A thesis submitted to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy of Central European University in part fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Science

Climbing A Thousand Mountains - Every Day.
Environmental Justice and Irregular Migrants in Lesvos, Greece

Figure 1. Irregular migrants and asylum seekers walking to the port in Mytilini, Lesvos (Source: Küpers 2014).

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS submitted by: Sophia KÜPERS for the degree of Master of Science and entitled: Climbing a Thousand Mountains – Every Day. Environmental Justice and Irregular Migrants in Lesvos, Greece

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Abstract

While environmental discrimination has been central to environmental justice research, the living realities of irregular migrants at the edge of Europe have been neglected. Drawing on ethnographically informed research in a self-organized refugee space in Lesvos, Northern Aegean (Greece), this research uses an environmental justice approach to describe the environmental interactions of irregular migrants at the sea border of Greece and Turkey. Narratives about reception and detention conditions are reflected in the light of access to environmental goods and benefits, exposure to environmental harm and interaction with host societies. The research shows that the situation of irregular migrants at an external border of the European Union is a significant field for environmental justice research of the everyday and that environmental justice can contribute an additional framing for activism locally and internationally.

Keywords: Keywords: irregular migrants, refugees, Lesvos, Greece, EU external borders, environmental justice, detention conditions, living conditions, everyday life

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People fall and rise. I went to hear and feel. All of you who shared your lives and wisdom with me will stand on your feet with faith. We will meet again and hear and feel together.

This thesis is for those who are gone, those who will soon be leaving and those who can never open up.

All that matters are the views.
They are where you are
And what is behind you
The ground underneath
Your feet and
Within

Many thanks to everyone who supported my project, who shared their time and expertise with me and who had a lot of patience while figuring out how to do research on realities that provoke our tears. Thanks to your support, I could make some people smile for a while. They made me smile a lot.

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1. Introducing the Problem

Irregular migrants[1] (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2013:2) with a variety of economic, political and geographical backgrounds enter the European Union (EU) as an area that promises a safer, wealthier and healthier living. Life conditions at the borders, however, are amiss. International human rights advocates claim that reception, detention, and living conditions are alerting (ProAsyl (PA) 2012, Amnesty International (AI) 2013, and Médécins Sans Frontières (MSF) 2014). Irregular migrants struggle for access to resources for daily life or live in spatial segregation and limited mobility. Access to the most basic goods and services is not granted, detention is a common practice, support is scarce, and violence takes place in the interaction with authorities and society. The provision of minimum services and goods keeps migrants alive, but little is done to provide a basis for more than bodily existence (Rozakou 2012). Environmental justice theory, despite the general lack of research on the issue, is a fruitful approach to describe and analyze the ecological situation of irregular migrants in Greece (Di Chiro 2008; Schlosberg 2004, 2007, 2013). The environmental justice claim that environmental discrimination follows the lines of racial discrimination needs to look at such border regimes for Europe. Literature on refugees and the environment suggests that further fields of research beyond environmental refugees have to be addressed and that refugee-host relationships should play a major role in this (Kibreab, 1997; Piguet 2013). Applying an environmental justice perspective has two implications. It broadens the field of academic research that has always been preoccupied with the everyday access to environmental benefits and exposure to environmental harm of discriminated groups. In addition, the claim that living realities of migrants at European borders include environmental injustice can be used by local and international activists in framing their political statements

1 The term "irregular migrants" (FRA 2013:2) is used for people entering the EU illegally. It is chosen in this thesis because the group of migrants in Lesvos, Greece, is heterogeneous. When arriving to Europe, they are considered as irregular until their identity is clarified. In the screening centre in Moria, it is determined whether a person is eligible for international protection or not. Those released are able to forward an application for asylum in Greece in the following 30 days during which they are free to travel inside the country. Others, who are not considered potential asylum seekers, may be sent back to their respective home countries.

and for putting pressure on the responsible authorities. The rise of fascist tendencies in society, the consequences of an economic crisis and the geographical exposure to migration flows shape the public opinion in Greece. As one of the countries with a strongly contested external border, it is claimed that Greece needs increased support from and collaboration with the EU and its member states. First reception centers, detention centers, but also self-organized camps and open public areas are spaces of migrant life in Greece. In Lesvos, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea close to the border with Turkey, issues of environmental discrimination are visible in everyday life. The case study in this thesis describes how a community of volunteers and activists provides material goods and support for migrants to bridge gaps in the system and to question its functioning. This shows how everyday living conditions of irregular migrants can be improved through interaction with host society and environment.

1.1 Research questions

The following research questions guide through this thesis.

- How do refugees in Lesvos relate to their environment?
- What are the material and environmental health related detention and reception conditions that refugees on the island (have) experience(d)? (In Lesvos and elsewhere in Greece)
- How can the conditions of refugees be understood in the light of an environmental justice framework?

1.2 Roadmap

This thesis is structured in the following chapters. Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the research problem and the research questions that guide through this thesis. Chapter 2 defines the research methodology applied, the role of the researcher in the field and the scope of the research.. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the relevant literature that this thesis builds upon. Here, the fields of the

refugee-environment nexus, refugee-host relationships, environmental justice approaches that goes beyond distribution, and the relation between environmental justice and everyday life are presented. In addition, both central environmental justice approaches are related to the case study in Greece. The fourth chapter introduces Lesvos as a case study and the self-organized camp Pikpa as the main fieldwork site for looking into the ecological situation of migrants in Lesvos Chapter 5 introduces everyday ecological issues that were identified from field work and interactions with the protagonists in Greece. It includes a section on the civil society group that supports the self-organized camp and presents insights into migrant life from the field work, drawing on conversations and observation. In addition to these experiences, it organizes the issues relevant to environmental justice according to topics while giving additional evidence from human rights based and other texts. Chapter 6 then presents additional findings about the interaction with authorities and looks at migrants in Greece from a perspective that goes beyond everyday life and distributional aspects. It looks at the procedural justice aspects and the interaction of migrants with authorities in the light of environmental justice beyond distributional issues. It further shows how environmental justice can be used for the analysis of power relations in the light of biopolitics. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings from chapters 5 and 6 and shows how the research questions were answered throughout the text. Chapter 8 gives short recommendations for further research. The remaining chapters 9 to 12 give information on literature, data sources used, and the protagonists of the field work.

2. Methodology

The very nature of the research questions asked for this thesis inspired the choice of methods applied in it. Beyond a review of the relevant literature in chapter 3, the main body of knowledge is based on ethnographically informed fieldwork conducted in a time frame of 8 weeks in Greece, from mid-March until Mid-May of 2014. This field work included participant observation and conversations. Most of the research took place at Pikpa, the self-organized camp in Mytilini, Lesvos. On the one hand, access to people was easy, because the open camp is organized by volunteers, and the inhabitants are mostly positive about receiving

visitors. On the other hand, however, access to information about the experience of migration and everyday life in Greece included a load of psychological issues that needed to be tackled and required patience. After all, migration is a politically and personally sensitive issue. It is impossible to fully understand the complexity of the situation and people's perspectives without having similar experiences. In addition, deeper interaction with authorities was impossible. While irregular immigrants are clearly protagonists of this research, a group of involved actors needs to be covered to achieve the drawing of a broader picture of the ecological situation at the EU external border. The group of volunteers and professionals working with refugees or on refugee issues is an additional group of actors covered. As Fetterman (1998) puts it, such key actors can be a central source of information about a group without being part of it.

2.1 Conversations and Participant Observation

> "An anthropologist's conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense" (Behar 2008:7).

The conversations reflected in this thesis took place with around 25 people. Due to the high fluctuation of people at the self-organized camp, this can only be an estimate. For quotations in this thesis, conversations with 13 protagonists were chosen. However, much information was conveyed as well in casual chats with inhabitants of Mytilini, neighbors, hosts and friends. Ethnographic approaches aim at giving as much freedom of expressions to interviewees as possible. The assumptions should be as limited as possible and need to be revised with every piece of data gathered from field work. This is the basis for a grounded theory approach and gives the protagonists of the research the chance to redirect the topics that matter for them rather than reacting to the pre-formulated ideas of the researcher (Strauss and Corbin 1994).

Given the circumstances of this research and the in-betweenness of the irregular migrants in a transit zone, the initially planned interviews were turned into semi-structured conversations. The establishment of rapport was required because the personal migratory experiences can be traumatizing when entering Europe and Greece and can go much further back than that: Both the reasons for leaving the countries of origin and the treatment people experience in Greece are delicate issues. Entering into conversations with people through the time spent together over a tea or beer, at their places, at Pikpa or in the city center and merging participant observation and interviewing into one research experience was the approach applied here. This research experience was the basis for data production. It is referred to as data production, because it is necessary to highlight that no piece of knowledge is similar to a fruit that can be picked and that every information depends on its context and, of course, its interpretation by the researcher (Fetterman 1998).

Most of the interactions were possible in English, however, some of the conversations were held in French or took place with the help of protagonists translating for other protagonists. Their languages were Persian, Arabic or Greek. Due to the language differences, details might have been missed. This, as it turned out during the fieldwork, was the best way to establish a personal relation with people without putting pressure on anyone. Field notes were at the end of every day of field work instead of recording conversations. Claiming objectivity would have meant not engaging in relations with people because one cannot be objective about human interactions – if at all. The issues that came up with regard to environmental interaction and access to environmental benefits are sufficiently clear, however. If asked in a formal interview situation, people might have expressed themselves differently, without small stories around the topic, with less words, with less interest.

> I did not come to Lesvos to gather data, leave and write my thesis. I came with the idea to do all of this while interacting with people in need who need attention, who need change and who need to be heard. The thesis conditions did not account for the possibility to do action research. But, research is an action in itself and should have an immediate positive impact on the individuals in question, if the individuals in question suffer from mistreatment and denial of access to basic resources (Field notes April 2014).

The following quote reflects quite well the emotions that field work, such as the work undertaken for this thesis can provoke in a researcher:

> "In the midst of a massacre, in the face of torture, in the eye of a hurricane, in the aftermath of an earthquake, or even, say, when horror looms apparently more gently in memories that won't recede and so come forth in the late-night quiet of a kitchen, as a storyteller opens her heart to a story listener, recounting hurts that cut deep and raw into the gullies of the self, do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits – of respect, piety, pathos – that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But if you can't stop the horror, shouldn't you at least document it?" (Behar 2008:2).

Participant Observation is temporary participation in people's everyday activities. It is a way of getting to know life, patterns and routines of the protagonists of a research from first hand participation rather than from narratives gathered during interviews or conversation. It is central to ethnographically informed research and requires strong research ethics (Fetterman 1998). During the research with irregular migrants, spending time together and getting closer during research psychologically challenging but also creates precious bonds. The aim here was not to discover scandals, but to get a feeling for what people mean when they describe their realities.

2.2 Ethnography and the Role of the Researcher in the Field

> "As Boler suggests, there is a mode of reading the emotional as political that 'calls upon us to "bear witness" and to actively engage in an examination of ethical responsibilities through our own emotional self-reflection' (Boler 1999:xxiv). It is in this sense – the sense of staying true to one's own emotional engagement – that I take the personal to be political. To recognize personal involvement in the production of ethnography is to take a political stance. The more the reader knows about me, the more I relinquish the power of 'ethnographic authority' (Clifford 1983). What still remains, though is my struggle to find a language that enables me to write *about* sadness and anger rather than writing *in* sadness and anger" (Laerke 2008:145).

The aim of the participant observation undertaken in Lesvos and especially at Pikpa was to get to know the daily life of refugees on the island and at Pikpa in particular. On the one hand, this makes it possible to write from an informed and involved perspective about the actors involved and their perspective on refugees' access to environmental services and benefits. On the other hand, the intense interaction with the protagonists of this thesis also made it possible to establish bonds. These special bonds have made the research undertaken an inspiring and rewarding experience. The intense interactions also give space and a need to account for the influences the researcher in the field might have had on the data produced and analyses and the way information and impressions from the field were perceived and interpreted. While a variety of aspects are with no doubt at work when people interact, I would like to present a few of them in more depth. Me being a white woman from a Western European and wealthy country, having funding to do this research at a Masters student level and the simple fact that I am doing research instead of, for instance, activism is a package that I carried with me wherever I went during my fieldwork phase. These issues were visible in one-on-one interactions with the refugees, both identifying as male and female, adults and children, the volunteers, and of course,

the authorities. There were characteristics at work that fall under the categories of analysis of ethnicity/race, origin/nationality, class, education, religion and age. They are "interdependent" (Walgenbach 2007:24) characteristics that do not work independently and that have to be understood the way they influence research. While these are not necessarily barriers, it is important to highlight that accepting a meal from a family, being invited for tea at a young man's place, meeting with a man over tea, entering a police station and chatting with the exclusively male officers, paying for someone's bus ticket or buying a birthday gift for a child are everyday life situations that can be comfortable or uncomfortable. During the fieldwork however, these were situations when it became obvious that there are tremendous differences between the living situations of the researcher and the protagonists of the study, based on all the categories of analysis imaginable. If somebody else had asked the exact same questions, they might have gotten different answers due to the different relation they would have had established. The aim here is to reflect on the perception of the moments spent together and to deliver a glimpse of how refugee reality was shown and narrated. In this, personal views play a role and are always visible in style and choice of examples.

2.3 Scope and Limitations

This thesis has a strong focus on environmental justice as a theory and research approach. It uses ethnographically informed approaches such as in depth conversations and participant observation. Qualitative data is the main data used for this purpose. Given that this is an ethnographically informed case study and not a full ethnography (that would require most of all more time for interaction), there are gaps and limits to knowledge. The case study is focused on the island of Lesvos, particularly the self-organized camp Pikpa. Narratives about reception, detention and the journey from Turkey to Lesvos contribute to drawing a picture of detention and reception centers, while visits to these places were logistically not possible,

mostly due to denied access. Some of the conversations also took place in Athens, due to the personal choices of the protagonists. While human rights advocates and their claims are presented in order to draw a broader picture of how environmental justice matters in the case of migrants at EU borders and to describe their role in Lesvos, human rights frameworks are not primarily within the scope of this research project. Therefore, comments on human right violations do not go deeper into legislation and policies. Further, the main focus of this thesis is not on policies as such, but on the everyday life experiences of migrants in the context of environmental justice.

3. Literature Review

The environmental interactions of refugees may not be the first problem that comes to mind when thinking about the present struggles of migrants at EU external borders. They obviously also encounter a lot of difficulties that are not primarily environmental. Therefore, it may be necessary to lay out the legitimacy of such approach. The explanation is based on relevant literature and multi-layered. First, an idea that a focus on environmental conditions in host countries only contributes to closing borders (Kibreab 1997) and the claim that for increased studies on the refugee-environment nexus (Piguet 2013) are presented. Then, the lifeboat ethics of Hardin (1974) will be put in context with humanitarian claims made for EU borders. After this, a claim for increased research on migrant-host relationships is made. Here, the importance of civil society in face of failing policies and state actors, but also of an analysis of power relations in the light of biopower (Rozakou 2012) is added. Finally, two main thoughts from environmental justice literature (Di Chiro 2008 and Schlosberg 2013) even the way towards the experiences from the field work of this thesis. The central point here is that environmental justice I about the everyday and that ecology does not only include the interaction of people with the natural environment, but also with human societies.

3.1 The Refugee-Environment Nexus

Already in 1997, Gaim Kibreab, a scholar in refugee studies, argued that the environmental conditions causing human movement are a "myth" (Kibreab 1997:1). He claimed that this focus had been adopted due to the then applied asylum strategy in the global North (Kibreab 1997). Seen in this light, and given the reinforced fencing strategies by the European Union, it is more than necessary to foster research on migrants and their environmental interaction in areas where it produces deeper knowledge about the struggles people face, rather than contributing to a discourse on environmental migration that fosters policies that dis-enable migrants to enter into healthy contact with environment and society in their host countries.

An earlier environmental discourse on resource protection as presented by Garret Hardin (1974) suggests that closing borders to migrants is a necessary policy for sustaining societies. His argumentation is that the "lifeboat" (Hardin 1974:561), the space and resources a society needs to sustain, cannot be shared with outsiders because resources are finite. He chooses the lifeboat metaphor answering a spaceship discourse used by environmentalists who use this to support their argument of equal access and responsibilities with regard to resource protection. Hardin doubts that all humans have an equal right to benefit from environmental resources given that the lack of control in such situations would lead to resource depletion (Hardin 1974). Hardin's thoughts on resource protection and the image of a full lifeboat are powerful. They turn into dangerous standpoints from an anthropocentric perspective, when put in relation with the humanitarian crisis that borders worldwide face with regard to migration. Here, human lives are threatened or neglected following policies that are based on similar protectionist approaches.

A number of reports and articles has been published throughout the last decade about the reception and living conditions of migrants in Greece and the EU asylum system to which

they are subjected. Human rights advocates claim that in the different fields of border control, the systems of reception and asylum and the practice of detention (MSF 2014, AI 2013, HRW 2013, and PA 2012), human rights are undermined and violated regularly. These organizations claim that the violations take place strategically and are sometimes accepted as collateral damage. Similar to a "lifeboat ethics" approach (Hardin 1974:1), the EU follows a discourse in which it makes the resources inaccessible for outsiders in need while safeguarding resources for people inside Europe (– supposedly in need as well). This perception completely neglects the benefits that immigration could have for European societies. If this perspective changed, immigration could be perceived as a contribution to society, and investment in the humane treatment of irregular migrants be seen as investment in European societies. Being actively part of a local environment might safeguard refugees' mental and physical health which will eventually benefit the host society. This is one conclusion that can be drawn from the recommendations given to Greece and the EU by MSF (2014) – safeguarding mental and physical health through the provision of adequate goods and services will have as a consequence a healthier group of migrants staying in Europe and improved chances of successful integration. While the US-American ecologist Garrett Hardin claims that a "world government" (Hardin 1974:568) is necessary to rule over resources. International human rights organizations, on the contrary, try to mobilize agents of change among policy makers, state agents, and civil society.

Not assisting migrants at the EU borders and the common lengthy detention with its amiss conditions, "constitute a violation of national, European and international standards". (MSF 2014:19) Here, a number of policies are relevant, such as "Directive 2008/115/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals; Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum

seekers (…,) EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; Greek Correctional Code; and UN Standard Minimum rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (...)“ (MSF 2014:19), as claimed by Médécins Sans Frontières. The ecological situation of refugees might not be mentioned as such in these legal agreements, but they are intrinsic in the conditions under which people live and the treatment they experience in Greece.

In a recent publication that gives an overview of the inconsistent role that the environment has played in migration research throughout the 20th century, Etienne Piguet, professor of Geography, claims that the “migration-environment nexus” needs further focus on embedding the environment in migration studies (Piguet 2013). He describes it as a field of research that has gone through significant periods of neglect of environmental topics in the last decades towards a new era in which the focus heavily lies on environmentally induced migration (Piguet 2013). Still, even Piguet mainly considers “environmental refugees”; nevertheless, his standpoint that the nexus between human migration and the environment needs innovative studies that look further into the complex relationships between social and environmental processes.

3.2 Refugee-Host Society Interaction

Adrian Martin, a scholar in development studies, identifies two different types of environmental conflicts between refugees and host societies – “cooperative” and “unproductive” ones (Martin 2005:329), or those that make a contribution to societies and those that create conflict. Turning unproductive interaction into productive interaction, he claims, might be possible through focusing on benefits that can be drawn from environmental resources for all actors involved. Conflictive relationships, it can be argued, can arise when migration policies make entry, reception, and stay traumatically difficult for

migrants, such as at the EU external borders. These places are generally far from fostering productive outcomes for migrants and host societies. Productive and positive interaction, as shown in this thesis, may be achieved in the given European and Greek context through civil society engagement. The strong involvement of civil society and the work of volunteers that can contribute to establishing long(er)-term relationships with refugees is highlighted as one solution to the problem of social segregation of refugees in migration research (Behnia 2007). In the case of local initiatives in Lesvos, such networks have been established through initiatives that have grown stronger and more formal throughout the years. Risbeth and Finney (2005) describe in their ethnographic approach towards integration of irregular migrants in Britain how access to natural space in reception countries can improve not only the physical and mental health of individuals, but how it also serves as a means of long-term bonding with space and inhabitants. Here, long term bonding, however, would be a vision of pro-immigration politics that neither the European Union nor the Hellenic republic practice.

Katerina Rozakou, a Greek anthropologist who focuses on the status quo of reception conditions of migrants in Greece, adopts an interesting perspective on biopolitics (Rozakou 2012), as politics that allow and deny life. She emphasizes the much neglected power dimensions of hospitality that are seemingly forgotten in general discourses about migration to Greece and reception in the country (Rozakou 2010). Her focus is mostly on the way volunteers experience the situation, giving a relatively new insight into the refugee-host relationship in the area. She claims that the camp as such is a space in which, through describing refugees as guests, irregular migrants are put in "a space between biological existence and full political and social life" (Rozakou 2012:536). She explains that in her field work observations, she found that "neither merely "bare life" nor a full political being, the refugee was produced as the receiver of humanitarian generosity, as having limited agency" (Rozakou 2012:536). Volunteers, however, turn this conceptualization around. They visit

refugees as hosts, granting them therefore re-attributed agency outside of the realm of authorities' responsibilities. Even when treating migrants as host, she claims, power relations are as much at work as in the camp, they are simply other types of power relations (Rozakou 2012). While she claims that both concepts are disputable, since even the volunteers idealize migrants' experiences, the concept of agency is important not only when talking about "helping", "supporting" and "empowering" refugees in everyday life, but also when it comes to the types of interactions refugees can have with the environment. There is a strong dependency of migrants on people and goods, but this dependency is rendered increasingly problematic with regard to institutional shortcomings and limitations of mobility in a zone of transit like Lesvos.

A voice highlighting the importance for locally grounded and internationally supported activism for the Greek-Turkish border region is the one of Max Schaub (2013). The irregular migration researcher claims that it is necessary for the region to receive international support from civil society networks and that such interventions are the only way to put pressure on the authorities in charge since these are actors actively involved in human rights violations that take place in the region (Schaub 2013). Whether or not these networks should be within in the focus of international policy-making to be used to establish durable integration patterns for migrants based on "social support networks", as presented by migration scholar Benham Behnia (2007:7), remains to be questioned: There might be a risk of putting too much of a burden on civil society while neglecting EU and Greek responsibilities and of even counting on civil society engagement while funds are subject to corruption (Personal Communications Joseph and Maria (a volunteer who had previously been working with a an international medical NGO) 2014). Local civic engagement seems to be one key to solving the problem (Schaub 2013). This can be supported by the fact that European and national policies seem to fail when it comes to confrontations with border realities. However, such

engagement needs to be aware of the power relations in their acting and a strong political framing to deliver their critique.

The ecological interactions between host societies and refugees' needs are a body of investigation that can use an environmental justice framework and thus become a part of research from a movement's perspective that has been growing in Europe throughout the last decades. Arguing from an environmental justice perspective might support refugees and those working for them in their struggle for improved conditions at the edges of Europe.

3.3 Environmental Justice Beyond Distribution

Environmental Justice, as professor for environmental politics David Schlosberg claims, is both "an academic idea" (2013:50) and a "social movement" (2013:50). Schlosberg has been claiming for over a decade that this perspective needs to go beyond distributional issues of access to environmental benefits and exposure to resources. He points out that environmental injustice always includes struggles related to identity and procedures in a broader sense of ecology. As he puts it:

> "The distributional paradigm is not the only articulation of justice, especially in practice. The issue of distribution is always present and central, but is also almost always tied with some discussion of recognition, political participation, and/or capabilities at both the individual and community level" (2007:2).

Cases of environmental injustice around the world have often been highlighted as cases where livelihoods or existences are threatened through environmental degradation, where particular societal groups receive a significantly higher share of environmental bads, where environmental decision making processes do not include nor take into account the rights and wants of local population. The rights and wants of ethnic minorities, indigenous groups or

environmental refugees have been described intensely and it has been shown how those who do not get recognized, who cannot participate and those who do not receive a corresponding share of advantages or disadvantages when it comes to natural resources are experiencing environmental injustice.

As a concept, movement and research topic in the European context, environmental justice has been present throughout the last decades. Here, a variety of approaches have been adopted, e.g. the development of an interpretation of environmental justice as 'just sustainabilities' by environmental social scientist Julian Agyeman and urban planning expert Bob Evans (2004), mainly describing the British environmental justice context, or the work of a group of authors that has described the scope for environmental justice in Eastern and Central Europe in a number of publications (Filcak 2007; Steger *et al.* 2007; Antypas *et al.* 2008 and Steger; Filcak 2008; Filcak 2010). This group of authors has focused on evidence of environmental racism, as proven by an in depth description of the situation of Roma in various countries of the region and give an overview of the legal and political basis for pushing environmental justice forward on an EU agenda. They show that Romani people are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, excluded widely from environmental benefits and how this segregation is institutionalized on a basis of ethnicity. The authors describe two realms of evidence where environmental injustice can take place: when people are suffering "from exposure to environmental hazards due to their proximity to hazardous waste sites, incinerators, factories, and other sources of pollution" (Steger *et al.* 2007:9) and when they "are denied environmental benefits such as water, sewage treatment facilities, sanitation and access to natural resources" (Steger *et al.* 2007:9). In the context of settlement of minority groups in proximity to waste sites, the authors refer to the idea that discriminatory practices based on social categories are "aggravated by 'environmental' discrimination" (Antypas *et al.* 2008:14). Differences in perspective between an earlier US-

American approach based on ethnic groups and the European social conditions-based approach to environmental justice have been highlighted in an overview of environmental justice in the European context by Éloi Laurent (2011), expert in questions of wellbeing and environmental sustainability. This author, however, advises that the focus on social status within the EU "should not be understood as meaning that environmental inequalities do not have a racial dimension in Europe (they of course do, like all social inequalities in racially diverse societies, as research on environmental inequality affecting the Roma community in Central and Eastern Europe shows (…)" (Laurent 2011:1849), referring directly to the work of Steger and Filcak (2008). In their 2008 publication on the vision of an environmental justice policy for the European Union, Antypas *et al.* state that a universal definition of environmental justice does not exist, but that "all definitions converge upon the concepts of discrimination and distribution of harms/risks and benefits" (Antypas *et al*. 2008:10). In the context of policy and law that could create a background environmental justice claims, the authors find that the EU has created a "vacuum" (Antypas *et al.* 2008:21), a shell built from international human rights law and environmental agreements in which the context-specific content, laws that bridge the gap both between human rights and environmental issues and the international efforts and European problems is missing (Antypas *et al*. 2008). For instance, most countries within the EU (including Greece) have signed and ratified the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, the so-called Aarhus Convention, which states that every person "of present or future generations" has the right "to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being" (Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) 1998:2). This convention, as the authors claim, would be a major step forward in procedural environmental justice matters, if only the link between vulnerability and structural environmental was addressed in the region (Antypas *et al.* 2008). Respecting this

right to an environment that contributes to health and well-being for migrants at EU external borders in the early stages of their life in Europe, maybe as well the "duty and the duty, both individually and in association with others, to protect and improve the environment for the benefit of present and future generations" (Aarhus Convention 1998:2) will then be recognized by the migrants in question. Most of all in the case of refugees under international protection, ensuring their well-being throughout their presence in EU territory may have positive long term implications for sustainability. Experiences of environmental justice are created through structural discrimination based on non-static categories. They cannot only coexist, but are interwoven. This is the case for irregular migrants in the EU. Despite the role that ethnicity surely plays a major role, as can be seen in the raise of modern fascism in the EU, it is always tied to the social conditions of those being discriminated. The very economic crisis experience and discourse give evidence for this.

3.4 Everyday Life of Migrants and Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice has been the subject of research in the realm of everyday migrant life in a several cases, globally. The spatial distribution of environmental risk among migrant communities in Germany (Raddatz and Mennis 2012), environmental working conditions of immigrant women in the US (Gute *et al.* 2009), procedural justice in environmental matters of Asian immigrants and refugees in the US (Sze 2011), migrants and refugees who settle down in contaminated areas (Filcak 2010), or even the consequences of exposure to lead in refugee resettlement practice (Caron and Tshabangu-Soko 2012). Despite the focus on migration and environmental injustices, these contributions look at migrants or refugees residing permanently in a place. The particular case of migrants in the very first stages of their stay at European external borders and the daily life implications of access to environmental services and benefits has been neglected.

Opening this field for environmental justice research and activism and looking into the reception and living conditions of migrants at the external borders of the EU can have the following implications. First of all, increasing research on different groups not yet sufficiently assessed within environmental justice research may give the field and the movement evidence on which activism can be built. Static definitions of environmental justice as in early research can be resolved and the often invisibilized and "multifaceted relations between environmental features and human wellbeing" (Walker 2009:619), described by Walker, a geographer working on environmental justice theory can become visible. Second, it may be shown that environmental discrimination is a part of racist practice and that there are multiple contexts in which the environmental aspects are not the main issue, but part of the experience of discrimination, and often a tool to exert power over those being discriminated. Third, migrants at the borders and the people involved in work with them locally and through international networks may be able to establish links between human rights, health, and environment (Steger *et al.* 2007) for their struggles for better treatment, but also for the revision of the European reception and asylum apparatuses. In addition, making the case for environmental justice at external EU borders in particular can contribute increased evidence, another story to tell, for those voices that aim at further integrating EU environmental and human rights policies for sustainability (Antypas *et al.* 2008; Steger *et al.* 2007).

3.5 Environmental Justice in Lesvos - Beyond Distribution and in Everyday Life

Environmental Justice has always been concerned with the everyday. It has intensely been described how feminist approaches of social reproduction and environmental activism combined explain that everyday life reproduction is environmental by Giovanna Di Chiro (2008), researcher on environment and community activism. Her work is, on the one hand, very much focused on "sustaining everyday life" (Di Chiro 2008:280) in order to assure the

future of communities, and on the concept of environmental justice in relation to the activism based on it, on the other hand.

It has been shown in publications focusing on Central and Eastern Europe that environmental injustice and environmental racism in Europe follow comparable patterns and practices as elsewhere. Similar practices of structural environmental discrimination, as I suggest in this thesis, apply to the initial living conditions of third country nationals entering the EU live. Here, it is not possible to determine racism against a specific ethnic group, but it appears that environmental racism exists against people who can be described as the community of migrants that are described as irregular in the context of the EU. They encounter common struggles and experience similar barriers to survival.

The situation of irregular migrants at EU external borders and in Greece as a country in which this case study is located, accounts for a seemingly endless number of things going wrong. Among the deficits that become visible in the way migrants are treated around the EU external sea border of Greece with Turkey are (1) exposure to risk during the travel in the Aegean Sea; defense strategies of coast guards and Frontex (European border police) increasing the exposure to risk, given the weather conditions and the fact that most migrants do not know how to swim; and (2) reception and detention conditions in Lesvos (and other places in Greece mainland or islands), including denial of free movement, denial of access to fresh air, lack of heating, lack and quality of food, water, sanitation, and clothing. The issues relevant from an environmental justice perspective that came up in interaction with the protagonists of this research are summarized in the following chapters. A central dimension of observation here is how refugees relate to their immediate environment, both in Lesvos and in detention. The focus here is on fieldwork in Lesvos but the situation of refugees is comparable at many other points of entry in the EU. The following excerpt from field notes

with its media piece from the British Guardian Journal (Smith 2014) shows the common ways that are usually associated with migrants at European borders: the risky journey by boat and the inhumane detention conditions. While these associations reflect realities, there is little focus in public discourse on the implications these experiences have for migrants and host societies. The remainder of this thesis argues that beyond these issues, interaction with host society and environment in everyday life are crucial factors to migrants' wellbeing.

> On April 1st, Helena Smith, correspondent in Greece for the Guardian Journal, writes "Migrants face 'living hell' 'in detention" (Smith 2014). The picture shows a rusty boat full of people, the caption: "The Greek coast guard rescued a boatload of more than 300 migrants in the sea near Crete on Monday 31 March 2014. But many detained migrants face hellish conditions in Greece" (Smith 2014). Hellish conditions, in this case are the detention conditions of migrants who are detained by the Greek police and put into prisons or centers, where sanitation, health care, food and water and heating are of bad quality or do not exist. The question, the image seems to be asking: Given what is awaiting them, is it worth the journey? Is it worth the risk? In the long run, this clearly depends on what conditions one left and what luck one has in applying for asylum, getting a positive answer, moving forward and on where one lands in Europe. The time migrants spend in Greece, however, is a time of lack of almost everything one might expect or need (Field notes April 2014).

4. Case Study: Irregular Migrants' Ecological Situation in Lesvos, Greece

Figure 2. Location of Lesvos with its capital Mytilini, the screening centre in Moria, and the self-organized camp Pikpa (Map Source: Google Earth).

The island of Lesvos (also called Mytilini, its capital) is part of the Northern Aegean at about 8.5 km from the Turkish coast (figure 2). The region is part of the main entry route of migrants to Europe with Turkey being the transit country most irregular migrants pass through (Strik 2013). Migrants reaching the island usually cross the sea with boats from Turkey. In April 2014 alone, 1500 individuals were arrested by the Hellenic Coast Guards in Greece, many most of them between Turkey and Greece (Greek Republic Ministry of Shipping and Islands 2014). Individuals and families pay a fee to the traffickers in Turkey and make their way without guidance through the often dangerous night and sea to Greece. Migrants often do not know they will be arriving to Lesvos but are told they will be arriving to Athens. Cases of maltreatment, such as illegal push backs physical and psychological violence taking place at sea and under the safeguarding of the coast guards (AI 2013), by the Hellenic Coast Guards have been reported, whose responsibility it is to detect the boats and

provide immediate help. If not detected at sea, migrants who arrive to the beaches of Lesvos can be detected by the police or are on their own. Helping migrants at sea or on land before they are subject to screening procedures can lead to the criminalization of the person trying to help (FRA 2014). Migrants arriving to Lesvos are diverse and their legal status depends on the geopolitical situation in their countries of origin. Since the status of "refugee" is not assigned to those escaping from economic instability (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2001-2014), the identity of individuals needs to be clarified. Until decisions on the status are made, individuals and families reaching the island have to go through a process of first arrival procedures in a screening center in Moria after giving their fingerprints at the police station. The center in Moria is a temporary structure that is used as a substitute for the old center in Pagani, which was closed in 2009 due to the obsolete conditions in which people were living and after an international campaign of activists, NGOs and media had pointed out the human rights violations with regard to material and health conditions. Moria is a small center of containers and fences that serves as a place where it is determined if migrants can be considered asylum seekers or if they are to be sent back to their countries of origin according to international law. People stay in here up to two weeks (Personal Communication Panagiotis N. 2014). The center is operated by the Hellenic Police. A new center, officially called "welcome center" is being built close to the present Moria camp. This center, according to the plans of the Initital Reception Service will be ready soon (Personal Communication Panagiotis N. 2014). The problem with the present camp in Moria is that its capacities cannot satisfy the needs of the number of people who arrive to the island. The conditions inside described in testimonies for this research, are a consequence of overcrowding and insufficient resources. Those who get released are then provided with a so-called "white paper" that allows them to move freely in Greece for up to 30 days (Personal Communication Yonous M. 2014). After these 30 days have passed, they have to either have asked for asylum or left the country. Leaving the country is only possible

illegally, while arriving and applying for asylum in Greece will have the permanent stay in Greece as a consequence according to the Dublin II and Dublin III regulations which define the EU member states' responsibilities with regard to entry and stay of third country nationals and asylum procedures (European Council Regulation (EC) 343/2003 2003 and European Parliament and Council Regulation (EU) 604/2013 2013). A common practice in Lesvos is for the police to bring individuals and groups who got released to the camp called Pikpa. Pipka is a place previously used as a children holiday village, now used as a self-organized camp for refugees. In fact that there often are no alternatives for people who are waiting for papers, or the ferry to Athens. Generally, it is difficult for refugees to find other types of accommodation due to lack of financial resources, the prejudices of hotel of owners or the lack of knowledge about the island. Those migrants who have a right to stay in Greece given their status stay at Pikpa for no longer than a couple of days, in the best case. However, there is also a group of people who are long term residents in the self-organized camp. Some of them may be waiting for their asylum requests to be issued which had been initiated under the "old system" (Personal Communication Yonous M. and Maria 2014) and which can take years to be processed. Others may be waiting for a family member to be released from detention or have to recover from health problems before being able to move on.

The camp is run uniquely by volunteers who provide food in the form of collected donations and support them with legal and practical advice. Especially between the long term residents and the volunteers, friendships have evolved. The volunteer network is mostly local, built by people with experience in working with refugees, neighbors, residents of the island, but also church actors, NGOs and international friends.

Despite the general Greek refugee management practices, this thesis is focused on the island of Lesvos as a geographical case study, more precisely of the environmental interactions of refugees staying at the self-organized Pikpa camp. Other spaces on the island and Greek territory form part of the experiences of many irregular migrants, these are central to the narratives around migration experiences and may give a broader glimpse of the refugee experience in Greece. The next chapter gives an overview of the environment-related everyday struggles of irregular migrants in Lesvos, with a focus on the Pikpa camp. Further, narratives about the experiences in reception and detention centers are presented. In order to synthesize the empirical data from the field work, reports and articles suggest deeper insights in the issues brought up by the protagonists of this research.

5. "Sustaining Everyday Life"

In her 2008 publication, Giovanna Di Chiro claims that activism that focuses on the "social reproduction" (Di Chiro 2008:294) – something she describes as "the maintenance and sustainability of everyday life and earthly survival" (Di Chiro 294) and environmental justice have a potential to "curb problems as big as global warming" (Di Chiro 294). This thesis argues that they might also be able to curb another great problem: the struggles of irregular migrants at borders. This chapter aims at first describing the way irregular migrants interact with their immediate environment, supporting the creation of answers to the first research question. In addition, narratives about reception and detention are presented in order to give ideas towards answering the second research question of how individuals describe their experiences in reception and detention facilities in Lesvos and elsewhere in Greece. The third research question, how the situation can be seen in the light of an environmental justice approach, is addressed in the everyday topics related to social reproduction and environmental

interaction. Analyzing the data from the field work with Di Chiro's approach gives ideas how to answer the third research question.

5.1 Activism in Lesvos – "This Alternative is based on Solidarity"

Civil society organizations and groups of volunteers have been able to show in the past that there is interest from part of the local island society to be agents of change. A collective of volunteers on the island of Lesvos, the Village of All Together, is active with the aim to provide better reception conditions to the refugees and immigrants (Rozakou 2012, WTL 2012a, and WTL 2013). Several milestones have been achieved by these volunteers: The Pikpa open camp started its activities in the early 2000s after the situation in Afghanistan drove a large number of people to leave the country and try to reach Europe. Back then, the purpose was to "overcome the system of detention" when providing space for migrants waiting for their cases to be examined (Personal Communication Constantinos 2014). The open center was closed the first time when the police who had been in charge of asylum application back then, accelerated the process of asylum due to pressure by the community. The second decisive moment for the group and their activities was in 2012, when the project reopened because of the Syrian conflict and the closure of the land border with Turkey in Evros when increased numbers of people came to the island (Personal Communication Maria 2014). The camp is an unused holiday village run by volunteers that gives shelter to irregular migrants who would otherwise be in the overcrowded reception center, in detention or in the streets. In addition to this space and care provided for refugees, the network was also strongly involved in the protests that led to the closure of the center in Pagani, Lesvos, that gained international media attention due to the disastrous conditions inside (WTL 2012a; Oi Polloi 2013).

The group, who makes the situation of refugees on the island accessible for insiders and outsiders through their online presence and networking activities with international groups, claims on its website:

> "The example of a self-organized reception center in Pikpa on Lesvos, where local people provided hospitality to those arriving proves that there are alternatives to militarized border controls, push backs, and detention centers. This alternative is based on solidarity" (WTL 2013).

As a reaction to the frustration with the authorities and the living conditions of refugees on the island, local solidarity initiatives have evolved. In a press statement that was written after the first opening of the open Pikpa center, the group states:

> "(...) we want to thank all of our fellow citizens who all this time helped alleviate the situation. Thanks to them our fellowmen who sought refuge in our country have a place to be protected from the cold and rain and a plate of food" (WTL 2012a).

Here, it becomes visible that a central point of critique in the past and current situation is the lack of acknowledgement of the central ecological and social needs of migrants by the authorities. The dependency on the authorities and the limited responsibility accounted for by these lead to a situation in which refugees and irregular migrants depend on the local civil society for help. While efforts are made by part of the island society, the group does recognize its limited capacities:

> "We emphasize that the problem has not disappeared but rather has expanded and it is certain that in the future it will even grow larger" (WTL 2013).

This initial statement shows that they are aware that their engagement will only partly be able to change the overall situation of refugees and a failure in the system even if, for those people who are able to spend time at Pikpa, the current situation improves with the support of the network. They continue:

> "We appeal to organizations, associations, unions and other ordinary citizens to help us until the state will assume its responsibilities" (WTL 2012a).

Here, the temporary manner in which aid can take place, but also the ideal involvement of a broader base of society is communicated. For the Greek state, they formulate the following expectations:

> "We demand from the state clear commitments to immediately move on to create structures with human conditions of survival for our fellow humans. We offer ourselves to continue the voluntary efforts and support, but in no case we will substitute the role of the state".

Reflecting on the media discourses around incidents in the region and the living and detention conditions of refugees in Lesvos, they claim:

> "As active citizens we don't accept any further image of shame with small children as protagonists and weary fellow humans and we will not allow from now on any negligence from the side of the responsible. Whatever happens on this island is representing all of us and we will not allow other situations that would be contradictory to what the society of Lesvos really is" (WTL 2012a).

Here, the sound of the words shows how the people involved in Pikpa and the Village of All Together see migrants and the institutions responsible for them as part of the same local society. There appears to be an active civility on the island that interconnects people. This is

not only a theoretical idea, but is materialized in this research that lives mainly from the many recommendations and contacts that people provided for it. Further, those taking care of refugees locally work in close cooperation with international networks and NGOs, refugees returning to the island and a transnational network of helpers in order to provide food, shelter and basic medical care. Even a helpful document has been written, a leaflet in which refugees are welcomed, shortly introduced to the island infrastructure of aid and are given information not only on their legal rights, but also on prospects and obstacles for once they leave the island (WTL 2012b).

The fact that local and international individuals and groups from civil society assume responsibility for people in need and that the needs of refugees are recognized, if not on an institutional level at least on an island level, gives hope that a governance system of refugees' ecological needs can take a shape in which they can be perceived as people with rights and agency. However, it seems as if the way to go from local solidarity to acknowledging the role of satisfying irregular migrants' needs for a sustainable society is still long. The following subchapters give an overview of topics about ecological interaction in everyday life of irregular migrants at Pikpa and in Greece.

5.2 “Food is everywhere, but only tasty when you have peace inside” - Stories about Food and Water

5.1.1 Rotten Beans – Food in Detention

> The food in detention and reception centers was overall described as very bad. While some people said that the food in the detention center in Komotini was very limited in amount and variety, but also of rotten quality, in the detention center in Korinthos it had been the same food for over a year and that this lead to problems with digestion and malnourishment. In this case, it was “potatoes, every day, I am sick of it” (Personal Communication Doudou March 2014) that had been served every single day since the arrest of the man who had forwarded an asylum request. The food was bad, once they gave them rotten beans, “rotten!” Joseph exclaims. There was nothing they could do about it but throw them away, you cannot eat that, he says. “We were treated like animals, animals!” (Personal Communication Joseph April 2014).

When Joseph, a man from Congo in his early thirties, says that the food in detention was inhumane, rotten, something the guards would probably not even give to the dogs, he said he felt like he was treated like an animal. It is in this important distinction between eating as a human necessity and having meals where the practices of food supply to migrants in the official centers shows that there is no minimum respect for them and that having to eat and having a meal are realms where power imbalances are negotiated. Sometimes, also people held at the port police area due to overload of the center in Lesvos have to rely on food donations from local volunteers.

According to testimonies, food in the screening center in Moria in Lesvos is provided. However, it was described as tasteless and insufficient. Aarash, a young Afghan man in his late twenties, says, the arrival of the truck of an ambulant food vendor is a central event for

those who can afford to buy sweets and snacks from him. It is important to keep in mind, nevertheless, that even if this possibility to purchase food is given, many migrants in the center have lost their money or cannot afford to spend it on food, knowing that they are far from reaching their final destination.

While the conditions of detention centers have been among the central points of critique of a variety in reports in the last decade, the issue of food supply here is not as central as one might expect from the narratives around food that are central to conversations with irregular migrants and refugees. One of the few reports that pays closer attention to food conditions in the detention of migrants is a 2012 report by ProAsyl (PA) about the Evros region and detention conditions there. This report reflects a number of conversations and gives evidence that food is not only a major issue in Lesvos, but in refugee life in general. It is obvious why: food intake is one of the basic needs of people in order to sustain, while other living conditions might have detrimental impacts on health and a lack of food would be the most central concern. Further, meals in the centers are perceived as structural elements of daily life that establish a routine, no matter how little food is provided or how tasteless it is.

5.1.2 Food and Eating at Pikpa

At Pikpa, there is a kitchen on the ground floor of the central building. Here, food is stored on tables in one corner, there are several stoves and oven on one wall and a large fridge on another wall. People prepare here what they receive from donations from the islanders, mostly potatoes, pasta, and onions, oil and spices as basic food items. The variety of food can be limited and monotonous. Whoever can afford it needs to walk to twenty minutes to the next grocery store. Compared to the centers and the difficulties of finding food with very limited budgets and while on the move people have experienced, the main advantage of staying at Pikpa is to be able to consume food of quality and extended variety and, most importantly, to

be able to prepare it individually. All of this enables the migrants there to convert it into a meal. Having a meal instead of mere energy and nutrient intake makes an important difference. It becomes most visible what being able to prepare and enjoy food that is not limited means to people when listening closely to their stories and sharing meals together. Visitors who come to Pikpa are often invited to have a meal or tea, both becoming a ritual for guests and hosts and a ritual of organizing the day and taking care of each other.

> One day, when I entered the room of the Afghan family, they were collectively separating mint leaves from branches they had picked outside Pikpa, washing them, blending them and mixing them with spices and yoghurt, which would later be the sauce for pasta we enjoyed together. The smiles on the kids' faces when their little brother came home with a bag of fresh strawberries were beautiful (Field notes April 2014).

Access to food and the way people get access to food is a field in which power relations become very visible. The moment when someone tries to find out who finished the food he had left in the kitchen and finds out that it had been eaten by a kid, the mistake when one of the volunteers supplies too little ingredients to cover the needs of the newly arrived people – these moments show that the lack of food or the unequal distribution even among people at Pikpa can be problematic and that food is a sensitive issue that has the power to bring people together and make them nervous and anxious. The Afghan family who stays at Pikpa for a longer time, even bought chicken to have eggs. They keep them outside in the green space of Pikpa. This would probably not have been possible elsewhere. Despite the dependence on donations, the necessity to share food and the limited choices people can make here according to their preferences, the concept of Pikpa accounts for a visible improvement of the food situation of most people who stay there compared to experiences on the move or in detention. The distinction between treating migrants like animals, as Joseph describes it and taking care

of people's needs shows that food is among the most important aspects in which the very concept of Pikpa improves the life of migrants directly.

> "The pleasure that was in the air when celebrating a birthday party where food was abundant and blissful, or the many other moments that were shared over food show that being able to eat, choosing where, what, how and when to eat and drink all seem to be part of the sovereignty that Pikpa tries to provide" (Field notes April 2014).

5.2 "The Cold in Europe is not Good for you" - Access to Shelter and Heating

Shelter and heating are important issues for migrants in Lesvos and elsewhere in Greece, since Greek winters can be cold and moist and most of the detention facilities do not have acceptable heating systems that could prevent people from exposure to the cold. The lack of access to heating and bedding, the moist facilities, and access to clothes are highlighted in a number of reports arguing that the conditions in detention and even for those asylum seekers waiting for their claims to be processed are critical (PA 2012; AI 2013; MSF 2014). Yonous M., the director of the Greek Forum for Refugees network underlines that social participation and housing conditions are connected. Such participation in society is supposed to be prevented partly through actions like the police operation Xenios Zeus (HRW 2008) that aims at detecting illegal immigration through controlling, for instance, migrants in the streets. This, he says, is based on mere appearance. In Athens and elsewhere in Greece, many migrants with or without papers are residing in overpriced and overcrowded basements which they cannot leave without fear of getting into the focus of police surveillance. He says, this type of accommodation should not be seen as a shelter. It should rather be described as a form of informal detention and an important limitation of migrant mobility. A 2013 public statement by AI highlights the detention conditions experienced, states:

> "In November 2012 when Amnesty International delegates visited the Korinthos detention facility, conditions at the center were very poor. There was lack of heating and hot water while bedding was dirty and not sufficient for the cold weather. In the beginning of February 2013, Amnesty International received further reports about very poor detention conditions including lack of bedding for the cold and further allegations that police ill-treated detainees at the facility" (AI 2013:1).

Aamir has spent many years both in centers and at Pikpa after leaving Iran. He says he is regularly controlled in the streets of Mytilini. Even though his asylum request is being processed and he has papers to prove this, the regular interaction with the police is not easy. He explains that they take him to the police station where he has to wait for hours, regularly. These practices as well have been identified as psychological burden and limiting factors to social integration by human rights advocates (HRW 2008, MSF 2014). Others, such as Joseph, say that the trouble experienced with a fascist groups and their violence in the streets makes them stay inside as much as possible, especially in big cities like Athens.

> Aamir, who came to Greece as an unaccompanied minor, says that the new provisional screening center in Moria is much better than the now closed old center in Pagani. He does not know Moria from inside, but he knows from people who told him about their stay there that it is bigger, cleaner, that everything is new. He adds that it is an advantage that people do not have to sleep in dirty beds there, at least not beds with the dirt of many years as he encountered in detention centers. His own experiences at Pagani, he says were horrible compared to the situation in Moria right now. He says, migrants who say Moria is bad will see and know the difference if they are detained later on during their journeys, in Athens or elsewhere. In detention, everyone told me, it was cold. In Europe, I was told by one of the Congolese men I met that it is always cold, even in summer, and that the cold drives them crazy. They say it does not good to people (Field notes April 2014).

Pikpa receives donations of clothes and bedding in addition to food. These items are not only necessary because people carry little luggage, but because of the climatic conditions in the island with its cold and moist sinters and springs.

5.3 "Why Should We Clean Their Toilets?" and the Water Bottle System – The Issue of Sanitation

> "The toilets in the bathrooms building have been broken for weeks now. They are dirty and getting dirtier every day. And the problem is, that the new arrivals don't care. So we discussed in our meeting with the volunteers that it is be best if one of us who lives here has a key. Every time one of the new people needs to do their business, we can give them the key. They will be forced to clean up after themselves. And it is okay, because they don't spend so much time here. Why should we clean their toilets, if it is a place that should be for everyone?" (Personal Communication Jack May 2014).

This comment made by Jack, a Congolese man in his thirties, after a meeting of the volunteers and the migrants at Pikpa shows that sanitation is a delicate issue because of the different levels of care that the different groups of people apply to the facilities. While those who stay at Pikpa for months have an increased interest in clean and appealing facilities, the temporary guests might not see the need for intensive cleaning. However, in a conversation with a newly arrived Afghan couple, it became clear, that even though the level of care might be different, they had tried to clean the toilet facilities and had stopped because the cleaning utensils they were able to find at Pikpa had not been sufficient. Sanitation, just as every other element discussed in this section, is vital for the everyday wellbeing of refugees. While some of the issues arising from obsolete conditions of bathrooms and the lack of hygiene are outlined in the next subchapter on health, this section is important, because a lack of hygiene cannot only have health impacts, but also represents a topic that is closely related to intimate life as well as internal struggles between the people staying at Pikpa. It is directly linked to the practices

of surveillance and care in the detention and reception centers. The existence of a single toilet for a group of hundreds of people and the lack of willingness to improve by the responsible authorities are only one problem. Mainly, the conditions of toilets and showers are described as grotesque (Personal Communication Jack 2014). From a visit to the detention center in Korinthos, AI reports in 2013 that "there was no soap or toilet paper and detainees said that the authorities did not provide them with hygiene products" (AI 2013:1). In Komotini, a heavily criticized center in the North of Greece (MSF 2014), there was no soap, no toothbrushes, no cloths, says Joseph. Only after weeks, a delegation from the EU came and gave them kits with items for personal care and clothes. Yonous M., director of the GFR, explains that a variety of practices in detention centers build on the fact that the sanitary facilities are out of order. He says that many refugees make use of a system of water bottles, one for drinking, and others for personal care. This way, they can avoid the use of dirty bathrooms and the time spent waiting in line for a dirty bathroom (Personal Communication Yonous M. 2014).

5.4 "I Never Had Problems. Now, Everything Hurts" - Migrant Health

5.4.1 Detention

A recent report on the detention conditions of irregular migrants in Greece by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) is an interesting critique of detention being a common practice that is not only a problem in itself, but which produces a variety of complications as consequences. The authors of this report describe how

> "The systematic detention of migrants and asylum seekers is increasingly being used, worldwide, as a core migration management tool – including by European Union member states – to restrict the influx of migrants and to pressurize detained migrants into joining

> voluntary return programs. At the same time, the detrimental impact of detention on migrants' health and wellbeing is largely disregarded by the authorities and ignored by host societies" (MSF 2014:7).

Despite this more general critique of detention as a tool, the report is focused on the experiences that medical staff made in detention centers, police stations and other spaces of refugee life in Greece. In Lesvos itself, the NGO had been active twice between 2008 and 2012. In addition to this, a number of people staying at Pikpa in Lesvos or living on the island Lesvos have been detained elsewhere before and confirm the critique that MSF now exhibits. In fact, several men at Pikpa recognized the pictures published in the report when it was shown to them and reacted with surprise, wondering how and by whom these photos had been taken. The report is based on two main points of critique, the health impact that detention has on migrants as a practice and the medical goods and services provided to them in detention. According to MSF, both physical and mental health suffer at detention facilities due to the very fact that detention itself is perceived as unjustified, but also due to the limited access to environmental goods and services of everyday need.

> "MSF's experience shows that being detained is the single most important cause of stress and frustration for the majority of migrants. Symptoms of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic manifestations were observed in many patients. Bad living conditions, overcrowding, constant noise, inactivity, dependence on other people's decisions and uncertainty about the future, all contributed to detainees' psychological distress" (MSF 2014:13).

In addition to these factors, the report mentions the lack of information and communication with the outside world as problematic. It is further highlighted that psychological problems do not only arise in detention, but that the groups concerned often have previous psychological

problems due to their experiences in their countries of origin and their journey to Europe that are reinforced through the conditions and treatment in detention.

The "extremely poor physical conditions"(9) of the facilities themselves, with "overcrowding, substandard hygiene conditions, inadequate heating, not enough hot water and a lack of ventilation" (9) lead to diseases and stress. The most common health issues recorded by MSF between 2013 and 2014 were "upper respiratory tract infections (24.7%); gastrointestinal disorders (14.7%); musculoskeletal problems (13.7%); skin diseases (8.5%); and dental problems (7.9%)". Here, it is likely that these problems arise from limited access to outdoor space, food of bad quality and sanitation facilities in questionable conditions, but also a lack of heating, moist buildings and a lack of clothing.

Problematic are not only these common practices, but the fact that medical services are not accessible. The treatment often has to be paid by migrants themselves while they cannot afford it. The inhumane treatment of detainees by the guards and police, who, as recorded often, do not pay attention to the claims made is another important factor.

> Constantinos is a colorfully dressed and quiet person, thinks before he speaks, and breathes in his cigarette smoke slowly and deeply. He was working in a center until 2009. He says: “the real problem are not the conditions that people live in. Even if the conditions inside the centers are the best one can imagine, the question remains: should these people be in detention at all?” (Personal Communication Constantinos 2014) The problem, for him, is the practice of detention itself (Field notes April 2014).

The practice of detention, as many of the people call it, is referring to the way migrants are detained by the police and kept in centers up to 18 months. Even when applying for asylum, people are commonly detainees. In fact, many people can apply for asylum only from a

detention facility because they get visits from NGOs who provide information about their legal rights. Experiences about detention were shared with me by a number of people, such as Jack, Joseph and Omid at Pikpa. They had each spent between six months and a year and a half in detention centers while waiting for their asylum claim to be processed. One story that describes the access to health services in Komotini very well is the one that Jack and Joseph tell about a friend who had been in pain for days until he lost consciousness. Only then, he was taken to a doctor by the guards. Due to the delayed treatment, the man is now paralyzed.

With the new reception and asylum systems, this, for some people seemingly endless, detention procedure will hopefully change. The Initial Reception Service is established for that purpose and has as aim to improve the conditions in the centers and to accelerate the process within which the status of a person is determined. People can be kept in those centers for a time of approximately 2 weeks (Personal Communication Panagiotis N. 2014). However, since the processes are still changing, there are still people who asked for asylum in the old system in detention right now. The detention centers they put him in twice were prisons, not centers, Joseph and Jack say, as they call them.

> It was like torture in the head, not a prison like it should be, where people live well (Personal Communication Jack April 2014).

Doudou, their African friend whom they put on the phone to prove they are still in contact with friends who are still in detention, says that at the detention center he is at in Korinthos, he does not have access to chairs nor heating. In almost 18 months he has not eaten anything but potatoes. He is sick of them, he says. Due to the cold temperatures in winter and spring and the lack of heating, he says they feel constantly cold. The way they help themselves to feel warmer is through heating water in a tea kettle. He says, this is the only way they can fight the cold right now.

> Talking to Doudou on the phone was a moment of total surprise. How do you talk to someone who is in detention because he is considered illegal...? Someone who says he has nothing else than just being himself and coming to Europe. Someone who says he has been eating but potatoes for more than a year and a half, someone who says there is no chair he can sit on, who says he feels cold all the time. What can I say to him, but explaining the situation in which I am meeting with his friend, explaining who I am? I ask a lot of questions, if he is fine and if he is healthy, if he has hope. He asks about what it would be like for him in Germany and if they treat refugees better there. To be honest, I say, I am not very familiar with the situation in Germany. But I believe from what I hear that Greece really has the worst conditions for people arriving to Europe. That I believe it could not get worse than that (Personal Communication Jack, Joseph, and Doudou, March 2014).

While ProAsyl asks the Greek government in its 2013 report to insure entry to the country by refugees as the most basic requirement in refugee management, another important recommendation was made by the authors of the Amnesty International 2013 report (AI 2013, PA 2013). They ask both the Greek authorities and the EU to invest in increased reception capacity and improved conditions rather than in the current approach to border management (AI 2013). The authors further request the authorities to find "alternatives to detention" (AI 2013:26). Such alternatives could potentially be refuge in openly managed areas, just like Pikpa. Such thinking is possible, but projects following these idea will of course have to take into account that health services and supply with basic goods will be needed if these were to be realized.

5.4.2 Health at Pikpa

> Jack shows me a video he took secretly with his phone in Komotini. I recognize Jack and Joseph, in a small room, some people sitting at a table, other on bunk beds. They explain where they are, leave the room, and show the bathrooms, the broken toilets, the broken showers, the buckets they use instead of the showers. Windows were broken, doors too. The water was always cold, water was everywhere due to the leakages. Human feces everywhere on the walls and floors. Jack says, he will keep the video with him until he feels safe. He wants to find the right person to publish it. Otherwise, he says, it might lose its power (Personal Communication Jack April 2014).

Jack, who has been living in Pikpa for several months waiting for his papers after having received a positive asylum answer within the old system, says, he had been healthy when he left Congo. After spending almost 2 years in the detention in Komotini, his hands shake, his back hurts, and his mind is weak. He says, whenever he talks about it, he feels free and sick at the same time. The memories must hurt a lot, as I understand when he raises his voice and shows me where he feels the pain in his back and his hand which is shaking every time he tries to hold something, like his cellphone. When Omid, a quiet and thoughtful young man from Iran, talks about it, he can barely remember the time he spent in Komotini. He says, it was a horrifying experience, and that it had an impact on his psychological well-being. He is depressed. Not only everyday conditions and violence, but the simple fact that he was put in jail for "nothing" were circumstances he cannot accept. He says he does not understand how something that terrible could happen to him after he already had to leave his country.

> "Pikpa is heaven compared to that, I just want to forget, not stay in Greece, not learn Greek, just be a tourist, like you" (Personal Communication Omid May 2014).

Omid, while not sure about his future, would like to leave Greece as soon as possible and go as far away from Iran as possible. For him, Greece is not a country he can imagine living in after his experiences in detention. For others, the decision where to go has not been taken yet. When asked what the future will bring, an Afghan couple who stays at Pikpa for a few days describes the uncertainty and psychological burden that they face every day. The wife says:

> "Leaving our country and coming here is an endless journey. We have nothing and nowhere to go. It is like climbing a thousand mountains, every day" (Personal Communication Afghan couple May 2014).

5.5 "Being Outside is Good for you" - Descriptions of Outdoor Space and Mobility

5.5.1 "Not Seeing the Sun in Months"

Jack and Joseph explain how in detention, they barely got a chance to be outside. At the police station, where they spent several months, they did not see the sunlight at all. This is a common practice, probably attributable to the effort it can take the guards to observe and facilitate migrants moving out of their cells. "They (*the guards*) don't care about people needing sunlight and seeing something different than their walls", says Yonous M. when asked how it is possible that even such simple services of no monetary value are not provided (Personal Communication Yonous M. 2014). The lack of contact with outdoor space is highlighted as one of the issues criticized by MSF (2014), AI (2013) and PA (2012) and is claimed to be directly related to human health problems. Further, the very concept of detention has as an aim to disrupt the human interaction with space and to limit access to daylight. Obviously the experiences differ from reception to detention centers. Those who pass through the screening center in Moria describe it as an acceptable space with regard to outdoor space. Still, they often describe it as too overcrowded to make use of the fenced yards

provided. However, when only staying a few days until they get released, they do not perceive this as a central issue.

As Risbeth and Finney (2005) argue, interaction with outdoor space is not only necessary for immediate migrant wellbeing in a host country. If access to outdoor space is not granted, as seen in the testimonies from detention and in the various human rights based reports, psychological illness, physical weakness and social alienation can take place.

5.5.2 "A Good Place for People and Animals"

Joseph says he likes walking and that he enjoys himself while walking the about 7 km from Pikpa to Mytilini. He points out the sea views when I walk him back after a meeting. He says: "When I see this... ah, this is so beautiful" (Personal Communication Joseph March 2014). And that he had not much more to do than this, that life was pretty boring for him. For the children, Pikpa is a spacious ground, away from traffic and neighbors, with several playgrounds and sports facilities nearby. Khalid, the eldest boy of the Afghan family describes it as a place of wellbeing for people and animals, the dogs, cats and chicken, alike. During the everyday life interaction with people at Pikpa, it becomes clear that interaction with nature, be it during a walk at the beach or in the garden and sport facilities, can have a healing effect. Being outside, playing football, racing in toy cars, picking herbs and wild flowers, jumping the rope, sitting in the sun or the shade, alone or in a group - all this makes it a peaceful and playful place for children and adults. Even the families coming from Moria to Pikpa acknowledge that the space that Pikpa provides for children to play is a relief and that they can feel safer here knowing that their children can play without any immediate threat. For the adults, this peacefulness has bright and less bright sides. On the one hand, the peaceful atmosphere is nice: some like hearing the children play, some like going to the beach, others like sitting outside whenever they wish to, day and night, with no control or

need to report. On the other hand, outdoor space and transportation are very much linked here at Pikpa. When Paris, the mother of the Afghan family wants to have some time away from their children without having them run after her, she cannot easily get to Mytilini or elsewhere (Personal Communication Paris April 2014). When the young men want to meet people, they have to go to Mytilini by bus, or wait for someone who gives them a ride, or walk. Many times, the ninety minute walking distance to the city is perceived as an obstacle to being in town, meeting people or running errands. However, most people express that they describe the green space that surrounds Pikpa as a blessing, so that the disadvantages do not play a major role. At Pikpa, interaction with outdoor space is neither limited nor supervised. There is green space and playgrounds in front of all buildings. Only a few meters separate the people from the sea and the hills. There are sports facilities, footballs and a lot of space to sit and be outside (figure 3).

Figure 3. The self-organized camp Pikpa camp with its playground and green space. In the background: migrants chatting in front of the main building (Source: Küpers 2014).

Following the argumentation of Risbeth and Finney, Pikpa is contributing to establishing a better relationship between migrants and host society by giving access to Greek neighbors and landscapes. It is a space where migrants can reconnect with nature after being detained or travelling at sea. In spring, many people go for quiet walks, collect shells at the beach or sit in the sun while the buildings are still cold inside.

5.5.3 "Walking to Pikpa Takes 90 Minutes"

Obviously, detaining migrants means limiting their mobility. Nevertheless, it does not only include the immediate choice where to spend time, but it converts Greece into a transit zone of indefinite stay. As presented above, the living conditions of migrants in Greece lead to migrants not wanting to stay in the country. However, detention is a practice that forces them to do so. At Pikpa, there is no surveillance or limitation of migrant mobility as such. However, given the fact that it used to be a holiday village or the children, it is remote, located closely to the airport in Mytilini, about 7 or 8 km from the center of Mytilini. Getting to Pikpa and back is not always easy. Walking to the center takes time, buses exist but are limited, especially in the evening, weekends or public holidays. Therefore, whenever being taken for a ride is possible for the people living at Pikpa consider this opportunity. The presence of both the police and racist groups in the streets of Athens and elsewhere is another limiting factor to migrant mobility. While people at Pikpa are in possession of legal papers, the process of verification can take a long time and is not perceived as justified comfortable.

5.6 "Follow Those Lights and You Will Reach Greece" - The Journeys from Turkey to Greece and from Mytilini to Athens

The route taken by migrants to reach Greece from Turkey is described by Frontex as the "Eastern Mediterranean Route" (Frontex 2014:35). People generally spend some time in Turkey, waiting for an opportunity to reach Greece, mostly via boats, since the land border was subject to significant "border management" (Frontex 2014:36) changes, such as the building of a fence and the increased presence of police officers in the Evros region. In Turkey, living conditions are harsh as well, as described by many people in Lesvos. Some of them had to stay in the country for several years until they could afford to pay a trafficker who reserved a place on a boat for them in exchange for money. As introduced in the case context, migrants arriving to Lesvos via boats face the major risk of exposure to weather conditions and a lack of expertise in navigation. Most people are taken to Moria by the police, because it is the only way of getting papers with which they can continue their journey to Athens to apply for asylum or continue their journey. The 11-year old Afghan boy who stays at Pikpa with his mother and siblings explains what Pikpa is about:

> "Pikpa is a place for people from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Congo. They can stay here before they go to Athens by ferry. It is a place for waiting" (Personal Communication Khalid, April 2014).

The former children holiday camp is a space to rest for a few days for many of the people who arrive. Many people are tired and exhausted, after hours or days of travelling and without knowing exactly where to go and how. They use Pikpa as a space of transit, but also for getting into touch with people who have more experience and knowledge. They take part in the everyday life of these staying at Pikpa for longer, as the following episode illustrates:

At a birthday party (figure 4) for one of the Afghan children at Pikpa I start talking to a man who is sitting by himself on the little wall that leads down from the stone buildings to the wooden cabins and to the playground at Pikpa. He is leaning against a tree in the shade in his grey sweatshirt and watching the dancing men and children peacefully. He says he is very tired now. He just arrived last night from Turkey, by boat, with 16 other people. The journey was long, about 8 hours at sea, it was hard. He got off the boat when the captain told him to, about 10 meters from the shore and helped the women, children and men to leave the boat one by one after pulling it a bit closer to the beach. At first, the water was deep, he could barely stand on his feet. The people in the boat were scared, but then he pulled the boat towards the beach where the water reached his waist. He says, he was scared, but he somehow had this braveness inside of him and therefore decided to volunteer for the others. After arriving, they were told to walk up a hill and then turn left to a petrol station from where they were supposed to take a taxi. However, the station was closed. They then walked to Moria camp, where they were ignored by the police. So, they called one of the local activists of whom they had gotten the phone number before the journey. The activists came and picked them up at the same place where they had landed, for which they had to go back up the hill. All this time, he says, they were wet, cold, tired. He even had to carry a man on his back who could not walk. He cannot feel his back now. He says, they were very helpful, gave him a lot of good advice. Once arrived, he says, he had to take off his wet clothes immediately and went to bed, covering himself with 3 blankets. He says, even in the morning his hands and feet were still cold, but that it would get better in a few days (Personal Communication with Mohammed, April 2014).

Figure 4. Children and adults dancing at a birthday party at Pikpa. In the background: the common kitchen building (Source: Küpers 2014).

The group with whom he arrived went to the police station the next day to get their identity checked and to start the screening process in Moria. The memories of those short term guests at Pikpa are very fresh. With regard to the news accessible regularly on migrants drowning and Costa guards saving lives at sea, those who make it to Pikpa without major losses can consider themselves lucky. Especially because arriving to Pikpa usually means that the first Screening at Moria was successful and that they are legal asylum candidates. After some days of rest or waiting for the next ferry to go to the mainland, people usually leave the island. Among the locals and tourists on the ferry, there are regularly migrants on the ship (figure 5). The following episode took place on the ferry to Athens. It gives a strong impression of the vivid memories of the migrant journey at sea:

> Travelling from Mytilini to Piraeus, Athens. Standing outside at the ferry deck talking with Aarash. The last colors of sunset fade away, the quarter moon is rising and the stars are visible in the clear spring night. Behind him, in the distance, there are deep dark clouds and yellow lightning. We talk about his life and job as a translator in Afghanistan, his studies in Russia, languages, my studies, and the future. He asks questions from

personal to if I know about how migrants get to what he calls ‘Europe’. He explains there are 3 routes, via Italy from Patras, through Macedonia and Bulgaria and via air plane with a fake passport. My comments are short. I don't know and don't want to know. Suddenly, he turns around, says he knows the lights on the mountain behind him. This way he had come by boat at night time from Turkey, a few days ago. They were about 30 people on a small boat, told to navigate towards the lights on the mountain in Lesvos. I ask him what the lights are. He says, windmills. He says, it was very dangerous, you did not know what would happen. The police took them on land and brought them to Moria. He turns around every other second looking at the mountains and the red pulsating lights on their tops. He asks me if it is legal to push people back. I explain, it is not under the EU regulation but that the police gets orders to do so, to my knowledge. He wonders how deep this water could be. Maybe 200 meters? Again, I have no answer. We agree that is does not matter. Later that night, I hear on BBC News about yet another incident at the sea around Samos. At least 22 people died (Field notes May 2014).

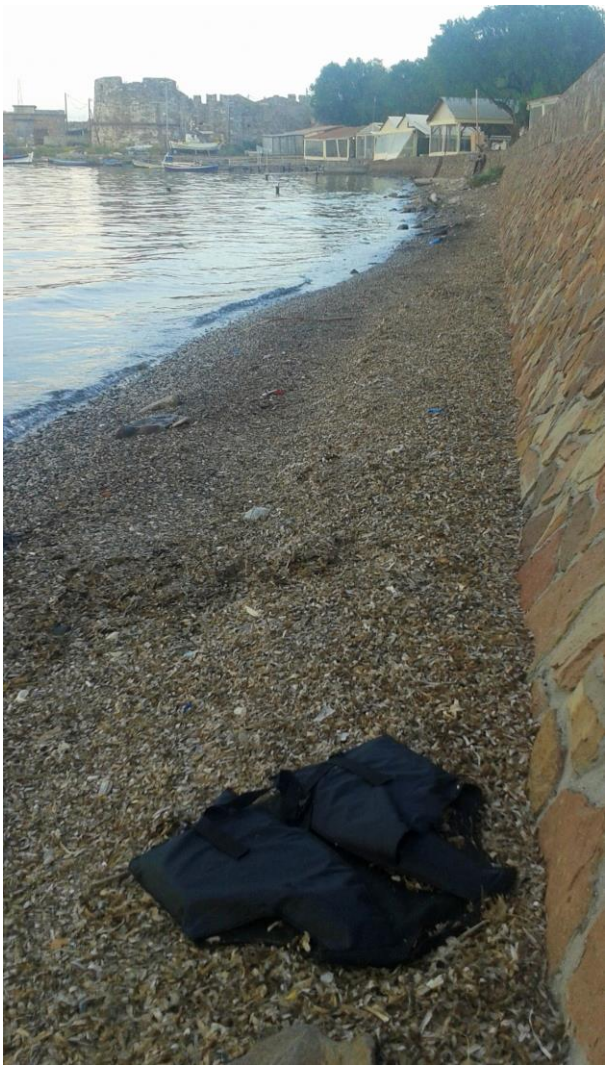

Figure 5. Life Jacket found at a beach in Mytilini. This type of vests is often worn by migrants at Sea but cannot save anyone from drowning if their boat sinks and they do not know how to swim.

5.7 Summary of Evidence of Sustaining the Everyday Life

The above mentioned issues around everyday life and environmental justice were not given categories, but came up in interaction with refugees and people working with refugees in the field. The narratives show that most of the problems refugees face are in fact everyday life obstacles related to environmental factors that dis-enable them to plan a healthy future within Greek society and that that also have strong impacts on their physical and mental wellbeing – possibly dis-enabling them to think about such future at all. Some aspects, such as the journey at sea from Turkey to Greece and the exposure to certain environmental conditions and health

problems may even lead to physical harm. Overall, the many difficulties migrants face in the transit zone that are the centers for reception and detention could be improved with increased access to outside space, healthier food items, access to gardens for cultivation, improved shelter and interaction with people and the local environment. In the case of Pikpa, the volunteers of the Village of All Together try to account for such goods and services. The next chapter gives insights into the interaction with authorities and the official standpoint of the Initial Reception Service.

6. Beyond Everyday Life

The previous chapter gives an overview of the ecological everyday life issues in migrant life at Pikpa and the experiences in detention and reception centers in Lesvos and elsewhere in Greece. The barriers to everyday access to benefits and services needed for sustaining life and interaction with the host society, all of these being distributional aspects, have procedural implications. Beyond the engagement of the local community, recognition, participation and capabilities play a role in environmental justice (Schlosberg 2004, 2007, 2013). This chapter looks into the way authorities interact with migrants, there is a sphere of interaction with authorities that reflects not only the material (distributional) aspects of environmental justice, but the recognition and participation in society. This chapter describes the interaction with two types of authorities experienced during the fieldwork. First, interaction with the newly established Initial Reception Service will give an idea of how their work is framed. Then, the interaction with the police and coast guards in Lesvos is outlined. Finally, these interactions are used to show how procedural justice for migrants at the border is not on the agenda of the authorities.

6.1 "You Cannot Have the Cake Whole and the Dog Fed". Meeting with Panagiotis N., Director of the Initial Reception Service

> When Mr. Nikas finally arrives to the office, he comes from a meeting with the ministry. While cooling down with a glass of water in my hand, I had a chance to look at his office, the little Frontex flag on his shelf, the large meeting table and the views from his window to Syngrou Avenue in the center of Athens with all its running cars during rush hour. He is a tall man in his forties with a tough handshake, calm, clear, tired. Right from the beginning I give him a chance to make it all sound human: I spent six weeks in Lesvos getting to know people and their stories. Now, I would like to get a more institutional perspective from him about the living conditions of people. He answers, he will not be more objective than the people arriving to Europe are. Everybody's story is a reality. He explains he loves everybody, would like to have a bed and a plate of food for everyone, but that the means are limited. The Initial Reception Service has built a new center in Evros (at Greek land border with Turkey) where things go well. Very well, according to his description. Accommodation, food, outdoor space, counselling, respect and training for the staff, all is exemplary for what their action plan includes for the years to come. I ask, how much it matters if this is only a reality in one place so far. He has a clear vision, is proud of the achieved and optimistic with regard of future achievements and says: "Rome was not built in a day" and "you cannot have the cake whole and the dog fed at the same time" (Field notes May 2014).

The activities of the Initial Reception Service (figure 6), established only in 2011 under the Hellenic Republic Ministry of Citizen Protection, include the creation of reception centers that are in charge for identifying "third country nationals who are arrested due to illegal entry or stay in Greece, under conditions that guarantee human dignity and their rights, in accordance with the international obligations of the country" (Hellenic Ministry of Citizen

Protection. Initial Reception Service (HMCP IRS 2014) and of clarifying their legal status. The official description highlights that both "the immediate vital needs" (HMCP IRS 2014), as well as "registration, medical screening and socio-psychological support, provision of information on their rights and obligations, and the referral of vulnerable persons such as unaccompanied children and victims of torture" (HMCP IRS 2014) are among the duties performed in such centers. With the release from the center, responsibility is taken over by the also recently renewed Asylum Service for those who decide to apply for asylum in Greece (HMCP IRS 2014). The funding for these activities is provided both by the EU and the Hellenic Republic (President of the Hellenic Republic 2011).

Figure 6. The building where the offices of the Initial Reception Service are located in Athens, Greece. Its activities are financed both through the Hellenic Republic and EU funds (Source: Küpers 2014).

One possible way of interpreting the above quoted conversation with the director of the Initial Reception Service is the following: It is likely that he is a person who is interested in bringing along change an in improving the living conditions of irregular migrants in Greece. He, however, tries to do so in the frame he has chosen. A frame built by the legislation and the existing action taken by the EU and the Greek state. It is a frame very different from the one

applied by the local and international supporters of irregular migrants in Lesvos. This seems legitimate if the aim is to provide better living conditions for migrants and refugees during the process of first reception. During our conversation, he uses the term “illegal migrants” and “aliens” (Personal Communication Panagiotis N. 2014), a language that reflects the official standpoint he presents. The discourse Panagiotis N. uses is based on a reassuring strategy that focuses on the visions for improvement of first reception and a singular successful case. It shows how preserving the status quo of migration management with its human right violations and racist tendencies is favored over an actual reform of the system. Reforming the system that produces the problematic existence of irregular migrants between being receivers of aid without participating in society would require rethinking the practice of detention and its impact on the living conditions.

So far, only the center in Evros complies with the visions of the Initial Reception Service. It is the only center built, until the one in Moria will be opened. Obviously, the conditions there improve the life of those who stay there. Only, the amount of migrants entering the country in this land border region with Turkey has decreased due to the fencing strategy applied. Therefore, it is questionable how seriously the overall living conditions of migrants in Greece can be improved with a few centers if detention centers elsewhere are still overcrowded and many people are without adequate shelter. The recently introduced reception system promises radical improvement. Despite the potential for change of the system for irregular migrants, detention, even for shorter time, will still remain a disputable approach towards migration management.

6.2 “The Rest is Outside Our Remit”. Presence and Interaction with the Hellenic Police and Coast Guards

> I established a contact with the head of the Police department in Lesvos through a professor at the university. The man on the phone however, did not speak English confidently and told me to contact someone else. I made more calls, reached that second police officer and got invited to present myself at the Police station the next day. There, I was guided through a maze of rooms and halls, got an involuntary glimpse of the dark and moist cells and was told I should make an official application to the press office. Then, they would be able to give me an interview. I wrote an e-mail, described my interest, and gave them possible questions I would ask about refugees' access to drinking water, food, and shelter. What the daily work was like. The answer came 2 weeks later. They were not in charge of drinking water, it was the municipalities' duty to provide that. They could not give me access to the screening center (I had not asked them for that in my emails). I replied, explained that they got me wrong, that I just wanted to talk to an officer or representative about their work with refugees, the access to environmental benefits they provide them. This time, the answer was faster. Bold, underlined: “We have already answered all your requests in the first answer, the rest is outside our remit” (Field notes April 2014).

Establishing contact with the local Police was not successful. Having a conversation with them in the streets did not work. Although the police and coast guards are present almost everywhere in Mytilini, at the port, in the streets, at church during Easter celebration, at the parade on a national holiday, at the bus stop in civil, at the bars and cafes, they have an aura of inaccessibility and power surrounding them. Uniforms, sunglasses, weapons, cars and phones being their omnipresent accessories. The same applies to the coast guards, hanging out on the ships at the port (figure 7), casually sipping cold coffee with straws from plastic cups while gazing at the water or the people walking next to them.

Figure 7. A Hellenic Cost Guard Ship in the port of Mytilini surrounded by small leisure sailing boats – coast guards and Frontex boats are an omnipresent part of everyday life in town

Performing their roles in everyday life and being polite, it seems, are a way of redirecting the gaze of those interested in knowing more about their practices and duties. One coast guard, as reported by a Norwegian activist who was granted an interview, says that the work they do is tough. It involves a lot of risk and responsibility and the support they can give to people is heavily limited by funding. One example is, this guard claims, that there is no funding for providing people with food while they are with the Hellenic Coast Guards after missions at sea. When walking with refugees in Mytilini, many stories were told about police interaction in the city and the centers.

> After visiting a church service with Aamir (*a young Afghan man from Iran in his early twenties*) during Easter celebrations, he joked: "look at all the policemen and the police cars, maybe they have come to take me with them" (Personal Communication Aamir 2014). Another day, when waiting for a bus at the central square and two men sat down, observing the people walking by. Aamir said: "look at them, you can

> immediately see they are policemen. Well in shape, sunglasses put, well dressed, observing" (Personal Communication Aamir 2014). When asked about the interaction with the police, he said, they sometimes stop him, take him to the police station to check his papers. It can take several hours, they sometimes do not do anything but make him wait with no reason. Checking documents, he says, cannot take that long (Field notes April 2014).

The police car that brings new arrivals to Pikpa (figure 8), officers standing in the streets, the Hellenic Coast Guards, all of them are very present in everyday life and have, if not active all the time, an ongoing impact on people's sense of security. While Greek citizens and tourists might be able to perceive this as a sense of protection from harm, they seem to be perceived as a threat and a means of limiting control by those who are either migrants or actively working with them.

> I am told by a friend and neighbor in Mytilini that the police practices are difficult to accept. Police officers will never confess what their practices are at work and how they treat people. They may look nice and neat in their uniforms, but there are many carpets in Greece and everything that does not look nice enough is put under one of those carpets (Field notes May 2014).

Yonous M. explains that police operations, such as Xenios Zeus lead to ridiculous incidents where officers control the same people over and over again, based on simply appearance. He says, many people loose hours of work per day due to this practice (Personal Communication Yonous M. May 2014).

The above described experiences and voices about interaction with the Hellenic Police and Coast Guards show that, while a lot of power over people's exposure to environmental harm and access to resources lies in their hands, they are not accessible for public statements. It is

understandable that their profession requires a lot of personal psychological strength, but it also shows that exerting power over migrants takes place both in the public and the hidden realms. While surveillance of public space through police presence in the streets is tangible, the institutions prefer not to be exposed to questions regarding the practices they apply in the case of migrants entering Greece illegally or regarding the role they play in their treatment in a transit zone like Lesvos.

Figure 8. The police driver brings migrants who got released from Moria to Pikpa. Most people are dropped off without much information (Küpers 2014).

6.3 Environmental Justice and Pikpa

The field work in Lesvos illustrates how refugees relate to their immediate environment in many ways. All have their own life stories and migration experiences. Cultural backgrounds, individual preferences and habits shape this interaction. What they have in common, however are shared limited mobility and limited choices to make on the island when it comes to access to basic environmental benefits. This access is restricted through a system of rules and circumstances. Detention and screening centers, but also police stations and facilities are a reality that most migrants arriving to Lesvos experience in one way or another. Prolonged detention is still a common practice, persisting even in the new Asylum Service. Such detention is not only violating human rights, but is also questionable as a practice in itself, because it is conflictive, hence unproductive (Martin 2005), and a threat to mental and physical health, as shown in previous chapters. The recently introduced new reception system promised radical improvement. Despite the potential for change of the system for the majority of irregular migrants, the center approach, will still remain a disputable approach towards migration management.

The main advantage that Pikpa offers for those who get released from the screening center is the provision of necessary goods, open space, and, thus, increased autonomy. Living conditions at Pikpa differ significantly from the experiences migrants make in centers. However, everyone staying there has visions of how Pikpa could be improved. The conditions at Pikpa are generally described positively, while a few people, mainly those who stay for a very short time, point out its negative characteristics. While improvement would not be impossible, it is necessary to understand the functioning of Pikpa as a place for migrants on a different level.

As claimed by the Village of All Together, Pikpa cannot replace all services that authorities should be responsible for. The people working for migrants here have limited capacities. It

serves as a place where the time people spend in Lesvos can be improved, but it does not offer a long term solution or an alternative to screening and detention. Being utilized by the authorities, as Constantinos calls it, may be helpful in improving the living conditions of a few, but while operating as a refuge, Pikpa alone does not change the Greek migration management system. The opinions of those working with refugees are mainly based on ideological assumption that those who apply for asylum should be supported better by the responsible asylum service. Those who get a paper for 30 days until they can leave the country should as well receive other options and support in order not be on the street. According to them, detention should not be a practice at all, and entering the EU as a refuge not illegal.

It is possible to discuss these requests from a perspective of environmental justice. Given the Dublin regulation realities (Dublin Regulation II 2003, and Dublin Regulation III 2013), however, it could be worthwhile looking into the possibility for refugees to establish a positive relationship with the place they arrive to in Europe. On the one hand, this could be through improved reception conditions, on the other hand, it is already happening in cases such as the Pikpa camp and the Village of All Together activism, where refugees are given space and access to resources. The situation in Pikpa now is still far from ideal in that sense: most people who are lucky enough to live here for a while have already experienced detention by Greek authorities and describe these experiences as traumatizing. Receiving care and support from volunteers might help to sooth the recent experiences, but cannot replace a generally more humane treatment by authorities. It seems that detention does not only give harsh spatial limitations to interaction with the social and natural environment in Greece. It further creates mistrust, fear and anger among irregular migrants who experience it: Joseph for example says he does not like the country and its people – a generalization that can be easily explained through the mostly negative experiences he had in Lesvos and other places

on the mainland before coming to Pikpa. He says: “Here, they tell you: ‘live!’, but they don’t make you live!” (Personal Communication Joseph April 2014). It is obvious, that living for Joseph does not only include being able to eat, but to be part of society. In a similar manner, Aamir expresses his criticism of the detention and asylum system: “They tie your shoes together and tell you to walk. But can you walk?” (Personal Communication Aamir April 2014).

6.4 Receiving Irregular Migrants with More than Distributional Justice

Environmental injustice in the case of Lesvos is most present, at first glance, when it comes to the distribution of access to environmental benefits. Schlosberg (2004, 2007, 2013) has been claiming now for more than a decade that procedural justice in form of participation in decision making of environmental matters is a substantial part of a just environmental situation. The very lack of citizenship, the lack of recognized and political being as opposed to bodily existence (Rozakou 2012) is the reason why these procedural issues are widely neglected in refugees’ daily life on the island. On a theoretical level, it can be claimed that while there is practical evidence in terms of all four elements of environmental justice as outlined by Schlosberg, distribution is the one that is prone to be the most visible aspect in the given study due to its material nature. This realization, however, needs to account for the necessity of highlighting that in case of prominent material distributional issues, these issues are very much tied to lack of recognition, participation and capabilities in terms of environmental justice (Schlosberg 2007). The relation here between the four elements is one of interdependence in which they all influence each other. Criminalization and victimization of migrants in society fosters a lack of recognition of individuals and groups and leads to distributional and procedural injustice in matters of access to environmental benefits. It is thus important to understand how the seemingly material struggles give an insight into the legal

and social situation of refugees, and how, on a theoretical level, the four components of environmental justice can be perceived as four opportunities for looking at practices of environmental racism. They are neither exclusive nor causally linked, but can intersect, interdepend and mutually reinforce each other. Therefore, one has to ask what the visible and materialized conditions have to say about structural injustice and racism.

Schlosberg (2007) highlights that environmental justice reaches beyond the individual experience and that it is "embedded in one's community" (13). This is crucial for the identification of power relations both between groups and between groups and the authorities, but also for actions based on an understanding of environmental justice.

In the case of refugees in Lesvos, the experiences of discrimination, denial of environmental benefits and exposure to environment-related risks is shared by a group of migrants in constant fluctuation of people arriving, leaving and taking many different pathways depending on their legal status and, indeed, luck. When talking about group experience on the island, one can speak of a group more confidently when including not only irregular migrants, but also people engaged in work and volunteering with them. This is, where Rozakou's considerations of hospitality need to be revisited. She claims that any interaction with refugees is part of hospitality because the very concept of hospitality converts people into hosts and guests in a relationship with unequally distributed power (Rozakou 2012). Rozakou describes hospitality as a tool of biopolitics that enable or dis-enable life (Rozakou 2012). The hospitality of volunteers and professional engaged in improving the living conditions of refugees is a relation of power, as well. Here, migrants are supported in order to be more than mere physical beings. However, they are still far from equal participation in society. The way the Village of All Together frames their activism in Lesvos and beyond, can, nevertheless, be understood as making the action of receiving support a political statement. This is due to the messages sent by the collective. These messages are grounded in a vision of solidarity and

challenging the system through providing alternatives. Further, there has been successful activism with the No Border group in 2009 and the ongoing support and information network is also a way of politically including people. Migrants are actively participating in the projects of The Village of All Together, even if this is limited in time and projects. This inclusion means that anyone who stays at Pikpa or who receives help is not a mere receiver of humanitarian help, but can articulate and act as a political subject with the support of people who have increased material means and expertise.

On the one hand, a lack of access to daily products, environmental benefits and goods is a lack of material support. On the other hand, it stems from the discriminatory practice of detention and neglect, the slow asylum system and the general lack of respect for migrants needs and wants.

7. Conclusions

Three main questions have been asked throughout this thesis.

- How do refugees in Lesvos relate to their environment?
- What are the material and environmental health related detention and reception conditions that refugees on the island (have) experience(d) (in Lesvos and elsewhere in Greece)?
- How can the living conditions of refugees be understood in the light of an environmental justice framework?

Evidence for formulating answers has been given throughout the previous chapters. The literature review locates this thesis in the body of research on migration and the environment and within environmental justice research. It further highlights that bringing environmental justice approaches to everyday life of irregular migrants at the EU external borders and the very first steps migrants take in Europe has not been undertaken yet. Necessity to both give

increased attention to the way migrants at EU border relate to the environment and to analyze this from an environmental justice perspective was shown.

The way irregular migrants relate to the environment and host society was then described with a special focus on the self-organized camp in Mytilini. The chapter on "Sustaining the Everyday" gives an overview of diverse narratives and observations made during field work about ecological interactions in Lesvos. Here, major inspiration is drawn from Di Chiro (2008) who understands the everyday as environmental and community action as a central contribution to ensuring social reproduction for disadvantaged groups. Her approach is tied to the vision of empowering communities to improve the everyday life of migrants, this relates intimately to the experiences of irregular migrants in Lesvos and their experiences in reception and detention centers. The chapter interprets from data produced in the field that everyday problems related to environmental goods and services are crucial in their immediate survival and long term well-being both in detention and reception and at Pikpa. It is described that the environmental interactions of migrants are diverse, but with a common pattern of denied access to certain resources, such as outdoor space and healthy food. It also outlines how activism in Lesvos emphasizes participation of migrants in everyday life ecological issues in order to achieve the maximum migrant autonomy possible. The then following chapter looks into environmental justice beyond distributional aspects that are the most visible ones in the case study. I synthesize the approaches of environmental justice in migrant's everyday life and the idea that environmental justice does not stop at distributional issues, but needs to look into the power relations and aspects of procedural justice that underlie these. Here, power relations are pointed out and it is argued that distributional issues in Lesvos reflect discriminations on structural levels in Greek and European societies.

On the one hand, the work of environmental justice writers usually aims at bringing along change for those who experience environmental injustices. If looked at the situation of

irregular migrants in the EU from this perspective, pointing out the ecological implications of a failing reception and detention system can help to improve the very conditions in such centers. Analyzing reception and living conditions of people is a critique of a type of racism that shows itself in form of accessibility of environmental goods and benefits. In addition, pointing out the ecological improvement of everyday life that the self-organized camp in Pikpa achieves shows the importance of civil society actors in improving migrant realities. Environmental justice is therefore not only the theoretical background for this thesis, but also a standpoint from which constructive activism is possible.

On the other hand, the question might appear, how important the environmental benefits are for people in conditions of first reception, detention or asylum. The answer now is simple: access to basic goods and services is necessary for people to sustain. If the access is limited or denied, people will not be able to survive. As Di Chiro puts it, the everyday is environmental (Di Chiro 2008). The immediate environment, whatever it might look like and provide for a refugee or migrant, is a crucial factor not only for immediate relief. It is essential to account for long term well-being and to, thus, include the care for "sustaining everyday life" (Di Chiro 2008:280) in the future. One might argue that there are more prevalent cases of environmental injustice where the realms of social inequality and environmental discrimination interdepend. However, the question should not be which injustice is more unjust or what type of discrimination is more discriminating. For people at the borders of Europe, their living circumstances are real. For some, it can last for years – especially within the old asylum system with its around "40.000 pending cases" (Personal Communication Yonous M. May 2014). Therefore, making use of the theory and argumentation lines of environmental justice work is more than legitimate. Environmental justice as an academic concept *and* approach to activism is useful here, because it emphasizes the human needs to everyday items and services provided by the environment, people and non-human beings, that every human being needs to the same extent. It gives human ecological needs a universally understandable face.

The materialization of power relations is visible in the everyday life of irregular migrants at European external borders in the way they relate to the environment of the host society and the access they have to goods and services to not only cover their everyday needs, but to account for a healthy future.

8. Recommendations

There are two main recommendations to be given after summarizing this thesis. One is addressed towards environmental research in the fields of the refugee-environment nexus and environmental justice. This recommendation has theoretical as well as practical implications, because the field of environmental justice research is both an academic field and a field that aims at bringing along real change for real communities. The research of this thesis shows that investigating the everyday life of irregular migrants and refugees at the edges of Europe is a field that has been neglected. The transit zone of the border is a space of manifold denied access to both distributional and procedural justice. Increased dedication would broaden the existing body of knowledge on environmental discrimination along the lines of race or ethnicity and poverty at the same time. Investigating environmental justice for migrants in border circumstances is both a theoretical and practical challenge and can contribute to strengthening the arguments for environmental justice both as a research topic and as an input for local and international activism. In this sense, this thesis is a small step towards initiating academic interest.

The second recommendation is for activists in Lesvos and has rather practical implications. Not only in Lesvos or in Greece, but on a global level, environmental justice approaches can help to strengthen communities who fight for the improvement of reception and detention conditions of migrants at borders. For instance, the collective in Lesvos could use an environmental justice thinking as an additional framing for their claims towards the

authorities. Here, the aim should not only be to provide increasingly voluntary support through solidarity action, but to gain the attention of media, politics and academia to communicate the failure of the existing policies and the need for shared European responsibilities in the case of migrants arriving to Europe. The Village of All Together and Pikpa adopt many practices that could be framed as support to sustaining environmental interaction and access to environmental benefits and services. They do provide environmental goods and services and emphasize migrant autonomy and agency. They simply do not frame it based on the idea of environmental justice (yet). Environmental justice emphasizes the everyday needs of people by visualizing why every day goods and services are important to sustain life and how they reflect power relations. It can be used to highlight the necessity of providing these goods not only for the immediate relief of people after arriving to Europe, but for the establishment of long term bonds with both Greek and European societies. This way, sustaining migrants' needs at the borders of Europe may one day be seen as an investment for their future in Europe.

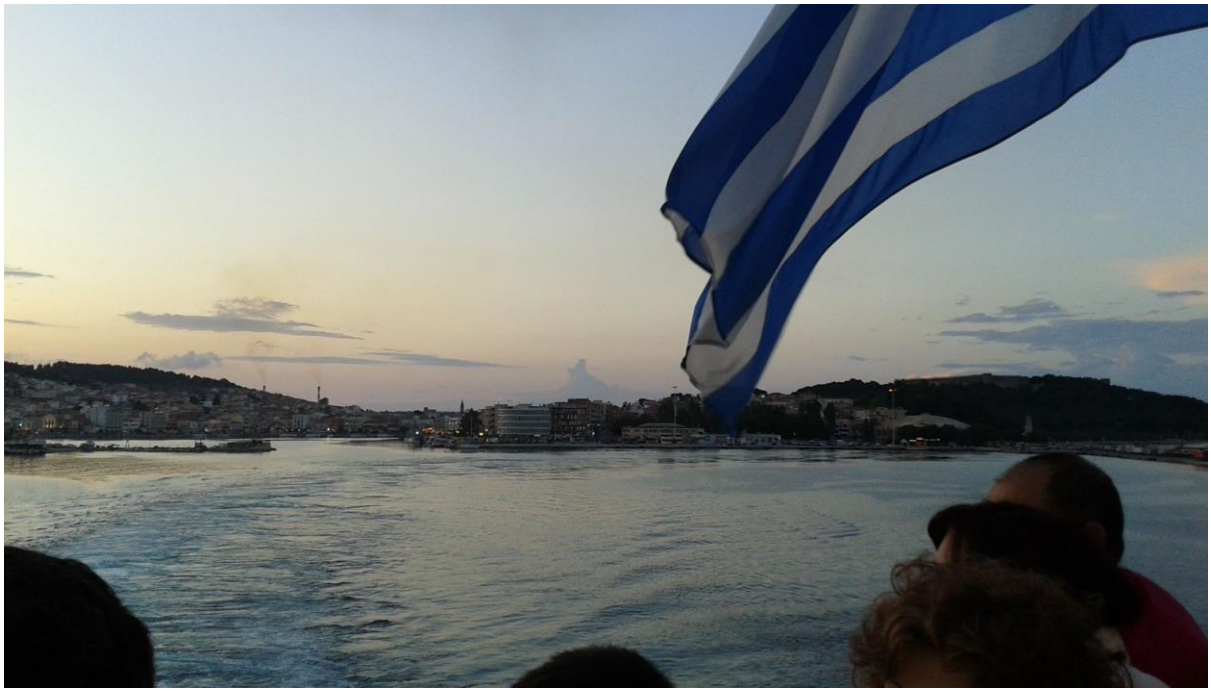

Figure 9. Migrants, locals and tourist leaving the island for Athens by ferry. This time, a safe trip at sea, but an uncertain future for many of them.

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Personal Communication Constantinos April 2014.
Personal Communication Jack March-May 2014.
Personal Communication Joseph March-May 2014.
Personal Communication Khalid March-May 2014.
Personal Communication Maria March-May 2014.
Personal Communication Mohammed April 2014.
Personal Communication Omid March-May 2014.
Personal Communication Panagiotis N. May 2014.
Personal Communication Paris March-May 2014.
Personal Communication Yonous M. May 2014.

10. Lists of People who contributed to this Work

10.1 Migrants and Refugees

1. Joseph (Congo)
2. Jack (Congo)
3. Paris (Afghanistan)
4. Khalid
5. Malia
6. Salim
7. Leila
8. Mohammed (Syria)
9. Afghan couple (Afghanistan)
10. Amir (Iran)
11. Omid(Afghanistan)
12. Aarash (Afghanistan)

10.2 NGOs and Volunteers

1. Raman (Christian Peacemakers, Norway)
2. Carl (Norway)
3. Maria (Greece)
4. Angeliki (Greece)
5. Constantinos (Greece)
6. Erika (Greece)
7. Nassos (Greece)
8. Eleni (Ombudsman Office) (Greece)
9. Maria (Ombudsman Office) (Greece)
10. Yonous M. (Greek Forum of Refugees and Afghan Community in Greece)

10.3 Authorities

1. Police Mytilini
2. Panagiotis N. (Director Initial Reception Service)

Names of some protagonists changed. This change is done in order to protect their personal life and stories. Professionals who agreed with their names being published appear as themselves.

11. List of Abbreviations

AI Amnesty International

EJ Environmental Justice

EU European Union

FRA Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union

GFR Greek Forum for Refugees

HRW Human Rights Watch

IRS Initial Reception Service

MSF Médécins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)

Pikpa Volunteer-organized refugee accommodation in Psani Panagioti Street, Mytilini

US Unites States