. Started working. Really ... I have this personality ... I am conscientious ... I hate it ... it tortures me all the time. I've started ... Tasted what the work is. How hard it is to earn money. But I loved it. I became really a workaholic. I have my own dream. I've changed very, very, very much. Touch wood, [changed] to the better side. (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian)

Among those who came to Britain in their late twenties, the reasons for migration seemed to be more specific, and migration was presented as a strategic move towards the realisation of concrete plans: to train with highly regarded music teachers, to learn a new skill, to accumulate enough capital to set up a business in the country of origin, to secure a house for the family and pay for the education of younger siblings. Earning money, accumulating capital, and gaining access to material goods otherwise out of reach were important motivations for all interviewees and in particular for Chinese respondents who, more than the others, had to contract significant debt to pay for their journey to Britain.

But the better life to which the young migrants aspired was not only made of material goods and money. Material wealth was seen as a way

of achieving freedom and autonomy, to grow as a person and realise one's potential:

I have the money now, I can afford to buy an ice cream or have a beer and not to think whether or not I will have something left for the next week. You see. In that aspect we were young people. We wanted to live, work and have simply a normal life. Not just existence, counting every penny, but to feel yourself a free person. (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).

Firstly, I wanted to earn and secondly, I wanted to see how this everything is here, how does it look. ... Maybe there is a feeling that I have to prove something to myself ... I am that sort of a person who sets targets for myself and tries to achieve. (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian)

In contrast, among respondents who migrated in their early twenties or earlier, the main driver for migration, while still placed under the rubric of 'searching for a better life', was seldom a concrete plan, but rather a state of mind, an urge for change, a desire to take control over their lives.

When Halyna (26, F, Ukrainian) came to Britain she was only 18 years old; since childhood she had dreamt of leaving Ukraine and exploring the world. When asked about her migration project, she replied:

They were not plans; it was just like, how can I say, youth's dreams, imaginations. It wasn't like an adventure. ... My plans were more to go and realise myself. Understanding myself.

Among Kurdish interviewees, migration was not, or not only, undertaken in search of a better life, but more often in search of a safer place, away from state-driven ethnic discrimination and police violence. Nonetheless, it was also a formative journey of discovery of their Kurdishness:

I can live here freely. I can live as I want. I can defend my Kurdishness. I am defending that here. Between our friends we do have these discussions. We discuss Turkishness, Kurdishness, Alevism and Sunnis. I can talk such issues with even police here. The police would not beat me, arrest me or do something else for talking about such things but we can't do that in Turkey by sitting in association or talking somewhere. We can't openly express our Kurdishness. We don't have that chance in Turkey. (Rojda, 22, F, Kurd from Turkey)

As mentioned earlier, youth also affects the pace of migration decision-making. Many participants recalled their decision to migrate as having been taken light-heartedly and quickly, without really thinking through all the implications and likely consequences. So quickly that, looking back, they expressed surprise and astonishment at how easily they made a choice and found themselves in a new country:

It was a surprise, he just asked me ... 'Do you want to go to the UK?' and I said 'When?' And he said 'Next week', and I said 'Yes'. So I had to apply for an emergency passport and he bought my ticket! It was just a quick journey, within a week everything was sorted. (Pat, 27, F, Zimbabwean)

Paired with this readiness to change, we also found what we may call a 'youth optimism' about the future and what lay ahead, even in spite of warnings received from other migrants already in Britain; in some cases this took on an almost mystical tone:

I'm ambitious. I always try, I learned to always move forwards, never stay still, quiet, whatever comes, comes. Due to the fact that I'm this ambitious person, whatever comes, comes, God knows what He does [laughs]. (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian)

### *Youth and the Risk of 'Illegality'*

As many countries have introduced more and more selective and exclusive immigration regimes that reduce the routes to legal immigration and rely on increasingly intrusive technologies of control to monitor and detect undocumented migrants, the risks associated with undocumented migration are also increasing, even if unevenly, along racial, ethnic and gender lines (cf. Pratt 2004; Silvey, Olson and Truelove 2007). This has created what Carling (2002) terms 'involuntary immobility' – that is, a disjuncture, particularly acute among young migrants, between aspirations and the ability to migrate. Involuntary immobility is produced by barriers established by immigration authorities as well as more-wide-spread desires to migrate (Jónsson 2011). Developing further what youth optimism entails, we argue here that, while there are obviously also older undocumented migrants, being young is one of main reasons for initiating and enduring the experience of unauthorised migration. The words of Bernardo and Cihan capture this sense of youth invincibility:



I don't know, I was so young, I think I didn't worry about the consequences. I thought, 'I'll do it and see what happens.' And it was OK [*laughs*]. (Bernardo, 26, M, Brazilian)

I'm 23. ... I don't have any worries. I know there are people who stay here illegally and still work in good places. ... They are not watching me now; CCTV is not watching me from above with a camera, [they are not saying] 'Cihan is illegal, let's catch him.' (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey)

As much as undocumented migration can be somehow related to youth, the realisation that time was flying – that they were getting older and had reached what they saw as a different stage in their life-course – became a trigger for young undocumented migrants to reconsider their migration plans and look for something different. However, as it was not always possible to find alternative solutions, some migrants felt a growing sense of frustration at being unable to regain control over their lives and develop according to their new needs, especially among those who had been undocumented for a longer period.

Semen is from Ukraine. He came to London eight years ago, when he was 20 years old. He feels he has achieved his initial migration goals. After years of hard work, he has bought a flat in Ukraine and, at the same time, has enjoyed living in the 'best capital in Europe', but now, approaching 30, he feels somehow trapped, unable to move on (socially), and this is pushing him to reconsider his stay in Britain. When he first came, he was fascinated by what he saw in London, it was like 'opening a door 50–70 years forward in the future', he explains:

I saw a completely different world. I used to work 16–17 hours [a day]. I had power and energy. I was younger. I simply didn't want to go home. I didn't want to return but to work and save money. It was different for me then. ... Now it is really the time to decide [what to do]. Time flies fast. I am 28. It is about time to decide where to be and how, and [to think about] family.

Interestingly, Semen explains how, since he feels he has already achieved a lot and is ready to move on, the risk of being caught by the police and forced to return to Ukraine feels more manageable. In his narrative there

is a clear sense of undocumented migration as a time-bounded experience, as something limited in time. He continues:

Many young people dream to come here even just as a tourist ... but I live and work in this city. I've earned a bit ... I am satisfied but the minus is that I have no papers. You want more, move forward, move on, to achieve something but without them [papers] – it's no way. ... I plan to stay for another year and then I will see what the situation is, maybe even going home.

For some, the transition to the next stage of life requires a degree of permanence and security that can only be achieved with a change of status, either by getting leave to remain in Britain or by going back to the country of origin. For others, a life change as significant as having a baby became the trigger for remaining in the UK, despite their lack of status, in the hope that, sooner or later, there would be an opportunity for regularisation.

The sense of undocumented migration as a transitory experience is echoed also in the words of Custódia and of other interviewees without children. Custódia (25, F) came from Brazil with her girlfriend less than a year ago; migration – 'leaving Brazil' – for her and her group of friends, was a 'dream of university students':

London wasn't my dream. But it's not by chance either. I didn't come to London due to chance. Hmm ... I, I ended up having a relationship, a cool friendship with a crowd who always talked about living abroad. All of them, at the time, between 20, 22 years old, let's say about three years ago. 'Oh, I want to go (abroad). I want to visit this and that place!' You know the dream of university students for after they finish their courses and things like that.

After many conversations, one day the plan became operative.

Suddenly, life shows you your path, your route, and I became very close to this girl, my classmate. We lived in the same town, we shared plans, hmm, and then she said 'Let's go to London. Let's go to London. It's cool there.' Then she'd surf the internet and say 'There there is this, there's the other', you know, things that tourists do.

Custódia's narrative conveys a sense of juvenile optimism, confidence and spirit of adventure. Buying a ticket for London and getting a visa for the first few months, as well as overstaying her visa, was relatively unproblematic in her account. Being undocumented was not really an issue for Custódia in the beginning:

This thing, 'I'll be an illegal (migrant).' I knew that's what I was going to do. ... In relation to documents, how I am going to work and etc., I never thought about it. I think that who comes here doesn't think about these things because they work anyway. Wherever there are Brazilians, you can say that there is (work).

However, as Gonzales has validly pointed out in his research on the transition to adulthood of young undocumented migrants in the US, 'illegality' is not a fixed status and affects young people differently at different times (Abrego and Gonzales 2010; Gonzales 2011). For Custódia, after a few months, undocumentedness is no longer an abstract and distant concept – difficult to imagine at a distance or through the stories of fellow migrants. She is now affected by it in every aspect of her life. This realisation triggers her to rethink her migration project:

If I don't get regularised and they let me stay, I'll leave in five years. At the end of five years, I'll go back.

*Interviewer: How did you come up with this number of years?*

Because I'll be 30.

*I: So?*

Because I'll be 30.

*I: Why is it important?*

Because I want to rest then [laughs].

Victoria, Uliana and Natalia, all from Ukraine, have come to a similar conclusion. Being undocumented does not allow you to grow beyond a certain point. It traps you into an economic and social niche – 'a capsule', in Natalia's words – from which it is hard to escape. It may be a suitable or acceptable temporary option when you are young but not for the long term.

My mum says 'How could you manage like that? I couldn't.' And I say, 'I can, because I'm young and I don't need to reach a higher

position straight away.' I don't ask for a lot, I know I just want to start somewhere low and build up gradually. But here in England, if you're undocumented, you can't get any further. I can't afford to grow personally. (Victoria, 24, F)

Your young years passing by and you are, like, in that capsule, you see. You can't realise yourself fully. If you have some skills, opportunities or talents, anything that you can demonstrate ... if you are a good worker or a craftsman, anything that you can use and give some benefits to this society, you can't 'open' it because you are in this capsule. You are locked in because you are afraid. You are afraid to say a word about yourself. That's how it really is. (Natalia, 26, F)

To work as a cleaner is not a profession. I'm still young. Cleaning your whole life is not interesting for me. If I liked it in the past, earning some money. Now it's ... now I basically have everything. But I don't have what I want. There is always something missing. (Uliana, 29, F)

### *Being Young and Undocumented in Britain*

Being a young person in Britain has advantages. The advantages are that you can do anything you want and reach your potential, young people work, you can have your own money and the sky is the limit. (Tanaka, 22, F, Zimbabwean)

You can feel yourself a person. You can earn money, afford to buy things, go for a holiday. It is not like that back home. (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian)

These quite positive quotations capture only half of the story we are going to tell in this section, where we explore migrants' views on being young in Britain. The way they see and experience Britain is, as we argued at the beginning of the chapter, a product of the intersection of structure and agency, of different individual circumstances, experiences, expectations, gender and social and cultural backgrounds.

The UK is, for young migrants, a land of freedom, of opportunities, of wealth and consumerist hedonism – 'I have means to buy whatever I want instead of having to pay it in 20 instalments [*laughs*] as it is in Brazil', says Bernardo (Brazilian, 26, M). However, it is also the exact opposite for those who have no rights to pursue such dreams and opportunities. Such striking contrasts can be frustrating, disheartening and overwhelming.

Some seem to have more resources for seizing at least some of these opportunities; others prefer to give up, reducing their aspirations to the bare minimum as a survival strategy.

In presenting their views on what it means to be young in Britain, the interviewees inevitably referred to their direct or indirect experiences in the country of origin. Narratives of youth are constructed in the transnational social field. Sometimes Britain is appreciated more for what it is not than for what it is, as the following quotation from David (29, M, Brazilian) illustrates:

[In Brazil] my life would be the same, every weekend everybody would go out together. At the end of the year, everybody would go to the beach for the New Year. We'd go back and return to the beach at Easter. It'd be the same life like everybody. I'd get a girlfriend, she'd get pregnant, I'd buy a small house, and my Dad would help me, always the same thing. If it's right or wrong, I don't know, but it's not for me so, like, in my case, being here was more than 100 per cent the right thing for me.

In our interviews with Zimbabwean and Kurdish migrants, the impact of the country of origin on the views expressed by interviewees was particularly evident. In the narratives of Zimbabwean migrants, as anticipated in Tanaka's quotation above, there emerges an idealised image of Britain as a land of hope, of educational and job opportunities, where a young person can at least aspire to fulfil his or her dreams:

At least in the UK, if you are a young person, you know your future is bright. ... Being in the UK at least gives you hope for a better future, longer life rather than being in Zimbabwe, where you are deprived of many things. I am happy that I am here – at least I have hope ... where there is life there is hope. In Zimbabwe you can hope for something but the chances of getting your dreams fulfilled are very limited. (Bob, 31, M)

They got so many [choices], you can choose to go to university or if you cannot go to university you can ... you got a line of jobs that are lined up that you can take up if you want to work. (Jamie, 30, M)

Indigenous British youth, according to some Zimbabwean interviewees, do not really appreciate what they have. 'They are spoiled', not having

experienced, so the argument goes, the hardship the Zimbabweans have gone through:

I think a lot of young people in this country don't quite appreciate or realise what they've got. It's not necessarily their fault but, all the same, it is a problem because you have a lot of opportunity to do a lot things that just goes wasted or unexploited really and ... that's just sad really because you find that, that, when you are a young person in Zimbabwe, the slightest chance we've got we really try to make the best of it. (Terry, 21, M)

In this country, if you are British and you have got your parents, they will spoil you and do this and that for you, you don't really think much about your life because you are getting everything you want ... but, in Zimbabwe, we don't have that kind of a thing. You grew up with your parents, you go to school, you work hard, you get your qualifications, you get a job, you get married, you move out of your family's house. (Kirsty, 22, F)

In the narratives of Kurdish migrants, Britain represents freedom, a freedom which they do not have as Kurds in Turkey. Kurds seem to appreciate, in particular, the cosmopolitan nature of Britain, where people from different cultural backgrounds can live together peacefully, without 'interfering' in each other lives:

In my country there is no freedom; there is freedom here, I can go out and travel, be free and not worry. (Avashin, 29, F)

There is not much cultural pressure here. People can live as they want because we live among different cultures here. Everything seems so natural. Nobody sees us as criminal because of our language and culture. (Rojhan, 27, M)

A friend who is studying at the university in Turkey and working in London as a waitress told me that she don't want to go back to Turkey. I have asked why? She said 'If I go back to Turkey I cannot just sit at this table with you and drink alcohol.' She said 'I have the comfort of this here.' But in Turkey she said there is pressure. Here nobody interferes with your life. People respect your way of life. (Amed, 29, M)

Contrasting with these idealised images of Britain, however, there is the reality of young migrants' everyday lives, which can turn the very opportunities they see all around them – so close yet so inaccessible – into a cause of frustration and discontent. Pat (27, F) is originally from Zimbabwe; she came to Britain when she was 20 years old, full of hopes and expectations, and now, after seven years, she says:

I look at people my age and what they are able to do and I look at their achievements, their educational achievement, their jobs, their own cars and I can't do any of those things so it does affect me. ... I do consider it as an injustice to me. ... Right now we just spend our time sitting around ... and ... right now we are still growing and we keep on growing without those opportunities ... you see ... wasting our opportunities in life.

Similarly, Diana and Brígido, both from Brazil, identify their lack of legal status as the main obstacle preventing them from fully enjoying what Britain has to offer to young people:

Not having documents, I haven't experienced the advantages of Britain yet. I don't know if I'll ever experience them. (Diana, 28, F)

Young people really have a lot of opportunities [here]. The ones who are here legally, the legal ones, not the illegal ones though. (Brígido, 30, M)

Travelling and going places, as many young people in Britain do, is frequently given as an example of what an undocumented young migrant cannot do. Not being allowed to travel means not being able to visit family abroad, but it also becomes a factor of social exclusion as it exposes them to their 'legal' friends. Despite the limitations and constraints due to their lack of status, some young migrants do try to preserve their social life, which sometimes, as in Dilan's case, means joining a volunteer theatre group when tickets for shows and performances are out of reach, or, as Rita explains, buying clothes and taking care of their appearance because it is what a young person should do:

I would like to go to cinema and theatre but I can rarely go. I love theatre and [am] working with a volunteer theatre group now. At least I can watch some theatre in this way. We write and play our own plays. (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey)

Because I'm a girl, I think a lot of money, not very much, but quite a lot goes on fashion. You're young, you want to look good. I think it's natural. And it should be like that. If you don't like yourself, no one will like you. So I'm not greedy when it comes to it. (Rita, 29, F, Ukrainian)

The following quotation from Eduardo (23, M, Brazilian) suggests a further angle – buying goods and spending money as a way of enjoying life as much as possible, this time not despite the lack of status, as the previous quotations imply, but rather because of it, and of the uncertainty about the future it causes:

My plans were to make money, right, but she and I were both crazy, we used to spend everything, but, that's like this, I didn't save money because I didn't want really. I chose to enjoy life here. It's wrong, I know it's wrong but I don't know, I don't know about tomorrow ... I enjoy, I enjoy life here, I've given up this idea of saving money.

However, this is not the only way in which people respond to their undocumented condition. For Firat and Rojda, comparison between the life of a young person in Turkey and that in Britain is not possible. Life in Britain is so hard and exhausting, sucking all your energy and time out of you and making you feel much older than you are:

I cannot think of any of these things as I am undocumented. I am not in a position to answer this. To be honest, I can't go that far to think about them. There are a lot of other problems before that, so I cannot even think about what you are asking. (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey)

We don't talk about the conditions here or there. My psychology gets affected. I don't feel like 22 or 23 years old but feel much older as if I am 50 years old. I had suffered a lot and many bad days. (Rojda, 22, F, Kurd from Turkey)

## *No Right to Dream*

### *Making (And Not Making) Plans for the Future*

The uncertainties arising from the possibility of detention and deportation are one of several dimensions in which the vulnerability of being undocumented is revealed in the everyday lives of migrants. In this



section, we explore migrants' projections about the future and if, and how, they are affected by the lack of documents.

Although none of the participants in this study had previously been deported from the UK, for most the fear of deportation was a central feature of their everyday lives. Many knew of friends, acquaintances or kin members who had been deported or were awaiting deportation. Echoing De Genova (2002), more than deportation itself, it is the possibility of being arrested and deported at any time that shapes their daily routine, their presence in Britain and their aspirations for the future. However, our study also reveals that this fear is experienced differently by undocumented migrants depending on their gender, life-stage, ethnicity, age and reason for migration. For those who feared persecution in their country of origin, deportation presented a serious threat to their lives, and so decisions were made within this context and a palpable anxiety surfaced in their narratives. Others were anxious about their livelihood or their capacity to repay their debts. However, deportation was not always considered to be the end of the world. It was something that *might* happen, and the risks and possible outcomes were not life-threatening but just necessary aspects of being undocumented that had to be built into the strategies of everyday life. The fear of deportation was thus experienced in different ways rather than uniformly. What everyone shared, however, was a sense of precariousness and uncertainty. Taffi (27, F, Zimbabwean), despite her nine years in Britain, explains how she still feels vulnerable and why:

I feel vulnerable, because you just don't know what will happen tomorrow or you just don't know how it's gonna pan out in the end, you don't know if you are going to end up getting your papers or if it's never going to happen.

Making plans for the future is a crucial part of being young. 'The right to dream', as one of our interviewees put it, or the possibility of imagining and planning the future, seems to be denied to young undocumented migrants. Institutional processes associated with migration have the effect of suspending, accelerating or slowing down the rhythm by which people aspire to live their lives (Griffiths 2013). Work carried out by Chase (2013; see also Chase and Allsopp 2013) with young people seeking asylum alone in the UK has highlighted the extent to which perceptions of well-being are derived not just from feeling in control of current and past aspects of their lives, but from looking forward and having a projected sense of

self within a future trajectory, a sense of ontological security. ‘My plans can’t change anything’, says Semen (28, M, Ukrainian), encapsulating the frustration of not being able to pursue his aspirations any further.

The difficulty in making long- and medium-term plans is evident in the narratives of our undocumented migrants, several of whom directly relate the impossibility of talking about the future to the condition of undocumentedness, as the following quotations illustrate:

I have no status, how can I talk about the future? (Fei Lin, 20, M, Chinese)

I really don’t have hopes while being illegal. (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey)

When you don’t have papers like me, it sort of makes all those little dreams that [you] had before become blurred. [You] sort of lose hope and you say to yourself ‘OK, now this hasn’t gone the way it was supposed to go, how long am I going to be sitting at home?’ As optimistic as you may try to be, the fact is that you’ll be going nowhere and it’s a very painful existence. (Terry, 21, M, Zimbabwean)

Here we focus on migrants’ feelings about the future and on the impact of being undocumented on future imaginaries, rather than on concrete plans and aspirations. We also look at migrants’ attempts to reclaim at least part of the unmet promise and explore everyday epiphanies of the ‘enforced orientation to the present’ (De Genova 2002: 427), a sentiment captured in the following quotations from Colin and Berenice, both 23 years old:

Right now my aim is just to succeed and do things in the shortest possible time ... which means taking in more work and trying to do a lot more than any other normal person would do. (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean)

I try to make the most of each day, like, what I can, because there are many things that are not [available] because of this situation. (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian)

Making concrete long- or even medium-term plans is difficult, if not impossible, given their circumstances. Life is so precarious and full of uncertainty that any plans can be swept away. Tracy and Serhado’s

accounts offer vivid illustrations of the feeling of uncertainty entrenched in the lives of undocumented migrants:

Every day is a day of uncertainty because you could just be walking down the street and you could be taken from the street or taken from work by the Immigration. (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean)

I cannot do anything, because I do not know what will happen. For example I talk to you now, after this I will go to work and I do not know what will happen to me on the way. Maybe they will arrest me on the bus and send [me] back. I cannot make decisions about the future but I have dreams. (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey)

But for some, dreaming too is forbidden, or felt to be a counterproductive activity, as it creates and nurtures aspirations that cannot be fulfilled. Custódia and Welat explain.

Every day you see your life in danger. Actually, it's not your life. Every day you see your dreams in danger, everything you dreamt of. (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian)

I am not in the situation to dream, because there is nothing to dream about. Because there is nothing much you can do ... Having future plans like marrying, children, depend on the money to afford these. You need to be legal in order to do this. If I am not legal, how can I have hopes? ... I don't even have the right to dream now. (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey)

### *Was it Worthwhile?*

The narratives collected in this study offer a complex and varied picture of the everyday lives of young undocumented migrants in the UK; experiences of hardship, racism, exploitation, as well as psychological pressure and insecurity, were shared, to different degrees, by all participants. In this section, we discuss the young migrants' assessments of their experience when asked whether, in light of the knowledge they had gathered – and counterbalancing, at least to some extent, their enforced social immobility and deprivation of agential capacity in relation to the future – they would embark on such daunting and challenging experiences again. To this question, most interviewees – and especially the Brazilians – responded affirmatively.

Eduardo (23, M, Brazilian) felt he belonged in Britain and, for him, the question had a straightforward answer – ‘Of course it is worth it.’ Bernardo and David echoed Eduardo. Bernardo explained that ‘illegality’ was the only way for him to stay:

I don’t regret having stayed here all this time at all, even as an illegal, because it was the only way, the only option I had. Otherwise I’d have returned to Brazil without having achieved anything. (Bernardo, 26, M, Brazilian)

Overall, our Kurdish interviewees did not regret the decision to migrate to Britain, despite the hardship, because of the situation they had left behind and the freedom they had gained.

[I do not regret leaving Turkey] not really. But our country is not something worth to live in as well. We had no protection for our life. At least I got my right to life here. (Firat, 30, M)

I might have struggled for five years but even thinking about going back home scares me. (Avashin, 29, F)

Kawa’s response is particularly interesting because it shows how the experience of an undocumented migrant goes through different stages – he has been in Britain for seven years – and how, after the initial disorientation, migrants gradually learn to get by.

Life is very difficult, I mean I came here, there was no one, I didn’t know the language, but I stay now. I am happy. I don’t have regrets, but it has been a long time. At the beginning when I came here it was very difficult, at that time I regretted. I had stress, psychological problems, I experienced all of them, they caught me, Home Office made life not so easy for me but that is gone now, that is gone. (Kawa, 25, M, Kurd from Turkey)

For some migrants, being able to survive and cope is a reason for pride and reinforces a sense of an ‘epic’ we have encountered in some of the narratives of our respondents. Interestingly, a number of them mentioned their intention to write an autobiography recounting their experiences, as the following quotations from David and Amed illustrate.

I have so many things written down, so many notes, that I might write a book. There won't be so many people who will conquer as much as I have. I've been here for five years, three more, it'll be eight years (altogether), so I might write a book after eight years. (David, 29, M, Brazilian)

Sometimes I write these things down. I have electronic book on the net. It helps me to discharge. (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

A sense of an 'epic' also emerges in Necirwan's account, as he explains why his experience was successful:

I think I have been successful. I have resisted. Maybe it's illegal but I worked and stayed in this country ... I managed to stand on my own feet. I have limited my life but I managed to exist in this country and I continue to do so. Regardless [of the] social and financial limitation of the situation, I continue to live this life. (Necirwan, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey)

For Welat (23, M, Kurd from Turkey), on the contrary, the balance between what he has gained and what he has lost is tipped towards the side of loss, as he explains:

Who can bring those years back? If this state gave you residence or citizenship, would this bring back those four years? I mean, if I were to go to Turkish state and spend my one year in the army, then I could have saved my three years.

Ukrainian migrants, overall, regarded their experience in positive terms; some of them reveal a clear sense of achievement and a view of migration as being an important stage of transition in their life-course:

It was a major plus, a major plus. Because you started by yourself and you achieve and achieve. Even to step over that language barrier. You step over, you saw a bit of that. Your worldview is completely different now. It's worth it. (Natalia, 26, F)

Those who came here and can survive in these [living] conditions will actually become a proper person in the future. (Dmytro, 22, M)

It's a new level in my life. I think that I'm making a step. This life and this tempo, it's harder. But I have to make these steps higher if I want to achieve something in my life. And, when it's harder, right, I feel that I progress. (Sergiy, 27, M)

Like Kawa earlier, Fedia (29, M, Ukrainian) shows how, after the initial uncertainty, once migrants begin to settle and to build social networks their assessment of the experience can change:

Now it's worth it. Currently. Because now you earn more money and now you have family and a child. It was worth it. Before, came here, little money, earned a little, just for food and the rent, and like that. But now. It's all worth it. Definitely. I think that every person that is doing something, striving, have some plans is worth it.

Levko (23, M, Ukrainian) shares a similar motivation to that of most of his compatriots; however, having been in Britain for eight years already, he has come to the conclusion that, being undocumented, one cannot achieve much in life and time is passing by:

I really want to achieve in my life, to become something. The biggest thought that eats away at you is that you [are] simply losing your time; that simply years will pass and that's it.

Levko's feeling of wasting time is shared by Tracy (29, F, Zimbabwean), whose poignant description sheds some light on how long it can take for the realisation to sink in of what it actually means to live as an undocumented migrant:

Our whole lives are consumed by visas and getting a stay and getting documented. And its stuff that, when we were back home, we never discussed or even thought about, so it just makes you more appreciative of the fact that maybe there's a lot of other people who have been going through the same things for years and I was just oblivious to their suffering because it didn't affect me in any way.

Among Zimbabwean migrants, positive and negative views were more balanced. The following quotations illustrate the two opposing positions.

Theo (19, M), who has been in Britain since he was 13, felt the experience was not worth it. In this bitter remark, he explains why:

It's just a drag, it's long, it's too much of fuss to be a British Citizen ... even if you do get it – they won't even treat you the same because you're still black.

Like Theo, Kirsty (22, F) has also been in Britain since she was a teenager and sees Britain as home:

I came when I was fifteen, and this is like a home for me already. I don't have anybody back home that I can call my relative or that I can call a family ... I've been in Britain for quite a long time and I just really wish I could be here forever because I've grown up here.

The measure of success for most Chinese interviewees was their ability to earn money. Yao Xiaomin's and Mein Chen's accounts poignantly illustrate this point:

It's very tiring; but I think it's worthwhile. At least I earn money by offering my labour. I didn't earn the money doing nothing. I earn money with both of my hands, I earn money with my labour. So every time I get my wage, it's also my happiest moment. (Yao Xiaomin, 25, F, Chinese)

Yes I have actually thought of this question. After coming here I thought 'Had I been able to earn 5,000 Yuan (£350) a month, I'd rather stay in China, instead of coming here.' (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese)

The brief dialogue that follows reveals mixed motivations and, together with the previous quotation, offers some insight into the kind of dilemmas the condition of undocumentedness carries with it.

*Interviewer: Do you regret coming here?*

I don't actually regret it. No.

*I: So, over the two years in the UK, you don't feel regret; and on the whole, you still feel that it's worthwhile coming here?*

But I do think I have wasted a lot.

*I: You mean you've wasted time?*

Firstly I have not done lots of work yet. I have spent most of my time on the internet. Secondly, I have not done a lot of study either. Compared to many of my friends in China, I feel that I am lagging behind. ... No feeling of achievement. I still feel that I haven't made any progress; I think I even have slipped back.

*I: You also said that, although it had been hard on you, you still felt it was worth coming to the UK.*

Yes. I have travelled half the globe. (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese)

Finally, the words of Guo Ming (30, M, Chinese), who came to Britain when he was already in his late twenties, reveal a sense of powerlessness which to some extent reframes the question of the worth of the migrants' experience:

I don't think it's worthwhile. But I'm powerless to do anything about it.

## *Conclusion*

If I were at home [in China], I'd go playing in lots of places. I'd go out in the evenings, too. Here in the UK, you work and sleep. After work you'd sleep; and after sleep you'd work. (Jessy Chang, 21, F)

This chapter has looked at the relationship between youth and migration through the accounts of a group of young undocumented migrants in Britain. Starting from an understanding of belonging as a complex interplay, a never-ending negotiation between several factors – age, gender, country of origin, social class, education, personal inclinations and life experiences, both in the country of origin and in the country of migration and the transnational social field – we have investigated participants' sense of identity, both as migrants without status and as young persons. Analysis of their interviews led us to identify key moments in this dynamic interplay in which youth as a narrative and embodied practice became particularly crucial in shaping migratory projects and individuals' experiences in the country of migration.

In order to understand the complexity of the condition of young undocumented migrants and shed light on their motivations and aspirations, the multiplicity of competing, and sometimes contradictory, discursive regimes must be acknowledged, as they contribute to the



formation of migrants' subjectivities. According to Rattansi and Phoenix (2005), while the structuring influences of class, gender and ethnicity remain powerful in the formation of youth identities, this frame is mediated by the intersections of the local and the global. These propositions have particular significance for the study of young undocumented migrants, highlighting as they do a range of factors which will shape both the process and the experience of migration.

Migration represents, for many young migrants, not just a rite of passage in the transition to adulthood and to a new social role, but also a formative and transformative experience which shapes their present identity and their actual relationships with their peers and with society in general. Their lack of status significantly limits the opportunities available to young migrants, who end up, in the large majority of cases, living in poverty, being subject to exploitation, and experiencing very difficult working conditions. Coping with such conditions is hard, and sometimes overwhelming. Being young, it emerges from the narratives of our participants, provides not only the endurance and resilience necessary to survive such an experience, but also a key motivation, as the following quotation illustrates:

What we know is that young people usually do not take steps back. English government should understand this. Political people will never, ever take step back. People who came for the money won't go back as well. Any Kurds they send back to Turkey gets back to this country and encourage others to come here. In last two years they sent back about twenty people that I know but they [are] all back and working here. They came back maybe with another ID or in any other way but they are back. (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey)

Undocumentedness is experienced through the effects of the reality it produces in the everyday lives of participants, and shapes, in different ways, their social worlds and their imaginings about the future. Some undocumented migrants may choose to go home, but not always or only because they can no longer cope with their living conditions. They may have achieved what they came for, or decide that the kind of trade-off required in order to survive in Britain without papers is no longer appealing or worth the sacrifice, or their personal circumstances may have changed and they want to look for something different.

# 8

## Conclusion

The consul banged the table and said,  
'If you've got no passport you're officially dead':  
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

(W.H. Auden, *Refugee Blues*)

'But we are still alive', says the *sans papier* in Auden's powerful poem – and 'We are still here' could echo any of the interviewees in our study, which set out to offer a qualitative insight, from their own perspectives, into the experiences and everyday lives of young undocumented migrants. This Conclusion will look both backwards and forwards, considering the ways in which past and current policies and prevailing political climates have impacted on the lives of this sizeable group of migrants. In particular we consider how youth, with all its aspirations and opportunities, intersects with the multiple vulnerabilities that come from being an undocumented migrant. What does it mean to be young and undocumented and to live in the shadows? What might the future hold for them? And what does it mean for society to have minorities living separate lives and occupying marginal spaces, unable to gain access to the basic rights that others in society take for granted?

Central to this book has been the nexus between migration, legal status and youth. Clearly evident is the contrast between the constructed identities of official, static immigration categories and undocumentedness as a *process* which, as the book has demonstrated, resonates more closely with the perceptions of the migrants themselves. The analysis has identified a number of instances in which youth, as a narrative and an embodied practice, intervenes to shape decisions around migration and settlement and migrants' attitudes towards living without status. A lack of status keeps young people frozen in the present, constraining their capacity to make plans for the future and fulfil their aspirations beyond, at most, some short-term economic gain. Although individual experiences differ, in the empirical chapters we explored and highlighted certain

commonalities that existed between and within the groups under study. The key areas where these commonalities were most often found were in the initial motive for migration, ethnicity, social and human capital, and gender.

Migration can represent a formative and transformative experience that shapes the identities and relationships of young migrants to their peer group and to society more generally. The lack of status significantly limits the opportunities available to young migrants who, in many cases, have experienced poverty, exploitation and unfair, physically demanding working conditions. The book shows how being young also provided the endurance, resolution and resilience necessary to cope with the harsh conditions that life as an undocumented migrant can bring. Youth was also a narrative frame through which interviewees interpreted their experiences, balancing their status as undocumented migrants against their life projects and aspirations. The young people talked about 'illegality' as a significant episode in their life story. Living *sans papiers* provides proof of their courage, resilience, maturity, independence and even their capacity to challenge gender and patriarchal norms.

Living a life without documents is increasingly difficult in the UK and requires considerable physical and emotional strength. The narratives presented in this book are a testament to migrants' resourcefulness and individual agency in a country that can disorient them with mixed messages. On the one hand, Britain is perceived as a land of opportunities and an upholder of human rights. On the other, it marginalises and excludes the most vulnerable from realising economic and educational opportunities and from accessing even the most universal of human rights. Even the most resourceful and resilient migrants have been overwhelmed and disempowered by their experiences, as the empirical chapters clearly demonstrate. However, we also saw moments of individual empowerment in relation to the young people's everyday mundane tactics, such as when to use bought documents, when to leave a job if safety is likely to be compromised, or even where to sleep at night. While research in other geographical contexts has identified collective mobilisation as a strategy for rights-claiming in relation to regularisation or to an improvement in pay (see Chapters 2 and 5), in the UK, collective action is not a feature of migrant agency, which tends to be more micro and individualistic.

In Chapters 4 to 7 we examined the multifarious experiences of being young and undocumented. Chapter 4 began with the point of arrival and showed the disjunction between pre-migration expectations and the

realities encountered on arrival. These initial encounters shaped migrants' longer-term strategies for settling in and cast light on the tensions that influence the tactics and strategies that migrants pursue in their country of residence. Learning what a lack of status entails is a process that begins on arrival. The young migrants in our study knew little of the harshest aspects of living a status-less life before arrival, despite most of them having pre-existing contacts in the UK. At the same time, we showed how many of the young migrants drew on and developed their resilience in order to cope with the exigencies and setbacks that were as a consequence of their precarious status. By exploring the ways in which the realities of being undocumented sink in through the young migrants' everyday lives, we have been able to give a more nuanced understanding of the temporality and changeability of being undocumented. Young people had to quickly adjust their expectations and become socialised into their lack of status – which meant learning the realities and negotiating the boundaries that are a consequence of that lack. It also involved mobilising existing social networks and the development of new networks that were crucial for information, advice and support in relation to everyday survival and for access to the labour market.

In Chapter 5 we explored working lives and labour-market strategies, focusing in particular on how being undocumented was the lens through which work was found, experienced and negotiated. Workplace vulnerabilities were evident across gender and national groupings. The narratives were peppered with accounts of poor terms and conditions of work, unscrupulous and exploitative employers, precariousness in relation to a lack of security and stability at work, and the absence of mechanisms through which to contest poor treatment. Some young undocumented migrants did find ways of incrementally improving their situation which included, in some cases, the use of bought or borrowed documents. Moreover, work was a site of anxiety; there was a constant fear of being caught while at work or of being exposed for constructing a story that was not based on reality. Our analysis showed differences in the patterns of work – in terms of sectors and jobs – between country-of-origin groups and between men and women. The kind of work carried out was a function of status and also of job-search strategies that tended to be linked to micro co-ethnic social networks which were often those of other undocumented migrants. These networks were trusted and considered safe but were also limited, offering little or no scope for real advancement. Instead, the

pattern of job mobility was a horizontal movement between secondary-sector jobs, predominately in food, retail or informal care work.

Not everyone was working and a minority of the people we spoke to had never worked in Britain. Those who had been through the asylum system were less likely to be working than those who had not, reflecting not only their original motives for migration but also, in some cases, their greater fear of deportation. Their lack of entitlement to any form of welfare provision meant that those not working were dependent on others within their social networks or had to use their savings during periods of unemployment. Dependency on others could be an uncomfortable but necessary position. Thus social networks served many functions in the everyday lives of many of the young people we interviewed, not only in terms of their working lives but also during their periods without work.

In Chapter 6 we developed our analysis of social networks by exploring the intersections between immigration status and migrants' social and community lives. A lack of status shaped migrants' social networks and their strategies in relation to them, both in Britain and in terms of wider transnational and diasporic engagements. Family and friends, as noted above, were crucial in the provision of information, advice, assistance and emotional support; in addition, faith groups and community organisations were important sites of information, advice, support and social interaction. Churches, in particular, were seen as safe spaces where the hierarchies of legal status were less significant. The role of community organisations varied in people's lives. For some, they offered important social interaction and places to engage in collective political action. For others, community organisations were avoided because they did not offer anything tangible or because they were deemed to be potentially threatening and unsafe places.

The avoidance of social interaction was something that permeated interviewees' narratives and revolved around issues of safety and trust. The young migrants constantly evaluated and assessed where to go and with whom, what to disclose and to whom. Perceptions of what was safe and what was unsafe informed their decisions and how they interacted with others on a daily basis. However, it also transpired that these perceptions varied considerably between undocumented migrants and in the experience of individuals over time. As Custódia, a 25-year-old woman from Brazil, put it, with time and experience one learned to become 'street-wise', to navigate through the city without being visible or to avoid places altogether at specific times of the day. The constant weighing-up of the risks of detection associated with particular activities and places

was a stressful exercise, one that some found more difficult to handle than others. The idea of returning to a country deemed unsafe made individuals especially fearful and cautious. As Dilan, a 23-year-old Kurdish woman, explained:

If you are student or tourist, you always have [the] option to go back to your country if you need to. But for us this is not possible. We feel like [we are] in prison here in this island.

Throughout the book we have demonstrated and emphasised how ‘youth’ intervenes in migration decision-making and shapes migratory projects and migrants’ understandings of their experience as undocumented, and, in turn, how they are transformed by the experience of migration. Some of the constraints experienced by migrants as a consequence of their lack of status were everyday ones while others related to plans for their future. In Chapter 7 we explored the ways in which being unable to make plans generated frustration and a loss of individual agency. Some even contemplated the idea of going home, either because they could no longer cope with their living conditions or because they had achieved their objectives. Others were fearful or even terrified of return and this fear framed every decision and every action.

Changing social and domestic circumstances also represented a significant factor in the lives of young migrants. Often it was children, left behind or born in the UK, who instigated critical points of transition. Augusto, a 26-year-old from Brazil, had been in Britain for three years with his wife. They had left a daughter behind and have a new-born son in Britain:

I can cope but my daughter is growing up, she is demanding us. Money isn’t everything.

Separated families, particularly those with children left behind in the country of origin, are affected by their lack of legal status, as it entails a protracted separation between family members. Immigration laws shape the ‘contours of family dynamics’ (Menjívar and Abrego 2009: 181) affecting intergenerational relations within transnational families (Dreby 2010). In these cases, family formation and childbearing may produce a different effect, one that roots young migrants in the country of residence and transfers their aspirations for the future to their offspring. Some of

our young interviewees talked about wanting to have families, though this was seen as difficult given the context of their undocumented status. Consequently, some considered returning to their country of origin to have a family, drawing on the resources they had accumulated abroad; for others this was not an option, given the circumstances of their migration or the situation in their country of origin. For those unable or unwilling to return home, there was an awareness of growing older, without children, in an increasingly punitive policy environment and under the ongoing constraints of their undocumented status.

### *Current Policy and Political Climates*

As was discussed in Chapter 2, successive policy measures in the immigration sphere have been focused on pre-entry and post-entry controls as well as making incremental reductions in migrant rights (Koser 2005; Sales 2007). Koser (2005) offers a typology of the policy instruments used by states to address irregular migration. The enforcement measures used include pre-frontier controls, such as visas, border fences and surveillance, and the use of biometric data, and post-entry measures such as detention, workplace raids, employer sanctions and restrictions on or exclusion from social and welfare rights.

Four things are important to note about policies designed to control irregular immigration. The first is that many policies are heavily criticised on the grounds of human-rights abuses, in particular the detention and deportation of migrants and their exclusion from welfare support (Golash-Boza 2012; Sales 2007; Silove, Steel and Mollicar 2001; Welch and Schuster 2005). Secondly, academics and NGOs are aware that such policies can themselves create the condition of illegality and of protracted legal precariousness which becomes embodied in migrants' lives and reverberates over generations (De Genova 2002; Goldring and Landolt 2011; Menjivar and Abrego 2009; Smith 2006). Thirdly, many of these policies are ineffective because they fail to address the complex reasons for migration, and there is evidence that irregular entries have increased despite the introduction of extra controls (Koser 2005; Uehling 2004). Finally, as we have argued, the instruments of migration control construct a concept and status of 'illegality': it is not an *a priori* or objective condition. Since immigration cannot be totally prevented, the harsher restrictions inevitably create an increase in breaches of the law and thus an increase

in the 'crime' of 'illegal' immigration. Yet the criminalisation of migration does not reflect particular behavioural characteristics: it is, as we have argued, contingent.

Global migration, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, is driven in part by inequalities and wage disparities, and these will continue to motivate the movement of workers from poorer to richer countries. There is also a continuing demand in the wealthier economies for unskilled and flexible workers. Not all migration, however, is economically motivated – persecution, generalised violence and human-rights abuses will also generate migration flows, and people will continue to move for educational or family reasons, or as a rite of passage to mark important status transitions (Hagan 2008). In short, the motives for migration are complex and mixed, and many people will continue to make their journeys and/or remain as undocumented migrants when their visas expire, or their asylum cases are refused, or after clandestine entry. Even if deported, many simply attempt to make the journey again and again (Schuster 2011). Such journeys are, however, becoming increasingly dangerous, partly as a result of the disappearance of legal and 'safer' routes to immigration. The role of smugglers, agents and traffickers has increased, as regular immigration routes have decreased. More money exchanges hands, greater risks are taken, and migrants are more vulnerable to human-rights abuses and death when making their journeys. Deaths occurring during both land and sea crossings are now regularly reported in the media. The numbers tell a story – one that reflects the ineffectiveness of policy and its terrible impact on human life. Over the past 15 years, 5,500 people have died trying to cross the border from Mexico into the US; in 2012 alone the number of deaths was 477 (Anderson, S. 2013). The reason, argues Anderson, is the lack of legal routes into the US for suitable work. Similarly, many migrants die trying to reach Europe; very recently – in October 2013 – 300 migrants drowned while trying to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Once in the destination country, undocumented migrants, as we have seen, occupy a particular space that is hidden, precarious and often vulnerable. In the UK, as in other comparatively wealthy economies, an underclass of vulnerable people deprived of any rights are living and working without access to any representation. Some countries have opted for or are considering a comprehensive regularisation programme for undocumented migrants – notably the United States, Italy and Spain. Regularisation enables undocumented migrants to come out of the shadows and live their lives freely, to access the kind of working and living



conditions others can enjoy, and to enter the pathways to citizenship for those deemed more deserving.\* These regularisation programmes have often come about as a result of large migrant-led social movements (McNevin 2006; Nicholls 2013; Nyers and Rygiel 2012; Squire 2011). In the UK, collective action has not been a feature of undocumented migrant agency. Instead, approaches to regularisation have been piecemeal and have targeted specific groups. In 2003, for instance, the Home Office authorised a ‘family amnesty’ for all asylum-seekers with a dependent minor, regardless of the status of their application. In 2004, the UK also granted A8 nationals the right to work by introducing a Worker Registration Scheme. As A8 nationals already residing in the UK could register regardless of their status, the Scheme acted as a regularisation mechanism for an unknown number of them (Vollmer 2008). The Case Resolution Programme initiated in 2007 to review the so-called ‘legacy cases’ – the backlog of over 500,000 unresolved asylum and non-asylum cases – is another example of this piecemeal approach.

What is significant about the UK is that there has not been a broad regularisation programme. Instead the focus has been on the detection and removal of undocumented migrants by developing and extending the policing of the immigration regime through public services and within civil society. The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 introduced fines of £5,000 for employers who were found to be taking on people without the correct documents; the penalty was increased to £10,000 in 2008. Accompanying these fines have been very public workplace raids and deportations, for the most part focused on businesses located within ethnic enclaves or in areas with a population density of people from visible minority groups. In our research, some people expressed their fear of workplace raids, which left them constantly on edge and led to them framing their employment decisions around these fears (see Chapter 5).

During the summer of 2013, a public and highly visible campaign – Operation Vaken – was piloted in London. The campaign targeted six boroughs thought to have high concentrations of undocumented migrants,

\* Many scholars have signalled the emergence in some Western liberal democracies, including the UK, the US, the Netherlands and France, of what has been termed ‘earned’ or ‘market’ citizenship, which sees citizenship no longer essentially as a *prima facie* right but as a prized possession that has to be deserved and can be withdrawn if not properly cultivated (Gibney 2013a; Joppke 2010; von Houdt, Suvarierol and Schinkel 2011). A recent proposal in the UK’s Immigration Bill includes provisions which would expand the executive power of the Home Office to strip someone of his/her citizenship even if this would render them stateless (Gibney 2013b).

and included 'Go Home' posters on the sides of vans, newspaper adverts, and cards placed in shops in these areas. The van posters displayed how many undocumented migrants had been arrested and provided a text number for advice and 'help with travel documents' for return to the country of origin. The rationale was that the underlying threat of arrest would encourage people to return voluntarily. After an evaluation, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, concluded that the approach was 'too blunt an instrument' and would not be rolled out. What the pilot makes clear, however, is that the agenda is to frighten undocumented people into thinking that return would be a preferable option.

Operation Vaken was followed by an email and text-message campaign in the autumn of 2013. Messages were sent to 58,800 people (some of whom were UK citizens) asking if they had overstayed their visas, with text content stating 'Our records show you may not have leave to remain in the UK. Please contact us to discuss your case.' This was a rewording of the initial content, which had stated 'You are required to leave the UK as you no longer have the right to remain' (BBC 2013). Whatever the effectiveness or otherwise of such approaches in their aim to 'smoke out' and deport migrants without legal status, they clearly have an impact in so far as they create publicity and maintain the focus in the media on undocumented migrants as a problematic and unwanted presence (Back and Sinha 2013).

### *Looking Forward or Looking Back? The Immigration Bill*

At the time of writing, in December 2013, a new Immigration Bill was working its way through the UK Parliament and expected to come into law in the spring of 2014. The Bill focuses on sanctions and on civil society, extending old measures and introducing some new ones. It proposes increasing the fine to £20,000 for an employer caught hiring workers with the wrong documents or none at all. In addition, private landlords, banks and the Driving and Vehicles Licensing Agency will be expected to carry out document checks. The Bill also proposes a clampdown on 'sham' marriages or civil partnerships. At the second reading of the Bill in Parliament on 22 October 2013, Theresa May stated that 'The Bill will [make] employers think again before hiring illegal labour.' According to the immigration minister, Mark Harper: 'The Immigration Bill will stop migrants using public services to which they are not entitled, reduce the

pull factors which encourage people to come to the UK and make it easier to remove people who should not be here' (GOV.UK 2013a).

The language of the Bill returns to that of the 1990s, when there was a binary of the 'deserving' and the 'non-deserving', with 'genuine' refugees falling into the former category and those deemed to be exploiting the system by taking limited resources away from the population as a whole falling into the latter (Sales 2007). Theresa May went on to say that 'It is unacceptable that hard-working taxpayers have to compete with people who have no right to be here' (GOV.UK 2013b). What is striking is how little policy has progressed – the sanctions are harsher and more extensive but the basic arsenal of measures is the same or similar. This returns us to our earlier statement that the government's policies are not meeting their objectives. Indeed, if they had the desired affect of managing migration and attracting particular types of workers, then these incremental increases would not be needed. This is not to deny that the policies have an effect, but it may not be the effect desired and may indeed be counter-productive (Martin and Miller 2000), resulting in increasingly vulnerable workers being unable to access basic employment or human rights, in skilled migrant workers staying away from an unwelcoming Britain, and in mixed-status families, including British citizens, being broken up as a result of immigration rules.

Recent research among undocumented migrants in London, which complements our own, reveals the ways in which workplace sanctions can worsen working conditions and increase precariousness for undocumented migrants (Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay 2013). Moreover, the risk of employer fines can be passed on to the workers, further depressing wages and increasing vulnerability, insecurity and disempowerment. According to Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay:

Raids ... target visible minorities and so form part of a racialised immigration regime ... they can make workers vulnerable to reporting, adversely affect community relations and further restrict their work opportunities and in so doing push undocumented migrants into the most hidden jobs with the worst working conditions. (2013: 3)

As the research presented in this book clearly demonstrates, undocumented migrants adopt a range of tactics to minimise risk and stay as hidden as possible. Some even opt out of the labour market, leaving them dependent on the goodwill of others or on informal domestic

exchanges that may be altruistic and reciprocal but that can equally be exploitative (Engbersen, van San and Leerkes 2006; Gutpa 2007). One of our interviewees, Sandra (31, F) from Zimbabwe, had in the past accepted a room in a family home in exchange for domestic duties. Describing her experience she said that, 'I was more like a domestic worker for them, I had to do something to live with them for free.' Far from undocumented migrants being 'discovered' and removed, this group are retreating further and further into ethnic enclaves and domestic settings within the most unregulated parts of the economy, hidden away from the rest of society and increasingly dependent on the vagaries of employers and social networks. What does this segregation mean, in terms of both the larger societal picture and the individual experiences and futures of these young people living as undocumented migrants?

In the next section we consider the conflict between current immigration policy and employment and human-rights policies. No part of government immigration policy is immune from the application of seemingly random and ineffectual measures to control who enters the country and, increasingly importantly, who is permitted to stay. Often the policies seem designed more to support the political rhetoric of immigration control than as carefully thought-out tools to manage migration in an orderly way. Thus a further proposal in the Immigration Bill is to add new powers to enable the Home Secretary to denaturalise anyone with dual nationality whose UK citizenship is deemed to be 'not conducive to the public good', and to strip away citizenship altogether from British-only nationals, even those who are UK-born, if they fall foul of the same criteria. Such a proposal breaches international human-rights conventions designed to prevent individuals with single citizenship from being rendered stateless. If the undocumented are hidden from view, the undesirable are to be stripped of their identity.

### *Rights, Segregation and Marginalisation*

Our research has shown how undocumented migrants are hidden away, mostly separated from society, with their daily interactions often restricted to a tiny circle of family members, faith-group congregations, community organisations, employers, other employees and/or other undocumented migrants from the same ethnic and/or linguistic group. For young undocumented people, the limitations in their daily existence,

self-imposed and carefully policed as a consequence of their status, act as an impediment in almost all aspects of their lives. Their social networks are small and often limited to other undocumented migrants from the same group, denying them access to wider networks and social contacts that could assist in the process of learning English and acquiring the tools to integrate into society more widely (Lancee 2012).

Our interviewees were young people with aspirations to study, work, develop professional careers, have families and, above all, be able to emerge from out of the shadows without fear. Being able to work freely was an aspiration of many. Not only did this dovetail with the motives for migration among those whose mobility was economically motivated, it was also a reflection on the multiple vulnerabilities experienced in the workplace as a direct consequence of being undocumented. Recurrent in the narratives were migrants' experiences of exploitation and lack of access to rights, but also their basic desire to be entitled to work in the regular economy free from potentially unscrupulous employers and contributing to the UK economy. For example, Brígido, a 30-year-old Brazilian who had been in the UK for three years, reflected on the issues of exploitation and lack of rights in a way that was similar to many of the other narratives:

I've had many problems in relation to [status] ... there's a lot of exploitation which is generated by illegal migration; it creates exploitation because they know that you, an illegal, you have no rights. You are not going to complain and if you worked and you should be paid £20 but they only deposit £10, you have to accept it, you know. So they'd pay me only part of my payment. I complained and they said, 'It'll come next month, because there was a problem, the administration made a mistake', things like this. Sometimes it was paid, sometimes it wasn't ... There is nothing you can do to claim your rights ... because you don't have any rights, claim what? You have to accept what is imposed.

Huadi Zhang, from China, who was 29 at the time of his interview, talked about integration, paying taxes and a sense of being 'normal' as part of his aspirations for the future:

I do want to learn some English. Then at least I can speak English when I go shopping. All I can do now when I go shopping is point at this and that ... [I] hope to be able to have a job and to work without any worry, paying tax. That would be a lot more relaxed ... I want to learn

English [to] be able to communicate, to communicate with the Brits. That would be good enough. That would allow me to lead a normal life. But if you don't know the language, how can you lead a normal life? All you can do is hide at home.

This is a group denied the protections available to others within the context of employment and employment rights or within the criminal justice system. Having no way of contesting work-based exploitation or other harms – such as being the victim of a crime – leaves undocumented migrants far removed from the basic rights afforded to and enjoyed by others. Alice was 27 and from Brazil. She had experienced serious domestic violence at the hands of her boyfriend, but felt helpless, saying 'I couldn't go to the police here ... I didn't know how I could get any kind of protection.'

The human-rights framework should afford everyone protection regardless of their immigration status because human rights are founded on the notion of personhood, not that of citizenship, with the concept of universality at their core. The UK is a signatory to international as well as European human-rights statutes, but the reality of human rights is that they are stratified by immigration status and are not universally accessible. They operate along a continuum, at the one end of which are citizens who have access to the full range of rights, while at the other are refused asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants who are unable to claim their rights (Morris 2002). Part of the barrier to realising rights among undocumented migrants is their deportability as 'un-citizens' (Nash 2009: 1078). Avoiding people, places and behaviours that could result in deportation was one of the main ways in which undocumented migrants policed their everyday lives.

One glaring omission on the UK's part, along with that of other migrant-receiving countries, is its failure to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Prior to this Convention, undocumented migrants had been either ignored or neglected, but the Convention marks a movement towards securing the employment and civil rights of migrant workers and their families, including those who are undocumented. However, as noted above and highlighted by Bosniak (2004: 323), undocumented migrants 'are afraid to avail themselves of the rights they may enjoy for fear of exposure to immigration authorities'.

Recent research by Ruhs (2013) argues that one solution to the global-migration/human-rights dilemma is to introduce (or where already in

place, to extend) temporary-worker programmes that allow entry for limited periods but without the full set of rights; in short, to allow access to wealthier economies for set periods of time in exchange for the forfeiting of some core rights such as welfare benefits, family reunion and long-term settlement. Such a proposal, however, directly contradicts the drive for equality and justice for all workers and does nothing to combat the actions of unscrupulous employers. Moreover, our analysis, alongside historic patterns of migration (e.g. guest-worker schemes), demonstrates that migrants, even when temporary and when their rights are restricted, do not necessarily return to their country of origin or adhere to their formal status as temporary or guest-workers. Temporary visas are overstayed and this can form part of the migration strategy (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2011). We would therefore argue that a more positive approach would be to accept that the UK, like all countries, is part of a global economy characterised by migration flows, and to embrace migration as a positive aspect of globalisation. Instead of compromising on rights, the struggle should be for societies that are fair and just, and work against exploitation, entrapment and precariousness.

Rights should be better policed, properly enforced and made available to everyone, not just citizens and others with a secure status. One starting point for this would be to shift the policy emphasis away from sanctions to the enforcement of workers' rights (Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay 2013). There is a comprehensive range of rights already in place for all workers, regardless of their status; these include health and safety protection, the right not to be discriminated against, the legal minimum wage, the right to holidays and the right to breaks during the working day (UndocNet 2012). In this book we have seen little evidence of these rights being adhered to with respect to undocumented migrants, and certainly no evidence of enforcement to ensure workers' rights. The focus of state interventions has instead been on sanctions – fines and raids – rather than on the protection of workers.

We would argue that the extension of political rights to migrants would contribute to shifting the political debate and could provide a counterbalance to the dominant narratives that construct migrants as 'the Other' and as a threat to the welfare system. Through the creation of pathways to regularisation and citizenship, undocumented migrants would gradually become part of this process too, and be encouraged to engage in democratic processes. The mobilisation of undocumented migrant youth for citizenship and political rights in the US illustrates this

trend towards more human-rights-based claims-making (Nicholls 2013; Sigona and Hughes 2012).

Throughout this book we have drawn attention to the marginalisation and separation of undocumented migrants in workplaces, the domestic sphere and wider communities. What does this separation mean for young migrants and for the cohesion and the multicultural life of the communities in which they reside? In the aftermath of urban unrest in northern English towns in 2001, community cohesion was high on the agenda. Britain was portrayed as a country where different communities lived side-by-side but not together. A review into the disturbances chaired by Ted Cantle reported that:

... the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarization of our towns and cities. ... Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges. (Cantle 2001: 9)

While the focus was largely on Muslim minorities, of whom most were British and British-born, the issue of cross-cultural contact nevertheless became high on the political and policy agenda. The idea was to facilitate contacts and understanding, and the education system was seen as a major site for such interventions. In a similar vein, a study of the links between immigration, social cohesion and social capital (Zetter, Griffiths and Sigona 2006) highlighted how immigration status and age, as well as leadership structures, organisational capacity and gender needs, were critical variables in the formation of social capital amongst migrant communities. For undocumented migrants, as we have shown in this book, the development of social capital, particularly in the form of wider networks outside the immediate group, is virtually impossible.

What we have found is the existence of economic and social structures that condone inequalities and divisions as legitimate for some but not for others. Aspects of policy that set out to challenge the disadvantaged position of many migrants in UK society fail to filter through to the most separated and isolated. Policies based on sanctions further entrench people within micro social and ethnic networks far removed from the 'mainstream' of society. This is especially apparent for those 'living above



the shop' where they work, scared to go out, unable to learn English or to form links with people from different groups. The fear of deportation shapes lives and life chances and has created an underclass confined to the margins of society, excluded from economic, social and civic integration. The numbers of undocumented migrants are not insignificant; we are talking about a sizeable element of the population, a group that includes people who arrived in the UK as children and young teenagers as well as children born in the UK to undocumented parents (Sigona and Hughes 2012). Condemning people to a life in legal limbo, *de facto* non-deportable and yet excluded from citizenship, has repercussions both for the individuals concerned and for society as a whole.

### *Concluding Reflections*

In this book we have presented the voices of young undocumented migrants, a group about which little was known. We have found their experiences to be varied and complex, and this heterogeneity serves to highlight the importance of personal biographies. The interviewees experienced their status differently and have responded to it in a multitude of ways and with varying levels of individual agency. Our analysis highlighted the ways in which being undocumented had different levels of significance depending on the setting – it is not a uniform experience, but one that is contextual and layered (see also Cvajner and Sciortino 2010; Willen 2007). However, alongside these differences, our research also revealed commonalities that were not only a consequence of status, but were also linked to the initial motives for migration and to other resources in the form of social networks and human capital. It is on these commonalities that we would like to reflect in concluding this book.

First, becoming undocumented means learning how to live life without papers – understanding what is and is not possible, what is risky and what is safe, who and who not to trust, and which institutions and places to avoid. We have shown how one way in which young migrants seek to handle their situation is to view their status as being somewhat fluid, as a process rather than an official formula – what Schuster (2005) termed 'status mobility'. Despite the dualistic burden – an identity of 'illegality' that is constructed then criminalised – undocumented migrants quickly acquire the skills and tactics necessary to survive within the boundaries of their identity. Work was crucial, not only because, for some, it was the

reason for their migration, but also because this group have no access to welfare. During periods of unemployment, alternative support structures were utilised, largely in the form of social networks but also of faith groups and community organisations. These relationships were not always equal and frequently resulted in dependency, powerlessness and, occasionally, exploitation. These unequal relations extended to the workplace, which was characterised by low pay, long hours and little or no stability. From the perspective of some of our interviewees, employers took advantage of their status and they felt powerless to contest their working conditions. Others strategised by using borrowed or bought documents, though we found that the sectors of employment and the jobs carried out were limited almost exclusively to those within the least-regulated parts of the economy, whatever the tactics used to find and stay in work.

The lives of the young undocumented migrants were also characterised by limited social circles and, for many, by isolation and loneliness. Relationships were avoided, which, given their ages, represented a significant void for many. Life was passing by without any sense of progress, development or achievement. There was an absence of forward thinking and planning for the future. Existence was very day-to-day and seemed to be more about survival than about really living with a forward trajectory. Bauman's description of 'wasted humans' who, as a consequence of the 'order-building' and economic progress of modernity, are devalued, dispossessed of their livelihood, unrecognised and unwanted (2004: 5) seems to reflect the experiences of many of the young migrants we interviewed. In the contemporary environment of complex patterns of migration and minority formation, the experiences of such 'wasted humans' have become and are likely to remain a significant feature in many societies. The actions of states and political institutions establish the conditions that make the everyday lives of undocumented migrants both precarious and dominated by fear. As Appadurai notes:

Minorities do not come preformed. They are produced in the specific circumstances of every nation and every nationalism ... the mobile, the illegal, and the unwelcome in the space of the nation-state – blur the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', here and there, in and out, healthy and unhealthy, loyal and disloyal, needed but unwelcome. (2006: 42–4)

The lives of the young undocumented migrants living in Britain in the twenty-first century can be seen as part of this wider phenomenon – both in and out, needed and unwelcome.

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