1.2.3.

Coinciding contradictions

Refugees’ daily life in protracted displacement

Figure 000: In between the way
Abstract
This thesis explores the experiences of everyday life in protracted displacement for refugees and migrants in Greece. In recent years, the securitization of Europe’s borders has intensified and together with the backlog in asylum application procedures this has led to further stagnation of the migration journeys of tens of thousands of people. This results in months – and sometimes years – spent in refugee camps with no clear prospect of a durable solution to their situation. By exploring this standstill from the perspective of the residents of Malakasa refugee camp, this thesis provides understanding of the daily lived experiences in protracted displacement and on the multiple ways in which the ongoing uncertainties are perceived and dealt with. The camp and life within it can be understood as an ambiguous space where opposites such as past and present, cooperation and conflict and the known and the unknown are brought together and made to coexist. For the residents of Malakasa camp contradictions and ambivalent experiences are at the core of daily life in displacement, which together form a complex reality that can be considered a dynamic equilibrium as well as an untenable entropy.

Coinciding contradictions:
Refugees’ daily life in displacement
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“We live not in stable states, with fixed identities, but experimentally — en passage between different narratives and worldviews, as well as different modes of being — participants and observers, in relation to others and yet alone, physically grounded yet lost in thought, filled with life yet bound to die, looking back and looking forward.”

(Jackson & Piette 2015:10)
Acknowledgements

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I carry you with me.
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Today I feel...
"Happy!" "Today I feel. Good." "Excited!" "Tired."
"Happy!" "Angry!" "Bad."

We sit in a circle on the colorful rugs in our school: a small container located in the back of the refugee camp of Malakasa, Greece. Twenty-two Afghan boys and girls take turns in telling me how they feel today. "Sad," a boy with shy eyes mumbles while playing with the loose threads of the carpet between his fingers. Meanwhile, his neighbor can hardly wait for him to finish and exclaims: "Today I feel energy!"

Malakasa refugee camp in Greece is a place of contradictions—not only concerning the feelings of children, but in many other aspects of life within it. This thesis explores these contradictions in an attempt to understand how daily life takes form in the space of a refugee camp, not designed nor desired for permanent living.

In response to the 2015 refugee crisis Europe has closed its borders, struck a deal with Turkey to push back number of arrivals on its southern shores, and placed those already in their territory in camps until further notice. In effect, for refugees and migrants who arrived in Greece after 2016 passage and journeys towards permanent resettlement are made difficult. Application procedures in Greece have backlogged leading to long waiting lists, while the promised relocation of migrants and refugees by other European member states to take pressure off Greece remains largely unfulfilled. For the migrants and refugees this results in a stagnation of their journey with no clear ending. I set out on this research wondering what exactly happens in this standstill, questioning if and how daily life within it takes form and might even become normal over time.

Based on three months of fieldwork in Malakasa camp between January and March 2019, I came to understand how for the residents existence is uncertain and disrupted whilst strangely and simultaneously, a predictable, daily reality has taken its course. The stories shared in this thesis reveal how the unpredictable can simultaneously be stable, the passive active, the fixed fluid, and the isolated connected. By showing both sides, the camp and life within it will be understood as an ambiguous space where opposites such as past and present, cooperation and conflict and the known and the unknown, are brought together and made to coexist. Coinciding contradictions are at the core of life in displacement for the refugees in Malakasa camp, and together they make up a complex reality that shows how life 'in between the way' is a stagnation that moves.

This thesis tells the stories of migrants and refugees on European soil, their choices very much constrained by the world around them, yet actively building a life in uncertainty even if this is not what they had envisioned for themselves. I will portray them not as passive victims, but as conscious human beings. I hope in doing so, the reader comes to understand that even though attention for the situation in Greece has diminished in recent years, it is still a daily reality for many as their lives in refugee camps hover between a dynamic equilibrium and an unsustainable entropy.
Before reading
It is important to take into account that the story of this camp is not the story of all camps in Greece. Each camp is different and of course every individual has a different experience of reality. Nonetheless I do attempt to show patterns in experiences and observations across the camp that may also be used analytically in other field work in similar camps to offer insight into life in places where people are forced into protracted displacement.

I will use the word residents when referring to the subjects of my research. On the one hand this proved helpful during data collection because it meant I could include everyone who resides in the camp, both registered and unregistered, as possible informants. On the other hand, it allows me to steer clear from terminologies and subsequent associations stirred by the differentiation between a ‘valid refugee’ and other forms of ‘migrants,’ notably ‘economic’ or ‘fortune’ migrants. In reality, all residents have different motives and journeys and fit into different ‘categorizations’ and concomitant status within the application procedures and this is of little concern to my research. To protect their privacy, the names of my informants have been changed. Throughout this thesis I will refer to Malakasa’s Open Reception Center as a camp, since this is the word residents themselves use.

Structure of this thesis
This introduction will be followed by a backdrop discussing the context of the situations of displacement for refugees in the world and specifically in Europe, after which I will zoom in further to Greece and Malakasa camp. Also, a brief context will be given to the study of contradictions and the academic relevance of this thesis. Chapter 3 will elaborate on the way I gained access to the camp, the methods I used to gather information, the position I held in the field and in this research and the limitations I encountered. This is followed by three empirical chapters in which I will analyze the collected data in a way that can be seen as a concentric circle: step by step it will come closer and reveal more details and layers of the residents’ daily lives. In chapter 4 I will sketch the outlines of life in Malakasa camp by explaining the main concerns for residents, namely the open and simultaneously closed character of the camp, providing both opportunity and restrictions; the way uncertainties about their situation become predictable and embedded in daily life; and how worries concerning daily needs result in a rhythm and regularity amidst the uncertainty. Chapter 5 will move a bit closer to their personal lives by focusing on memories of the past and how these resonate in the present. I will elaborate on how an unknown place can feel familiar, and how waiting becomes active. In chapter 6 I will demonstrate how residents built homes away from home, and how various contradictions play a role on the level of family, community, and in relation to the host society. This will be followed by a conclusion in chapter 7. In order to create a more organic link between my findings and my attempts to signify them, instead of presenting a ‘frame’ upfront, I have woven the theoretical and conceptual ideas into my empirical chapters. Footnotes can be found at the end of each chapter.

Layout
As a visual artist, it was important for me to pay attention to the layout of this thesis, as I believe that this too plays a role in how the content is perceived by the reader. The arguments of my thesis have been translated into a visual concept by Onno Blase, through which hopefully the story becomes even more tangible. First, the pages are not bound together but folded into different booklets, in an attempt to mirror tension between the temporary and permanent in which residents in Malakasa find themselves. Just like the residents had to get used to their new surroundings, the reader will need some time to find its way in the design. The elements of a layout that usually follow a predictable structure have been played with, such as by dislocating the page numbers. The quotes of residents will be recognizable by the slanted typography, while my field notes are back slanted. Also, images are not where they normally are, but gathered in a separate booklet. This way, they become a visual essay that can be read alongside the text. I will elaborate on this further on the use of images in the methodology chapter. All pictures are taken by the author and the drawings are made by residents of the camp.
Today I feel...
2. Holes of oblivion and the contradictions of existence
Our anthropological understandings of cultural and social life as something stable, isolated and static has long ago been replaced by a growing awareness of the constant changes, connections and movements that shape it. This becomes evident in the growing attention for the role of mobility in societies and human lives (Sheller & Urry 2004), in which the intensified flows of people, products and ideas are subject of study. However, as much as there is movement and change, there is also a rise in new attachments, securitization and reterritorialization that results in restrictions, immobility and isolation for certain groups in society. The lives of the people in this thesis connect to both sides of the story, as for them both stability and change, isolation and connection, and immobility and mobility are simultaneously present.

Protracted displacement

The residents of Malakasa camp are part of the ever-growing number of internally and externally displaced refugees in the world. Everyday an average of 44,400 people is driven away from their homes due to natural disaster, conflict and persecution. At the beginning of 2018 UNHCR counted a total of 68.5 million displaced persons. For two-thirds of them, durable solutions or permanent resettlement in the foreseeable future within or outside of their country of origin remains out of sight (Loescher & James Milner 2011). The UNHCR states that these situations of protracted displacement “endure because of ongoing problems in the countries of origin, and stagnate and become protracted as a result of responses to refugee inflows, typically involving restrictions on refugee movement and employment possibilities, and confinement to camps.” For instance, many of the approximately 190,000 refugees (predominantly form Somalia and South-Sudan) in the massive, under-sourced camp of Kakuma in north-west Kenya cannot go home as conflicts and violence in their countries continue. Their living conditions are dire and they have limited options to improve their lives because their actions are restricted by the authorities (Demo 2009). Host societies often regard the arrival of irregular migrants as a threat and act accordingly. In Australia, for instance, all asylum seekers entering the country by sea are directly transferred to remote Pacific island camps with no chance of resettlement. The average time spent in displacement is somewhere between 10 and 26 years (UNHCR 2018). Abebe Feyissa Demo, who has lived in Kakuma camp himself, describes how during these years “all the days of the week are the same, except in name” (2009, 12). This standstill with little prospects for the future marks most cases or protracted displacement, where the ongoing uncertainty negatively affect human rights and livelihoods of the people it concerns (Loescher & James Milner 2009). Even though protracted displacement is officially used to indicate a wait of more than five years, the term and field of study it entails is useful for the case study in this thesis because similar challenges occur, as in all cases migrants and refugees have to find a way to live semi-permanent lives, in places not meant for permanent living.

Europe: beyond control

In Europe, since the upsurge of arrivals in 2015, the refugee discourse has been coined as a ‘crisis’ that consequently calls for a state of emergency and quick and temporary, ad-hoc solutions in order to maintain public order.

Questionable deals were closed with countries such as Turkey, Sudan and Afghanistan in an effort to regain control over migration flows perceived as beyond control, allowing migrants and refugees to be sent back in exchange for financial compensations. Additionally, and as part of this “expanding exclusionary border apparatus” (Katz 2017, 1), reception centers have been established across the continent to accommodate refugees and migrants who made it into European territories. Both actions reveal “the dual face of Europe’s liberal democracies, whose values of openness, equality, and freedom contradict the fortification of their borders” (Katz 2017, 14). In anticipation of the European elections, the discussion on the reception of asylum seekers focused primarily on securitization of national territories, and little attention was given to the other side of the table: those whose lives it concerns. Effectively, “the life of a few million human beings seems to be a secondary question to be debated by the European leadership— acceptable collateral damage for the protection of European spatial exclusivity” (Dalakoglou 2016, 185). This has led to the protracted displacement of tens of thousands of refugees in camps across Greece and Italy, as they are prevented from moving further into the continent.

Reception in Greece

After the closing of the Macedonian borders in 2016 preventing migrants and refugees from traveling further north, and the controversial EU-Turkey deal in that same year which placed new arrivals in detention, Greece has changed from “a place of transition to a place of destination” (Kreichauf 2018, 5). And as of April 2019, a total of 77,176 irregular migrants (UNHCR factsheet April 2019) are residing within the country, waiting for clarity concerning their legal status. After the decrease in arrivals after 2016, in 2018 numbers have slowly been increasing again. The Dublin Regulation requires refugees and migrants to apply for asylum in the first country of entrance, which because of its location, often happens to be Greece. European member states promised relocation of refugees and migrants from Greece in order to lift the unequal burden, however this promise has only partly been fulfilled over the last years. Public media in those countries share little of the living conditions and treatment of migrants and refugees in Greece, apart from a few dramatic scenes on the Aegean islands, but recent investigations reveal that the situation remains “inhumane and degrading” (CTP 2019). With the closing of borders, Greece’s involvement has changed from “short term assistance in transit to long-term responsibilities” (Kreichauf 2018, 6), a task they do not seem properly prepared for. Even before the ‘crisis’ Rozakou (2012) critically examined Greece’s refugee management, defining its policies as “a politics of invisibility,” reflected in “poor reception infrastructure, and obstacles, delays, and violations recorded during the asylum process” (2012, 563). With European funding, “large, camp-like structures with lowered living standards and a closed character” (Kreichauf 2018, 1) have been set up. Although these camps are intended to be temporary solutions, they become quasi-permanent whilst, willingly or unwillingly, more permanent solutions progress slowly or remain out of sight entirely (Anderson 2014). The time spent in these camps varies between cases, between a few months up to as much as three years (based on my
own observations). These figures are of course much lower than previously mentioned instances of protracted displacement, however, they are not less relevant in the study of how people experience having to live somewhere between two worlds, in a place they do not want to be. In Europe, even though it is a known fact that circumstances and living conditions are often precarious, the situation is no longer regarded as “a humanitarian drama” (Polman 2019, 46).

Polman draws a link between the camps in Greece and what Hannah Arendt (1951) had termed ‘holes of oblivion’: camps as spaces in which people disappear “as if their fate was no longer interesting for other people, as if they were already dead” (Polman 2019, 48, my translation). And indeed, amongst the residents of Malakasa this feeling of being ‘forgotten by the rest of the world’ is brewing.

**Malakasa camp**
The Malakasa refugee camp is located 42 kilometers north of Athens on mainland Greece. It is an Open Reception Facility situated on a military base, where the Hellenic Army is the responsible authority but where the International Organization for Migration (IOM) functions as the main site management support agency. The camp is located one kilometer outside of Malakasa, a small town with approximately one thousand inhabitants (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2011). Since its establishment in 2016 it has gone through several transformations: from a tent camp to a prefab camp, from a place hosting mostly island transfers for a short period of time to a place where people spend months if not years of their lives. Even though Malakasa camp is formal and institutionalized, in recent months an unregistered population has set up a make-shift camp on the terrain, where they wait for a spot in one of the prefab housing units to open up in the already replete camp. The camp currently hosts an estimated 1427 registered residents and 229 unregistered, unofficial residents, of which 88% Afghan, 7% Iranian and 4% Iraqi. Of the registered population, 366 are single males, against 244 families of more than two members. Sixty percent of the population is male, against forty percent female (of all ages). Amongst all new arrivals in Greece, Afghans form the largest (and growing) group with 2,814 (39.7%) new arrivals since January 1st, 2019 and the rejection rates of their asylum are at 47% (2017-18). Most residents of Malakasa camp are focused on obtaining citizenship in Greece, and/or traveling onward to northern Europe. They are in different stages of their asylum application: some still wait to register, some wait for their first interview, others for the results to come in. Some already have a Greek ID card but remain living in the camp, unsure about how to move forward from there.

**Co-existing contradictions**
In this thesis the way that the residents of Malakasa camp give form to their daily lives will be explored through the information and stories I gathered in the camp. In doing so, I focused on the “lived reality—on human lives as they unfold and are transformed in everyday situations, events, and interactions” (Jackson & Piette 2015, 6). This daily existence is not easy to pin down, as I experienced in the field and while writing this thesis. It often concerns both the most prosaic actions and reflections, as well as more consciously performed activities and profound experiences. Consequently, I came to understand daily life as complex and nuanced, where contradicting notions are simultaneously present. It is important to keep in mind that the dichotomies that come to the fore are contradictions not in the sense of ‘either/or,’ but rather of ‘both/and.’ They are “seemingly opposed forces [that] are simultaneously present” (Harvey as quoted by Berliner 2016, 3). This focus on the space between opposites allows me to stay close to the complexity of experience of everyday life (Rapport & Overing 2000), which in contexts of crisis often becomes ever more visible (Kapferer 2006).

"Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective rights and juridical protection no longer made any sense.” (Agamben 1998, 97)

Accepting both forces paints the picture of a social world that is not a stable singular system, but “replete with ambivalence” (After Gluckman, Rapport & Overling 2000, 82), where contradictions become “a state in itself” (ibid, 83).

This research will focus on the residents’ actions, opinions and reflections to emphasize that they are not just subjected to the circumstances but that they are individuals with agency in their own right. This is an aspect that is increasingly acknowledged and studied and with this thesis I attempt to contribute to this move away from portraying people as inert and pitiful victims. However, to find the right tone in doing so is not an easy task. There are accounts in which people’s willpower is overstated, and those in which the effect of their protests against injustices is undermined. This research attempts to do justice to both people’s purposeful efforts as well as their ability to cope with what they cannot change. Although much research concerning refugees and displaced populations has been carried out, our understanding of what and how they give form to their lives on a daily bases, underway, halfway or when reaching the dreamt destination, is deficient. The impact of the conflicts that triggered their flight, of the challenges they face along the way when trying to find passage, of adjusting to new worlds and views, of losing a community and forming new bonds, of grieving what was lost and of dealing with the uncertainty concerning their future – and much more; all this we still do not fully comprehend. Social sciences have an important job in diminishing these hiatuses. Even though many studies end with conclusive judgements and results, it is important to be modest and to admit that such clear-cut conclusions are usually not viable, since reality is much more ambiguous, confusing, messy and incongruous. By foregrounding the inconsistencies and contradictions this research is an attempt to step away from the ‘categorical’ character social research results can have. It is a plea for acknowledging the frequent incompatibilities of the findings, and for attempting to reflect these in our reports.
2. Holes of oblivion and the contradictions of existence
3. You can’t feel our day and you can’t feel our night

Method and style of investigation
Access
In preparing my first anthropological research, I learned that a central element in doing ethnographic inquiry is to learn through first-hand experiences about the lives of others, with the aim of uncovering “the processes and meanings that undergird socio spatial life” (Herbert 2000, 550). It sounded clear and simple, but when I stepped into the field I soon wondered how I would get such a ‘first-hand’ experience of lives that were lived under completely different circumstances from mine. In order to gain access, I had signed up as a volunteer with a non-profit organization that provides education for children in refugee camps in Greece. Upon my arrival plans to open a school in Malakasa camp took flight and I was asked to be the coordinator and main teacher for this project for the duration of my stay. Considering my background in art and education this task was one that I happily took on. The job gave me the possibility to be involved in building relationships with both residents and staff from the very beginning and to come in contact with an average of eighty children on a daily basis. It proved to be a good entry point to get to know the camp; however, it also meant that much of my time was spent teaching English, mathematics and art, inside a container in the back of the camp. Consequently, I spent the first weeks of my stay on setting up the classes, learning names and faces, and trying to get an overall idea of the way the camp functioned. My fieldnotes from those first weeks consisted mainly of brief observations made in between classes.

Getting closer
During these first weeks I felt a challenge in overcoming the imagined distance between the residents’ lives and mine. In the current political climate, everything surrounding the refugee and migrant discourse is set up in a way to differentiate ‘them’ from ‘us.’ This becomes clear in the limited access to most refugee camps and the way that volunteers working in camps are always advised to “keep emotional distance,” with the aim of protecting the refugee population, but with, in my opinion, the effect of discouraging an equal level of human interaction. In all honesty, during the first weeks of my fieldwork I felt a complete stranger. It seemed as though I was trespassing; both on the authorities in charge of the camp as I had not been completely open to everyone about my research, and on the residents, intruding on their privacy. However, this ‘estrangement’ (Gobo 2008) is also a useful tool in ethnographic research, as the attitude of a stranger, of someone who does not know the underlying rules and conventions and aims to become a member comes with a specific mindset. It is “a cognitive state where the natural attitude, ‘thinking as usual,’ is suspended and the ethnographer is forced to see sets of activities in (supposedly) ‘social facts” (Gobo 2008, 161). In other words, a certain distance and alienation helps to deconstruct the world around you, to actively question and decipher it in order to get an understanding of the way it functions. After classes finished I would often sit on the steps of the warehouse behind the school to catch my breath. From there I could observe a large section of the camp and I started to notice the daily grind around me. I realized that being present (Okely 2011) was to be my first method in trying to get a sense of what was going on. Through these moments I became familiar with the space around me: the layout of the camp, the materiality, the games that were played, the silence and noise, the garbage and mess that lay around and the brand-new white sneakers that wandered through it.

Participant observation
Twice a week I had been teaching kickboxing and self-defense to women and girls and on one particular Monday, a young woman named Sanam joined the class. Her eyes were soft and her face lit up every time she laughed and took a punch. She spoke to me with a clear voice in perfect English, and shyly I asked her if she would have time to talk. Instantly she invited me to a woman’s day celebration organized by residents later that week in one of the containers. That next Wednesday, huddled next to Sanam on a bunkbed surrounded by over thirty other women she gave me explanations and comments on the rituals taking place, showing me what was going on behind those doors. Quickly she became my gatekeeper as she arranged interviews for me, but even more importantly: she generously shared her own time, home, jokes and thoughts. With her help, I was able to further overcome the distance I had felt before and to get closer to their live-worlds. Participation is driven by the objective “to share and thereby understand the experiences” (O’Reilly 2009, 154) and to blend in and disturb the situation as little as possible. Participation allowed me to spend more unguarded time with residents, and in doing so I became witness to the small, but for this research relevant, occurrences in their daily lives. It allowed me to observe and be part of their interactions and encounters, helping me to understand how people relate to each other under such circumstances.

Interviews
Apart from many useful informal conversations I had on a daily basis, towards the end of my fieldwork I conducted 18 semi-structured interviews, indirectly involving 43 residents. Five single men, three single women (one pregnant, one with two teenage children, and one separated from her children), and ten family units of more than two people. These interviews were necessary in order to find out how the residents themselves interpreted their situation (Heyl 2011). I prepared a topic list and revised it after each interview; however, the conversation would be largely informed by what the interviewees felt was necessary to tell me. This initially resulted in many conversations about their bigger struggles and worries and less about their daily lives. However, the interview moment itself was a chance to observe this, as around them other family members went about minding their own business, other residents would drop by and sometimes join the conversation resulting in group discussions, or food would be prepared. With families and single women, the interviews were conducted in their homes with Sanam as my translator, as they felt most comfortable and free to talk there. The single men all spoke sufficient English for me to conduct the interview by myself, and as they often shared a container with many others they preferred to sit outside or at a local café to talk in private. If the setting allowed, I invited my informants to draw life-rivers (Tafere 2011; van Ommering 2017) in which they sketched the different stages of their lives, making it easier to communicate their journeys, memories and dreams. The drawings served as an enabling technique to “help the respondents to discuss issues […]
to focus their minds” (Eadie & MacAskill 1996, 38). After making the drawings, the interviewees would explain them to me step by step, to make sure I would not misinterpret their work (Literat 2013). I could not have been able to understand the camp the way I did without Sanam. She helped me navigate cultural differences and offered me feedback on the appropriateness of my questions. This clearly shows that a translator is not “merely the transmitter of what others say” (Bujra 2006, 175), but is also part of “a social relationship involving power, status and the imperfect mediation of cultures” (ibid, 172). This is something I often reflected upon with Sanam, as I wanted to make sure her participation did not negatively affect her position in the camp and her safety was not compromised. After my departure, she went on to work as a teacher in the school.

Visual methods
Because I have a background in visual art, it was inevitable that I would take photos and make small sketches during my fieldwork. It helped me focus my attention and see details in the environment, which appeared plain and static at first sight but turned out to be much more improvised and dynamic. Visual methods can help one observe the visual aspects of a culture (Pink 2007) which in the camp mainly meant capturing the living conditions, the appropriation of materials for homemaking, and different fashion styles that showed religious and economic differences. The images I took are never ‘just’ pictures, as they are framed by me: “Framing people, objects and events with a camera is always “about” something. It is a way of pointing out, of describing, of judging. It domesticates and organizes vision” (MacDougall 2006, 3). When taking pictures, I became aware of the fact that most people did not like their picture to be taken. Thus, I made sure never to photograph them in a recognizable way, unless they explicitly asked for this. This results in photos in which the residents themselves remain largely invisible, which I hope will be compensated by the way they are heard and made visible in the text. In order to give these images as well as the drawings made by children and interviewees equal importance as the text they are included separately in this thesis in the form of a visual essay.

Positionality
During my fieldwork, I had different roles at the same time. I was a volunteer and coordinator for the organization, co-volunteers and the camp authorities; a teacher to my students and their parents; and a student myself in relation to my informants. By communicating my student role in regard to this research, residents understood my limited power to bring change, but appreciated my curiosity to learn from them and the genuine attention I gave to their struggles. The teacher and student identities were accepted roles in the setting (O’Reilly 2012), that the residents could easily relate to and respect. Being a young woman made it easier for me to become close to women in the camp. With regard to men it was easy to come in contact, but I made sure not to become too close so as not to raise other expectations. Women often worried about my safety in the camp, as I usually made my way around the terrain and nearby village alone. Although their worries and stories affected me and I might have guarded myself mentally more than usual as a consequence, I never felt unsafe or out of control of any situation I found myself in. The European Commission points out that refugees, asylum seekers and migrants are a vulnerable group and in conducting research with them ethical considerations need to be safeguarded with extra care. By placing the refugees’ experiences in the center of this research I aim do justice to their autonomy, values and rights to make their own decisions instead of only highlighting their predicaments, suffering and victimhood. In line with this it was important for me to find a way to contribute albeit only in a small way to the improvement of their situation and not just ‘come and take’ information. By offering my skills as a teacher I tried to compensate my ‘taking’ of information with a bit of ‘giving.’ By choosing this subject for my research I confess a bias in the discussion of the reception of refugees in Europe. I have been working as an art teacher in reception centers in Amsterdam over the last years, and thus hold opinions about their treatment. Even though I aimed to find a neutral and analytic tone in this research, this can never fully be the case as my words are affected by my own experiences in life and understandings of the situation.

Limitations
By combining different methods, I attempted to grasp life in Malakasa camp as accurately as possible. However, of course there are limitations to the scope of this research. For example, due to safety considerations I could not personally spent time in the camp after dark even though this was when many key events happened. Consequently, concerning this aspect I base my story completely on what residents have told me. Also, I could not observe the one on one interaction between residents and the camp’s management or Greek authorities as this happened in private, and am thus unable to uncover strategies for dealing with that aspect of their situation. Social conventions and rules also applied to me and there were limitations to what I could ask and witness. I did not become close to everyone in the camp, which means many ‘behind the scenes’ situations in the private sphere, such as different gender interactions, remained out of sight. As my knowledge grew over time and I got closer to the desired first-hand experiences of daily life in displacement, I realized there was always going to be a limit to my capacity to fully understand and experience their lives. Every day upon going home I felt an uneasiness that came from the awareness of having the luxury be able to leave the camp. When positions herself in relation to the life-and-death struggle of her hosts, Susan Sontag (1968) accurately writes: “(...) we are volunteers, extras, figurants who retain the option of getting off the stage and sitting safely in the audience." Or, as one interviewee confronted me: “You can’t feel our day and you can’t feel our night, because you don’t live like this.” Nonetheless, in the following empirical chapters I do my best to give a hint of what it is like.
3. You can't see our day and you can't see our night
Figure 002: Laundry drying in the wind

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Program, Protracted Refugee Situations, Standing Committee, 30th Meeting June 10, 2004: https://Fatima.unhcr.org/40c982172.pdf

In an attempt by the European Union to regain control over the crossing of people on the Mediterranean Sea, in exchange for funding and visa-free travel Turkey agreed to take back migrants that depart from Turkey’s shores and arrive in Greece irregularly.

The International Organization for Migration is an intergovernmental organization that is now affiliated with the United Nations, and offers support and services to governments in the management of migration flows.

Refugee Support Aegan, Malakasa Camp, on: https://rsaegane.org/en/malakasa-camp/

Malakasa profile, weekly demographic report 17/05/2019


You can’t feel our day and you can’t feel our night
4. (Un)safe, (un)certain and (in)secure
Malakasa camp is marked by varying degrees of (un)safety, (un)certainty and (in)security that are simultaneously present in daily life. In this chapter these first sources of constant concern are discussed, by looking at the residents’ daily movements, worries and needs. First, I will introduce the ambiguous open and simultaneously closed character of the camp which both restricts and controls the residents’ mobility, as well as that it allows a certain degree of freedom and independence. Next, the ongoing uncertainty regarding control over their present impasse and future prospects are discussed and the way they gain the impression of normalcy. Lastly, I will explain how physiological daily needs such as food, shelter and hygiene are a source of worry in daily life, while at the same time these needs offer residents a daily routine and direction, and trigger discussions and tensions between them.

4.1 An open gate and barbed wire fence
Malakasa camp is located on the foot of a small mountain, right next to the highway connecting Athens with Lamia. The camp is invisible from the roadside, as bushes and trees block the view. At the ramp sleepy stray-dogs dwell around a small parking lot, and on some days fruits and vegetables are offered for sale to residents from the back of pick-up trucks. A part of the military terrain on which the camp is located is still in use by the army, and an armed soldier patrols the entrance to this section. The entrance to the camp lies right next to it, and this gate is open and unguarded. Malakasa camp is officially an Open Reception Facilitation, meaning there is no surveillance checking who and what goes in and out of the terrain. The only thing greeting visitors and residents when entering is the soft buzzing sound of the gate’s broken sensor.

22

Freedom and restriction
The first most evident contradiction in the lives of the residents of Malakasa camp is their immobile mobility. After leaving former homes and crossing mountains, oceans and borders, upon arrival in Greece their mobility turned to immobility as the migration process was stalled by closed borders and they were restricted to live in the designated area of the camp. Even though the camp is accessible for everyone through the open gate, the rest of the terrain is enclosed by a continuous barbed wire fence. The fence signals a sense of detention (Bjertrub et al. 2018), as Sanam (20) describes: “It [means it] is forbidden. Our [Greek] side of the fence is forbidden for you. You cannot come to our side.” Together with the open gate this creates an ambiguous open and closed space, as residents are on the one hand restricted to live in a confined area, while at the same time they are free to come and go outside of it as they please.

At the entrance, three ISO-boxes form a reception area run by the IOM. The boxes are covered in signs displaying important phone numbers, timetables with activities and posters reminding residents of human rights (such as protection against violence, see figure 064). During office hours residents hang around here to use the WIFI-network, or they wait in line to talk to the IOM.
The presence of the IOM and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) creates a certain degree of safety and control, as residents are offered care and attention, and if necessary the police or medical services are called to the site. After they leave the camp turns into a different place: “There is one world, during the day, and when we leave at five another world starts,” a staff member confides. NGO’s are warned to “measure the factors of risk” when desiring to organize something after office hours, since the “situation in the camp is not the same as you see now [during the day].” Many residents confirm this image. When I ask Fatima (22) if she is ever scared, she lowers her voice and tells me: “Yes… a lot. At night.” Some parts of the camp are actively avoided. Hossein (10) tells me that there is a part in the back he does not like to go to because of “bad people.” Fatima tells me that when her parents leave the house she immediately locks the door behind them. She speaks of men who cover their faces and knock on doors, a story that is shared with me by others too. They threaten residents with knifes and ask for money. Fatima confesses she felt safer in Moria on Lesvos, known for its notorious living conditions, frequent fights and fires, but where there is full-time police presence. The absence of permanent police and medical teams in Malakasa camp gives residents the feeling of abandonment and unsafety.

Next to the tents a one-story apartment building and about 200 Prefabricated Housing Units (referred to as ‘containers’) form different streets and neighborhoods that house the registered residents. In between these containers, ISO-boxes and buildings are used by different organizations that provide activities and care for the residents. The terrain is covered in white gravel, making for an uneven walk. Both grass and dirt are trying to win terrain. Big puddles block the road and garbage, plastic bags and food leftovers lie underneath the small bushes. At the same time the area surrounding the camp is somewhat idyllic, with its green fields with cattle, dense woods and rocky mountain trails.

Unsafety in Malakasa camp is experienced differently by residents, as “gender, generational, mobility-related and social-economic differences play a role in people’s experiences and choices” (Horst & Grabska 2015, 13). Women, for example, tend to feel less safe in the camp than men. Sanam prefers to stay in her container as much as she can:

“Because my mother is here, and the neighbors. [Lowers her voice] One month ago I heard some men had sex with a girl. [Loud voice again] Eight men! Eight men with one girl! They raped her. When I heard this, I was afraid. At six o’clock we locked the door and windows. Every night.”

Her younger brother Mohammed (13), however, is not afraid and spends most of his time using the WIFI at the entrance of the camp, even late at night. His sister is unhappy about this: “This camp is not safe. Every night, big boys argue together. They drink wine and they don’t know what they want to do. It is dangerous here for a boy that does not know anything about other people.” Many take for granted that young, single men cause fights and turmoil during the night,
but Hamid (25), one of these men, is frustrated with the way they are portrayed. He prefers referring to them (and consequently himself) as the young generation, since “they are the ones who can build a country,” and reminds me of how vulnerable they are here, too, with nothing to do and little perspective for their future.

(Un)controlled
The open and closed character of the camp can be both “limiting or liberating” (Grabska & Horst 2015, 13). For some residents it restricts their movements, whereas for others the uncontrolled space is used to set their own rules. While the open gate has allowed him to live within the camp, Yasser (35) is worried about the lack of control. We sit on the cold floor of the mosque tent when he lowers his voice:

“I have a few words to say, but secretly. We have gangs in the camp, who have their own people. When something happens, when one person in the gang has a problem all the members will come and fight. I saw it with my own eyes. Over twenty persons were beating up two or three people. There are two gangs that are controlling the camp. Also, there is prostitution. And they are selling drugs, I saw it.”

Like many other men Yasser does not want to get involved in fights: “One day they came and they were drunk, we were all sleeping. And they were all shouting ‘Get out of the mosque!’ He points at the cuts in the outer tent: And the other day, the ‘don,’ the wife of the gang’s head... you know? She came with a knife and cut the canvas of the tent because one of our children fought with their children. Look! We taped it with scotch tape. She was saying ‘How can you beat my child?’ The people were crying, children were crying. But a man cannot touch a woman, so I did not do anything.” Rahman (23), one of the few Iraqi residents in the camp, makes sure to greet everyone politely but not to engage in too much conversation: “Everyone who does not want to fight, will not fight. I just say ‘hi’ to people and ignore the rest.”

Even during immobile protracted displacement, movement remains an important aspect of daily life as residents have to navigate the space within and around the camp. The open and closed character of Malakasa camp offers at once protection and exposure, as well as limitation and freedom. Residents use and enjoy the liberty and free access that comes with the openness of the camp, whereas at the same time they disapprove and object to the feeling of abandonment and exposure to threats caused by it. The fence is ignored, while at the same time it makes them feel imprisoned and unwelcome. When asked what they would do or change about the camp if they were in charge, they unanimously answered they would put guards up front and make more rules. The residents would rather have more control, limitations and protection than the exposure to violence that comes with the little extra freedom of movement.

While the lack of control and open gate gives room to uncontrolled crime and threats, it also creates a degree of freedom and independence. The residents use this freedom to go outside of the camp for shopping, visits and picnicking as often as they want. In the back area of the camp a big hole has been cut into the fence, giving access to the field and woods behind it. Sanam tells me: “[...] The refugees don’t care. We have broken the fence. We have picnic’s outside, we have our fun times there, because it is more beautiful.”

Thus, the open boundaries of the camp have their advantages as they allow for people and goods to flow in and out. At the same time the fence constantly reminds residents that their freedom is restricted and not finite. The camp as a space of detention and restriction of migrants’ movements, is as such part of Greece’s “border apparatus” (Katz 2017), governing the inclusion and exclusion of groups and identities (Newman 2003). Such borders can “function as barriers to movement and interaction, or as an interface where meeting places and points of contact are created” (ibid, 22).
4.2 Predictable unpredictability

One of my students, Nazia (9) comes up to me during class to show me her drawing. We have been making landscapes of places they have been, or want to go. Her paper is nearly full and she looks worried. “I don't know where to draw my future…” she sighs.

The lives of the residents are unfolding in a place not meant for permanent living, in the temporal space of a refugee camp. The ongoing lack of control over the present impasse and their pending future causes a great deal of uncertainty, resulting in mental and physical health issues. At the same time, life in the camp has become predictable, and a routine starts in which this uncertainty is embedded.

Protracted uncertainty

In migration studies the concept of liminality has often been used to refer to the phase of transition between old lives and new beginnings. Building on van Gennep’s *rite de passage* concerning the different phases of transitional rituals, Turner (1967) defined it to be a state of being *betwixt and between*, in which one’s identity is undetermined for a period of time. This phase of liminality is preceded by a separation: “detach- ment from his or her community and rejection of previous symbols and codes,” after which the person is no longer who he or she used to be, but an “indeterminate kind of person, or even non-person” (Eriksen 2010, 172). In liminality, this non-person dwells somewhere in between, in a place where life is “indefinitely suspended” (Tsoni 2015, 37).

When describing the state of being of Malakasa camp’s residents, liminality does not seem accurate enough. To some extent it is true that they could be regarded as non-persons in that their opinions and voices are (usually) not heard and that their legal identities are unclear (after Hannah Arendt in Parekh 2014). But considering my observations in the field a few side notes should be made. First, liminality is a stage ‘between two stable positions’ (Eriksen 2010, 172), however for the residents in Malakasa both their past and future are not stable entities. As a matter of fact, the past was so unstable that it was necessary to leave, and the future is so uncertain that they are nearly incapable of imagining it. Previous identities are not left behind, as connections remain present through embodied history (I will elaborate on this in chapter 5), (worries about) loved ones and hopes of returning someday. Even though they take unclear legal positions in the host society, the separation of former identities is not complete. Furthermore, if this impasse was not an integrated part of life, it would have no bearing on the future. But, as I will further elaborate, it probably will have lasting consequences on the physical and mental wellbeing of the residents. The last phase of a rite de passage, ‘reintegration’ can also already be observed, as they have already started to acclimatize and relate to the new society around them (more on this in chapter 6). Thus, contrary to what the traditional rite-de-passage and liminality literature would suggest, their present status is not a shapeless void.

Personally, I find the concept of *protracted uncertainty* formulated by Grabska and Horst (2015) more fitting. Like liminality, it refers to the ongoing feeling of profound uncertainty by which their time in displacement is marked, but it still allows for *life* to take form within it. Contrary to uncertainties experienced during flight that “occur at rapid speed and in highly dramatic ways,” Grabska and Horst (2015, 2) state that in exile “uncertainty often takes on a much more protracted and slow form.”

“She cries every night. She thinks very much. I don’t know why but when she thinks about something, she is like this: she looks in one place, staring. Her neck and head shake. I don’t know why. My sister always hugs her and says ‘Mom, don’t shake your head.’ Mostly I tell her ‘don’t worry mom, everything will get better, it is just for now, maybe for one year. After that maybe it will get better.’ She says ‘OK, yes, no problem.’ But after some time, she gets worried again.”

(Sanam about her mother Mariam, 48)

A lack of control over the future has a profound impact on the wellbeing of residents, as Miral (23) tells me: “It makes us crazy. I have lost my hair because of this thinking. There is no other option than to think, think, think.” Uncertainty is a combination of imperfect knowledge and the unpredictability of the future (Williams and Baláž 2011). A recent study by Bjertnæs et al. (2018) conducted in five different reception centers across Greece shows that between 73% and 100% of the respondents (depending on the site) were diagnosed with anxiety disorders caused by this uncertainty. The importance of information became apparent to me in the field by the constant questions about their options and questions about how to the way around Greek society. Hadyeh is pregnant and unsure about how she will have her baby here: “I am happy and also I am sad. Because I don’t know how to go to hospital, or where I can buy clothes for him, and when he is born we will probably leave here, where will we live with a little child?” Frequently, official papers and communications were shoved under my nose to be deciphered. Fatima (22) shows me an email she sent to the Canadian embassy. It is touching in its simplicity:

“My name is Fatima. I am afghan. We are 9 people. We want to come to Canada. Can you help us?”

She shows me the automatically generated reply, stating that if they want to get in contact they have to mention their visa application number. She does not have one, of
permanent (Brun 2015). Uncertainties in displacement become “so embedded in the social fabric that they become indistinguishable from it, forcing people to make lives in fragmented and volatile worlds” (Grabska & Horst 2015, 2). This movement of the unstable becoming more embedded does not mean that their lives are not marked by the continuous uncertainty. In her research, Kublitz (2015) shows how Palestinians living in Danish refugee camps regard their current lives as “bleak and claustrophobic” and as a “catastrophe [that] is continuing” (2015, 230). For them, coming to Denmark was not the beginning of a new life but made things go from “bad to worse” (ibid). In Malakasa camp too, “small [catastrophic] occurrences […] slowly wear down” the residents (ibid, 245), further eroding their already precarious daily lives. Kublitz explains how “(…) single small incidents in itself come across as ‘nothing” (ibid, 224), but at the same time they are what wear people out. In other words, their ongoing worries in combination with the passivity and perceived ‘nothingness’ of everyday life in the camp is what makes life in displacement precarious.

In sum, the ongoing lack of information and control over an unknown future, disrupted lives in the present, and a loss of social networks result in mental health problems and disappointment affecting a sizable part of the population. The constant worries leave its mark on daily life, as worrying and wondering what will happen next itself becomes part of their daily being and as such, embedded in their routines and rhythm. Additionally, protracted uncertainties lead to an erosion of moral life, revealing how the reality of displacement is less of a static standstill, and more of an ‘ongoing catastrophe.’

4.3 Daily needs: a rhythm of worries

In displacement, efforts concerning daily human needs form an ongoing challenge and a source of insecurity for residents. At the same time these worries give a direction and rhythm to their lives. Concerning these basic human needs, Agamben (1998) has explains a camp as a space that is merely meant to re-produce bare life: only biological existence is supported by the authorities as a way of controlling the population, and only the minimum of food, hygiene and shelter is provided. This suggests life in camps is upheld, but that no space is created for human life, with all “its potential, possibilities, and forms” (Katz 2017, 13). However, I argue that even when daily life evolves completely around daily needs, automatically the meaning-giving, reflections and opinions concerning these needs are also ventilated and thus give rise to political identity, discussion, cooperation and tension amongst residents and between the residents and the camp’s management. This shows that bare life without further (political) identity does not exist in the camp, and more subjective realities do take form.

The basics

The residents of Malakasa camp have access to shelter (in a container or in one of the apartment buildings), a cash card with a monthly allowance and other sorts of legal and health assistance. With the allowance residents can buy food and other necessities in Athens to prepare at home. Sanam explains to me that it is good, but in reality, hardly enough to live by. Many families have debts resulting from their flight that keep mounting: “We borrowed money from my mother’s cousin… and we have to pay it back to him. We worry about this. From now on we have to save our money to pay back.”
For registered residents days partly revolve around buying and preparing food, standing in line to obtain donated clothes or other products and cleaning their temporary homes. These daily needs automatically lead to a daily rhythm and routine. Much time is also spent in line for medical treatment, as Atifa (36) tells me: “My husband has a problem with his heart. (...) If you want to go to the hospital, you have to book a time with the doctor here in the camp. Then, you can go to another hospital, where they will tell you to go to the Red Cross doctors... They kick us around like a football, borro, borro, borro [go, go, go].

Differences within the camp

The on-site staff often refer to Malakasa as a model camp, and this may be an accurate comment when comparing the conditions to other camps in the country, as for the majority of residents in the camp the physiological daily needs are met. However, a strong divide is visible between those who are officially registered residents and those for whom there is no space available and remain unregistered. A growing group of people has set up a make-shift camp within the official camp, where they await to be registered and start their asylum application process.

At the entrance of the big tents shoes and flip flops lay around in pairs. Inside, rugs and blankets cover the concrete floor, creating a patchwork of different colors and textures. As I stumble through between their tents, I notice the majority of them are young men, however there are a few families too, some with small children. Some people appear fresh and clean, while others have wrapped their bodies in grey blankets or sleeping bags to keep warm.

Three men roll out an improvised electricity cable that consists of several cables tied together. I am told they plug into the network every afternoon, after the IOM has left the site, so they can prepare a hot meal. Inside the tents I see sleeping bags, blankets, sheets and towels piled up. Bottles of soft drinks and bags of flat bread are tugged into the sides.
The people residing in these tents have chosen different routes to come to Europe, mostly crossing from the Turkish city of Enez to Alexandroupolis in Greece. Abas (25) tells me: “In Athens other Afghan refugees told us to go here. There was no other place to go.” Upon arrival in Malakasa they were disappointed: in order to take the pressure off the overcrowded hotspots priority is given to those who traveled from Turkey to the Aegean islands. Even though the unregistered population is allowed to stay on the campgrounds, little assistance is provided and humanitarian organizations are discouraged from reaching out to them in order not to create pull factors and attract more people. Abas continues: “If you go to the IOM they tell you to wait, wait, wait. We have been waiting for three months, maybe we will wait for one year.” We sit on the cold floor of the Mosque in front of their donated outdoor tracking tent. His wife who has just finished sweeping dust aside adds: “My daughters [1 and 3 years old] are sick, both are coughing. With this cold weather it is just getting worse.”

For many unregistered residents obtaining and preparing food is a daily challenge.

“Sometimes we go for outings, but every day we go to the municipality in Athens to take food. The doors are closed when we get there. We go early. We wait for one hour, they open the gate and a lot of people try to get in and push us. We go every day and get back at 3 pm. We spend all day just to get food. If you go with one person, they will give you food for one person. If you go with two, they give you for two. If we eat lunch, we cannot eat dinner. It’s like this.”

(Abas)

Those who have more personal resources are better off. Yasser (35) is here alone and has some savings: “I have money, I buy food. But these people cannot afford [it].” Next to the big tents a container with portable (cold) showers is installed. Another option is to knock on doors of the registered population that have hot showers in their containers. Yasser explains: “Some say ‘yes,’ some say ‘no.’ Some people don’t know how to ask it. It is difficult, they feel shy.” The lack of proper facilities leads to the spread of lice and scabies that keep people up scratching their skin at night. Their biggest hope is to get registered and move into a container. Yasser explains: “A container is somehow better than a tent. If it gets cold you can be warm, if it gets hot you can be cool. You can have a shower. You can have your own cooking area.” For now, this is their biggest wish: “To have space, privacy. That is the first priority.”

The situation of the unregistered residents leads to tensions between them and the registered population. They sometimes organize protests to put pressure on the IOM to speed up their registrations. One morning upon arrival I noticed the entrance of the camp was blocked by the unregistered families, silently forming a human wall to prevent people, including the IOM, from leaving or entering the camp. However, protests are not always peaceful, and consequently the staff has to take safety measures and leave the site, and their absence also affects the registered residents. Additionally, rumors about bad behavior of unregistered residents spread easily. Sayed (10) tells me some people in the mosque broke into the warehouse and took all the jackets that were waiting to be distributed: “Mosque people Alibaba, not good” (the term ‘Alibaba’ is used to label someone as a thief). Efforts of the IOM to create more compassion for the unregistered amongst the registered residents were fruitful and led to more doors opening up when warm showers were requested and containers being shared. However, while the IOM works hard to move people into containers, new arrivals keep coming in overnight and numbers are expected to rise over the summer.
“They just put you here like an animal.” (Shabir, 17)

Although better off, even the registered population describes its situation as animal-like, a reference also made by Agamben (1998). Building on Aristotle’s thoughts, he distinguished between zoë and bios. Zoë refers to mere biological life: the life that humans share with all living creatures, stripped of political and social identities. Hannah Arendt relates this side of life to all “tasks related to sustaining life processes – reproductive labor such as washing, cooking, cleaning, tending to the young [...]” (as mentioned by Owens 2009, 750). Only when liberated from these tasks, could political life, bios, be performed. In the camp, as the comments and complaints of residents show, the tasks concerning zoë are inevitably intertwined with bios. They become a reflection of one’s position in the camp and are put forward in the political dialogue and protest to illustrate the disregard of human rights. Thus, even the most basic of human needs carry within them much more than just that.

Quite a big chunk of daily life goes into sheer survival, which gives direction to daily routines and activities for all residents. For the unregistered residents this might take up their entire day and for the registered who live under better conditions, less time is dedicated to these chores. For both groups, all efforts to stay alive are accompanied by statements on the way these needs are met.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I aimed to outline the constant concerns that affect daily life in displacement. These concerns reveal the first contradictions that I want to put forward, showing how people live within the seemingly incompatible. First, the open character of the camp creates unsafety as the lack of control allows for a different world to take over at night, where drugs, gangs and threats limit residents in their movements. Even though the residents’ migration journeys have been stalled and the impossibility of moving forward turned their mobility into immobility, the permeable borders of the camp still give room to a degree of movement and freedom. I discussed the ongoing uncertainty as a defining and predictable factor in their daily lives, as the uncertain and unknown will surely still be there tomorrow, and in their repetition become part of their everyday being. Lastly, I focused on the way daily needs gives form to daily life as the chores and worries about it takes up much of their time. At the same time becomes much more than that, as it is expressed is saturated with consideration, mediation, evaluation and illusion. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at the way the present is formed based on past experiences and knowledge, and how within that present the activity of waiting is informed by hope for the future.
4. (Un)safe, (un)certaın and (in)secure
5. The known and unknown

Figure 027: A girl on rollerblades dances with an air-filled bag
Life “in between the way,” as Sanam referred to it, meant being between the home she and her family once had and finding a new permanent place to start life anew. It suggests that at this very moment they are no longer traveling away from something, but neither are they moving towards something else. It is a period of life which is locked between a past and a future that are out of reach, but as I hope to show in this chapter, that nonetheless penetrates the present. The past, not just in terms of memories but also embodied in culture and habitual ways of being, is not left behind but remains evident in the way residents of Malakasa perceive and move through their daily life in the camp. At the same time, through engagement with their new surroundings, this new world also becomes familiar and starts mixing with the old. In the last part of this chapter I will discuss how hopes for the future help residents give form to this period of their lives, marked by indefinite waiting. The contradictions I will discuss in this chapter lie in the way the past remains present, the known mixes with the unknown, and the passivity of waiting is made active. Together I aim to show how in a standstill “[...] the clock continues to tick and movement continues to take place” (Brun 2015, 22).

5.1 The past remains present
In the current impasse stories and memories of the past were shared with me frequently. These were stories that recounted suffering, risk-taking and near-death experiences, as well as those that communicated good things about their former lives in terms of rich material and social worlds. To better understand how the different times relate to each other I invited my interviewees to draw lifelines (Tafere 2011; van Ommering 2017), or ‘life-rivers’: maps depicting places they had lived including important moments or events of the past, followed by where they are now and where they want to be in the future. As if it were a river, they made drawings that led from one place to another, telling me their story synchronously and connecting the different elements. This way the moments are situated in relation to each other which helps to understand the place Malakasa camp has within their larger life stories. Recalling memories offers “storytellers a way to re-imagine lives” (Riessman 2005, 6), which does not result in “faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future.” Most people had never taken this time to look at their lives step by step, and found it a positive, yet emotional, experience.

Rivers of hardship
Most stories and drawings made by adults started from the moment and place of birth. A home surrounded by family and friends, school and work. Parallel to making the drawings, some people showed me pictures of decorated living rooms and modern kitchens, cars and holidays with a mix of pride and grief for what they had and what they lost. Soon, the drawings started to be marked by hardship: Taliban or ISIL forces attacked and took over neighborhoods, roads or the workspace. Family members disappeared and a constant fear that something bad could happen haunted their lives. Mohammed Reza (55) sums it up: “We just didn’t have safety.”

Figure 028 — 032: Drawings made by students during class, depicting happy memories of home, friends and school
The drawings took on different styles, and one, by Abdulfazl, is probably the most detailed. His life is extremely fragmented, as he constantly moved back and forth between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Dubai for work and sometimes for safety. In the bottom right corner, he drew his family house that had “a lot of green grass, flowers, and trees.” The black coloring in his drawing indicates hardship: “twenty-five rockets” attacked the Mosque of his town, followed by the community fleeing by car or foot to Pakistan. A few years later he worked in Dubai, and every time he came home his mother would be at the airport waiting for him, with flowers in her hand. Later, he moved to Iran, where constant discrimination and corruption made it hard to build a life, after which he decided to head for Turkey, and later Greece.

Another resident, Yasser (35) was working for the Afghan government in Kabul when he received a call ordering him to place a bomb in the ministry where he worked. He refused and they (“Daesh”) threaten to kill him. “I went to the police station and told them what had happened to me. They told me not to worry and took the phone number. (…) But if the police and army cannot save a member of parliament who has bodyguards and bulletproof cars, how will they save me? It is ridiculous.” Fatima (22) was proud to be one of a handful of female employees in the police force in Kabul. When she and another co-worker found out the Taliban had infiltrated their team, her co-worker was murdered. Fatima knew she had to be quick, and left that same day with her parents and eight siblings. Rahman (25) shares with me his experiences in Mosul under ISIL’s control:

“We did not have a life. I felt like I was dreaming. The last six months so many people wanted to die. Here, you can eat three times a day, maybe four, right? There just one time. Because you don’t have more food. You don’t know when it will finish. When will the police come? Yes, they came closer, but ISIL was so strong and they were fighting so much.”

Sana (30) was already a refugee in Iran where Afghans are openly discriminated against:

“We worked from early morning to evening. Because of the inflation everything got very expensive. I worked for five months and they did not give me my salary. (…) When he [her son] would go out to buy food or anything I would be worried, maybe [they] will come home injured. I was always worried that Iranians will beat him or his brothers.”

Esan (13) used red chalk to depict bad times in his life, and green to show the happy moments. After the kidnapping of his father (bottom right) the family decided to leave Afghanistan for good. For his father, it was not his first encounter with violence: “One of my sisters died. She was shot, they shoot into the sky and the bullet hit her.” Esan’s mother too went through hardship: “My life is very full of sadness. My father was 26 when he died in the war. They took him, the Mujahidin. He was a teacher.” Her husband adds: “I am about 40 years old now. When I was 6 or 7, I saw the war, the fights, until now. Two or three times I got injured during fights. I have the splinters of bullets in my side.” Esan’s mother agrees: “Me and my husband, we have lived all our lives in war. I don’t want this for my children. I want to go somewhere where they are safe and can go to school. I am very tired of war.” After a few more difficult times and being “near to death” in the boat to Greece, Esan colored the present green, just like other happy moments in his life-line and added the words: “Now it’s wonderful in Greece,” and “to be continued…”

Other stories, such as Soraya’s, involve challenges within the family household. Her story starts with a green colored house (upper left) from where she is sent off to get married at the age of 13. From the first day of their matrimony her husband abuses her (red path and thunder cloud). She has two children with him and after a particular grave incident where he hit her with a stick (right bottom corner), she gets a divorce. She raises her children by herself and after an incident within the family (which she cannot specify for me, because “it is really so bad”) she fled with her now teenage children to Europe. The journey leads up the page through
the mountains of Iran to Turkey, and over the ocean with high waves (blue square) to Malakasa camp (yellow). She predicts the future to be difficult (red path), but eventually she will be in a new house (purple) with her two children.

Journeys
The impact of flight leaves permanent scars on its inhabitants, especially on the new generation. A young girl tells me: “No good, Malakasa. I hate it here because I am in the middle of the mountains, again.” Her mother explains: “My children are traumatized by mountains, they hate them. (...) We were surrounded by mountains for over twenty hours. We walked in the snow up to our legs. Some smugglers brought us horses but they fell down, and it scared the children. This is why she hates the mountains. You know, I saw the mountains in my dreams before we left, and now I see them in real life.”

On their sixth attempt, they finally made it to the Greek island of Samos. When they climbed onto the shore they ran into the woods:

“We walked three hours in the night. There were so many snakes, we were afraid. We arrived in the camp at 3 in the morning, and all of us were wet, but the police of Samos did not give us water, food or bread, nothing. We were shaking all night.”

Thunderclouds depict difficult times in Sanam’s drawing too. Her life starts with a full house of people, but over time, more and more family members disappear or are separated from her. Her future resembles the start of her life, in shape and color, and it involves a bigger social world than the places she has been since she left Iran. She wants to be a dentist (left lower corner).

Journeys
The drawing made by Karim (11) shows the Iranian mountains and apples they gathered to eat. He tells me: “We were lost for twelve hours. We ate apples that we found in the trees. I got separated from my family at the Turkish border, they put me in a different car. I could not see, because they put me under a carpet. My family had to pay money to get me back.”

Abas (25, father of two): “We didn’t leave for fun. We were forced to leave. When we came to Iran and we tried to cross the border to Turkey, the Iranian border police opened fire and 78 people got killed around us. We had to cross barbed wire, my hands were injured, I was carrying my babies. Nazani is one year old now, so she was five months at that time.” His wife Miral adds: “You can see a lot of human bones on the route of people that died there.”

Once in Turkey, things did not get much better for most people. They were offered little protection or help from the authorities and worked arduous jobs for little pay in order to save money for (what was supposed to be) the last stretch of their journeys. When caught by the coastguard at sea on an attempt to reach European territory, Sanam and her family were brought back to a camp on Turkish soil:

“They told us: ‘take of your clothes and sit, stand, sit, stand.’ My sisters cried, I cried. My mother too. Four female police officers looked at us. My sister said ‘I won’t take off my clothes, I won’t!’ They shouted at her. I don’t know what they were looking for, maybe a knife, maybe a gun, maybe a bomb? [Laughs]. We had our period, they said that was no problem, ‘just take it off.’ We were brought back to that camp three times, and every time we had to do it.”

On their sixth attempt, they finally made it to the Greek island of Samos. When they climbed onto the shore they ran into the woods:

“We walked three hours in the night. There were so many snakes, we were afraid. We arrived in the camp at 3 in the morning, and all of us were wet, but the police of Samos did not give us water, food or bread, nothing. We were shaking all night.”
The drawings all show continuous lifelines in which Malakasa camp is connected to what came before and what will hopefully come after. It shows that their current situation is part of life, and not a complete pause or void. However, the opinions about this current temporal address vary greatly:

“It is my favorite place.”
“I am comfortable here.”
“It is not a place for living.”
“It is hell.”

A place can, like a symbol, be multivocal in that it “means different things to different people or in different situations (Eriksen 2010, 383, referring to Rodman 1992). The past influences how life in Malakasa camp is experienced. Rahman (25) has been in Malakasa camp for over a year and has formed friendships in the camp:

“This is like my favorite place compared to Mosul. I saw so many bad things. This mountain... [points in the direction of the mountain next to the camp] if he would see what I saw, he would die. I see so many people die in front of my eyes. People without hands, without stomach... But I push it out of my head. We were afraid. But now it is OK. I do not think about it. I forget the bad things.”

Atifa (36 and mother of six) does not like to dwell on the past:

“We saw a lot of things. (...) I don’t want to think about my past, because the past passed, I get confused. I think just about the future. I am here, and I just hope for my future.”

When comparing the life-rivers I see a cycle reappear: most of them start from a safe place, a home with family, friends, school, leisure and work. Then, after disruptive events and often continued hardship, the journey and different stages in the migration process are marked, ending in Malakasa camp. Directly after the present a future which resembles the beginning of the drawings in color, form and content reappears: the dream of new safe place with family, friends, school, etc. In Abulfazl’s drawing (figure 033), the gardens of his youth are similar in shape and color of the trees and grass he envisions for his future. Colors are used to label the different moments in terms of ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ Overall, it seemed as though for most of them Malakasa camp occupies a center point in this dichotomy: yellow between red (bad) and green (good), blue between black (bad) and red (good). Malakasa camp is depicted as not the worst, but also not the best place to be, compared to former experiences and future dreams. By contrasting different times against one and other the past remains relevant in the present.

5.2 A feel for the (new) game

“In each one of us, in differing degrees, is contained the person we were yesterday.” (Bourdieu 1990, 56)

Another way in which the past remains relevant in daily life is through embodied ways of being, the habitus, as conceptualized by Bourdieu (1990). With its origins in Greek philosophy, habitus is “a form of internalized knowledge situated in the body that signals the implicit and nonverbal rules of a particular configuration” (Eriksen 2017, 9). It is the “pattern of judgement underlaying people’s evaluations of situations, and their subsequent actions” (Salman & Assies 2017, 74). The habitus is a product of and response to what is already known: “history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history” (Bourdieu 1990, 54). In other words, it is the unconscious reflections and actions based on past experiences and accumulated knowledge that underlay human behavior and give form to everyday being.

Dinner time

“If we don’t have this, we cannot eat,” Achmed (33) tells me as he clears out the space in between the mattresses on the floor and spreads out a plastic cover. He pulls it into place and throws pieces of bread onto it, followed by a bowl with cabbage and three forks sticking out. Minutes later two bowls of home-made yoghurt, five plates with rice, and three plates with pasta are served. Some of the plates get one spoon, while others don’t. We are only four people, so I am unsure which plate I should consider mine. In order not to embarrass myself, I closely observe how the others eat and try to only use my right hand, as I think the left is considered unhygienic and sacrileges. Can I use my own spoon to take yoghurt from the bowl? When I try to scoop the food together with my hands and stick to the bread, it repeatedly falls back to my plate. The food is a little bit spicy too and my nose starts running. They notice and laugh. By now, not used to sitting on the floor in this posture, my legs have started to cramp, but I make sure not to show it.

As I struggled to decipher the way I should eat the dinners that were offered to me, I realized I lacked ‘a feel’ for their game. As habitus is born out of repetition, and through it cultural norms and practices are reproduced, the unfamiliar way of eating and sharing made me uncomfortable. Bourdieu used the metaphor of the game to visualize the habitus: ‘the fields are the playing board and the embodied dispositions provide the ‘feel for the game,’ which cannot be explained wholly by the rules of the game’ (as described in Bridge 2011, 77). This ‘feel for the game’ renders the world more familiar, and thus creates a feeling of safety, of knowing how to act and move around. In the context of life in a refugee camp, this habitus is important to consider because when arriving somewhere new people never start from scratch. Rather, they continue to “repeat their act,” showing “a pattern in actions” (after Giddens in Salman & Assies 2017, 72 emphasis in text). As Connerton (1989) points out:

“It is not just that it is very difficult to begin with a wholly
new start, that too many old loyalties and habits inhibit the substitution of a novel enterprise for an old and established one. More fundamentally, it is that in all modes of experience we always base our particular experiences on a prior context in order to ensure that they are intelligible at all.”

The habitus responds to the logic of the particular field in which it takes place, where it generates “all the ‘reasonable’, ‘common-sense’, behaviors (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities” (Bourdieu 1990, 55). Because of similar circumstances people develop similar habitus. This synchronicity of habitus between people makes coordination and collaboration amongst them possible. In the camp, this similar habitus can be witnessed in the intuitive sense for ‘correctness,’ and ‘right and wrong’ behavior of residents, which is often more powerful than explicit norms and rules (on which I will further elaborate in chapter 6). A similar habitus creates predictability and order, connection and community, making it a “connecting point between individual actors and the larger system” (Eriksen 2017, 9).

Change
Former ways of being and knowing offer direction under new circumstances and are at the same time constantly re-shaped by new experiences: “As new formal worlds (new objects and relations) are created from old, so culture becomes a constantly reworked product, a workaday bricolage, not only without beginning but also without end” (Rapport & Overing 2002, 391). This reworking of the habitus is, however, a slow process as incorporating and internalizing the new situation does not happen overnight, revealing the complexity and multiple layers of one’s habitus (Salman & Assies 2017). Even though previous experiences have become hardened and people are attached to their way of doing things (ibid), it is not fixed. The past is gripping and imperative, but over time it can adjust to new circumstances.

In the camp, much of the daily activities, the sleeping, eating and cleaning, is done on the autopilot. For instance, a simple walk through the camp usually goes without much thinking. People make their way over the uneven gravel numerous times a day. Some walk fast, some slow; some avoid eye contact while others stop walking to greet someone they know. Either way it is usually done with an “absence of conscious attention” (Wunderlich 2008, 127). Through these everyday embodied activities and experiences residents develop “a sense of (and for) place” (Wunderlich 2008, 125), and with their walk they are part of shaping that same place. The more time spent in displacement, the more the residents develop a ‘feel for it.’ They have become accustomed to the new surroundings as they now know their way around the camp effortlessly, even in the dark. They have developed an intuition for the dangers and opportunities around them, have learned to interact with authorities and agencies, and in smaller ways: even half a sleep a phone tucked into the mattress is found with eyes closed. In Sigona’s words: “The camp become[s] a part of their identities and bodies” (Sigona 2017, 8).

A need for normalcy
As days go by a new daily routine evolves. The vital improvisation during flight made place for repetition and routine: children walking to school in the morning; families carrying bags with groceries back to their containers; the smell of Afghan dishes filling the air around dinner time; playing cricket on the field behind the camp.

“Here, life is always repeating itself.” (Atifa, mother of six)

Except for pointing out the repetition itself, daily life as something that is mundane, ordinary and predictable, proved hard to put into words for residents and was in itself not perceived as something desirable. Not to mention, when I asked residents if life here became normal after a while, it was often met with irritation. Sana (30) pointed to the space around her and smirked: “Yes, it is very nice, I like it here… I sleep here and don’t care about anything else!” However, a somewhat predictable, ordinary daily life is important as it can “promote a sense of wellness and independence” when “familiar routines that minimize disruptions and chaos reclaim the ordinariness of daily life and bolster a sense of
autonomy” (Nguyen-Gillham et al. 2008, 296). In their study of Palestinian youth, Nguyen-Gillham et al., show how creating normalcy can be a way of dealing with the situation, or rather “coping through normalization” by creating “routines and rituals that establish structure and stability” (ibid, 295). Thus, ordinariness can be seen as a sign of resilience, as it “is rooted in the capacity to make life as normal as possible” (ibid, 296). To create this sense of normalcy, Soraya (27) tells me, “is difficult, but it is possible.” Fatima shares this attitude of making the best of it: “Maybe one day life will be better. But now it is also good.” She takes life in Malakasa “day by day.”

In the new environment, previously obtained knowledge, professions, interests and cultural values remain present in the way residents navigate their current lives, while at the same time they have to appropriate new ways of being. The habitus renders the world more predictable, as people with similar backgrounds find a sense of certainty and familiarity between them. At the same time, the new situation has to become part of the old embodied knowledge as residents slowly start to adjust to their new surroundings. Normalcy that comes into being through the familiarity with their environment offers a way of coping with it, even though the thought of life in Malakasa as being normal is rejected.

5.3 Active waiting and hope(lessness)

“I have been in Greece over two months now, and still I am not registered. They have put us on the waiting list and told us to wait until our number comes. Whenever we go there, they tell us to wait.” (Sana, 30, unregistered)

For migrants and refugees, the feeling of being stuck is enforced by the time (months, sometimes years) spent waiting, together composing a landscape of time (Anderson 2014). Waiting in detention. Waiting to find a ride and for routes to open up. Waiting for a chance to try to cross a border. Waiting for interviews and papers to arrive. For most residents in Malakasa their first asylum application interview is scheduled between six months and three years from now, forcing them to await a future “that is too slow coming” (Pascal as quoted by Bourdieu 2000, 209). However, this waiting, with its connotation of passivity, can be seen as an activity in itself that is loaded with meaning and in which the unknown future plays an important role.

Passing time

“Refugees were like a vehicle whose brake and accelerator were engaged at the same time: much roaring and agitation but no forward movement.” (Demo 2009, 12)

By residents, the wait is often experienced as an inactive passage of time, in which they have ‘nothing’ to do. However, in reality residents give form to it in different ways, ranging from making them inert to making them active, and everything in between. Waiting is “a practice that is not in time but makes time” (Bourdieu 2000, 206, emphasis in text), and agency-in-waiting, as Brun (2015, 33) describes, “indicates the process by which people structure the experience of protracted uncertainty, that is, how they cope with this particular experience of uncertainty.” Active waiting can be done individually by actors, but can also be encouraged by accommodating activities for residents, such as language and sports classes. Either way, the structuring of biding time is done differently by everyone. Shabir (17) for instance, likes taking trips to Athens where he hangs out with his friends and walks around the city to pass the time. Teenagers Mohammed and Eltaf (both 13) prefer spending as much uninterrupted time on their phones as they possibly can. Huddled together near the WIFI-hotspot they play popular online fighting games for hours in a row. As the younger kids indulge in their endless games of toshlabazi (marble-play), flower picking, hide and seek, rollerblading and bike rides through the camp, teenage girls pour hours into the online world of Instagram, sometimes at night when the internet cards they buy for their phones are cheaper.
Sports facilities have been set up in one of the bigger tents, where cumbersome weight lifting machines are used by young men. Ajmal (17) walks around the camp with his mates to pass the time, while playing loud music through a speaker: “We go to the jungle in the back, we make a big fire and dance, every night.” He shows me videos of boys drinking alcohol, playing loud music and jumping through fires. His mother has her own thoughts on this: “They act like they are unemployed. It is better to do something because right now we have nothing to do, we sit all the time in the koneks [container], but we have to try to do something. For example, to study, to keep busy. I get tired of working [household chores] and they get tired of doing nothing.” Most registered children are in the process of being enrolled into Greek schools, where they attend classes a few hours each day. For others, mostly adults, the agency-in-waiting is directed to deal with the causes of the wait itself. Every day, they try getting a hold of their case workers or line up in front of migration offices, both in the camp and in Piraeus. Their proactive attempts are also seen in the constant requests I received for language classes for adults, showing an eagerness to be able to learn and communicate with the world around them. The few activities offered in the camp are not equally known or available to all residents, as not everyone makes use of them or has been able to secure a spot:

“I want to tell you the truth. Every day we dance together here in our home. [Laughs] Most of the time we sleep, but when we wake up we dance. To relax, it is like a sport. What is your idea, what should we do here? (...) There is no program for us, so we can’t do anything.” (Tawed, 27, father of two young boys)

Waiting entails a certain degree of anticipation for what is to come, and in doing so forms “a link between the present and future” (Gasparini 1995, 30). This expectation and orientation towards what is to come makes it not only a crossroad of the past and future, “but also of certainty and uncertainty” (ibid, 31). For Miriam (48) waiting becomes a routine, in which she memorializes the past and imagines the future:

“I get up at six o’clock to say prayers. I make bread. I wake up the kids. I make breakfast for them. Bread, tea, honey, maybe cheese and eggs. Every day is a repetition. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Once I went to English class and I couldn’t learn, it was too difficult. So now I just stay here. I clean the house. And meanwhile, I am just thinking, thinking, thinking. Why did we come here? What happened? What should we do?”

Active waiting includes “a constant monitoring of the likelihood that the events one is waiting for will occur and how much time one is prepared to wait” (Marcel 1967 as mentioned by Brun 2015, 23). For the residents the actual waiting time has exceeded the expected waiting time, a delay that can lead to dissatisfaction or (great) discomfort (Gasparini 1995). Ruminating over their options is part of daily conversations and the waiting time can either be accepted by “staying in queue with other people who are waiting” (ibid, 35) or, ways can be sought to avoid and minimize it. Gasparini links the former to those people who follow the rules and regulations, which most residents seem to do. However, the latter strategy to minimizing waiting time is considered with by many when assessing ways of illegal passage to other countries. But to actually pursue this involves risk taking.

Risk is “a situation or event where something of human value (including humans themselves) has been put at stake and where the outcome is uncertain” (Rosa as quoted by Boholm 2003, 165). Risk taking can be seen as a coping strategy for waiting, in that it turns “uncertainty from being an open-ended field of unpredicted possibilities into a bounded set of possible consequences” (ibid, 167). The most common way of skipping the line is to browse through online brochures to buy a passport from someone who resembles you, for an average of 4000 euros. The money must be left behind in a shop in Athens, and after a few weeks the passport will be ready. Mahdi, a young man who used to work as a journalist in Afghanistan, tells me his first attempt to get through customs with the ‘borrowed’ ID went smoothly. He texts me: “Yesterday I passed all security but in the end the gate was closed. I arrived late. I have to try again tomorrow.” The next day he adds: “Just pray for me today,” accompanied by a picture of himself dressed in a suit and carrying a briefcase to look more convincing. Unfortunately, he fails again: “I got arrested and came home.” He kept trying though, and his latest attempt a few weeks later took him to Zurich where he was reunited with his brother. Stories like these give residents hope that faster movement is possible, but when executed successfully it also tears families apart. Women are often sent ahead in the presumption that they have more chance of getting through customs than men, leaving fathers behind with their children.
Hope(less)

Hope plays an important role in active-waiting: “hope may be understood to be generative of action in that it accesses a temporal sense of potential, of having a future” (Marcel 1967 as referenced by Brun 2015, 24). It is “the capacity to believe in the future despite uncertainties” (Turner 2015b, 175). The future was a frequently discussed topic, however it often remained vague. Apart from the goal-oriented hope of obtaining citizenship in a European country, it seemed residents were unable to imagine concrete scenarios, in terms of what their lives would look like after that. By emphasizing their current suffering, the future is contrasted as something brighter and better. Thus, also (negative) engagement in the present can be seen as a means through which hope is maintained (Turner 2015b).

One way the residents actively articulate hope is through prayers directed at resolving the situation. In God and through prayers many residents find strength. During several religious ceremonies over thirty women gathered in one of the containers. Huddled together they cried intensely over the life of imam Ali. Their emotional reaction, I was assured, was about his life, and his suffering. Not about their own; however, “maybe someone also thinks about that,” Sanam tells me. The second part of the ceremony was more light-hearted, and candy was thrown around and jokingly fought over. During one of the prayers, Dunya the lead singer of the ceremony, explicitly prays for passports for everyone, to which the crowd bursts out laughing, the women raise their palms to the sky and enthusiastically sings “Ali! Ali! Ali!”

“Praying was so important, all the people prayed. When you put your God in your heart you will not be afraid for anything. Seeing bombs drop, hearing the sounds, for six months in a row. And the tu-tu-tu-tu of machine guns. How can you sleep like that? But when reading the Koran, you will feel safe within yourself, you trust and forget everything. If we didn’t do that everyone would have gone crazy.”

Religious rituals have the potential of together opposites together, such as finding peace while surrounded by violence and war. As Eriksen further elaborates: “the symbolic and the social, the individual and the collective; [...] it usually brings out, and tries to resolve – at a symbolic level – contradictions in society” (2010, 273).

Apart from religious rituals, the permanent presence of a dream for a better future, of vague open-ended hope (Turner 2015b) helps to deal with the current impasse. Residents kept trying, asking and assessing their options. Rumors of the possible reopening of the borders passed through the camp frequently, leading to unrest and more talking:

“You can take a big ship and it will bring you to the country you want to go. Or a train and the police will buy your ticket. Since a week this has been the news. Is it true?”

(Rahman)

Some residents eagerly held on to the possibility of such rumors to be true; but, not everyone fell for it:

“From my point of view, it is smugglers making drama for..."
the people. You know, they have their own websites and news agencies. When they run out of money they do some propaganda: ‘Europe is opening the borders, so let’s go! If you miss this time you cannot go.’ And the people from Afghanistan, they start walking. The people from turkey and Iran... they start walking.” (Yasser)

Those with hope seemed to be in a better emotional state than those who did not see where all of this was going. For them the continuous disappointments smothered the little hope that was left, as Sana sighs: “Every time we came with hope, but it soon became hopeless.” As a European, I was frequently asked what their chances were here in Greece or elsewhere in Europe, to which I was not able to give clear answers. However, I soon realized that even hearing the slight possibility for a brighter future was enough, as Yasser explained: “She is hopeless, she wants hope from you.”

Concluding remarks
When living ‘in between the way,’ an everydayness unfolds in which the residents of Malakasa camp give form to their wait. In this chapter, the co-existing contradictions I aimed to reveal are seen in the way the memory of the past resonates and influence in the present; in how the embodied ways of knowing penetrate and blend with the unknown; and in how the passivity of waiting is also active when informed by feelings of hope and hopelessness for an uncertain future. It shows how within the “permanent impermanence,’ ‘everyday time’ continues to flow through routinized practices and survival strategies” (Brun 2015, 19). In the following final empirical chapter, I will take another step towards the less tangible sides of daily life, by taking a closer look at the contradictions that shape social interactions and feelings of attachment, exclusion and inclusion.
Figure 058: Curtains
6. (Nowhere is) An island
“In as much as every human life involves gaps or aporias between expectations and outcomes, acting in the world and being acted upon by the world, being alone and being with others, finding and losing one’s way, rising and falling, no life is ever completely assimilated to or alienated from the world.” (Jackson & Piette 2015, 5)

Malakasa camp feels excluded, both physically and emotionally. The residents are in Greek territory but do not enjoy the same rights, access or connections as locals. They cannot work and have little social contacts outside of the camp. Thus, even though they are in Greece, for the time being they are not really a part of society. This exclusion has been pointed out by Agamben (1998) when he described camps as *spaces of exception*. Agier (2008) further elaborated on this thought, stating camps are *extraterritorial* as they are often assigned to secluded locations in order not to disturb public life. They are an *exception* in the sense that residents are at the same time in and out of the host societies’ legal system, as well as that residents are socially and economically excluded from participating in the host society (as mentioned in Parekh 2014 and Turner 2015a).

By accommodating people in camps, a population is “included through its own exclusion” (Agamben 1998, 96), or as Turner formulates it: “excluded spatially and legally while simultaneously being defined and contained by the surrounding society” (2015, 4). Camps immobilize refugees and deprive them of rights (Sigona 2017), leaving no room for re-appropriation (Katz 2017). However, Sheller and Urry (2004, 109) state: “All places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island’” and the residents of Malakasa make use of such networks. In other word the residents are “not solely included through an exclusion” (Oesch 2017, 110), and “camps are seldom isolated, as new local and international networks expand between them and their surrounding areas, as well as with other towns and diaspora groups” (Montclos & Kagwanja 2000, 206). Whereas Oesch focusses mainly on the ambiguous legal statuses people in refugee camps take in, and Pérouse de Montclos and Kagwanja (2000) reveal how economic endeavors create city-like exchanges within and beyond the camp, I will consider the social aspect of exclusion and argue that this too is not clear-cut.

In this chapter I will show how even though residents feel isolated and discriminated against, the camp is not an ‘island,’ as residents create a sense of home, family and community despite their experienced exclusion in (stalled) transit. The contradiction lies out in this chapter will scale up, starting from the very private sphere of the home, to (fictive) family bonds, with a special focus on gender relations in displacement, followed by the connections within the larger community of the camp, to end with the relationship between the residents and the host society.

6.1 (Far from) Homemaking
Malakasa camp is not a place destined for permanent living. For the uprooted residents, finding a sense of attachment and belonging seems an impossible and contradictory enterprise. However, small attempts of homemaking during the wait reveal how a sense of home is sought out and regained, how surroundings are re-appropriated and how through these actions residents become part of producing the space of the camp, even if they do not want to be there.

During the three months of fieldwork I was able to observe different things people do with their dwellings. I soon discovered that the energy in each of the shelters differed greatly. While some felt cozy and homey, others were worn-down and seemed unattended to. Some were nearly empty apart from a few thin mattresses on the floor, while other were fully furnished with a sofa, tv set, and pictures on the wall. Containers shared by unaccompanied minors or single men felt more student-like and messy, whereas family units were more organized.

The word ‘home’ was regularly used in conversation to refer to these temporal containers or houses while during interviews ‘home’ was only used to refer to the place they had left behind and their current address was not more than a ‘container’ or ‘house.’ The study of home in protracted displacement by Brun and Fábos (2015, 10) shows that although life is marked by hardship and uncertainty, “home-making nevertheless takes place as people try to recreate familiarity, improve their material conditions and imagine a better future.” Homemaking allows for a certain control over their situation, as it is a way of organizing “space over time” (Rapport & Overing 2002, 157).

He asks me to follow them to the bathroom. Morat (40) tells me: “I cannot speak languages but I can make things. I cannot just sit here in the chair all day.” He shows me the tiles he laid on the floor which he found outside a supermarket: “They were in the garbage!” Some were broken, but he found a way to make them fit. He shows me how he made the sides a little higher so the water can no longer enter into the living room. “Next, I want to make a porch.”
Efforts that are made to turn the temporal shelters into more comfortable and pleasant places to be, are a sign of active waiting and ‘keeping busy’ as well as that they reveal a certain degree of rootedness in and attachment to this new place, or as Heidegger discussed: “rootedness comes through building” (mentioned in Gieseking et al. 2014, 147) and in doing so it connects the physical with the emotional. Homemaking in waiting is important because it can give a sense of orientation, of “directions of existence” (Douglas as mentioned by Rapport & Overing 2002, 157). It creates a space for the routines and regularities to take place, remolding and rendering the surroundings familiar over time. Brun and Fábos refer to Eastmond (2006) for a definition of home as a place “where normal life can be lived; it is a place that can provide economic security, social context, and a sense of belonging” (2015, 8). Since these are all aspects that are hard to find in protracted displacement, Brun and Fábos introduce the concept of constellations of home to reveal a sense of home that is more complex, interconnected and multidimensional because of the circumstances in which it takes place. The constellation includes routines and practices that turn the place of displacement into a meaningful, familiar place; the “values, traditions, memories, and subjective feelings of home” (2015, 12); and the institutionalized and projected notions of home. Taking all of these aspects into consideration allows for an understanding of the sense of belonging in displacement, in a place where residents feel they do not belong. Brun and Fábos argue that “often included [...] in notions of home for forced migrants are feelings of longing for a different place, and memories of different places that come together in the practices of homemaking at the place of a present dwelling” (2015, 8). Thus, memories of former, lost homes and the longing for future homes support efforts of homemaking in the present.

The construction of porches and little gardens takes time and by committing to their construction, residents communicate a realization that they might be here for a while to come, implying that the temporal might be more permanent. Through such acts of homemaking the space of the camp is shaped and given meaning by the residents. In doing so, they take part in producing the space of the camp (Lefebvre 2014 [1991]). Camps are constantly deconstructed, developed, and changed through practices and social interaction of all actors involved (Katz 2017). Katz argues that the complicated realities in the camp lead to an ongoing transformation of the spatiality and materiality, which “rapidly appear, disappear, and reappear through a mix of violent actions, humanitarian support, and the day-to-day actions of their dwellers” (2017, 12). Space, according to Lefebvre, comes into being through a “trialectical process in which conceptions, perceptions and lived experiences of space interact (Iveson 2013, 944). The physical configurations of the camp inform daily experiences, but it also has a strong abstract presence in the minds of the residents obliged to live here. The blending of these concrete and abstract elements of space informs the meanings that are attached to it. Rahman, who has been here for nearly two years, does not want to leave his container, even though it is old and damaged and he has had the option to get an upgrade:

> “Because I am a translator with the IOM and the doctors, so many people told me: if you need something they will give it to you. But I told them I want to stay here in this container. They told me: ‘Well, if you don’t want to be in
Rahman’s reason to stay put is connected to feelings of home and attachment. For many other residents however, ‘home’, as a place of familiarity connected to a sense of belonging, lies in the past and is imagined as something good that might be found again in the future. Their temporal dwellings in Malakasa camp are not communicated to be a ‘home’ as such; however, over time familiarity has led to an appropriation of the spaces they have been condemned to live in, inevitably resulting in practices of homemaking.

6.2 Living with(out) family

Family and friends, or their absence, shape an important part of the experience of life in the camp. Traditionally, in Afghan culture family provides the main network for social support and is an important component in coping with the ongoing political, social and economic unrest and war that has dominated the country for decades. “Families are the primary resource for structuring individual and collective life. (…) The people of Afghanistan could be held up as a prime example of collective resilience, an everyday resilience embedded in the social contexts of family and community networks” (Panter-Brick & Eggerman 2012, 374). Nguyen-Gilham et al. show in their study of Palestinian refugees “(...) the value of supportive relationships with friends, peers and families for managing distress” (2008, 294).

“The only people that are important for me are my children.” (Soraya)

Being able to eat and sit together with family and friends, a normalcy and dignity can be experienced, which are necessary conditions in order to develop resilience, adaptability, and survival within the insecure landscape of displacement (Oka 2014). Being able to have feasts, to eat together with family and friends, to maintain social ties through gift exchange, sharing, and consumption helps people to remember better days and to stay connected (ibid). Research shows that being without family in displacement can lead to depression and anxiety (Schweitzer et al. 2007; Bjertrup et al. 2018). For unaccompanied minors, such as Shabir (17), here without family, a substitute family in the form of close friends gets him through:

“You know [at home] I never stayed with my brothers in one room, but we are four persons here that have been together for four years... we are like family. (...) We are close with each other. In our container we work together. They tell me this is your job, you will do this every day. Another person has another job. I am cleaning the home, washing the dishes. Sometimes I make Afghan bread. Without friends it is impossible. When my friends are with me, I never feel alone. Because they always give me fun and laughter, we make jokes. We can be happy together because they are also alone. We are just like a family, we do everything together.”

This kind of intimate relationships are a form of fictive kin: “based not on blood or marriage, but rather on religious rituals or close friendship ties, that replicates many of the rights and obligations usually associated with family ties” (Ebauch & Curry 2000, 189). Shared (traumatic) experiences draw people closer, as Dunya explains her bond with Sanam’s family: “Since Turkey we have been together. Especially in the sea, because the boat broke. All of us were very sick, all the woman cried.” Even though she is assigned to live in a different camp, she prefers to stay here with them: “It is like a new family.” They have dinners together, sit around at night to talk, and one of the ladies next door regularly gives everyone back massages with olive oil. When I walk around the camp with Ayas, a young Afghan man who grew up in Pakistan, a woman with two young children happily greets him: “Hi captain!” He explains to me how he was forced by
smugglers to be in charge of steering the boat across the Mediterranean Sea and how grateful the other passengers were when they made it. Many families that have shared a part of their journey seem to have formed close friendships. They go on daytrips and picnics and help each other when they can. In that respect their journey over sea could be regarded as the liminal stage of the ritual, as it creates powerful experiences, shared among all participants, that might last a lifetime (Eriksen 2010, 173).

Many children in the camp form friendships, get into fights, and are best friends again the next day. For adults, however, it is not as easy to create new meaningful relationships with the people around them. Fatima’s father, a 45-year-old man with 9 children, tells me he does not remember how to make friends. As we talk, he stares through the open door onto the terrain, where one of their carpets is drying in the wind, after they washed it today. Every now and then he jumps up and sticks his head outside, afraid someone will steal it. He misses his old friends, the ones he had for a long time back home. In Afghanistan he knew how society functioned, how to get work and provide for his family. Here, he tells me, he doesn’t know. This indicates a disappearing of social capital (Bourdieu (1986), which Ebauch and Curry (2000, 190) explain, is a combination of all the “positions and relationships in groupings and social networks, including memberships, network ties, and social relations that can serve to enhance an individual’s access to opportunities, information, material resources, and social status.” It is an important resource for well-being and often declines in displacement, as what was valid before might not work in this new and different context. Thus, the social network that existed before and gave access and forms of power needs to be rebuilt and restructured.

When living in exclusion family and friends are vital for feeling supported and connected. Sharing time, food and resources with others can ignite feelings of normalcy and dignity. These things are not available to everyone in the same way, as some residents have come to Europe alone and others have lost the capacity to form new friendships, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Forming new bonds and sharing the experiences of displacement can give a new sense of belonging in a place residents do not want to be.

6.3 Old forces under new circumstances: men and women

We sit on the floor of the container to talk to Dunya. Every time Sanam’s younger brother Mohammed (13) peaks through the window Dunya pulls her hijab onto her head and covers her neck. It happens so many times that it becomes funny and the girls sent him away with played aggression. “Women are sexually provoked by hearing a romance.” Sanam reads from her phone, after translating Dunya’s words. I am puzzled... “With their eyes!” Dunya adds.

The relationship between men and women within and outside of the camp is complicated. Being a woman myself, I felt it was difficult to approach men for conversations without being judged by female residents, and vice versa I could not work with a male translator if I wanted to talk to a woman. Remarkable too, is the way my students automatically sat segregated in class. As if a magnet pulled them apart, girls sat on one side of the container and boys on the other. For adults, gender issues can stand in the way of the treatment of asylum applications, for example when sensitive information needs to be shared. Soraya: “It was bad for me because the translator was a man and I couldn’t tell my story.” Male doctors that intend to inspect the female residents are often rejected. Sanam explains what happened when her pregnant neighbor, whose husband is in northern Europe, recently had to go to the hospital:

“Afghan men, they never saw the women like Europeans, who wear short skirts without a scarf. And now when they see an Afghan woman that wears European clothes, maybe they will rape her. (…) The women that wear hijab or good clothes are safer than others. Because God loves women, he made us the pearl in the oyster, only special people can see your body. Your mother, your father, your brother, your uncle... And later, just your husband. Other man cannot.”

Soraya, a single mother, tells me how she is approached by men in the camp everyday: “They tell me I have to be their girlfriend. And if I don’t want this than I have to get married with them.” She continues: “Men from Afghanistan don’t have any education, they look at women as if they are a thing. You just have to work at home and take care of your children, you can’t go to school.” Even though Fatima was allowed to work in the police force in Afghanistan, she was afraid: “I had to work together with men. A certain group of
people does not like this, but others know women are also human.” Recently, the relationship between men and women is changing, Fatima tells me, “because women are becoming more educated.” However, getting them equally involved in activities continues to be a struggle.

I join a meeting about a youth project within the camp aimed at community involvement. For the project to be selected for funding an equal amount of men and women need to participate. As we discuss the options with the eight young men that have signed up so far, one of them states: “The women will not come to work with us.” A discussion follows and one of the volunteers proposes the guys could talk to the families to ask if the women can join in. “They won’t listen to us,” is the response. “I am a refugee just like them, you European people have to come and tell them, then they will listen.”

Afghan culture traditionally has a strong patriarchal component, in which women are placed under the father’s or husband’s authority (Boesen 1986). In many cases the family decides if a woman can or cannot do something. Families are also in charge of arranging marriages, a custom that continues in the camp. Sanam tells me about a recent proposal where two ladies came to their container and told her mother: “You have nice daughter, she wears her hijab good, she is well behaved, she is beautiful, I have a son in Germany if you want he can come and they can get married.” There are stories of relationships that are formed within the camp, sometimes even resulting in marriage. When family is absent, neighbors can function as mediators to arrange the proposal. Abulfazl, for instance, met a girl in Moria camp, on Lesbos, and tells they only met briefly a couple of times, did not talk but just looked at each other, after which a family he had become close to during the journey arranged the marriage. Unfortunately, after a few months she fell in love with someone else and wanted a divorce. Abulfazl is heartbroken. Marriage does not always provide the happiness or security one hopes for.

In her analysis of the position of Afghan woman, Abirafeh (2006, 2) states: “Women’s rights have always been highly politicized, and [...] gender politics, as much as geopolitics, has provided the impetus for conflicts” and not just under Taliban’s regime. Although of course Afghan women do not form a homogenic group, the discrimination of women is “symptomatic of much longer-standing religious and cultural tensions between traditionalists and modernizers in Afghan society” (Barakat & Wardell 2002, 910). In some circles girls are sent off to get married at a young age, like Soraya who married at the age of thirteen: “Because of money. A lot of people give their daughter to a boy just for the money, age is not important for them. It doesn’t matter if the man will kill their daughter, if she will have a good life or not. From the moment I got married, he started to hit me.”

Even though domestic violence is not new in many Afghan households, in displacement the male authority is under pressure, as men cope with feelings of being useless and unable to provide or take care of their family (Horn 2010), which can lead to an increase in violence. Women become extra vulnerable as social systems and safety nets have disappeared or been disrupted (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). In addition to this, in situations of post-conflict the effect of “trauma, frustration, and inability to access trainings and...
economic opportunities have contributed to the increase in domestic violence in recent years“ (Abirafeh 2006, 5).

Ramzya tells us she tried to cut her wrist, hoping her husband would change if he realized how much he was hurting her. It didn’t work, she laughs, she didn’t die. My eye catches the blue piece of cloth she tightly wrapped around her wrist. She doesn’t try to hide it. He always feels bad after he hits her and tries to kiss and comfort her. After taking in her story we sit quietly and hold hands, the previously cozy living room now feels unsafe and unsettling. We talk about her options, but she doesn’t want to report it with the IOM, afraid he will find out and get angry. She does not want a divorce either because she thinks this means she will lose her children. She smiles a beautiful girlish smile. She loves him, she tells me: “Afghan men are like this.” When we hear a noise outside she jumps up. I see a flash of fear on her face. Before she opens the door, she begs me to change the subject.

Ramzya, like many other women who have just arrived, is unaware of European laws on these matters. She will not go to the IOM to report her case out of fear that divorce means she will be separated from her children. Moreover, many women in displacement feel they have little options then to stay with their abusive husbands, as continuing this journey alone feels impossible. A woman in the camp, Zainab, did divorce her husband in Turkey and has not seen her two children ever since:

“I don’t know where they are. It has been over a year and I have no information about them. I feel very depressed, but I am trying to keep myself happy. I feel pain every day in my heart but I hope I will see them again. That’s why I keep up life. They are 8 and 5 years old now."

Introducing the residents to international human rights sets in motion new thoughts and beliefs when it comes to the relationship between men and women. The old patriarchal forces are under pressure in the new circumstances and inflict with new ideas and possibilities. Contradiction is also visible in how this gives the camp the potential to be “a space for positive change” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014, 403), while at the same time displacement increases the vulnerability of women, creating unsafe worlds inside the already uncertain, temporary homes far from home.
6.4 Estrangement and recognition in Little Kabul

“The society we have tried to escape exists here as well. It continues in the camp.” (Hamid)

One of the few non-Afghans in the camp, a Kurdish woman, tells me she often feels like she is in Afghanistan, as almost 90% of the residents are Afghan. Some people even jokingly refer to the camp as ‘Little Kabul.’ This common background effects life in the camp, as Afghan society is marked by nearly four decades of war. Shabir explains:

“We are coming from war. Some cities in Afghanistan are very bad, you cannot go shopping because of Taliban and Daesh. Kabul is so dangerous, every week there are bombings. And outside of the capital it is even worse. After nine o’clock at night you cannot go there. Daesh and Taliban take over everything. The police and army cannot go there. Really the Afghan situation is so bad. They are killing people, too much, too much.”

In these wars, the relationships between the five different ethnic groups have been put on edge. In Fatima’s view the Hazare and Pashtu don’t get along, because the Pashtu are more associated with the Taliban (or “Tali”) and they live in separate parts of the country. The differentiation between them becomes visible in (the lack of) interaction in the camp: “They don’t really talk to each other here,” she tells me. At the same time, as they have come in contact with different people from different nationalities during their migration process, a strengthening of ethnic identity in terms of ‘being Afghan’ can be witnessed (Eriksen 2010).

“We are from Afghanistan, we are the same. I am not thinking they are Pashtu or Tadjik. But in Afghanistan, the people, the government made this problem. But I don’t have a problem with anybody here.”

Shabir thinks previous ethnic tensions have lost importance as people gained more access to information, which changed their mind-set:

“Now they know everything, on the internet they see everything. Before, in Afghanistan, they were like: ‘They are Tajik, they are Uzbek…’ but when they come out of Afghanistan they are not like before. They change. They think, we are just from Afghanistan, it is not important if you are Pashtu or Tadjik, but some people yes, they think like before. They do what they did before, but a lot of people changed.”

Monsutti, in his study of the Afghan diaspora explains exile “may foster a broader identity with reference to the Afghan nation” (Monsutti 2008, 69). Under the new circumstances this identity may be more relevant than the differences amongst them. For instance, at the time the camp was shared with Syrians tensions resulted in violent and even deadly fights. In these fights, Afghans operated as one group against Syrians. This shows ethnicity “concerns what is socially relevant, not which cultural differences are ‘actually there’” (Eriksen 2010, 331). However, the closeness between different Afghan groups is not completely new, as bonds between them have always existed. Afghans “are embedded in overlapping social spaces,” as “more or less permanent ties of trust and friendship always exist outside lineages, tribal sections, neighborhoods, or ethnic groups” (Monsutti 2004, 225).

Most residents find it better to be in a camp with only Afghans, as sharing the same background and having similar cultural values makes them feel comfortable. A sense of community is felt in the way people help each other out, organise gatherings, share secret internet-hack codes, borrow money from neighbors and watch each others children. Through small busenesses that have been set up such as hairdressers and shops where they prepare Afghan dishes, residents provide each other servises and strengthen the ties between them. These community feelings are enforced by the camp’s management, who organizes community meetings, events and, during my stay, a nowroz (Afghan new year) celebration to which all residents were invited.
In exile these social ties are not what they used to be, as “like cities, the camps are responsible for mixing populations and gender” (Montclos & Kagwanja 2000, 211). In her study of life in different refugee camps in Jordan, Feldman (2015, 250) describes the frustration that is communicated when her informants reflect on the loss of “familiar forms of sociability and connection.” Amongst residents in Malakasa camp, apart from the previously discussed tensions concerning changing gender relations, there is a nostalgia when thinking back to what was. Fatima tells me she misses walking around her neighborhood, where everyone, “men and women are happy and talking.” Here, people seem to be more suspicious towards each other and ‘on their own.’ This becomes visible when fights break out over the question who was first in line when winter jackets are distributed and in the high degree of social control: “People here in the camp talk too much,” Fatima complains.

In the camp, both rapprochement and reluctance towards the residents’ fellow countrymen can be observed, leading to community formation as well as little islands within that community. In this I recognize what Feldman (2015) describes as the growing attachment to the new space and people, as well as alienation from it and profound wish to leave. The community in the camp gives both comfort and recognition, as well as pressure and control.

6.5 Hostility and sympathy beyond the camp

“We have always been refugees. In Pakistan, in Iran, Turkey, now Greece... from the beginning I was a refugee. I hate this because there is no way, where should I go, where can I live forever? Where is my country at last?”

(Atifa)

Refugees are often categorized as outsiders, who “belong neither here nor there” and are an anomaly in the host societies and seen as a problem that needs to be solved (Turner 2015a, 2). This discourse serves a purpose, because against it the one that does belong (the insider) can be contrasted: “by producing the refugee as someone marginal and lacking, the normalcy of the ‘citizen/nation/state constellation’ is also produced” (Soguk as quoted by Turner 2015a, 2). This exclusion become visible in what De Genova (2013) conceptualized as the Border Spectacle: the bureaucratic procedures and laws, detention and deportation strategies, that together “produce a spectacle that enacts a scene of ‘exclusion’” (2013, 1180). It presents exclusion and illegality as objective facts by the use of “language and image, (...) rhetoric, text and subtext, accusations and insinuations” (De Genova 2013, 1181). The Border Spectacle produces and makes visible illegality, and it enforces and normalizes the social degradation of migrants by disqualifying and stigmatizing them.

“It is a kind of shame. Because people do not treat you normally, not like they treat their own people. They don’t see you as human, really.”

(Yasser)

“They put a difference between me and you. Do you know what it means? (...) They should treat everyone the same, it should not be like this. It is not the rules of life.”

(Hamid)

Bjertrup et al. (2018) point out that feelings of isolation and rejection amongst migrants and refugees in Greece are enforced by a lack of interaction with Greek society. And, on the few occasions they could have interactions, such as when catching a train to Athens, this often leads to tensions.

At the train station in Malakasa the platform towards Athens is loaded with people from the camp. I watch how most residents jump off the platform to climb up again on the other side, ignoring the elevated bridge that leads over the tracks. When the train arrives, they crowd the doors and push to get in. Sanam whispers in my ear: “Greeks don’t like this, I think.” All seats are occupied quickly, and I stand close to Sanam and her family next to the door. During the ride the train fills with laughter, chitchat and a crying baby. At different stops Greeks try to get into the
overloaded train, their faces unamused. Sanam is pushed up against the back of a Greek man, which is “a big problem.” But they laugh about it: “He is not really soft.” When a seat opens up they instruct me to take it. I sit next to a Greek lady with red painted lips and ask her how she feels about the train overflowing with refugees. She smiles and tells me: “We are hospitable, but the problem is we are not organized, our government is not organized. Having so many people in one train, it is a problem. Sometimes there are tensions. We just cannot do it. There are too many... and the Greek people are tired.”

Sanam cares a lot about what Greeks think of them: “Maybe some people when they see all the refugee going with the train, they don’t know that we have to do this to go to the church or to take money to buy bread or something. But Greeks, maybe they think we just go to the park, because we don’t pay any money.” And if her friend Dunya were the boss of the camp, she would not let refugees take the train to Athens every day, “because it gets too crowded at the station, the Afghans laugh, they speak loud, Greeks don’t like this.” Aref (12), likes Greece: “I like the ocean.” However, his brother Farid adds: “The people from Greece are not good. I think they don’t like the refugees. When I arrive with the train and metro, they look bad at us.” Aref agrees: “Yes I see it. When we sit in the train, one of the Greeks went like this [hides his nose in his shirt as if to avoid smelling the other person]. It makes me feel very bad.”

“We thought we could come here and we could work and enjoy life, spend time with our children, make a happy life. But the dream was just a dream. This is reality. We thought we would be treated as humans, which we were not in Iran. But it is the same situation. This is a big pain and disappointment. Every day we think about this. Why is this happening to us? (Sana)

Hamid thinks Greece is to blame for the bad circumstances and tensions in the camp: “Greece is guilty for this situation, for the fighting, responsible for what will happen to these people. Not the people themselves. For example: I am under your control, yes? You can do anything with me, you can put me in the best situation and in worst situation, and within two days I will become crazy. It is Greece who decides about these people, judges these people. This is the way.”

Residents are aware of the stereotypes that Greeks might hold: “Maybe they think the refugees come here and catch their bread, their money,” Farid tells me. Dunya does not like to be put in a box: “I don’t like it that Greeks think that we come from a place where there aren’t any rules. For example, if one person does something bad, they think all of us are like that, that we are dirty.” Eriksen (2010) describes how on the one hand there is an “ethnic and religious revitalization,” while at the same time the “uncertainty, ambivalence and individualism” (Eriksen 2010, 382) reveal a longing to be accepted into the host society and escape the social and cultural category they inhabit. It is unsure if they will ever be recognized as full members of society at all, as even “legal citizenship is not equivalent to cultural citizenship, and racialized immigrants are perpetually produced as cultural outsiders” (Pratt 2003, 48).

There are stories of friendships and interactions with Greeks that are more positive. Soraya hopes “some people who know about us, maybe they feel us.” Dunya, who wears a chador that covers her body when she goes outside, tells me: “I had heard that Greeks were very fascist, and that you cannot wear a chador. But now that I wear this, I don’t have any problems. No one even looks. One time a Greek woman asked me why do you wear this chador? I told her... you know holy Mariam? She had a hijab too. Nowadays they don’t wear it, Christians, but before they did. The woman said: ‘Bravo, it is good that you do this for yourself.’” Rahman also holds a more nuanced opinion, reflecting on the contradictions he encountered: “Look, in Europe I learned so many things. So many good and bad things. Somethings are good: some people are open and kind, you can talk to them. And so many things are bad... But what I see is that they take better care of dogs than of people.” Their current treatment disappoints most residents:

“Whether we are speaking of murderers, psychotics, witches, religious zealots, or simply those who do not share our own core values, we tend to operate in one-dimensional terms, as if the humanity of the other were reducible to a single “negative” trait or aberrant moment.” (Jackson & Piette 2015, 10)
In their relationship to the Greek society, the residents want to blend in and not cause any disturbance, but at the same time they struggle with feelings of disappointment and sadness regarding their treatment. The label of refugee adds to this feeling of being an outsider, as something that withholds them from being seen and being recognized for who they are.

Concluding remarks
In this final empirical chapter, I attempt to show how even though the camp is in many ways a space of exception and ‘an island’, it is also a place full of connections and relations that gives room to new meanings and feelings of belonging. Residents build temporal homes and new intimate ties in a place not meant nor desired for permanent living, as well as that they contest old ties and relational forces in this new context. In displacement they are both at home and homeless, alone and together, insiders and outsiders.
6. (Nowhere is) An island
7. Coinciding contradictions: a picnic

Conclusion

Figure 074: Prayers before the picnic
We have followed the shore line for about twenty minutes and left the buzzing center of the city behind. I look over my shoulder and smile at the small excited group: five women and their children, carrying heavy shopping carts loaded with food, eager to get to their picnic spot.

In this thesis I have tried to understand what constitutes daily life for the refugees and migrants that temporarily have to make their home in Malakasa camp. This enterprise was confusing, precisely because of the way contradictions coincide in this reality. By foregrounding these contradictions, I hope to have shown how “life goes on in camps— albeit a life that is affected by the camp” (Turner 2015a, 1). In this concluding chapter I will bring these coinciding contradictions together, by taking you along on a picnic.

Soon we step into a dreamlike landscape: on the left I see a forest of small trees with a flowerbed of poppies and daisies underneath. On the other side of the path rocks lead down to the waterfront, where the ocean sits still in the air of spring. After finding the best spot, blankets and rugs are pulled out and put together to make one big sitting area. The kids run off in every direction and within seconds one of them is in his underwear, ready to jump into the water. The mood seems to lift yet further when the girls start dancing to music played from a portable speaker.

On this sunny spring day in March, Sanam and her family took the opportunity to go outside of the camp. In chapter 4, I focused on the residents’ immobile mobility, as borders and boundaries affect their movements, showing how both restriction and freedom, threats and safety can be found. Also, I described the effect of the ongoing emotional uncertainties caused by the lack of further movement, but which becomes a movement in itself as over time it is embedded in their daily lives, making the unpredictable more predictable. I ended this chapter by showing how everyday basic human needs form a source of constant concern while also giving direction to daily routines, and how this ‘bare life’ simultaneously represented much more than that: in the camp it inevitable became something political.

While two of the women start video calls with their husbands in, respectively, England and Germany, Dunya puts on her chador and starts praying. I see Mariam, Sanam’s mother, walk towards the shoreline. Behind her the bay stretches out, and I see the mountains and train tracks that we crossed and followed earlier to get here. Mariam finds a spot on the rocks and directs herself toward Mecca. She gets on her knees and bows her head to the ground. For a brief second, she becomes invisible, as her dress blends into the colors of the rocks. Moments later she reappears again and reaches for the sky.

Chapter 5 sketched a landscape of time, in which I demonstrated that protracted displacement does not result in a liminal void of being in-between worlds, but becomes a world of its own where the past, present and future coincide. The new situation is informed by past memories and experiences, embodied ways of knowing, the habitus, that give stability to daily routines and rituals and recognition between residents. Yet the new and unknown world in which they have landed affects them, and slowly changes their way of being. A routine and familiarity with the surroundings are developed and the time waiting for what is to come, although perceived as passive, is spent in active ways fueled by open-ended hope for the future.

The sun begins to warm up the air and I am tempted to jump into the water. I scan the area to find a place to change, upon which Dunya offers me to use her chador as a dressing room. She helps me put my arms into the sleeves, and attaches the top with elastic bands behind my ears. Once the cool black cloth is wrapped all around me Dunya bursts out in laughter as I stumble around on the rocks, trying to keep my balance. I jump into the freezing water cheered on by the children.

In chapter 6 I addressed how the residents of Malakasa camp are simultaneously excluded and included socially, with regard to their direct surroundings in terms of their family and friends, and broader in relation to the camp’s community and the host society. Through appropriation a home is constructed in an undesired place, an act that makes them part and connected to that place. Real and substitute families give support and direction, but can also be another source of unsafety and uncertainty. When alone, fictive kin can to give them a sense of belonging, although feelings of isolation and loneliness remain. Cultural (gender) expectations guide daily life, but can be experienced as a limitation and in some instances a severe threat, as cases of domestic violence in displacement or not rare. Within the camp’s community there is both closeness and alienation, attachment and differentiation. In relation to the Greek society there is aversion to the way they are treated and an awareness of the ‘outsiders’ status of being a refugee, as well as a longing to be accepted and to blend in. This chapter showed how through their everyday interactions, spaces of exception simultaneously become spaces of inclusion and connection.

The picnic has been set up. Plates are filled with rice, meat, homemade bread and a fresh tomato salat. I have baked a banana bread following my mother’s recipe that is first carefully inspected by the ladies, and then quickly devoured by the boys. After lunch it is time to take selfies for the girls’ Instagram accounts. I am instructed to keep clicking while they pose on the rocks, flirting with the camera, exposing more and more skin. The kids have gone into the woods to look for treasures, and the two teenage boys have made a little fire for themselves, away from all the rest. A thermos pot of tea is brought out, and as we stretch our bodies in the sun a discussion concerning Dunya’s hairdryer evolves. She has been sharing it with all of them and now it is broken. Who will fix it remains unresolved, as we doze off into a nap.

When reflecting on my findings, seeing both the freedom and limitations, the unpredictable and stable, the passive and active, the fixed and fluid, the detached and involved and the isolated and connected, I see a dynamic equilibrium that demonstrates how life keeps going under precarious circumstances. However, it is not a status quo. Underneath the
surface an erosion takes place which leaves its marks on the residents, as more and more time is filled with uncertainty. And, as for now, the end of this impasse is not yet in sight. In 2018 numbers of arrival on Greek shores have gone up again compared to the previous year, despite the EU-Turkey deal. The promised relocation of refugees and migrant to other European member states is hardly carried out, rejection rates of asylum applications are high and the public debate concerning the fate of migrants and refugees in general has become quiet. Together, this feeds into an untenable entropy for the people of Malakasa camp, who are forced to live daily lives in the midst of it. With this thesis I aimed to give face to a place that risks turning into another ‘hole of oblivion,’ and create a deeper understanding of the difficulties and uncertainties that millions of people worldwide deal with on a daily basis.

When we step back into the train later that afternoon, we are catapulted back into reality. In the seats next to us, a group of five men whose faces I recognize from the camp try to get our attention. The smell of alcohol makes Sanam roll her eyes. Through the chairs, I see Kosar sleeping in her mother’s arms and Dunya leaning back onto the headrest, trying to ignore the men’s provocations. Her chador is tightly wrapped around her arms and her hands protect her pregnant belly. When we arrive in Malakasa, we hear rumors about the death of two people who got into a fight after a game of volleyball. When no one really responds, I assume it is just a rumor. We exit the train, and start walking back towards the camp. In the darkness I become part of a caravan of over three hundred people. Men, women and children. Buggies with babies and strollers with leftovers and blankets are carried across the tracks, off the shortcuts, down towards the camp. Orange street lights shine on their heads, hair and hijabs. Silhouettes, some I recognize, but many I still do not know.

In this thesis, I have highlighted the experience of refugees’ protracted displacement that remain underexposed to the surrounding societies, and also in social research. I have stressed the perspectives, actions, initiatives, and learning processes of the people living their daily lives in the midst of the ‘refugee crisis,’ and in doing so I hope to have exposed sufficiently their agency and dignity. I strongly believe refugee-studies should put more emphasis on this aspect, instead of focusing solely on the dimensions of victimhood on ‘their side,’ and the threats on ‘ours.’ I believe social scientists have an important duty in making other people’s lives come to live and relatable through their work, to make them recognizable instead of categorical, in order to confront societies with the consequences of policies and ballyhoo. A better understanding of the human consequences and experiences, is a prerequisite if we want human dignity and human rights to guide our reactions to these refugees instead of letting the securitization of our societies push them further out of sight.

At the intersection I take a right to follow the road that leads to my house, while the crowd turns left and makes its way back to containers and tents, within the fenced area of the camp. I stop to look over my shoulder. As I watch them move away from me I feel a mixture of sadness and amazement. Sadness for the reality they live in and having to go back to the camp after such a beautiful day, and amazement for the fact that I had a chance to see them outside of this frame. To see them do what they like to do, say what they think, feel as they please. Serious, tired, sad, happy, excited, outgoing, loving, annoyed. I close my eyes and feel again how Mariam combed my tangled hair after I came out of the water. With a pink plastic comb, she patiently worked her way through the knots. Her daughter Sanam sat next to us and smiling commented: “Today I feel happy.”


