

Waiting in liminal space: Migrants' queuing for Home Affairs in South Africa

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Waiting is a common feature of everyday encounters between individuals and organisations. Government officials and private sector workers make us wait for decisions, wait for services and sometimes, simply wait our turn. Yet, little attention has been devoted to theorising and developing the concept of 'waiting', and it is noticeably absent in the literature on social organisations and organisational behaviour. In this article, we seek to add texture and meaning to the experience of waiting and to explore the unique set of power relations and social processes the phenomenon may entail. More specifically, drawing on the work of Victor Turner, we describe waiting as a liminal experience, as a transitory and transformative space which lies between life stages, statuses and material contexts. We then develop the idea by scrutinising a particular form of encounter between individuals and organisations, that between the foreign migrant and the state bureaucracy in contemporary South Africa.

Keywords: Migrants, liminality, waiting, power, Turner

Introduction

As outsiders to South Africa, migrants often find themselves faced with lengthy waiting periods, waiting for documents, for government services and, in the case of those targeted for deportation, waiting in the Lindela detention centre. Drawing on ethnographic, survey and interview data collected at refugee reception offices and detention facilities in South Africa, we explore the way migrants endure and reflect on their conditions of waiting, both in hope and in vain.

Migrants queuing for Home Affairs in South Africa are, to use Vincent Crapanzano's (1985: 43) words '(w)aiting for something, anything, to happen'. Our focus on this particular experience of waiting in queues is grounded in the observation that with waiting comes 'feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability (...) and all the rage that these feelings provoke' (Crapanzano 1985: 45). Such a description captures well the complicated emotions of so many migrants in South Africa: little meaning can be attributed to their waiting, except for the future possibility that 'something, anything' is expected to happen. Queuing outside Home Affairs refugee reception offices can, we argue, be seen as part of a ritual which has the ultimate aim of making things happen. Such queuing can be considered a *rite de passage* where everyone in the queue is in a liminal phase, 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1987: 3), and there waiting for something to happen. It can thus be regarded as a ritual that 'exemplifies the transition of an individual from one state to another' (Deflem 1991: 13).

Waiting might be considered a crucial aspect of liminality, in an almost Kafkaesque atmosphere waiting for things to happen (Sutton & Vigneswaran 2011). Waiting in liminal or

transitional space is waiting for things to come; it is an 'inter-structural period' (ibid). It is a waiting that is endured because it is fuelled by a mixture of despair and hope: despair because of the knowledge that the waiting might culminate in an end like the execution in Kafka's *The trial* (1925) or Nabokov's *Invitation to a beheading* (1989); hope because it is grounded in a longing for and expectation of a new status or identity at the end of the waiting period. It is like coming-of-age initiation rites where one begins the ritual as a boy or a girl, then waits for transformation during the liminal phase, and eventually comes out as a man or a woman. What exactly happens in this liminal in-between phase is often hard to decipher. A liminal phase is often shrouded in secrecy, uncertainty and ambiguity; conceptualised (cf. Turner 1969) as a sequence and interaction between structure and 'anti-structure', or as an ambiguous phase between two states of being. From such a perspective, every end to waiting signals a new beginning, but also the start of new waiting, as "no end, no object of waiting can fulfil our waiting" (Schweizer 2008: 46). In other words, waiting can be understood as a *perpetuum mobile*; waiting as experience in and of itself (cf. Szokolczai 2009).

'Waiting' seems theoretically and conceptually neglected in organisational or management theory. The omission is significant for a number of reasons. In the first place, the omission occurs because many authors of management literature write and think from a position of management and power, whereas waiting is usually experienced by the less-powerful in an organisation or 'system', or by the less powerful when dealing with organisations. Consequently the literature pays insufficient attention to the experiences and particularly the emotions associated with the waiting of the less powerful in

an organisation (cf. Fineman 2003), and this can be more broadly articulated as applicable to individuals interacting with institutional or organisational arrangements. In other words, organisational theory's lack of analysis of waiting seems to signify a management and power bias in organisation studies. Second, the absence of the concept of waiting in organisational sciences could signify the ultimate commonality of waiting for all who work in and have to deal with organisations. That is, waiting is so pervasive in everyday organisational life that it has become an unconscious and unarticulated experience: "(t)he very 'ordinariness' of normality often prevents us from seeing that which we are accustomed to: we tend to have a blind spot for what is usual, ordinary, routine" (Ybema *et al.* 2009: 1).

Neglect of the ordinariness of waiting in organisational theories might also have to do with uncomfortable undercurrents of complicity which are linked to the negative consequences of power inequalities, something Victor Turner (1969: 95) attends to in his descriptions of liminality when he describes how liminality and liminal persons are "frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon". As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, "For years now, (...) I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never'. The poor will always be with us; the poor will always wait. Their time is not money" (in Schweizer 2008: 6). Captains of industry, kings and other powers-that-be, never or hardly ever (have to) wait. Waiting is usually for the less powerful. It may be possible to construct an inverse scale between power positions and waiting times: the more power, the less waiting; the less power, the more waiting. Or, seen from its opposite: power is often signified by speed. Power is often associated with assertiveness and with 'getting things done quickly'.

This article focuses not on the powerful that Hoag (2010) so adequately describes in his discussion of the bureaucrats of South Africa's Home Affairs Department as they deal with refugees, but on the powerless manipulators with whom those bureaucrats have to deal. Yet it is also likely that all players in the games of organisational politics and power are complicit in the perpetuation of having the less powerful wait, as in Martin Luther King's 'never'. Organisational power guru Jeffrey Pfeffer is quoted as saying about his latest book (2010): "[People] must begin that process [of acquiring power] by looking within ... 'Stop waiting for things to get better or for other people to acquire power and use it in a benevolent fashion to improve the situation. ... It's up to you to build your own path to power'" (italics added)¹. People who are made to wait usually seem on the losing side of things. But why then do they still simply wait?

Arguably, it is hope that makes the powerless persevere and that ultimately makes waiting a phenomenon that is socially productive in a bureaucratic context. Waiting

patiently can at times be used by the less-powerful as a 'weapon of the weak' (cf. Scott 1985). Out-waiting, as a form of 'outwitting' (cf. Skalnik 1989)², a powerful opponent may constitute an effective means of appeal. When he fasted, Gandhi waited without eating until his powerful political opponents, both Indian and the seemingly all-powerful British Empire, gave in, or at least returned to the negotiating table (cf. Tidrick 2006). Taken together, the above suggests that the 'contexts of waiting' are key to analysing and understanding processes and manifestations of waiting and its consequences for power dynamics, hope and liminality.

In South Africa, all new immigrants must endure the bureaucracy of Home Affairs in order to secure their residence status. As long as they do not have a form indicating their valid status, they risk detention if any official asks for their papers. The three stages of Van Gennep's *rite de passage* (Van Gennep 1981) on which Victor Turner bases his later analysis are evident here. In Stage 1, people enter as a migrant. In Stage 2, people must apply for status, in Stage 3 people might have become a South African resident. Applying for this asylum status is done through the Department of Home Affairs. Applicant migrants must queue for the Home Affairs offices and wait their turn in queues that are often long and may take days. It makes sense in this context that queues are appropriately also called 'waiting lines'³. This queuing and waiting for Home Affairs can be viewed as the liminal phase and space in the *rite de passage*: people in the queue are 'betwixt and between' their migrant and resident status. The bureaucracy of Home Affairs, which migrants must navigate in order to secure official proof that gives them their asylum status, is the black box replete with ambiguity and uncertainty.

While in the organisational sciences the subject of time is by now a well-established topic (see for example Whipp *et al.* 2002; Hassan & Purser 2007; Sabelis 2009), waiting as a separate phenomenon rarely receives detailed (conceptual) scrutiny. The issue of 'waiting' as an issue in and of itself is dealt with in greater depth in the arts and philosophy. In Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot', for example, two men wait in vain for two days for someone named Godot (Beckett 2006). The expectation of Godot's final arrival and the contemplations and reflexions by the characters on a wide range of religious and existential issues during their waiting are the central ingredients of this play. Consider also the series of very powerful paintings that Ferdinand Hodler created of the period that Valentine Godé-Darel was waiting to die of ovarian cancer between November 1914 and January 1915. It shows in a very intense way how much waiting also has to do with endurance (in Schweizer 2008: 90), and where hope can only be for the relief of death. The 'art of waiting' also features in many wellness oriented websites⁴. In general we could say that waiting is often depicted as one way of experiencing time. The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) speaks of 'lived' time. In discussing his famous experiment

1. www.gsb.stanford.edu/news/bmag/sbsm1008/feature-pfeffer.html (accessed 19 June 2011)

2. We would like to thank Mugsy Spiegel for pinpointing this edited volume to us.

3. There is a field of 'queuing theory' that refers to the mathematical study of waiting lines, mainly applied to transport and logistics (see for example Gross and Harris 1998)

4. See for examples: <http://www.freedomsteps.org/the-art-of-waiting.htm>; <http://www.myonlinewellness.com/topic/brwaiting>; <http://mindyourwellness.net/2009/06/03/are-you-waiting-for-the-storm.aspx> (all accessed 27 April 2010).

with waiting for a lump of sugar to dissolve in a glass of water he writes:

If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy-nilly, wait until the sugar melts. This little thing is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that of mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*. It is no longer a relation, it is an absolute (in Schweizer 2008: 15, italics in original).

In order to conceptualise waiting in relation to liminality, it is important to emphasise a common characteristic in all perspectives and angles on waiting: it is consistently viewed as an ambivalent time and space, 'in between'. There is always a 'before' and an 'after' in relation to waiting, although every end to waiting at the same time signals the beginning of waiting for something else. Waiting has something to do with straight forward mathematical clock time; but is also a highly subjective emotion linked to endurance, hope, impatience and, for refugees facing the considerable threat of being an illegal immigrant who can be thrown out of the country, outright anger, fear and dread. Waiting evokes a mixture of conflicting emotions that do not match with a common sense of normality: "We are strange when we tarry. We are not strange [i.e. we are considered 'normal'] when we hurry" (Schweizer 2008: 87). Nowadays everybody claiming to be successful (and powerful) in society is always busy and in a hurry. The common saying is 'if you snooze, you lose', meaning that if you are not fast and assertive enough you lose out on something – something that is desirable. This general observation links in with our earlier observation that waiting and tarrying seem to be for the less-powerful, while speed and assertiveness are for the powerful. Those who are assertive usually win the competition in interviews for jobs. Tarrying is usually not a particularly appreciated quality of any applicant. If ever a job applicant has to mention one of his or her lesser qualities, they often come up with 'impatience'. In this context this is usually one of the safest vices to mention, because it is usually considered as additional evidence of the assertiveness of the candidate. Such candidates basically say that they are not prepared to wait or to tarry; they identify themselves as members of an exclusive and enviable group for whom waiting is not an option. Yet waiting is a double-edged sword and an ambiguous concept; it is or can be a 'weapon of the weak' as is demonstrated by instances of 'waiting with persistence' which by their very practice demonstrate assertiveness.

Modern society nowadays seem to have developed quite a lucrative industry to give people almost anywhere the possibility to deny waiting by offering distractions "by which it [waiting] can be forgotten – magazines in professionals' waiting rooms, entertainment on television, computer games, snacks, even the cigarettes" (Schweizer 2008: 8). For those waiting for days in a queue for Home Affairs in South Africa there are few such distractions, except probably for the ciga-

rettes which they buy one at a time. Such queues may best be described as sites of 'raw waiting', in the sense that it cannot be avoided or averted; waiting in queues for Home Affairs has simply to be endured. Such queues are liminal both in terms of time (i.e. waiting for the new official status as an asylum seeker) as well as in terms of physical space – migrants in the queue stand in a legal no-man's land, where they are no longer in their home country, but are also not yet legally in South Africa). Furthermore they cannot be certain whether they will attain this coveted status once it is their turn at the Home Affairs officers' desks. The hope that they will achieve such status makes them persevere, even though it is a hope born out of desperation in the face of threats of random expulsion.

Our eclectic and impressionist description of the concept of waiting is mainly informed by art and philosophy. From this exploration it is sufficient to say that waiting is a concept that is filled with meaning about space and time. Waiting has to do with lived experiences that gain particular meaning in relation to the contexts in which they are played out. Waiting for death to come, as Valentine Godé-Dorel described above, is quite another type of waiting from waiting in a traffic jam. The waiting of the black American civil rights activist, as described above, is quite different from waiting for a lump of sugar to dissolve in a glass of water, as described by Bergson. With the above discussion on the concept of waiting in mind, we now explore in more detail the queues of asylum seekers at Home Affairs offices in South Africa and see how the concept of waiting in relation to liminality can inform our analysis of this queuing as a socially productive process.

Waiting for asylum

Liminality is an apt device to apply to the condition of refugees and migrants in South Africa. Internationally, migration researchers have paid considerable attention to the long queues that migrants wait in to enter a country: at border posts, in airports and at embassies (see eg. Gilboy 1991; Heyman 1998; Adelman 2002; Adey 2008). However, in South Africa it would seem as if the waiting game has been turned inside out. Almost anyone with the correct documents, a bit of savvy, or a few hundred rand can negotiate their way into the Republic with relative ease. In fact, this 'queue' became considerably shorter after the Department of Home Affairs simplified visa and entry conditions in anticipation of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

It is once migrants enter South Africa, however, that they find themselves in a queue, or rather: in queues. Migrants wait, often interminably, to acquire and maintain travel documents (visas, asylum papers, driver's licences, etc.) and to access services (setting up a cell phone contract, opening a bank account, signing a lease etc.). Yet migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are not the only people in South Africa who wait long periods for bureaucratic wheels to turn. In 2006, twenty-one-year-old South African born and bred Kabelo Thibedi had waited two years to receive his national Identity Document which he needed to get a job, access social security and go to school. When his mother informed him that his application had been delayed yet again, he walked into the Johannesburg Home Affairs office with a toy gun and held the office manager hostage, demanding that she hand over his

Identity Document.⁵ While this particular reaction was somewhat extreme, interminable waiting for Home Affairs to issue documents is a common experience for most South Africans.

Migrants also tire of waiting, but they face an additional burden. For them, the existential tension of bureaucratic delay is accentuated by the somewhat more random and more violent threat of expulsion. Migrants anticipate the next Department of Home Affairs raid on their building, the police road block waiting around the next corner, or the day that one's neighbours might gather *en masse* in an attempt to forcibly evict them from their homes. Even moving forward in a queue outside a Home Affairs office might be laced with dread, as one inches ever closer to the prospect that one's application will be denied and a deportation order issued. So, migrants do not simply feel like outsiders waiting to get 'in'. They are already 'in' yet they constantly live in heightened expectation that someone is about to come and tell them they do not belong and ought to go elsewhere.

Over the past decade, such experiences of precarious waiting have been poignantly emphasised and dramatised outside the doors of South Africa's refugee reception offices. Of course, not every migrant into South Africa applies for refugee status, particularly those who possess resources or the appropriate academic and/or professional qualifications. However, for both *bona fide* asylum seekers and those who lack other alternatives, the asylum system has become the most readily available means to regularise one's residence status. According to South Africa's 1998 Refugees Act, people seeking asylum in South Africa may enter the country informally i.e. not at a prescribed border post. However, in order to apply and qualify for refugee status (and obtain the all-important documents which verify one's right to remain in the country, work and study) one has to wait in a line. Applicants must present themselves at one of the country's six refugee reception offices to lodge their formal claim with the Department of Home Affairs.⁶ Then they must return every few months to renew their permit and/or sit through interviews to determine whether they have qualified for refugee status.

According to Amit, Monson and Vigneswaran (2009) such queues did not move very fast during the time of their 2009 survey. As they observed, applicants rarely got inside the office on their first try. About one in every four applicants had to leave and return to the office more than five times before gaining entry. New applicants at the offices reportedly had to wait an average of twenty nine days between first arriving and first entering the reception office. Many applicants did not acquire documents right away, and they then had to return repeatedly to renew. About one in every three applicants had waited more than a year to get an asylum-seeker permit and about a similar proportion had had to renew more than fourteen times before being interviewed by a status determination officer. To add to their frustration, many applicants reportedly did not find out their results right away. About one in every six applicants waited over a year before receiving a decision (Amit *et al* 2009).

As a result of these problems, the offices themselves became sites of tremendous frustration and struggle, as anxious applicants waited in long queues that stretched outside office buildings. Take, for example, the conditions at the Marabastad office, located just outside Pretoria:

Asylum applicants at Marabastad have taken to sleeping outside the office, in the hope that this will improve their chances of getting inside. There are regularly between eighty and three hundred people sleeping outside. At night armed criminals visit the site. Incidents of theft are common. There have been several reports of rape. There is no shelter in the vicinity of the office and people often endure rain and very cold conditions. Many women sleep with babies by their side. On some occasions the police have visited during the night and arrested asylum seekers or extorted them for bribes. Fights about places in the queue are common, sometimes degenerating into the throwing of bricks and stones and leading to several cases of hospitalisation. On at least one occasion metropolitan officials arrived in the morning to clear all temporary shelters, bedding, and belongings of people gathered outside the office.

In the morning, people form themselves into queues. Agents, security guards and interpreters are all involved, making offers and explaining how people will be received on that day. No-one knows how they will be received, who will be chosen and how many will gain entry. The police arrive and on occasions make arrests. There are also beatings; by the police, by security guards; on occasions by street vendors, who join in. Almost everyone is in a heightened state of anxiety and there is pushing, shoving and then more fights, particularly when people push in or rearrange the line. All this occurs in a venue that reeks of urine and sweats with anticipation and fear. All of this occurs before anyone has seen a Home Affairs official (Vigneswaran & Hlalambelo 2008: 6).

The conditions at Marabastad were and still are, to most objective onlookers, appalling. So, to some extent, it was difficult to find much in the way of logic or meaning to the experiences of people in the queues. However, if we pay attention to the queue's spatial dimension, we could begin to make some sense of these conditions. Here it is worth noting the way the office has been set up, as much as a barrier to limit access to state resources and processes, while symbolically and physically excluding specific categories of migrants. Where state incapacity and legal loopholes have allowed foreign migrants into the country's physical space without a pause, the office's gatekeeping provides the sovereign with a means to express its capacity by making migrants wait, and to make the office a metaphorical 'port of entry' (cf. Donnan and Wilson 1994). In addition to a state monopoly of violence (cf. Elias 1982), the state also attempted here to monopolise

5. www.iol.co.za/index.php?click_id=13&set_id=1&art_id=vn20051201070030492C648547

6. Refugees Act, s. 21; Refugees Act Regulations, s. 2(1). These provisions anticipate that conflicts in neighbouring countries may lead to large, and relatively disorderly influxes of asylum seekers.

control over time.

We can go further by recognising that experiences of waiting outside the Marabastad office brought together the two dynamics that we had previously suggested were characteristic of the migrant experience in South Africa: the slow yet civil procedure of bureaucratic delay and the violent and capricious practices of exclusion and expulsion. While applicants waited outside the office in the hope that they were playing their dutiful part in the orderly practices of the state, they were subject to various forms of state and non-state violence which kept them constantly 'on edge' and undermined any attempts they might have made to imbue their waiting experience with hope. One asylum seeker we spoke to glumly described the experience in the following way "[y]ou get stepped on. You are tired, you are bored and thirsty. You feel like you are dead and not human anymore."⁷ The cumulative product of these two dynamics were a condition which was not only 'betwixt and between', but one in which applicants were also victimised for their hope, locked in a sort of existential purgatory or an experience of entrapment. If we take this in Turner's terms, the moment of structural transition between the status of undocumented foreigner and legal resident becomes both attenuated and independently operative; it becomes a form of life experience in and of itself. In other words, the act of waiting for the asylum process acquires its own set of life processes and routines: of travelling to and from the reception office; of maintaining one's documents and copies; of learning the workings of the lines and the character and disposition of particular officials; of avoiding the harassment and victimisation by criminals; and of understanding the terms and conditions of one's status. Seen with greater acuity, it may be less about understanding one's status than projecting hope for and anticipation of attainment of a new status. Perceived thus, hope and anticipation may almost be existential prerequisites of waiting as the ideas those who wait project onto the future gather a momentum of their own.

Importantly, this was not simply a life experience imposed on migrants who enter the asylum system. Rather it was a 'waiting game' which many migrants themselves helped to create and perpetuated through their own actions. Most of those who waited for asylum papers were fairly confident that they did not qualify as refugees. Yet, they chose to go through the procedural farce.

In part, they did so for instrumental reasons. Knowing how long the process would take, they applied for asylum status because they know it would provide them with working rights for a relatively long period of time. Another reason to do so was for moral reasons. For most migrants it would probably have been easier and cheaper to obtain documents through more blatant forms of fraud (e.g. paying someone for forged documents). Yet, as the following quote suggests, there were applicants who believed that, in experiencing the

purgatory of asylum application, they were simultaneously showing respect for the state's right to register migrants while only slightly obfuscating the truth by making an asylum claim that they knew would eventually be treated as disingenuous.

It helps the government. It's a mutual ... it's a mutual agreement, you know? When you are registered, you can't do crime, you know? Because when they get you, or ... you cannot runaway, you see? When you are registered and you are working, you cannot steal from ... from your employer because he will trace you. Yeah, it helps the government. It helps me not to be deported. Yeah (Scheiden 2009).

Here, waiting for asylum takes on aspects of a 'weapon of the weak', as we have pointed out above, where migrants make their (collective) capacity to wait the basis for a reinterpretation of South Africa's immigration and identity document system. However, waiting takes on a slightly different cast when the waiting game is transformed by the state. When migrants are arrested and held for deportation, they continue to wait but now find themselves very tightly held in the state's embrace (Torpey 1998), and their hoping turns from wanting the waiting to continue to wanting it to come to an end.

Waiting for deportation

As mentioned above, the experience of migrants in South Africa is that they live in perpetual fear of the possibility of expulsion. The looming threat of deportation is perhaps best symbolised by Lindela, the administrative holding facility where undocumented migrants are detained pending their eventual expulsion from South Africa. We now explore how the experience of waiting at Lindela is significant, and how it can be distinguished from the kind of waiting experienced by migrants in queues at refugee reception offices.

As already elaborated, migrants' experiences of waiting in queues was marked by frustration, confusion, and anxiety, and the experience that efforts made to wait patiently may each day turn out to be for naught if one does not reach the head of the queue and has to return again on another day. Despite this, the queue retained a certain imagery of a forward shuffling, as the passage of time would, at least in theory, be accompanied by a movement of those in the queue toward the office and the possibility of getting a permit and its attendant benefits and freedoms.

Such experience of waiting can be compared with that in the Lindela holding facility which, although host to similar experiences of frustration, confusion, and anxiety, may be viewed as the 'end of the line' in the status determination process. Those at Lindela have all been apprehended and labelled as 'illegal foreigners' who lack legitimate documentation; they are sentenced to spend an indeterminable period at Lindela until they are deported to their country of origin. In contrast to those queuing for permits, who hold out the hope

7. Our research team conducted all interviews with detainees awaiting deportation in South Africa at the Lindela Repatriation Facility in Krugersdorp, Gauteng. The South African Department of Home Affairs provided access to the facility and opportunities to request interviews, subject to a variety of conditions. These conditions included limitations on our access to identifying information for respondents. Due to the fact that some of our respondents had been at the facility for many months or on several occasions and often subject to threats, assaults and other abuses by officials and other detainees, we have also not included any information which could be used to link the claims made in this paper to our respondents. The following discussion will only identify the nationality of our respondents and, where necessary, some other relatively general identifying information.

that they will be legally allowed – or might find some other way – to stay in the country, there is very little chance that detainees at Lindela will be granted legal status of any sort.

While release from Lindela is highly unlikely for most, detainees interviewed in 2009 demonstrated a number of approaches people had found for coping. First, some irrationally clung to the marginal hope that their case would be exceptional and that Home Affairs would allow their release. Some launched appeals regarding their status determinations while at Lindela, knowing that they would have to wait months to learn the outcome (prolonging their detention); others went to the extreme of staging a hunger strike to bring attention to their case. For these individuals, waiting was an active process throughout which they constantly contested and resisted the prospect of expulsion. They refused to accept that deportation was the only way their waiting experience could end.

Consequently, some detainees simply refused to view Lindela as the 'end of the line'. Instead, they sought ways of incorporating the immigration system's effects into their broader life plans, employing a device which may be referred to as a 'migration story'. This involved migrants making use of a set of narratives, anecdotes, chronological benchmarks and personal relationships to represent both their history of migration up until the present and to forecast their future. By applying the framework of such migration stories, they could present the various setbacks associated with deportation as interruption stages in an individual's personal history, rather than as its ending. That enabled them to position their stay at Lindela, and their eventual expulsion, as merely one phase in their migration journey. Perhaps the most extreme variant of this manifested amongst those Lindela detainees who claimed they would return to South Africa, regardless of how long it would take them or how difficult it might be to make the necessary arrangements. For example, an interviewer of a Namibian detainee at Lindela reported witnessing approximately 100 Malawians being sent for deportation. As they passed by the Namibian detainee, many smiled at him and said goodbye; to which the Namibian interviewee responded: 'It doesn't matter. They'll just come right back'. In a similar vein, one Chinese national detained at Lindela because he had been caught with fraudulent papers spoke about what he would do 'next time' and explained that he was adamant that he would never again pay a middleman to obtain his documents for him. He nonetheless left it open whether this denoted acceptance of moral wrongdoing or simply a determination not to get caught again. For such detainees, their present condition of detention is merely temporary and their minds are elsewhere: their experience of waiting is punctuated by thoughts of their prospects 'outside' and plans for their next move.

Earlier we mentioned that every end to waiting signals the beginning of waiting for something else. While the detainees described in the paragraphs above may well have viewed their departure from Lindela as the beginning of the next stage in their migration journeys and perhaps their eventual

return to South Africa, for the majority of detainees at Lindela deportation had greater finality, that is, expulsion marked the closure of their time in South Africa and the end of planning for the life they might have lived here. Their time at Lindela thus served no purpose in and of itself and, in the same way as Hodler's paintings depict Gode-Darel as hoping only for the relief of death, these detainees hoped only for the relief of deportation.⁸ An example is a Sudanese detainee who surmised that deportation would be preferable to his present confinement: "It would be better, just to be free". Even detainees who maintained their innocence — such as the Zimbabwean migrant who insisted: "if only I had the chance to show the police my passport" — seemed to gaze ahead to the deportation event expectantly, in anticipation of being rescued from their current state of limbo. Other migrants who seemed to have absorbed some measure of culpability for being at Lindela — such as the Congolese detainee who mused regretfully that "they gave us the opportunity to be here legally but we broke it ... it is our fault we are here" — viewed deportation as the inevitable outcome of the series of events they had themselves set in motion through their transgression(s).

As demonstrated above, some Lindela detainees were vehement in their denial of wrongdoing, while others appeared more willing to accept their guilt; still others vacillated between denial and acceptance of the 'illegal foreigner' label. Regardless of the extent to which they refuted or subscribed to the authority of the deportation system, what all detainees shared was the lack of certainty regarding how long they would have to remain at Lindela: they had very little control or understanding of whether they would wait for days, weeks, months, or years.

Much in the way that queues in front of refugee reception offices are characterised by a unique set of processes and routines that migrants had to learn and participate in, Lindela had its own rhythms and routines which some detainees scrutinised carefully in hopes of understanding their position. For example, in an attempt to discern what the outcome of their own respective cases might be, many detainees compared themselves to their fellow nationals and used what had happened to them to calibrate their own expectations. Still others clung to subtle patterns and signals in an effort to infuse the system with logic. For example, a Malawian detained at Lindela for three weeks at the time of interview shared his belief that a visit from one's ambassador meant that one's deportation was imminent, while a Namibian, at that point detained at Lindela for five months, maintained that if one's name is called on the speaker at Lindela it means he is going to be released. With few concrete indicators regarding the status of their legal cases, attributing meaning to such small signs and events was often all a detainee could do to discern their probable length of stay. The mention of discerning rather than influencing is significant here, for there is little a detainee can do to change the outcome once at Lindela.

Irrespective of the mindset detainees adopted to cope with such uncertainty, the perception that every day of wait-

8. An exception to this would be individuals who have, or claim to have, legitimate asylum claims and fear persecution upon return to their home country. These individuals anticipate the deportation event with dread and there is little relief associated with the end of their waiting experience.

ing might bring with it some form of loss was widely shared at Lindela. Such loss ranged from deterioration of prospects at school or work to increasing disconnection from friends and family. In the words of one detainee from Rwanda: "Today is Friday. Tuesday is gone. Wednesday is gone. Thursday is gone. 90 days is the rule of how long you are supposed to stay at Lindela. How many days is in two years? It is abusing humans to keep me here."

Indeed, although Lindela's official purpose is strictly administrative, at least according to Home Affairs, it is the experience of waiting that leads many detainees to surmise that Lindela has a punitive purpose. Most detainees, especially those who had previously served time in a conventional prison, had few complaints with respect to the food, water, and sleeping arrangements at the facility. However, all were plagued by the frustration of being caught in a situation that was contained in space, yet not time-bound. Those who had previously been in prison even suggested that being deemed a criminal has some advantages over being an 'illegal foreigner': a criminal sentence comes with a specific end date.

What then is the significance of these experiences? What is to be learned from the conditions of waiting in queues for asylum, or waiting in detention for deportation? We might say that a key similarity between the conditions at Lindela and in refugee reception centre queues across the country is the establishment of a dynamic — perhaps a struggle, an entanglement, or maybe even a game — that juxtaposes the agent (the migrant, the detainee) with the structure (the immigration system and its various bureaucratic hurdles).

As explored above with respect to reception offices such as Marastabad, migrants participate, apparently willingly, in a seemingly endless array of processes and procedures to legitimise their presence in South Africa, even when they are aware of the flimsy nature of their claims. With the knowledge that their acquiescence perpetuates and lends credence to a system the state has set up, they agree to the terms of the arrangement in hopes of ultimately benefitting from it. We might distinguish this from detainees at Lindela who fail to appreciate the logic of a system which deems them sufficiently unacceptable to merit expulsion, yet insists on keeping them (and thus bearing responsibility for them) in detention within state boundaries for a prolonged period. The same Sudanese detainee mentioned above was quick to challenge the very notion of being detained prior to deportation: "... How long you gonna stay inside. You don't see far. Ok, they can deport you. But to keep you!" This sentiment was echoed by a female Liberian detainee who contended: 'You can imagine, all this only for papers! If they think we are so bad, they should release us. You keepin' cows in a place and you just leave 'em there'.

With few exceptions, detainees at Lindela had no incentive to participate in or perpetuate the system that had led to their detention: there was very little chance that they might evade expulsion through cooperation of any kind.⁹ While this end result (deportation) was all but inevitable, detainees nonetheless demonstrated a variety of approaches and responses to their fate. First, some denied they would be deported; this characterises the response of all those who

appealed their status determination cases or went to the extremes of staging hunger strikes to gain attention. Second, some retained control of their experience by subsuming Lindela into a broader migration story and/or insisting that they would simply return to South Africa once expelled. Third, those detainees (perhaps the majority) who viewed deportation as the 'end of the line' and the closing of their potential life in South Africa found the waiting pointless and painful. The latter two categories might even have welcomed the deportation event, preferring it to their present condition of containment. Regardless of which of these approaches was adopted by a particular detainee, all agreed that the key thing that had been taken from them at Lindela was time.

Tentative conclusions

Waiting as a general phenomenon *within* organisations, and in dealing *with* organisations and organisational procedures, remains a neglected phenomenon and concept in organisation studies. The reasons for this may range from a power biased perspective from which many organisation scientists might consider the uncomfortable relations between waiting and the perpetuation of power inequalities in organisations, to the sheer everyday character of waiting which leads to its remaining largely unnoticed and thus unremarked in official organisation study discourse. What we have tried to show is that waiting merits serious analysis, at least in so far as it relates to certain bureaucratic processes such as those of government departments that regulate migrants. In the bureaucratic rituals that come with the regulation of migrants, liminality plays a crucial role and liminality always comes with some sort of waiting; waiting is inherent in liminality. Although waiting may seem very mundane and a general everyday experience, it is nonetheless a complicated phenomenon. It must be contextualised in order for us to elucidate its meaning.

We have here sketched two kinds of liminal situations in which waiting is central: waiting for asylum and waiting for deportation, and we have shown that it is the particular contexts — both bureaucratic in nature — that determine and qualify the character of the experience of waiting. In the example of 'waiting for asylum' in the queues of refugee reception offices, it is hope that transforms collective waiting into some sort of a 'weapon of the weak'. In the 'waiting for deportation' of the Lindela detention centre, we suggest there is no hope that unifies and feeds persistence, and therefore experiences with waiting are more diverse and individualised, and they range from 'waiting for the relief of finality', that is waiting for freedom to be regained after being deported to one's home country, to 'waiting to start the process all over again', that is thinking about new and innovative ways to enter the process anew, once one has been released from having had to wait to be deported. In both instances, waiting can be considered as socially productive.

These examples of liminality and waiting in South Africa provide pointers that suggest that, because of its sheer commonality, there is an urgent need to theoretically and empirically explore, in ethnographic detail, organisational processes that involve waiting and the extent to which it is related to

9. The exception here would be bribing an official to secure one's release.

experiences of liminality. We thus suggest that there is need to develop an 'ethnography of waiting' in order to be able to qualify and nuance the various types of waiting in the contexts and conditions in which they occur in everyday organisational life.

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