

**Starting From Refugees Themselves: Sketch for an Institutional Ethnography of  
Refugee Resettlement**

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### **Abstract**

Using insights from Institutional Ethnography (IE) this paper argues that far from being passive recipients of resettlement, refugees are actively participating in the resettlement process. This paper draws on interviews conducted with four Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) living in a mid-sized Canadian city located in the province of Québec. It is argued that GARs had to engage in some forms of 'work' in order to be resettled in Canada. Two of them are addressed: remembering work and waiting work. This paper concludes by arguing that by starting from the experiences of GARs we can start to learn about refugee resettlement in a novel and promising way.

Refugees are often conceived as ‘problems’ to which solutions must be found. Resettlement is definitively one of them. While resettlement is in part accomplished ‘for’ (certain) refugees it is unsettling to find so little written about their experience of resettlement. The goal of this paper is to add to the existing literature on resettlement by highlighting the active participation of refugees in the resettlement process. With the help of the generous concept of ‘work’ developed by Smith (1987, 2005) and some of her followers (Diamond 2006; McCoy 2006; Mykhalovskiy and McCoy 2002; Manicom 1995; Gregor 2001, 1994; Diamond 1995), I want to look at what refugees ‘do’ during the resettlement process abroad. More precisely I discuss the accounts provided by my GAR informants (n=4) and call attention to their ‘work’ as refugees who were resettled in a mid-sized Canadian city located in the province of Québec. In what follows I argue that my informants were far from being passive and that their participation is/was an essential, albeit not recognized, feature of the resettlement process. By participation here I mean more than ‘being’ a refugee under UNHCR mandate. Using institutional ethnographer’s generous concept of work as a heuristic device enables me to emphasize different aspects of my informants’ stories as they pertain to resettlement. It allows me to direct my attention to what GARs ‘do’ throughout the resettlement process and to “fill it” with experiential accounts. Although the research on which this thesis is based does not allow for an extended exploration of the resettlement process as a whole, especially of the elements of the process that took place outside Canada, and while it does not claim to be representative of all resettlement experiences, this research nonetheless made it possible to identify some of what refugees do abroad prior to their arrival in Canada. As such I was able to achieve two things. First, I provide a novel way of addressing refugee

resettlement that allows us to discover the hidden face of resettlement i.e. the lived experience of refugees who are being resettled. Secondly I generate different questions for further inquiry of the institutional organization of refugee resettlement.

In what follows I first present an overview of Institutional Ethnography (IE) as a method of inquiry. Secondly, I look at the use of interviews in the resettlement process and to what it entails for refugees. I argue that my informants' constant re-telling of their traumatic experiences of exile constitutes a form of work that an analysis of refugee resettlement must acknowledge. Then, I show how waiting is a form of work that my informants engaged in for quite a long time before coming to Canada. I discuss how waiting can be conceived as work and show some of the investigative potential of doing so. I conclude by discussing the implications of using 'work' as a research tool and briefly sketch other forms of work that were not addressed in the chapter but that could be explored in further research.

### **What is Institutional Ethnography?**

IE is a sociological approach that 'explores the social relations organizing institutions as people participate in them and from their perspectives' (Smith 2005, 225). Institutions here are not conceived as a particular type of organization. Instead, an institution is viewed a "vast complex of coordinated and intersecting work-processes taking place in multiple sites" (DeVault and McCoy 2006, 17). For example, what an institutional ethnographer sees when he or she looks at the institution of health care, is a "vast nexus of coordinated work-processes and courses of actions – in sites as diverse as hospitals, homes, doctor's offices, community clinics, elementary schools, workplaces, pharmacies, pharmaceutical companies, advertising agencies, insurance companies,

government ministries and department, mass-media, and medical and nursing schools” (DeVault and McCoy 2006, 17). Similarly we can conceive of refugee resettlement as an institution i.e. as a vast complex of coordinated activities that take place in various locations including camps, offices, airports, hotels, etc. The activities are mediated by what Smith calls the relations of ruling.

IE was developed by Dorothy E. Smith as an ‘alternative sociology’ which instead of objectifying people’s experience (as she claims is the case in ‘mainstream sociology’<sup>1</sup>) would ‘preserve the presence of the subjects’. As she puts it: “The focus of research is never the individual, but the individual does not disappear: indeed, she or he is an essential presence” (Smith 2005, 59). IE is conceived as people-centered instead of theory-driven i.e as a ‘sociology *for* people’ instead of a sociology *of* people. It draws on ethnomethodology as it sees people as the expert practitioners of their own lives. But in contrast to ethnomethodology, IE does not investigate people’s experiences but rather uses them as a starting point to discover “how what they are doing is connected with other’s doing in ways they cannot see” (Smith 2005, 225). In that respect IE is a materialist approach to social research and not an interpretive one. In fact, ‘experience’ does not have the same meaning in IE than it does in other types of research. As DeVault and McCoy (2006) put it, “in contemporary society, local practices and experiences are tied into extended social relations or chains of action, many of which are mediated by documentary forms of knowledge” (19). The focus of an IE is not on experiences per se, but on ‘extended social relations’.

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<sup>1</sup> When using the expression ‘mainstream sociology’ Smith refers mainly to structural functionalism (Smith 1987, 2005).

*Work in a Generous Sense*

In institutional ethnography the concept of work extends beyond commonsensical notions of paid employment or unpaid labour and refers to “anything done by people that takes time and efforts, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they have to think about” (Smith 2005, 151-152). In order to develop this ‘generous conception of work’, Smith drew on the thinking of a feminist group called Wages for Housewives, that originated in Italy, which believed that housewives were doing unpaid work that was sustaining the paid work in society and, by the same token, capitalism. Smith expanded the notion of work to include not only the unpaid work of housewives but also all the activities that are not recognized as work but that are playing an active role in sustaining the organization of social life and its institutions.

This focus on ‘work’ locates researchers’ investigation into the everyday and mundane aspects of people’s lives. This notion of work anchors investigation in material conditions and means. In their study that explored the work undertaken by people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) to look after their health, Mykhalovskiy and McCoy (2002) designed the concept of ‘healthwork’. This conceptual device allowed them to focus on the various things that PHAs do in relation to their health condition without presupposing what these things were: “[h]ealthwork, as we used it, located our research within a genuine investigative mode of inquiry. It operated as an empirically empty term, one that waited to be filled as PHAs told us about their practice and their experience”(24). These two completely different expressions of the generous notion of work nonetheless share a specific function: that of anchoring the research in people’s everyday lives.

## **Refugees and Work**

Drawing on Smith's extended notion of work (Smith 2005, 1987) and more precisely on Mykhalovskiy and McCoy's (2002) notion of 'healthwork,' I started to think of refugee resettlement as involving 'work' not only on the part of the employees of the different agencies, organizations and government ministries involved but also on the part of the actual subjects of this process i.e. the refugees themselves. Using the generous notion of 'work' allows me to direct my attention to what people 'do' throughout the resettlement process and to "fill it" with experiential accounts. The notion of work used in this study refers to the actual doings of refugees throughout the long and complex process of resettlement. Through an attentive look at the work performed by refugees we can start to see how what they do connects with what the other parties involved in resettlement also do and thus extend our research to the ways in which these various doings are put together so as to produce resettlement.

We should not confound here the notion of work put forward in this paper with other concepts such as "coping strategies" or "livelihoods". While the latter can certainly be conceived as forms of work, they do not constitute the only forms of activities that refugees engaged in throughout the resettlement process (both before and after their arrival in Canada) and that can be used as a research device that orients us to the ways in which resettlement is institutionally organized.

## **Interviews After Interviews: Resettlement and Remembering Work**

The experience of refugees, and especially GARs, is characterized, among other things, by the constant submission of oneself to interviewing procedures. Interviewing is in an integral aspect of both refugee status determination (RSD) and refugee resettlement. In

the following section I describe the use of these interviewing procedures and look at what it involves on the part of refugees.

*Refugee status determination and interviews*

In the case of GARs, it is typically the UNHCR that refers them to the Canadian government for resettlement. But well before any person is considered for resettlement in Canada, he or she has first to be recognized as a refugee, at minimum under the Mandate of the UNHCR. As Kagan (2006) argues, the “UN’s refugee agency effectively decides among asylum-seekers who can be saved from deportation and in some cases released from detention, who can get humanitarian assistance, and often who can apply to resettle to third countries” (2). In fact, each year “UNHCR’s offices decide on the fate of more than 80,000 individuals, which makes UNHCR the biggest RSD decision-maker in the world” (Smrkolj 2010, 168).

In order to decide if someone is a convention refugee, a UNHCR Protection Officer conduct one or multiple interviews with that person. For the officers responsible for RSD, the task is threefold. He or she has to

- (i) Ensure that the applicant presents his case as fully as possible and with all available evidence.
- (ii) Assess the applicant's credibility and evaluate the evidence (if necessary giving the applicant the benefit of the doubt), in order to establish the objective and the subjective elements of the case.
- (iii) Relate these elements to the relevant criteria of the 1951 Convention, in order to arrive at a correct conclusion as to the applicant's refugee status. (UNHCR 1992, 34)

Credibility assessment is therefore an essential feature of RSD.<sup>2</sup> It relies almost entirely on the applicant's testimony "since asylum-seekers can rarely specifically corroborate the central elements of their claims" (Kagan 2002-2003, 367). This puts enormous pressure on applicants and their ability to deliver a narrative that convinces the UNHCR Protection Officer that they have a well-founded fear of being persecuted if they are sent back to their country of origin. RSD is not an objective enterprise and "[t]he assessment of credibility is inevitably prone to some subjectivity because it calls for an adjudicator to judge the trustworthiness of another human being. Emotional impressions of a person and "gut feelings" can have a substantial impact" (Kagan 2002-2003, 375).

#### *Refugee resettlement and interviews*

Interviews are also used by UNHCR to determine if a refugee should be referred to a resettlement country for their consideration. Upon reception of resettlement referrals at the field office, an evaluation is made of the resettlement needs of the case referred (this procedure is called Resettlement-Needs Assessment). An interview is then normally scheduled with the refugee whose case is being considered for resettlement. This interview is organized around the Refugee Resettlement Form (RRF) and its different sections.

Other than information on the principal applicant (PRA), his or her family members and other close relatives (including his/her spouse's close relatives), the form asks for the languages spoken by all the applicants as well as their level of education. In order to fill out the RRF, the UNHCR officer also has to ask about any travel/identity documents held by the PRA and list all the countries of transit in which the PRA has transited or resided

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<sup>2</sup> Neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the Statute of the Office of the UNHCR mentions credibility, but negative credibility assessments are a leading reason for rejections in most refugee status determination systems (Kagan 2002-2003, 368)

since he/she is in exile. Medical status and criminal or detention records are also part of the RRF interview. After the interview, the resettlement officer also needs to write the refugee claim as well as an assessment of the need for resettlement. If necessary, a special needs assessment and additional remarks are joined to the RRF which is then transferred to the branch office where the resettlement submission is prepared. Once the case is complete, the resettlement submission is sent to the country of resettlement. In the case of Canada the resettlement submission is usually sent to the nearest Canadian visa office. There, an agent will evaluate the case and may schedule an interview with the applicants.

### *Remembering as Work*

In their journey from their country of first asylum, all my GAR informants went through a process of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and of resettlement assessment at the hands of the UNHCR. They also had to go through the resettlement evaluation process at the level of the Canadian government. As shown above, the resettlement process relies intensively on the use of interviews. The questions that preoccupy us here are what kind of work (in Smith's sense) is involved on the part of the refugees through these procedures? And what does talking about their uprooting entail for refugees?

As we have seen, the purpose of interviewing throughout the resettlement process (starting with RSD) is to determine the eligibility and credibility of the applicant's case so as to ensure that the refugee to be resettled is a genuine refugee in need of resettlement. This is achieved through multiple interviews conducted by various people at various stages of the resettlement process. All these interviews centre around the applicant's story of exile and especially on the reasons that lead them to think that they

will be persecuted if they go back to their country. In the case of the interviews around the Resettlement-Needs Assessment and the RRF the applicant is also being asked to explain why he/she cannot remain in his/her country of first asylum. This points to the hierarchy of durable solutions mentioned in chapter 1 where resettlement is conceived as a solution of last resort when both voluntary repatriation and local integration are not achievable.

The repetitiveness of interviews accentuates the importance of remembering the traumatic events that lead refugees to escape from their home. Remembering in this context is definitely a form of work that connects with the doings of the various people at work within the institutional organization of refugee resettlement.

The work of remembering traumatic events is a particular kind of work. It involves an intense emotional charge and is a challenging and unpleasant activity. This was brought to my attention when one of my informants specifically asked that we did not talk about the events that pushed him in exile because he wanted to forget what happened back then. To forget is antithetical to resettlement work because of the institutional processes of RSD and resettlement assessment.

As Mr. Bemba suggests below, forgetting, or at least attempting to do so, becomes institutionally relevant only after resettlement has occurred. To forget seemed in fact to be one of Mr. Bemba's priorities after his arrival in Canada. During my research I had the chance to follow a resettlement worker and Mr. Bemba to the grocery store. We were there to buy the Bembas their first groceries on the day they moved from the hotel to their apartment. At one point, Mr. Bemba asked where he could find beer. He told me: *“La bière c'est bon. Ça va m'aider à oublier ce qui s'est passé en Afrique... On peut*

*oublier ça maintenant*”. Mr. Bemba had been in Québec for hardly a week and he felt like he could now start to forget. This was made possible in part because the focus of the institutional organization of GARs’ resettlement once they are in Canada shifts from one’s past to one’s future. After their arrival in Québec, the focus of the institutional processes that shapes the everyday life of GARs then becomes oriented towards their integration into Québec society through various means such as becoming tenants, holding a bank account, applying to provincial health insurance, learning French or improving their French language knowledge, receiving social assistance, etc. Ultimately the GARs will be stripped (at least institutionally) of the refugee label and will become a permanent resident like any other and, possibly, a Canadian citizen.

Before this happens, however, the GARs need to recollect the events that preceded their flight from their own country at several moments prior to their resettlement. Although, as it has been suggested above, the remembering of these events could represent an arduous emotional task, the recollection of events itself, however, seems to be less difficult. In fact, when I asked Mr. Banga if it was hard to recall his story, he answered as follows:

*Mr. Banga : Oui bon...quelque chose que vous avez vécu ...au moins les grandes lignes vous les savez...certains détails peuvent vous échapper mais si c'est un nom de quelqu'un qui vous a agressé vous direz alors « tel m'a agressé »... « tel m'a sollicité pour me joindre au mouvement »... «Pourquoi vous ne pouvez pas rester dans le pays voisin l'Ouganda? ...Je ne pouvais pas aller en Ouganda parce qu'il y avait tel, tel et tel qui travaillais là-bas et qui me connaissait très bien et qui était de la partie adverse...je ne pouvais pas rester là ». Alors tout ça là...des noms comme ça, ça ne vas pas vous échapper...je ne pense pas. Alors les grandes lignes vous les aurez toujours. Et là moi je me dit que si on me faisait encore une interview en détail aujourd'hui je peux m'en sortir.*

Here, Mr. Banga suggests not only that he remembers certain elements of his story of exile easily but also that this remembering is intimately linked to the

interviewing procedures he was submitted to. By referring to an interview setting, Mr. Bemba thus highlights the dialogic dimension of his remembering work.

In fact, the remembering work of GARs involves not only the recollection of an important event but also the telling of their stories to interviewers whose positions within the institutional organization of refugee resettlement allow them to scrutinize and evaluate these stories so that they can be written up and made institutionally actionable (or not).

The refugees I interviewed told me that they knew that the people asking them questions were looking for errors and contradictions in their testimonies. Here, is an illustrative excerpt from my interview transcript from my conversation with Mr. Banga:

***Me : Et votre histoire par rapport au Congo vous l'avez répété souvent?***

*Mr. Banga : Oui! Bien sur! Vous ne vous arrêtez jamais. Même des précisions là...ils vérifient même si vous vous trompez de date et tout ça là. Parce qu'ils veulent confirmer...au bout de tout ces années là...la longueur de toutes ces années là c'est pour justement vérifier l'authenticité de votre récit. Parce que souvent on vous demandera des questions précises là...quelque chose que vous avez dit en 2000...alors en 2007 on vous revient avec la même question. Vous risquez même de vous embrouiller là...et c'est à cela qu'ils s'attendent.*

My GAR informants knew, to various degrees, that the interviewing procedures they were submitted to were in fact hooked into different institutional processes and that 'they' were keeping track of what was said in these interviews. From the experience of GARs we can thus start to see that their remembering work is coordinated by relations of ruling that originate beyond the local setting of the interview and permeate it through the interviewing procedure conducted by the interviewer. As we have seen above, these interviewing procedures always involve the use of forms or interview grids that are designed outside the particular location of the interview and it is through these texts that the ruling relations of refugee resettlement coordinate the remembering work of GARs

and the work of the interviewer. The interview, in short, happens as the ongoing accomplishment of the remembering work of refugees and the interviewing work of the interviewers (be it UNHCR or Visa Office staff members) and is organized around texts that are produced conceptually outside the site of interviews.

GARs' accounts of their remembering work also suggest that while being interviewed successively prior to their resettlement, they knew that their stories were evaluated and that credibility was assessed. Here's how Mr. Bakale told me about one of the interview he had to go through:

*Mr. Bakale : Oui...ils demandaient l'histoire, ce qui fait qu'on ne peut pas retourner au Togo. Donc c'est comme la première entrevue qu'on nous a faite Donc si tu te contredis, c'est que tu as menti. Donc ils ont tous les papiers...*

***Me: De la première entrevue?***

*Mr. Bakale: c'est ça! C'est dans l'ordinateur, et ils ont fait sortir ça pour vérifier si vraiment ça concorde vraiment avec ce que tu as dit.*

Mr. Bakale's understanding of his testimony as being written somewhere (in the computer) points to the textually mediated organization of the interviewing procedures within refugee resettlement and to the fact that the replicability of the applicants' testimonies allows for the assessment of credibility and authenticity of their claims as well as their admissibility to resettlement. In fact, the remembering work of GARs is conceptually organized by texts such as the UN Convention, the UNHCR *Resettlement Handbook*, the IRPA, etc. and materially inscribed in texts such as the RRF.

In brief, GARs' remembering work comprises the negotiation of emotions and memories and certain aspects are easier than others to achieve. But the usefulness of Smith's generous concept of work does not reside in its ability to typify people's doings but rather in its capacity at revealing that what people do inescapably coordinate with the doings of other. Remembering work as a conceptual device has allowed us to see that

GARs are active in interviewing and that the constant recalling of events on the part of refugees and the consistency of their stories is an essential feature of refugee resettlement as an institutional process. As such it points to the institutional organization of this process and can serve as the starting point of an institutional ethnographic investigation as discussed in the conclusion of this paper. The present research, however, neither allowed for the observation of the interviewing procedures mentioned above nor for the interviewing of either UNHCR staff members or Canadian visa officers, and therefore could not explore further this aspect of refugee resettlement. Yet, my GAR informants' accounts of resettlement suggest another type of 'work' they engaged in through the resettlement process, namely, waiting.

#### **“Les Années Passent”: The Work of Waiting**

In his ethnography of a long term care facility in the United States, Timothy Diamond (1995) once described the elderly people waiting for their food in the morning (after a 14 hour fast) as a form of practice: “There each sat before breakfast, bib in place, eyes glued to the elevator. They waited quietly, with a wild patience, practicing patienthood, actively practicing the skills of silence” (129). In order to highlight the active dimension of waiting, Diamond draws from Smith's concept of 'work in a generous sense'. In an interview with Smith, Diamond (2006) argues “[t]he beautiful thing about the generous concept of work is that it can include the doings of all kinds of things, including the work of doing nothing, which may be the hardest work of all” (51). Like Diamond's patients, my GAR informants also practiced active patienthood through the resettlement process. For them, however, the result of their patience was not the breaking of a fourteen-hour fast; it was the breaking of many long years of uncertainty

and insecurity. The experience of resettlement for my informants was, in fact, characterized by long periods of waiting that sometimes added to their suffering. For my informants, the various stages of the refugee resettlement followed one another at a very slow pace thus allowing for long periods of institutional calmness where they cannot but wait to be called, once again, by the competent authority. From the time they left their homes up to the moment they arrived in Canada, my GARs informants spent between 10 and 17 years of 'waiting'. As Mr. Banga told me, his life was one of transit: it was a life stuck "in between" i.e. a life where he did not know where to go but knew he could not stay indefinitely where he were. He was condemned to wait and such a life does not allow for long term planning:

***Me : Donc vous pendant 10 ans vous avez attendu. Vous semblez avoir été constamment dans l'attente de voir comment votre dossier...***

*Mr. Banga : Et comment! Vous n'avez pas le choix! Vous ne savez pas qu'est-ce qui viendra...il y en a qui disent qu'il faut partir en Afrique du Sud...mais aller en Afrique du Sud faire quoi? Parce que d'abord vous n'avez jamais l'argent pour vous rendre là-bas rien...donc vous êtes juste là...vous vivez au jour le jour...vous n'avez pas de projet à long terme.*

***Me : Jamais de projet à long terme?...***

*Mr. Banga : Non presque rien...*

Resettlement is not a *de facto* durable solution for all refugees. And it can take years before a refugee is considered for resettlement. During these years of waiting refugees can be active by trying to find organizations that could refer them to UNHCR.

As Mr. Banga states:

*Mr. Banga : Alors vous demandez la réinstallation chez HCR. Souvent HCR dit: "Nous ne savons pas où nous allons vous installer" ...et à vrai dire, HCR est vraiment inondé par vraiment beaucoup de réfugiés...il y en a qui se sont sauvé du Burundi, du Rwanda, beaucoup...une grande partie venait du Soudan...des milliers, des milliers qui arrivaient du Soudan dans le camp...Et aussi à Nairobi...donc il y avait plein de réfugiés. Et le Kenya c'est révélé le pays le meilleur pour essayer de recevoir les fugitifs. Alors...qu'est-ce qui s'est passé. Alors...quand vous...quand HCR ne peut pas vous réinstaller...généralement vous allez auprès des organismes qui aussi aident à la*

*réinstallation...qui sont...qui travaillent en partenariat avec le HRC. Alors vous allez frapper partout là...et vous expliquer et démontrer le sérieux de votre vie à Nairobi...vous ne pouvez pas travailler...*

No matter how active one is in his/her waiting, the outcome of this work is often uncertain. The unpredictability of the refugee's future is also exacerbated by what, drawing on Darville (1995), could be called 'organizational illiteracy' i.e. the fact that refugees do not (always) know 'how things work' at the institutional level:

*Mr. Banga : Alors j'ai été à des organismes...Les organismes des fois ils vous écoutent...et s'ils croient que votre cas est sérieux ils vous donnent d'autres rendez-vous...encore des rendez-vous...des fois ils disent « nous allons envoyer les dossiers quelque part »...on ne vous dit pas où. Ils disent que peut-être un jour vous serez appelé par un autre organisme qui pourra s'intéresser à vous etc. Au bout de des années...des fois ça prend six mois, des années...les années s'écoulent comme ça...c'est alors qu'ils renvoient encore...un moment donné encore je crois qu'on envoie votre dossier au HCR encore...qui peut dire celui-ci peut être réinstallé...je ne sais comment... Alors le HCR va vous demander...il va encore vous appeler...c'est lui qui chapeaute tout...pour poser des questions en vue d'une réinstallation. Finalement on trouve que HCR nous appelle on ne sait pas comment...Sinon on avait déjà écrit beaucoup de lettres qui montraient l'insécurité...Et on vous répond que vous ne répondez pas aux critères...et ils ne vous disent jamais ce que sont les critères.*

For refugees, organizational illiteracy can give rise to anxieties *vis-à-vis* the various institutional procedures at play in refugee resettlement. For instance, it can lead refugees to wonder if their cases are being properly processed:

*Mr. Banga : Chaque année vous renouvelez votre 'mandate' et à chaque année que vous allez là-bas vous faites les fingerprints...pour voir si c'est toujours les mêmes personnes qui apparaissent. Il est arrivé une fois ou même ils sont venus nous visiter jusqu'à chez-nous à la maison...Et on se disait : « Mais qu'est-ce qui ne va pas? C'est comme si nous sommes des nouveaux...ils s'intéressent à notre dossier fraîchement...qu'est-ce qui ne va pas? »*

Mr. Banga's concerns are also part of waiting work. His interrogations in relation to the processing of his case point to the institutional organization of refugee management. It suggests that the waiting work of refugees coordinates with certain procedures involved in the management of refugees and that waiting work is not performed in isolation.

Rather, it is the product of a particular institutional arrangement that includes not only the work of paid employees working for organizations but also the waiting work of refugees. Such work includes, among other things, the emotional management of the various anxieties and concerns produced by this institutional arrangement.

During the period that separates exile from resettlement, different events challenged my informants' patienthood. For instance while they waited for their case to be processed, they witnessed other refugees being resettled. As Mr. David recounts here, this situation can sometimes create tensions that refugees need to manage.

*Mr. David : Parce qu'au fur et à mesure que ces effectifs viennent c'est les Ogonis, les nigériens...Nigéria. En même temps qu'ils viennent à peine ils font trois mois, les États-Unis les avalent, c'est-à-dire qu'ils vont vers le États-Unis.*

***Me : Donc vous vous avez vu des Nigériens arriver, rester trois mois, et partir aux États-Unis?***

*Mr. David : Et être réinstallé là-bas. Mais quant à nous autres qui sommes du Togo, non.*

***Me : Vous ça été beaucoup plus long...***

*Mr. David : Beaucoup plus long. Parce qu'on considère que...nous n'avons pas...nous ne sommes pas dans les mêmes besoins que les nigériens....parce qu'ils ont essayé de scinder le truc là...*

***Me : Et est-ce que cela crée des tensions entre les Togolais et les Nigériens?***

*Mr. David : Ah bien oui!! Heureusement que le Togolais est vraiment....comme on le dit...placide. C'est-à-dire qu'il accepte les coups. Mais si c'était les Nigériens qu'on essayait de scinder de la sorte il y aurait des meurtres!*

Mr. David was definitely at work there managing his frustrations and when he argues that if it wasn't for the peaceful character of the Togolese there would have been murders, he highlights quite eloquently the very fact that waiting IS an active dimension of resettlement. For resettlement to happen as it does, refugees must peacefully wait their turn and actively practice the 'skills of silence'.

Eventually, however, their turn came and my informants were selected for resettlement by the Canadian government. This obviously marks an important point in

their experience of resettlement. It was a decision that was welcomed with joy and relief as demonstrated by Mr. Bakale:

*Mr. Bakale : Donc on nous a dit : « vous avez été retenu pour le Canada... »*

***Me : Et ça c'est une belle journée pour vous ça?***

*Mr. Bakale : Ah Oui! C'est la fête! Ça commencé donc...là où on est maintenant... Quand on te dit maintenant que tu vas au médicale c'est que c'est parti...tu pars... tu sais que tu t'en va bientôt. Et c'est un soulagement oui!*

For my GAR informants, however, the relief of knowing that they will be resettled in Canada was followed by another period of waiting. In fact the processing of cases in the Canadian visa offices can be very slow. This is especially true in the Visa Offices where my informants' cases were processed. According to CIC's website, the processing time for GAR cases coming from Africa is the longest at the Visa Offices in Accra, Ghana (41 months) and Nairobi, Kenya (37 months).<sup>3</sup> As a comparison, the processing time in Cairo (Egypt) is 15 months and is of 11 months in Pretoria (South Africa).<sup>4</sup>

In the following interview excerpt, my informant tells us that he usually counted 6 months between the different steps of the resettlement process after he knew he would be resettled in Canada:

***Me : Combien de temps entre l'entrevue à l'ambassade et les examens médicaux?***

*Mr. Banga : 6 mois...C'était souvent...nous comptons souvent des 6 mois...encore 6 mois oui. Et nous on a pu terminer les examens vite...mais il y a eu un enfant qu'on disait que ce n'était pas clair que...que l'enfant avait comme une ombre pectoral...qu'elle doit aller passer des x-rays...ça nous a aussi agacé...alors après elle est parti là et elle à fait*

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) even launched a campaign to raise awareness on the long delays at the Nairobi Visa Office. According to CCR (2011), "Thousands of refugees in many different countries are affected by the long delays at Canada's Nairobi office. Canada's visa office in Nairobi covers 18 countries in East and Central Africa. These countries host hundreds of thousands of refugees, including Somalis, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Congolese, Sudanese, Rwandans and Burundians. Many have already been waiting years for a durable solution, barely surviving in wretched camps or in precarious situations in the cities." [...] "These long delays leave vulnerable refugees in dangerous situations for longer than anywhere else in the world".(CCR 2011)

<sup>4</sup> For the processing time of all the Visa Offices see <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/times/perm/ref-government.asp>

*4 fois des x-rays...et ils ne trouvaient rien du tout...on se demandait si ce n'était pas une façon de nous torturer d'avantage...Après 6 mois c'est encore l'ambassade qui vas nous appeler...Et elle nous a dit que l'organisme qui s'occupe du transport des gens pourrait nous appeler...Alors après 6 mois encore on nous appela là-bas pour évidemment les modalités du transports...on nous a fait signé quelques papiers...*

***Me : Et à ce moment-là vous savez que vous serez réinstallé au Canada?***

*Mr. Banga : Oui à ce moment là...Non...dès que vous passez par l'ambassade et que l'ambassade ne dit pas que vous vous contredisez dans vos propos, vous savez que définitivement vous viendrez au Canada. Mais il reste encore les dossiers médicaux, les casier judiciaires on fait ça aussi...ce sont des formalité...vous ne savez pas comment ça se passe mais il y a un bureau qui s'occupe de tout ça pour vérifier tout ça...vérifier qu'on n'avait pas d'antécédents tout ça là...pour tout le temps que vous êtes resté au Kenya que vous n'avez pas eu de litige avec le gouvernement. Alors il faut clarifier toutes ces choses. Alors 6 mois plus tard on nous appelle au bureau qui s'occupe du transport...je crois que c'est une parti de l'OIM...Alors là il ne se passe pas grand chose...ils nous disent seulement les dates.*

***Me : À ce moment là il reste combien de temps avant que vous partiez?***

*Mr. Banga : À ce moment là il ne reste que peu de temps [...] Alors après 2 mois vous vous retrouvez à l'aéroport, vous prenez l'avion et vous vous en allez au Canada.*

Mr. Banga's accounts here shows beautifully how his waiting work after his selection by the Canadian government was coordinated by the processes that connects the work of people located in various sites such as the medical examination room, the visa office and the IOM. Consistent with Smith's sociology, we can say that Mr. Banga's waiting work was accomplished at the level of embodied experience and was accomplished in coordination with the work of others in places he could not see.

Ultimately, there is a moment in the journey of GARs when resettlement becomes 'real' i.e. that their knowledge about having being selected is transformed into their actual departure from their country of first asylum. One day, refugees who have been selected for resettlement in Canada actually pack up their belongings and leave. There is a clear shift in the narratives of the GARs I interviewed when they recount their departure from their country of first asylum. Up to this moment in their story, we can feel the weight of the waiting and the heaviness of uncertainty. Then, there is a precipitate

acceleration in the narrative: all of a sudden, GARs are urged to hurry up and get prepared to leave promptly. Here's how Mr. Bemba depicts his departure:

*Mr. Bemba: En 2011 le Canada nous a dit d'être prêt parce que tout est presque à jour. Et nous attendions encore. Et enfin le moment est arrivé. Préparez vous car à tel jour vous allez partir.*

***Me: Ok. Et qu'est-ce que vous faites pour vous préparer?***

*Mr. Bemba: Le HCR nous a donné quelque chose pour acheter des valises et tout ça.*

***Me: Et la journée du voyage comment ça s'est passé?***

*Mr. Bemba: On nous avait parlé le mercredi et nous sommes parti le dimanche. Et tout est brusque! brusque! Oui on doit tout faire vite vite. Alors on ne peut même pas en informer la famille.*

After having waited for 14 years as refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Bemba and his wife, their nine children and their grand daughter had about four days to prepare their departure. As he mentioned, they did not have the chance to let other family members and friends know that they were actually leaving. And one of the first things Mr. Bemba asked when he arrived in Canada was that if he could phone Africa to reassure his relatives and inform them that the whole family had been resettled in Canada and that everyone was well. This is an illustrative example of how what happens abroad affects what happens in Canada.

## **Conclusion**

When we apply Smith's generous concept of work to the study of refugee resettlement we come to see refugees as participants in rather than recipients of resettlement. In fact, without refugees' active participation within the institutional organization of refugee resettlement, their resettlement would not be possible. Of course the GARs interviewed for this research all benefited from resettlement, but to limit our understanding of GARs as only recipients prevents us from seeing how resettlement shapes and is being shaped by the actions of GARs.

In this paper, Smith's notion of work was used to highlight the active participation of refugees in the various interviewing procedures that characterized their journey from exile to resettlement. What was brought to our attention was that in order to qualify for resettlement my GAR informants had to learn to be interviewed and to retain a memory of key narrative points that described their exile. Although these memories are presumably traumatic they had to be repeated over and over to various people for different purposes. Moreover my informants knew, to a certain extent, that their stories were scrutinized and analyzed so as to assess their credibility. The repetitiveness of the interviewing procedures also created anxieties and concerns about the unfolding of the resettlement process. The interviewing of refugees is thus a dialogic event that involves the works of refugees and interviewers. And, as we have seen, the interview is also a textually mediated event i.e. that texts coordinate the unfolding and outcome of the interview.

The second form of work that this paper has highlighted is that of 'waiting'. It was shown that the waiting that my informants were engaged in during the pre-resettlement phase constituted a form of work. This type of work is characterized by the impossibility of having long-term plans and the reliance on the resettlement process to set the pace of one's life. The waiting work of my GARs informants was coordinated in part by the "five-step" process of resettlement (Milner 2005) and by the work of people situated in various sites outside the local settings of my informants' waiting work. By using the notion of work to analyse this waiting, we can see how waiting is not only an outcome of the resettlement process but that it was an integral aspect of my informants' experiences of this process. When we look for instance at CIC's table of processing times

at the various Visa Offices we see but a number (e.g. Nairobi – 37 months). This number conceals the experiences of GARs and does not allow us to see what exactly this number means or involves for GARs. By starting with the GARs' experiences, we can get a better sense of what waiting means in terms of 'work' and we can start to see that GARs are playing an active role in this waiting not only in terms of managing their emotions but also in terms of waiting their turn and not revolting.

Of course 'remembering work' and 'waiting work' are but two examples of the myriad of activities involved in the resettlement process on the part of GARs. Other forms of work such as finding food, getting to various places (such as the Visa Office, the IOM offices, the medical examination room, etc.), "killing time", etc. were not addressed in the present paper but could certainly constitute the focus of other studies. For instance, one could explore the ways in which refugees feed themselves and how the ruling relations of refugee management shape this activity. Or one could ask how refugees get to their interviews and how this coordinated with the institutional organization of refugee resettlement<sup>5</sup>. The ways in which refugees kill time could also serve as the basis of an inquiry into the social relations of refugee life and offer an entry into the institutional organization of refugees. By asking "how do refugees spend their time and how is this shaped by extra-local relations?" we could investigate the ruling relations shaping the lives of refugees prior to their arrival in their country of resettlement. These are some of the potential foci of research suggested by particular attention paid to refugee's work.

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<sup>5</sup> In his study, Anderson (January 2012) analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively the time and money spent by urban refugees in Nairobi in order to access different services. This study provides an interesting empirical argument to the fact that refugees are "at work" during their experience of exile.

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