



Interview with: Manu (02)
Interviewed by: Marie
Date of interview: 19 February 2017
Travel: DRC – South Africa

Marie: Good morning, my sister. My name is Marie. I will be talking to you about my research. I am from the Migration and Inclusive City project. I am delighted that you have agreed to share the story of your life with me. Can you tell me about your living conditions here in South Africa?

Manu: A very good morning to you. My name is Manu. It is true that I live here in Durban, but I am from Congo. I left Congo with one child and came here to live with my husband. Then I gave birth to my second child who is a boy. Until now we live together, enduring our refugee life. After a while, I gave birth to my third child when he was only seven months—he was born prematurely. That child died when he was two months and two weeks. Then I had a fourth child, a baby girl. I am an asylum seeker, which means that I use an asylum permit.

We were living with their father. But life was difficult because I was using an asylum permit. I do not have a refugee status. I have tried by all means to secure refugee status but I have not been successful so far. You know, to live with children in this country with no assistance is very difficult.

Their father used to work as a barber in a salon. We lived like that for a while, but then we decided to go back home because our life became unbearable. This was in 2012. It proved to be impossible: we could not go home. Then we realised that there was nothing else we could do. So we decided to have another child, the fifth one. However, things were already very bad. We were barely surviving with our children and we had failed to go back home to DRC.

After a while my husband's job ended. This gave him a lot of stress and he started drinking alcohol. But he was not a good drinker. Every time he drank we would fight the whole night—no rest, no peace. We had a lot of problems every time he drank. And at that time I had just given birth and my baby was only one month old.

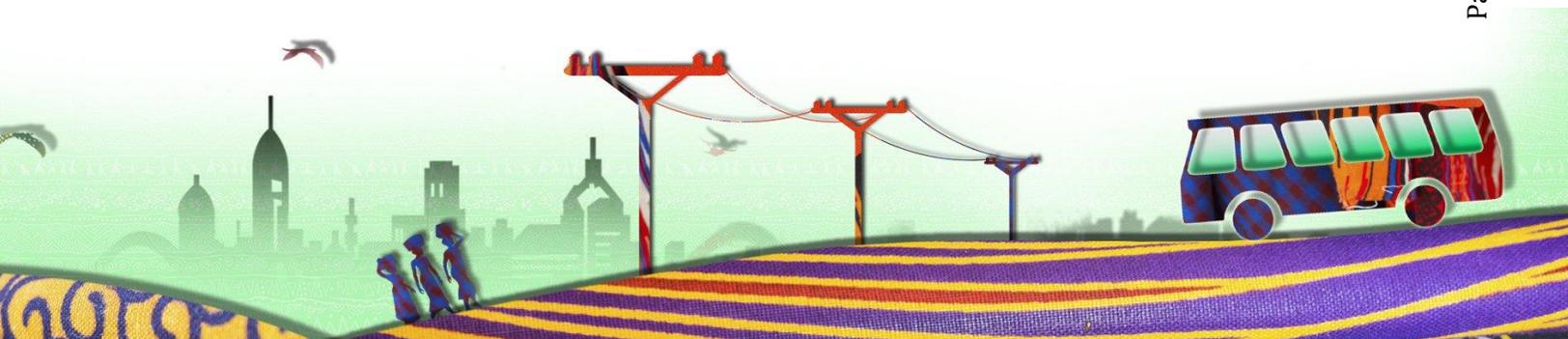
Marie: Okay.

Manu: So, we continued to live with these problems. Then he started beating me up. He would beat me up to an extent that my friends would call the police, but when the police arrived, I would send them back because I would feel sorry for the father of my children. Maybe he would change or stop drinking. It is not good to lock a man up. Moreover, I thought that those gestures from my side will make him cut down or, better, stop his drinking, but instead the situation continued to worsen.

Once, when my baby was two months old, he beat me up and he almost killed me. The police came and arrested him. He spent one week and two days in jail. Then I went to withdraw the case because people were talking a lot. But before that I had left that flat where we were living together and moved to another one. And then I started to look for a job. I found a job where I was earning R300 per week. It was another refugee who employed me. However, that money was very little considering that I have four children and rent to pay for my flat. But I did not tire or despair. I carried on working there because you cannot leave your job until you find another better one. Life became extremely difficult, four children all under my shoulder and I don't have refugee status.

Marie: I would like to ask if all your four children go to school or what?

Manu: Yeah, two are going to primary school and another one goes to crèche.





Marie: Okay, in terms of paying for school fees, for you as a woman and a single mother, how do you manage with all those four children?

Manu: I don't know. I live by the grace of God.

Marie: Okay.

Manu: Because the school that the two go to costs me R300 for the whole year, which is R600 for both, but you can pay little by little until you complete the payment.

Marie: Okay, how is life progressing then? I know that you are a fighter woman.

Manu: Yeah, I am still working at that restaurant. I don't want to leave there. Sometimes we get [food], sometimes we don't, sometimes we go to bed hungry just so that I can save and keep a bit of money for school transport of my children.

Marie: And your husband, does he support the children or not?

Manu: No, he doesn't support them but he comes from time to time to visit them and sometimes, after a lot of insistence, he gives them R20 for school transport if he likes, but he seldom does that.

Marie: And on your side, how is life treating you here in South Africa considering the challenges that you are facing and hardship that you are going through alone without a husband? And what do you see going well especially regarding the education of your children?

Manu: For me I can say that here in South Africa life is very difficult because there is no support at all, neither for me nor for the children. As for me, I think I will not make it because of the kind of job that I am doing and my living conditions. I don't know whether they will continue with their education. I don't see that happening because I can see that I am struggling to survive here in South Africa.

Marie: Okay, but I want to know how is your daily life going? You say that life is failing you in this country, but you are not telling me how it is failing you.

Manu: Okay, yes, first of all, my living conditions are terrible. I live in a flat that is in a very bad condition, but because I don't have money I have no choice but to continue living in that flat because it is cheap. But it is in a bad state. That is why I am saying that I will not manage to continue living in those terrible conditions. We are not even eating well. When we do manage to get nice food, the conditions under which we eat are appalling. Sleeping is also a challenge. Our sleeping conditions are not good. Can you imagine a mother and four children, including boys, sharing the same bed? We are suffering. I am not living in acceptable conditions at all in this country. And I can see that I will not make it unless someone helps us with some sort of assistance. As a refugee, I have nothing at all.

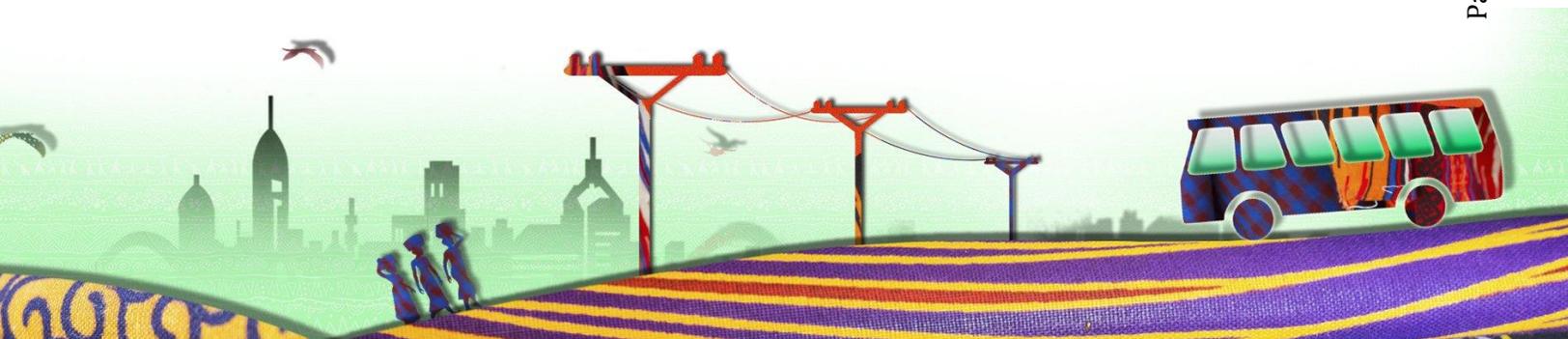
We know that if a refugee arrives in a country, s/he needs assistance so that s/he can integrate and survive in a foreign country. Unfortunately, I don't see any help from anyone here. I know that there are people who have refugee status, but I don't have it, even after eight years living in this country. Those who have refugee status can get a child support grant for their children from SASSA, but I can't access that grant because I don't have the status, so how am I going to survive here with no assistance? No one is willing to help me and that is why my life is very difficult here for me.

Marie: Okay, I hear that one issue that is troubling you is the issue of refugee status. How about your children, do they also not have status? Do they at least have birth certificates? Do they have all those documents or what?

Manu: Yes, my children have birth certificates but they don't have refugee status. They have asylum permits. Even me, I don't have refugee status.

Marie: Okay, maybe that is the reason you are not receiving child support grant for your children?

Manu: Yeah, because I don't have refugee status I don't qualify for a SASSA grant.





Marie: Have you made efforts to go and ask at Home Affairs how come after eight years you are still an asylum seeker?

Manu: Yes. There was time when I went to Home Affairs to ask why I am in the country for so long but I am still on asylum permit, and others come and in a short time, not even a year, they get their status. I asked one person at Home Affairs who told me: “That is how things are. You cannot get refugee status until you complete five years living in the country”. When I completed five years I went back and told them that I had now been in the country for five years—why were they giving me an asylum permit again? How am I going to survive with these children? I explained to them my living conditions, that I am bringing up my children alone without their father. They told me that it is not their problem, it is the problem of the government.

Marie: Does your former husband have a permit or refugee status?

Manu: No, we all have permits. He also does not have refugee status.

Marie: Okay, that is probably why your children also have asylum permits. But are they being given a run-around at school or, even with that permit, are they studying well?

Manu: No, no one has even asked them those things. I don’t know if they will ask them when they are in high school. They are using birth certificates in primary school, because even if you do not have an asylum permit you can use your birth certificate.

Marie: Okay, taking into account everything that you have just said, how then do you manage with your life? How about your work, what kind of work are you doing? And your salary, are you able to tell me the amount of money that you are being paid or not?

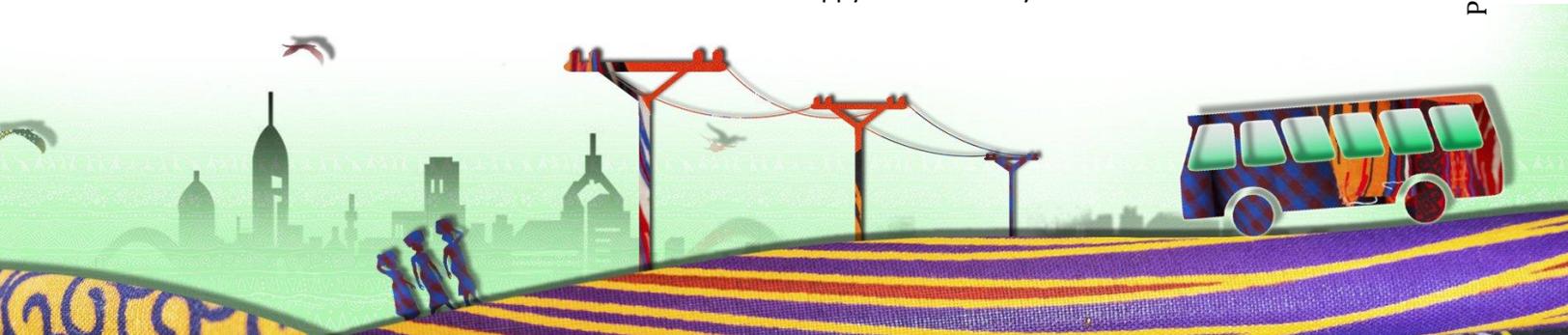
Manu: For these past months I was working and earning R2650 per month, but it was someone else’s job. She was taking a break and wanted me to cover for her during her break. Unfortunately she is back, so I have not worked there for a long time.

Now I am not working. I just have a once-a week-job at someone’s house where she pays me R100 per day. I only go there on Tuesdays, but she called me today. I thought I should not go because I am scared of what people are saying about xenophobia. That is why I am not going. But she told me I could go on Thursdays as well because I begged her and explained my problems to her. I told her that I am a single mother of four children, so to work only once a week will not help me that much. So she said I should go today which is Thursday but I didn’t go. I got scared because of what is going around about xenophobia. People are saying that locals are preparing an attack against us. Even my children did not go to school. I was scared—that is why I am at home today.

Marie: Okay, I hear you speaking about xenophobia. Since you arrived in this country, other than the issue of your living conditions, can you tell us whether your safety is guaranteed in this country? This is because you said to me that you fled war in your country.

Manu: Yes, I fled war at home and I thought that if I come here I would have peace and be safe, but there is no safety and no peace here. I arrived here during xenophobia. Another time, when I was pregnant with that child who died, the police raided our flat and wanted to take my husband away. I screamed and asked them where they were taking him to. They pushed me very hard and it is in that very month that I gave birth to a premature baby.

Again, two years ago, during xenophobia people invaded our flat and started beating us up. It is like this since I came to this country. I have never lived in peace, because even our decision of going back home in 2012 was motivated by the fact that we were attacked in our flat—they pushed me, kidnapped my husband and took whatever they wanted. When he came back he was severely beaten and full of blood all over. Since then I have never felt safe or happy in this country.





Again, during xenophobia of last year, 2015, our home was again forcibly opened because we were sharing the flat with Zulu people. They turned against us and called other Zulu boys telling them that we are refugees living in that flat. That is when we were beaten up again. So I have never known peace in this country and even now there are a lot of rumours of attacks, which take our happiness away again.

Marie: Okay, I hear what you are talking about regarding xenophobia. I am really delighted for the story that you have given me. Thank you.

