Rethinking freedom from the perspective of refugees

Lived experiences of (un)freedom in Europe’s border zones

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Publication date

2023

Citation for published version (APA):

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Appendix

Appendix I

Information Brochure

Rethinking the notion of freedom from the perspective of exiles and refugees

Dear participant,

You will be taking part in the philosophical research project conducted by the University of Amsterdam, Department of Philosophy. The main researcher of this project is Shahin Nasiri. Before the research project can begin, it is important that you read about the procedures we will be applying. Make sure to read the following information carefully.

I Purpose of the research project

The aim of this philosophical fieldwork is to account for an empirically informed understanding of the notion of ‘freedom’ that corresponds to the existential position of the refugee. By way of face-to-face conversation, this research intends to examine how you conceive of the notion of ‘freedom’, in the context of your lifeworld. Throughout this conversation, we will deal with a number of questions, in order to understand the place and meaning of freedom in your way of life, on personal, interpersonal and political level. As such, this fieldwork aims to analyse how freedom is being understood and experienced, once viewed from the standpoint of refugees.

II Who can take part in this research?

Persian-speaking adults residing in refugee camps can take part in this research.

III Instructions and procedure

This face-to-face conversation will take about 1 hour. The conversation can take place at a location of your preference. The participant may pause or end the conversation whenever needed. With your permission, this conversation will be recorded. The recorded data will help the researcher to analyse the data for scientific purposes. Please note that this data will only be used for scientific objectives of this research. It is important to note that this study does not seek to collect and analyse sensitive data about participants, such as their life stories or facts concerning their asylum request or other confidential information (for confidentiality see section VI).

You can consider this conversation as a (philosophical) dialogue you might have with your friends or relatives. To start our conversation, I shall put forward a number of guiding questions such as “Do you think that freedom is important in one’s life?”, “What does freedom mean to you?”, “Does freedom have any links with the specific form of politics, form of government or form of life?”, and so on. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. These questions are intended to provide insights into the way you understand and experience freedom. These questions could, therefore, be answered in the way you find
Appendix

most appropriate. During our conversation, you can ask questions or add anything that you might think is relevant.

IV Voluntary participation

You will be participating in this research project on a voluntary basis. This means you are free to stop taking part at any stage. This will not have any personal consequences and you will not be obliged to finish the procedures described above. You can also decide to withdraw your participation up to 8 days after the fieldwork has ended. If you decide to stop or withdraw your participation, all information gathered until that point would, permanently, be deleted.

V Insurance

In view of the fact that this fieldwork does not involve any health or safety risks, we have not taken out any special insurance policies.

VI Confidential treatment of your details

The information gathered over the course of this research project will be used for publication in scientific literature. Your personal details will not be used in these publications, and we guarantee that you will remain anonymous under all circumstances.

The data gathered during the experiment will be encrypted and stored separately from your personal details. These personal details and the encryption key are only accessible to members of the research staff.

All recorded material, including audio recordings, will never be shown in public without your written consent. After the research project has been completed, you will receive a separate form to provide such consent if you wish to do so.

VII Further information

For further information on the research project, please contact Shahin Nasiri (phone number: […]; email: s.nasiri@uva.nl; Oude Turfmarkt 145, Amsterdam. If you have any complaints regarding this research project, you can contact the secretary of the Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam’s Faculty of Humanities at Kloveniersburgwal 48, 1012 CX Amsterdam; commissie-ethiek-fgw@uva.nl).
Appendix

Informed consent form

‘I hereby declare that I have been clearly informed about the nature of the research and the methods used, as described in above Information Brochure. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I have consented to participate in this research on an entirely voluntary basis. I am aware that I am entitled to discontinue the interview at any time. I retain the right to revoke this consent up till 8 days after the interview was conducted without having to provide any reasons for my decision. I am aware that in case of withdrawal all gathered information will be removed and deleted.

If my research results are used in scientific publications or made public in any other way, they will be fully anonymised. My personal information may not be viewed by third parties without my express permission. If I need any further information on the research, now or in the future, I can contact Shahin Nasiri (phone number: +31615312042; e-mail: s.nasiri@uva.nl; Oude Turfmarkt 145, Amsterdam).

If I have any complaints regarding this research, I can contact the secretary of the Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam’s Faculty of Humanities, at Kloveniersburgwal 48, 1012 CX Amsterdam; commissie-ethiek-fpw@uva.nl.

Signed in duplicate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>......................</td>
<td>.............</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘I have explained the research in further detail. I hereby declare my willingness to answer any further questions on the research to the best of my ability.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of researcher</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>....................</td>
<td>.......</td>
<td>............</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Persian Translation]
Appendix II

Interview schedule

Central question: What does freedom mean once viewed from the perspective of refugees?

Method of enquiry: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)
Type of interview: semi-structured
Location: Lesvos/Athens, Greece
Types of question: (Self-other-world)
I. Questions relating to personal perceptions (self);
II. Questions relating to intersubjective relationships (other);
III. Questions relating to actual and ideal world (world).
Appendix

Interview Schedule

Following questions serve only as a general guideline for initiating each conversation and do not represent a fixed interview structure. In all interviews, interlocutors’ narratives and line of argument will be prioritized.

A) The following questions explore the notion of freedom in view of personal experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self/subject/person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which symbol, idea or image comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘freedom’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that freedom is important in one’s life? In what way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does freedom mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How do you experience freedom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o How does the state of being free feel? (pleasure, pain etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that only human beings can be free? How about other species or things?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you recall memories of moments that you truly felt free?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B) The following questions explore the notion of freedom in view of interpersonal relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other/ Intersubjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you value the most in life? How does freedom relate to this value, if at all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that freedom matters to all human beings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you describe someone that (according to you) possesses an exemplary amount of freedom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the characteristics of this person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does freedom for others mean the same thing as it does to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you define your freedom in relation to that of others? Are human beings entitled to (the same amount of) freedom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under what circumstance do you think that people feel unfree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o What are the main elements or circumstances that restrict freedom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Does the state of unfreedom concur with any sense of physical or psychological condition, such as pain, anxiety, or disability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that there is any relationship between freedom and equality? Freedom and justice? Freedom and security? (how do you distinguish these concepts?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C) The following questions explore the interrelation of freedom and refugeehood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual World (the camp)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does homeland mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you consider this place as your home or temporary residence? What is the difference between the camp and home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is a refugee according to you? What does the term refugee mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you describe your situation in refugee camp? Compared to where you came from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that you are (un)free right now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that you are (un)freer than when you left your homeland? In what way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you see your relationship with camp supervisors and other refugee organisations (UNHCR, volunteers etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppose that you will be forced to stay in refugee camps for years, what would that mean for you in terms of your freedom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

| Does detachment from your family and friends, social context affect your sense of freedom? In what way? |
| Would you feel freer if you had a European passport? |
| How does the fact that you are being seen as a foreigner and asylum seeker impact your sense of freedom? |
| How do you perceive your freedom in comparison with those of citizens in this country? Or if you were a citizen in this country? |
| What would you do, if the host country decides to deport you? What if they threaten or decide to detain you? |

D) The following questions explore the notion of freedom concerning the expected/imagined/ideal society.

| Expected World (the ideal place of refuge) |
| What are the main features of an ideal society according to you? |
| What common values or principles should be pursued most in this society? |
| Does freedom have any links with any specific form of politics or form of government? |
| Is it the role of society to help realise freedom? |
| What do you expect the host country to be like? What is a desirable place of refuge? Do you think you will be freer there? |
| Suppose that the host country requires you to leave your culture and language behind and adapt your life according to the norms and rules of this country. How would that impact your life? Does that restrict your freedom? |

Analysis

Date: 
Time: 
Participant: 
Location: 
experiential themes | Transcript | Exploratory comments |
### Appendix III

**Analysis:**

(Short excerpt from an interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiential themes</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Freedom manifests itself in actual practice      | L: The freedom is just on the tongue, democracy is on the tongue. If you just say it orally and you do otherwise, it is not important. Practice is important. If you decide to do something, then you have to put it into practice, but if you just talk about it, you do the worst thing. In Kurdish, we have a saying: those who say and do are lions, they are the best people; those who say and don’t do it are donkeys. It means practice your belief!  
Q: How was your trip to Greece? Was it dangerous? | Metaphorical meaning: The lion and the donkey: the free (brave) and the unfree (fool)! According to L., Freedom manifests itself in actual practice. It is exercised in action (see correlation with flight). Action and words, speech and deeds should be consistent. They should move towards the same direction, otherwise one is unfree (fool). If there is an inconsistency, you are doing the worst thing. L. uses the resources of the Kurdish culture to explain his point of view. He does not provide abstract arguments. So, the role of culture upbringing, and education is clear in this narrative.  
L. was aware that his journey to Europe would endanger his life (also his family and children). But his life in Makhmour was so unbearable that he decided to escape. |
| Practice versus empty words                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Tautology of refugehood                                                                 |
| Flight is a purposeful practice                  | L: I asked my relatives to join. It was very difficult to cross the Turkish border, second, they have no money. Third, they have children. They said we are refugees for 25 year, how can we become refugees for the second time. At the same time, it is very difficult and very bad there. If they don’t show you how to come, you can’t probably go. If they bomb you. If they bomb me, maybe 1 person of my family will be killed. But if we flee from here, we all might die during the journey, drown in the sea, or be killed by the Turkish government. They don’t make any difference between children, men, and women. I told them, I know that I might die during this journey, but I will go. It is better to die on one day and to die everyday. If they kill me, it will be one time. In Iraq, I want to go to Erbil, they don’t allow us. I feel very bad, because they are also Kurdish. They joined Turkish people to kill us. It went to the university, we have many dialects, they speak Sorani, we speak Kormanji, believe me, the director of the university told me many times that I have to learn Kurdish (Sorani dialectics). I felt very bad as we do speak Kurdish, it is only a different dialect that they can understand. I told him you are a professor a manager, not a normal person, how can you say such words. These things kill me everyday, if I was killed in Turkey [during the journey] or drowned in the sea, it will be one time.  
If they would do the same things to us as in Iraq, the situation will be the same. |
| Flight as a courageous act                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | (Interrelation of freedom and flight)                                                 |
| Unfreedom as social death                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Escape and flight is as an act of liberation from constant state killing and social death. It is worthwhile to undertake a life-threatening journey than to accept the unfair status quo. (Metaphor: Lion versus the donkey! I ask about the time that L. spent in Moria camp on Lesvos. He describes it as ‘very very bad’. Large number of people are concentrated in a small space. The camp only provides a space for storing the living bodies, to keep them alive. The available space for every person is not more than |
| Pre-flight as unfreedom                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For his family members, it was strange to understand how a refugee could flee for the second time. How can a refugee become a refugee again. How can one place his place of refuge? (This is a notable observation!) |
| Social death versus life-threatening risks       |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For L., something else was at stake: if you cannot give shape to a human (free) form of life, and when you are constantly prevented from doing so, then you are already dead. You experience death on a daily basis. Social death is the state of permanent killing, in which no concrete killer is to be named or blamed. Under such conditions, it is better to risk one’s own life for something unforeseeable, no matter how big the risks are. He didn’t want to accept that he might be killed in a territory that he considers as the Kurdish land. |
| Unfreedom as rejection and neglect               |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For L., something else was at stake: if you cannot give shape to a human (free) form of life, and when you are constantly prevented from doing so, then you are already dead. You experience death on a daily basis. Social death is the state of permanent killing, in which no concrete killer is to be named or blamed. Under such conditions, it is better to risk one’s own life for something unforeseeable, no matter how big the risks are. He didn’t want to accept that he might be killed in a territory that he considers as the Kurdish land. |
| Experience of reification                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For his family members, it was strange to understand how a refugee could flee for the second time. How can a refugee become a refugee again. How can one place his place of refuge? (This is a notable observation!) |
| Treatment of people as things (commodities)      |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For his family members, it was strange to understand how a refugee could flee for the second time. How can a refugee become a refugee again. How can one place his place of refuge? (This is a notable observation!) |
| Perception of the camp as a storehouse!          |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For his family members, it was strange to understand how a refugee could flee for the second time. How can a refugee become a refugee again. How can one place his place of refuge? (This is a notable observation!) |
| Dehumanising architecture                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                            | For his family members, it was strange to understand how a refugee could flee for the second time. How can a refugee become a refugee again. How can one place his place of refuge? (This is a notable observation!) |
| Exposure to administrative relocation and constant displacement | I stayed there for 24 days. It was very very bad. We were put in one box with 8 families. It was divided with blankets. Our space for my family (4 members) was 2x2 m. My children cried and other residents of the box with no children got crazy and complained. They didn’t respect me. They were unhappy that our children were crying or wanted to go to WC. There are a lot of people who sleep on the street. Around 10-15 people died by cold or other reasons. After that, they | For his family members, it was strange to understand how a refugee could flee for the second time. How can a refugee become a refugee again. How can one place his place of refuge? (This is a notable observation!) |
**Appendix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>232</th>
<th>232</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sent families to Kara Tepe, and singles came to the boxes. In the hotel, it was good, after 2 months they sent us to Kara Tepe. There we had no electricity, not enough water to shower, no cold water to drink. For one camp, we had only one tea-shop. We stayed there for 5 months. They relocated us to Thessaloniki as my son got very ill, they did some tests and referred us to a hospital outside Lesvos. So, we came to Thessaloniki, it was the end of the summer, my son is now better. They go to school here. They play with them. […]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the physical dimensions of the body. It seems that people are just stored like boxes in a storehouse. The ISO-boxes are not very different from containers, by which one transport commodities. There is no protection against cold or heat. I have been in Kara Tepe myself. During the winter of 2017, it was reported that between 10-15 refugees died in Moria, because of the severe weather conditions. They relocated L. to mainland as his kid was diagnosed with some kind of fever that could not be treated in the Island. Now, they are staying in Thessaloniki in a refugee accommodation centre, second largest city in Greece.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation**

This section contains an extensive interpretative analysis of central experiential themes and notable topics that are reflected in the conversation.
Appendix IV

List of Interlocutors and Group Experiential Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Refugee claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shahab</td>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najib</td>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>In process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farzad</td>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>In process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal</td>
<td>Afghan/undocumented</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>Afghan/undocumented</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>In process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>Kurdish/undocumented</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>In process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morad</td>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>In process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adel</td>
<td>Afghan</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>In process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group Experiential Themes and their Subthemes

**Table 1**

Group Experiential Theme 1: Pre-flight condition: abandonment as unfreedom

Subtheme 1: Placelessness

Subtheme 2: Juridico-political inconsistency

**Table 2**

Group Experiential Theme 2: Manifestation of freedom in the act of flight

Subtheme 1: Purposeful escape and negation of abandonment

Subtheme 2: Partial fulfilment of one’s desire

**Table 3**

Group Experiential Theme 3: Unfreedom as humiliation

Subtheme 1: Existential alienation

Subtheme 2: Intersubjective humiliation

Subtheme 3: Political reification/abandonment

**Table 4**

Group Experiential Theme 4: Encampment and spatial unfreedom

Subtheme 1: Camp as a symbolic non-place

Subtheme 2: Materialized placelessness

Subtheme 3: Political abandonment

**Table 5**

Group Experiential Theme 5: Post-flight condition: Freedom as friendship

Subtheme 1: Dynamic movement from hostility to friendship

Subtheme 2: Freedom implies equality and philanthropy

Subtheme 3: Principle of amity
Summary

Rethinking Freedom from the Perspective of Refugees:
Lived Experiences of (Un)freedom in Europe’s Border Zones

In mainstream political discourse, refugeehood is increasingly being associated with victimhood, powerlessness, abnormality, and political crises. On the one hand, refugees are, often, viewed as voiceless victims who should be offered protection and assistance on humanitarian grounds under exceptional circumstances. On the other hand, they are, increasingly, being portrayed as enemy-like strangers who pose a threat to the borders, stability of receiving states, and the well-being of their citizens. This prevailing framework fundamentally disregards refugees’ political subjectivity and ignores emancipatory phenomena and practices of freedom, which are embedded and expressed in refugees’ migratory movements.

This philosophical investigation aims to contribute to our understanding of the dynamic relationship of freedom and unfreedom from the perspective of refugees. To examine this dynamic relationship, this study situates itself in the autonomy of migration approach and draws on narratives and lived experiences of refugees, which were collected during in-depth interviews with refugees (Greece). These experiential accounts have been analysed and theoretically discussed in accordance with the guidelines of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

To realise these theoretical objectives, this dissertation engages with a variety of scholarly sources and discussions in the field of political theory. In the first two chapters, I will offer a critical overview of mainstream discussions that are, implicitly or explicitly, premised on the humanitarian framework offered by the Refugee Convention and relating international instruments. As will be argued, this humanitarian framework fundamentally disregards refugees’ political subjectivity and poses several limitations for addressing refugees’ practices and perceptions of freedom. To articulate an alternative theoretical point of departure, I will employ the notion of ‘(non)-subjectivity’ and reformulate refugeehood as a self-standing, non-derivative juridico-political condition. Following this theoretical approach, in this dissertation I argue that the meaning of freedom and unfreedom should be understood in the context of a conflictual dynamics. This conflictual dynamics manifests itself in three spatio-temporal conditions (phases) that characterise refugeehood, namely pre-flight, flight, and post-flight condition. Four chapters of this dissertation examine the dynamics of freedom and unfreedom based on refugees’ narratives and lived experiences, spanning from their pre-flight to post-flight condition.

The first chapter provides a critical overview of the humanitarian framework, which represents the prevailing conception of refugeehood and its relation to freedom. I argue that this
framework has been shaped within the Conventional paradigm (the 1951 Refugee Convention) and is conceptually determined by the boundaries of national citizenship, statehood, and territorial sovereignty. The humanitarian framework conceptualises refugeehood in terms of a transitory, temporary, and exceptional status that should, ultimately, transform into national citizenship, either by inclusion (naturalisation) or exclusion (repatriation). Correspondingly, it envisions refugees as ‘victims of persecution’ who should be granted protection on a temporary basis. This humanitarian vantage point tends to reduce refugees to depoliticised victims whose biological life should be rescued by host countries and international aid organisations. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss a line of critique of this humanitarian framework, which was first formulated by Hannah Arendt and further developed by Giorgio Agamben. According to this criticism, the formal discourse of human rights has a paradoxical nature and rests upon the exclusionary boundaries of the nation-state paradigm. These exclusionary boundaries amount to the systematic exclusion of refugees from the domain of freedom, rights, and citizenship. While this critical approach sheds light on several institutional structures and political conditions characterising refugees’ unfreedom, it overlooks lived experiences, political interventions, and struggles through which refugees exercise and enact freedom. This chapter concludes that the humanitarian approach and the Arendtian/Agambenian criticism are either state-oriented or citizen-centric. Therefore, they do not offer an adequate analytical framework for addressing freedom from the perspective of refugees.

The second chapter offers an alternative approach for rethinking the interrelation of freedom and refugeehood. By employing the notion of (non)-subjectivity, I elucidate that the meaning and significance of (un)freedom cannot be reduced to static political categories or citizen-centric conceptions. ‘(Non)-subjectivity’ denotes the human condition of political figures who articulate and enact freedom by resisting, exposing, and unsettling the determinations of politics of exclusion and unfreedom. To develop the idea of (non)-subjectivity, I reflect on Rancière’s politics of non-parts, political writings of Olympe de Gouges and Frederick Douglass, and theoretical observations raised by critical migration scholars. Following this I then explain in this chapter that refugeehood represents an ambiguous juridico-political position, which transgresses the binaries of inclusion versus exclusion and citizenship versus rightlessness. On the one hand, refugees are thrown into a juridico-political situation in which their formal right to freedom is denied or violated. On the other hand, they are fully capable of articulating and exercising freedom in different phases of refugeehood.

The next four chapters adopt the concept of (non)-subjectivity and discuss the results of my IPA study. These chapters describe the different dimensions of (un)freedom and are organised
in a chronological order. The third chapter examines the dynamics of freedom and unfreedom in refugees’ pre-flight and flight condition. To elaborate this dynamic relationship, I dwell on interlocutors’ reflections on their pre-flight condition and their interpretations of escape and flight. This chapter is structured around three main observations. Firstly, I argue that the Conventional concept of ‘persecution’ is too narrow and too reductionistic to account for the conditions and root causes that, currently, give rise to the emergence of refugeehood in the sense of a mass-phenomenon. Secondly, I present an analysis of refugees’ interpretations of unfreedom and embed them in theoretical discussions concerning migration. To elucidate how refugees make sense of unfreedom, I adopt the notion of ‘abandonment’ and itemise its spatio-temporal and juridico-political characteristics (i.e., placelessness and inconsistency). Thirdly, I examine in what way the act of flight and escape represents the dynamic transition from unfreedom to freedom. Drawing on insights from critical race theory and autonomy of migration school, I conclude in this chapter that flight is a purposeful and multifaceted act, which is permeated by refugees’ practices and lived experiences of freedom.

Chapters four and five are interconnected and present an analysis of unfreedom in the post-flight condition. Chapter four is, primarily, concerned with socio-political conditions that engender refugees’ unfreedom in the receiving countries. In this chapter, I problematise misrepresentations of refugeehood, which underly humanitarian and securitised narratives of migration. I contend that, in receiving countries, refugees are thrown into an unequal host-guest-enemy relationship. By depicting and treating refugees as vulnerable victims or unwelcome guests, refugeehood undergoes a derogation process in the host countries. I analyse in what way this derogation process is being reflected in refugees’ perceptions of unfreedom. Drawing on Derrida’s criticism of politics of conditional hospitality, I examine hierarchal relationships (powerful hosts versus vulnerable guests), humiliating processes, and political practices that amount to the abandonment of refugees in host countries. The central thesis of this chapter is that refugees’ unfreedom stems from alienating and reifying practices, processes, and relations that expose them to the state of abandonment and placelessness.

Subsequently, chapter five focuses on spatial characteristics of unfreedom as reflected in political practices and arrangements of encampment. Drawing on interlocutors’ lived experiences, I elucidate that encampment is a clear manifestation of politics of abandonment, which subject refugees to physical isolation, segregation, rejection, and neglect. In this chapter I present a detailed analysis of placelessness and argue that refugee camps represent non-places in the symbolic, political, and architectural sense. Moreover, I discus the underlying political logic that gives shape
to the proliferation and normalisation of these hostile spatial arrangements within the nation-state paradigm.

Finally, in chapter six, I present an examination of the meaning of freedom in refugees’ post-flight condition. This chapter is structured around three key observations. Firstly, I show that experiences of abandonment and placelessness are never totalising and do not (fully) determine refugees’ human condition. By exploring interlocutors’ narratives and politics of cross-border solidarity, I highlight the signifying practices, encounters, and counterstrategies, by which refugees articulate and enact freedom. Secondly, I maintain that, for refugees, freedom is understood and experienced in an autonomous relational field that is marked by equality, friendship, and mutual belonging. Thirdly, in receiving countries, this relational field is the result of autonomous interventions, interpersonal relations, and collective struggles in and through which hostile determinations of unfreedom are resisted, exposed, and unsettled. The central thesis of this chapter is that the notion of ‘freedom’ becomes intelligible, meaningful, and experienceable within this conflictual process and expresses itself in a relational field that refugees interpret as friendship.
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Een bezinning op vrijheid vanuit het perspectief van vluchtelingen:
belevingen van (on)vrijheid in Europese grensgebieden

In het overheersende politieke discours wordt vluchtelingschap vaak geassocieerd met
slachtofferschap, machteloosheid, humanitaire hulp, abnormaliteit en politieke crises.
Vluchtelingen worden in de media en politieke debatten weergegeven als stemloze slachtoffers, die
op humanitaire gronden hulp en tijdelijke bescherming verdienen. Ook worden zij in toenemende
mate beschouwd als een bedreiging voor de grenzen, de stabiliteit, en het welzijn van de natiestaten
waar zij heen vluchten. Dit overheersende discours heeft weinig oog voor de politieke subjectiviteit
van vluchtelingen en negeert emancipatorische ervaringen en praktijken van vrijheid die aan het
politieke fenomeen vluchtelingschap ten grondslag liggen.

Dit proefschrift stelt zich ten doel het perspectief van vluchtelingen een stem te geven en
de verhouding tussen vrijheid en onvrijheid op basis van hun belevingen te bevragen. Dit
filosofisch onderzoek heeft een fenomenologisch karakter en reflecteert op vrijheidservaringen
van vluchtelingen, hun vluchtverhalen en hun percepties van onvrijheid. Deze verhalen en
levenservaringen zijn op een dialogische wijze tijdens diepte-interviews met vluchtelingen in
vluchtelingenkampen verzameld. De interviews zijn op basis van de richtlijnen van een
fenomenologische onderzoeksmethode (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)) geanalyseerd
en theoretisch bediscussieerd.

In het licht van deze fenomenologische benadering focust dit onderzoek zich op de
dynamische verhouding tussen vrijheid en onvrijheid in verschillende fasen van het
vluchtelingschap. Zo worden de ervaringen en vrijheidservaringen van vluchtelingen op een
kritische wijze ingeborg in theoretische discussies over vluchtelingschap, politieke (on)vrijheid, en
migratie. In het bijzonder werpt deze studie licht op belevingen van (on)vrijheid in het land van
herkomst, het bevrijdende karakter van het vluchten, sociaal-politieke structuren van verlatenheid,
tijdruimtelijke aspecten van onvrijheid en vrijheidservaringen van vluchtelingen in het gastland.
Bovendien stelt het onderzoek de hiërarchische conceptuele tegenstellingen tussen burgers versus
niet-burgers, gastheren versus gasten, ‘echte’ vluchtelingen versus ‘economische’ migranten,
inclusie versus exclusie en rechthebbenden versus rechtelozen ter discussie.

Om deze theoretische doelstellingen te realiseren maakt dit proefschrift gebruik van een
verscheidenheid aan wetenschappelijke bronnen en discussies op het gebied van politieke theorie.
In de eerste twee hoofdstukken wordt een kritisch overzicht geschetst van de gangbare
theoretische benaderingen die, implicit of expliciet, op de conceptuele kaders van het Vluchtelingenverdrag (1951) en de daaraan verwante juridische definities berusten. Deze benaderingen worden het ‘humanitaire raamwerk’ genoemd. Betoogd wordt dat het humanitaire raamwerk geen recht doet aan het perspectief van (hedendaagse) vluchtelingen en niet in staat is de totstandkoming van vluchtelingschap als massafenomeen uit te leggen. Om die reden is dit theoretisch raamwerk niet toereikend om de verhouding tussen vrijheid en vluchtelingschap adequaat aan het licht te brengen.

Om een alternatief theoretisch vertrekpunt te formuleren, beschouw ik het vluchtelingschap als een zelfstandige juridisch-politieke conditie, die zich in ons tijdperk als een massafenomeen manifesteert. Dit proefschrift introduceert het begrip (non-)subjectiviteit en betoogt dat de betekenis van vrijheid en onvrijheid in het kader van een conflictueuze dynamiek dient te worden verstaan. Deze dynamiek manifesteert zich in drie fundamentele fasen van vluchtelingschap, dat wil zeggen de ‘pre-vluchtfase’ (pre-flight condition), ‘vluchtfase’ (flight condition), en de ‘post-vluchtfase’ (post-flight condition). Vier hoofdstukken van dit proefschrift bespreken de dynamische verhouding tussen vrijheid en onvrijheid in deze fasen aan de hand van levensverhalen en ervaringen van vluchtelingen.

Het eerste hoofdstuk geeft een kritisch overzicht van de humanitaire benaderingen die de meest gangbare interpretaties van vluchtelingschap vertegenwoordigen. Dit theoretisch raamwerk is historisch geformuleerd in de institutioneel-conceptuele kaders van het natiestaatmodel. Dit model wordt gekenmerkt door de begrippen ‘nationaal burgerschap’, ‘zelfbeschikking’ en ‘territoriale soevereiniteit’. Vanuit dit uitgangspunt beschouwen de humanitaire benaderingen vluchtelingschap als een tijdelijke status (vluchtelingenstatus), die op individuele slachtoffers onder uitzonderlijke omstandigheden betrekking heeft. Zo wordt aangenomen dat deze tijdelijke vluchtelingenstatus, vroeg of laat, door specifieke vormen van inclusie (naturalisatie) en uitsluiting (repatriëring) ophoudt te bestaan. Dienovereenkomstig worden vluchtelingen in humanitaire benaderingen beschouwd als weerloze ‘slachtoffers van vervolging, die op humanitaire gronden tijdelijk bescherming verdienen. Dit humanitaire uitgangspunt reduceert vluchtelingen tot gede politiciseerde slachtoffers, die volledig afhankelijk zijn van gastlanden en internationale hulporganisaties.

In het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk bespreek ik een kritiek van dit humanitaire discours, die door Hannah Arendt (1951/1973) en Giorgio Agamben (1998/2000) is geformuleerd en uitgewerkt. De Arendiaans/Agambeniaanse kritiek toont aan dat het te simplistisch en misleidend is om vluchtelingschap te beschouwen als een tijdelijke of uitzonderlijke status die uitsluitend op individuen betrekking heeft. Integendeel, vluchtelingschap is in ons tijdperk een massafenomeen

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dat de interne logica van het natiestaatmodel op de proef stelt. Volgens Arendt en Agamben heeft de (formele) humanitaire interpretatie van mensenrechten een paradoxaal karakter. Deze paradox manifesteert zich in de conceptuele en daadwerkelijke grenzen van het natiestaatmodel. De politiek-juridische bepalingen van nationaal burgerschap en territoriale soevereiniteit zijn immers in strijd met grondbeginselen van mensenrechten, die op universele voorwaarden en garanties berusten. Dit conceptueel-institutioneel spanningsveld leidt tot de systematische uitsluiting van vluchtelingen uit het domein van vrijheid, mensenrechten en burgerschap.

De Arendtiaans/Agambeniaanse kritiek werpt licht op verschillende institutionele structuren en politieke condities die vluchtelingen als onvrijheid beleven, perciëren en interpreteren. Deze kritiek blijft echter eenzijdig en gaat voorbij aan bevrijdende ervaringen, praktijken en politieke interventies waarmee vluchtelingen aan vrijheid betekenis geven. Dit hoofdstuk concludeert dat zowel de humanitaire benadering als de Arendtiaans/Agambeniaanse kritiek burger-georiënteerd en staatsgericht zijn en zich voornamelijk richten op de relatie tussen vrijheid en burgerschap en de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van het natiestaatmodel. Daarom bieden zij geen adequaat analytisch raamwerk om vrijheid te onderzoeken en te interpreteren vanuit het perspectief van vluchtelingen.

Om de onderlinge verhouding tussen vrijheid en vluchtelingschap te reconstrueren, wordt in het tweede hoofdstuk een alternatieve theoretische benadering voorgesteld. Betoogd wordt dat de betekenis van (on)vrijheid niet eenvoudigweg kan worden gereduceerd tot de verhouding staatsburger en/of binaire hiërarchische tegenstellingen tussen inclusie versus uitsluiting en burgers versus rechtelozen. Vrijheid en onvrijheid constitueren op een dynamische wijze de ervaringen en juridisch-politieke condities van vluchtelingen. Om deze dynamiek te analyseren en te duiden maak ik gebruik van de notie (non-)subjectiviteit. Deze notie geeft uiting aan het perspectief van politieke personen die door hun bevrijdende ervaringen en praktijken vrijheid betekenis geven en tegelijkertijd de conceptueel-institutionele beperkingen van politiek en burgerschap overschrijden. Om het begrip (non-)subjectiviteit uit te werken overdenk ik in dit hoofdstuk emancipatorische ideeën en politieke interventies van Olympe de Gouges (een revolutionaire vrouw) en Frederick Douglass (een voortvluchtige slaafsgemaakte).

Voor deze (non-)subjecten is vrijheid geen formeel recht of vanzelfsprekend privilege. Integendeel, vrijheid is het product van praktijken, belevingen en de dagelijkse interactie waarmee (non-)subjecten op het politieke toneel verschijnen en een gelijkwaardige plaats op de wereld opeisen. Vanuit dit uitgangspunt betoogt dit hoofdstuk dat vluchtelingschap een zelfstandige juridisch-politieke conditie is die zich niet laat vatten in binaire tegenstellingen. Vluchtelingen bevinden zich enerzijds in een juridisch-politieke context waarin hun formele recht op vrijheid
structureel wordt ontzegd of geschonden. Anderzijds zijn ze volledig in staat deze structurele onvrijheid te ontkrachten en aan uitzonderlijke vormen van vrijheid gestalte te geven. Als politieke (non-)subjecten problematiseren vluchtelingen de formele grenzen van vrijheid en leggen zij de uitsluitende grenzen van nationaal burgerschap bloot.

De volgende vier hoofdstukken bouwen voort op dit theoretische uitgangspunt en thematiseren de politieke betekenis van (on)vrijheid in verschillende fasen van vluchtelingschap. Deze hoofdstukken zijn chronologisch geordend en bespreken de dynamiek van vrijheid en onvrijheid op basis van de belevingen en percepties van mijn gesprekspartners (vluchtelingen). Het derde hoofdstuk focust op de dynamiek van vrijheid en onvrijheid in de pre-vlucht- en vluchtfase. Om deze dynamische verhouding te beschrijven, sta ik stil bij hoe gesprekspartners hun eigen existentiële positie in de pre-vluchtfase interpreteren. Daarnaast ga ik in op vrijheidservaringen die aan hun vluchtverhalen ten grondslag liggen.

Dit hoofdstuk toont aan dat de betekenis van vrijheid nauw samenhangt met de ervaring van vluchten en ontsnapping. In dit verband worden twee hoofdobservaties genoemd. Ten eerste wordt betoogd dat de structurele blootstelling aan onvrijheid in het land van herkomst voor vluchtelingen een belangrijke drijfveer is om te vluchten. Ten tweede wordt geobserveerd dat de massale vlucht van vluchtelingen en migranten meerdere oorzaken heeft en mede afhankt van verschillende sociale, politieke, economische en ecologische factoren. Deze factoren correleren met het falen van natiestaten, milieurempen, postkoloniaal militaire/humanitaire interventies, aanhoudende internationale conflicten en permanente staatloosheid. Vervolgens wordt gesuggereerd dat het conventionele begrip ‘vervolging’ (bepalend voor de juridische definitie van vluchtelingschap) ontoereikend is om onvrijheid in de pre-vluchtfase te duiden. Het begrip ‘vervolging’ speelt immers in toenemende mate een marginale rol in de wijze waarop vluchtelingen onvrijheid in hun land van herkomst ervaren en interpreteren. Om die reden kan dit begrip niet als een alomvattend criterium fungeren om de verhouding tussen vluchtelingschap en onvrijheid te begrijpen.

Om te verduidelijken hoe veel vluchtelingen in dit tijdperk onvrijheid beleven, gebruik ik het begrip ‘verlatenheid’ (abandonment). Voor veel vluchtelingen omvat verlatenheid een essentiële ervaringsdimensie van onvrijheid, die in verschillende fasen van vluchtelingschap tot uiting komt. In dit hoofdstuk worden de tijd-ruimtelijke en juridisch-politieke dimensies van verlatenheid uiteengezet (plaatsloosheid en inconsistentie). In juridisch-politieke zin verwijst verlatenheid naar een menselijke conditie waarin vluchtelingen systematisch worden blootgesteld aan rechtsonzekerheid en politieke praktijken van afwijzing, verwaarlozing en veronachtzaming. In de
tijdsruimtelijke zin beschrijft verlatenheid structuren en modaliteiten waarin een mens voortdurend wordt belet een gelijkaardige en consistente plaats in de wereld te verwerven.

Vanuit deze invalshoek gezien is het vluchten van vluchtelingen een bevrijdende poging om de structuren van onvrijheid tedoorbreken. Het vluchten is een handeling (een migratiebeweging) die de dynamische overgang van onvrijheid naar vrijheid tot stand brengt. Enerzijds is het vluchten een moedige en risicovolle daad waarbij (non-)subjecten weerstand bieden aan de bepalingen en structuren van verlatenheid. Anderzijds dient het vluchten als een doelbewuste interventie te worden geïnterpreteerd waarmee (non-)subjecten hun subjectiviteit uitoefenen en een gelijkwaardige plaats in de wereld opeisen. Voor vluchtelingen manifesteert vrijheid zich in deze tweedimensionale beweging. Deze beweging markeert de overgang van verlatenheid en sociale dood naar het politiek bestaan en naar vrijheid.

De betekenis van (on)vrijheid krijgt gestalte in een dynamisch conflictveld waarin verlatenheid en het vluchten als twee bepalende factoren fungeren. In tegenstelling tot gangbare opvattingen kan vrijheid daarom niet worden gereduceerd tot een statische politieke status of een formeel recht dat ondubbelzinnig wordt verleend of ontzegd. Uit het perspectief van (non-)subjecten is het vluchten een grensoverschrijding in symbolische, politieke en geografische zin. Het vluchten is een veelzijdig fenomeen dat verschillende praktijken, ervaringen, strategieën en interventies omvat waarmee vluchtelingen het hiërarchische onderscheid tussen burgers en niet-burgers problematiseren.

In het tweede deel van het proefschrift onderzoek ik op welke manier de dynamiek van vrijheid en onvrijheid in het gastland (post-vluchtfase) tot uiting komt. De fenomenologische analyses in hoofdstuk vier en vijf laten zien dat het verlangen naar vrijheid niet zomaar wordt vervuld en gerealiseerd. In de post-vluchtfase bevinden vluchtelingen zich in een ambivalente machtsdynamiek die gekenmerkt wordt door de verhouding tussen machteleoze gast en machtige gastheer. Deze machtsdynamiek leidt tot politieke structuren, tijdsruimtelijke bepalingen en intersubjectieve relaties die vluchtelingen als onvrijheid ervaren en interpreteren.

In het gastland worden vluchtelingen vaak behandeld als kwetsbare en machteleoze slachtoffers, afhankelijk van de vrijegivigheid en gastvrijheid van de gastheer. Daarnaast worden zij in het politieke discours steeds meer weggezet als vreemdelingen die door hun migratiestromen een bedreiging vormen voor de soevereiniteit en stabiliteit van gastlanden. In deze ambivalente machtsdynamiek ondergaat het begrip ‘vluchtelingschap’ een semantische metamorfose en wordt het geassocieerd met slachtofferschap, abnormaaliteit, machteleoosheid en politieke crises.

Op intersubjectief niveau functioneert vluchtelingschap als een denigrerend stigma dat vluchtelingen ervan weerhoudt een gelijke positie in de wereld te verwerven. Uit verhalen van
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vluchtelingen blijkt dat de ervaringen van onvrijheid nauw samenhangen met dit denigrerende stigma waaraan zij in alledaagse ontmoetingen, interacties en bureaucratische processen worden blootgesteld. Op politiek niveau leidt het hiërarchische onderscheid tussen machtige gastheer en machteloze gasten tot verwarlozende maatregelen en bureaucratische vormen van afwijzing, retificatie en vervreemding. Zo worden vluchtelingen gereduceerd tot statistieken, massastromen en cijfers en systematisch onderworpen aan de structuren van verlatenheid en plaatsloosheid (placelessness).

In hoofdstuk vijf besteed ik aandacht aan de ruimtelijke kenmerken van onvrijheid en plaatsloosheid. In ruimtelijke zin materialiseert onvrijheid zich in de politieke organisatie en het management van vluchtelingenkampen. De totstandkoming van grootschalige vluchtelingenkampen in grensgebieden is een uiting van de logica van verlatenheid die ten grondslag ligt aan de humanitaire en gemilitariseerde vormen van crisisbeheersing. Vluchtelingenkampen belichamen de ruimtelijke kenmerken van onvrijheid in symbolische, materiële en politieke zin. De onmenselijkende architectuur van het kamp schendt de integriteit van het menselijk lichaam en belet vluchtelingen om een (nieuwe) plaats in de wereld op te bouwen. Het langdurige verblijf van vluchtelingen in kampachtige constructies onderwerpt hen aan fysieke segregatie, temporele onzekerheid, existentiële verlamming en bureaucratische vernedering.

Hoofdstuk zes thematiseert op welke wijze vluchtelingen de juridisch-politieke condities en de ruimtelijke bepalingen van onvrijheid in het gastland bestrijden en ontkrachten. Dit hoofdstuk brengt drie hoofdargumenten naar voren. Ten eerste laat het zien dat structuren van verlatenheid en plaatsloosheid nooit alomvattend en allesbepalend zijn. In het gastland ontwikkelen vluchtelingen immers verschillende tegenstrategieën en politieke interventies waarmee zij de bepalingen en praktijken van onvrijheid blootleggen. Ten tweede wordt in dit hoofdstuk stilgestaan bij deze tegenstrategieën en politieke interventies en wordt besproken op welke wijze vluchtelingen in hun ervaringen vrijheid gestalte geven.

Voor vluchtelingen manifesteert vrijheid zich in een autonoom relationeel veld dat wordt gekenmerkt door gelijkheid, vriendschap en wederzijdse verbondenheid. Dit relationele veld ontstaat door autonome interventies, politieke vormen van solidariteit en collectieve strijd tegen structuren van verlatenheid. Zo verschijnen vluchtelingen als (non-)subjecten op het politieke toneel en stellen zij de hiërarchische tegenstellingen tussen gastheren en gasten, tussen burgers en vluchtelingen en tussen vrienden en vijanden ter discussie. De centrale stelling van dit hoofdstuk is dat de betekenis van vrijheid nauw samenhangt met vriendschap en op een kritische wijze als zodanig dient te worden geïnterpreteerd. Vrijheid als vriendschap manifesteert zich in een autonoom relationeel veld, gekenmerkt door gelijkheid en wederzijdse verbondenheid.
Acknowledgments

I was twelve or thirteen years old that I first encountered the dazzling world of philosophy. To be precise: it was Plato’s Symposium on the theme of love that dragged me into this world. Back then, I was still living in Iran and knew very little about the Greek intellectual tradition and its philosophical giants. I read the dialogue in Persian translation. It was written in a beautiful prose and reflected the literary character of the work, using the resources of the Persian literature. A few months later, I got acquainted with philosophical investigations of Aristotle, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Biruni, Khayyam and their modern counterparts. I was fascinated by their passionate reflections on science, philosophy, art, poetry, and politics. Their holistic vision of human knowledge inspired me to zigzag a bit between philosophy, theoretical physics, politics, and art. That period was also the stormiest moment of my life, as it foreshadowed the beginning of my long-term exile.

All in all, my first encounter with Socratic dialogues had an everlasting impact on me and taught me two fundamental lessons about the nature of philosophy. It made me realise that every philosophical inquiry stems from a genuine desire that motivate us to explore the concealed dimensions of phenomena that seem most evident to us. It also made me realise that philosophy is, essentially, a collective activity that takes shape in a dialogue, in which different ideas, perspectives and interlocutors are involved. These two lessons are fundamentally at odds with stereotypical conceptions that associate philosophy with a solitary monologue of a highly rational intellectual that has isolated himself from the rest of world.

This dissertation is the fruit of these two important lessons. This philosophical symposium stands on the shoulders of many committed scholars and is the result of a collective effort to which many interlocutors have contributed. The ideas presented in this dissertation reflect my conversations and dialogues with many refugees, migrants, and solidarity activists in Kara Tepe, Moria, Mytilene, and City Plaza (Athens). Specifically, I would like to thank Farzad, Jamal, Adel, Mina, Shahab, Morad, Liam, and Najib for their trust and patience during long and challenging interviews. Your life stories, unique insights, and emancipatory ideas are an essential part of this research project.

Needless to say, my supervisors played an indispensable role in this symposium on the theme of freedom. Yolande, from the very early stage of this philosophical journey, you generously offered your intellectual support and encouraged me to remain committed to the fundamental questions of this inquiry. Throughout these years, I enormously benefited from our conversations, your fruitful comments, and engaging academic guidance that testify to your intellectual commitments. Thank you! Daniel, I truthfully appreciate that you agreed to become part of this
research project. Your thought-provoking questions and instructions helped me a lot to work on underdeveloped aspects of my analyses. You were always looking how this work could live up to its fullest potential and emphasised the importance of interlocutors’ narratives.

Moreover, I would like to express my gratitude to Robin Celikates. You were the one who introduced me to UvA’s philosophy department. Your intellectual support (first as a co-supervisor then as an advisor) is of great value to me. I remember that you were very enthusiastic about the interdisciplinary character of this research project, and your encouraging observations motivated me to continue with this very challenging philosophical journey. In many respects, this dissertation incorporates many critical ideas that we talked about. I am immensely honoured and thankful that Tesseltje de Lange, Sandro Mezzadra, Uğur Ümit Üngör, Marc de Wilde, Huub Dijstelbloem, and Jana Cattien were willing to act as committee members of my PhD-defence.

To give shape to this research project, I received the Peter Baehr Prize (UAF Foundation) and the Young Talent Award, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds. Moreover, the University of Amsterdam supported me financially to carry out my fieldwork in Greece. Without this generous support, this project would face many obstacles. Especially, I would like to thank the late Meindert Fennema for his support, encouragements, and friendship. I am also grateful to Chandran Kukathas and other members of LSE’s Department of Government from whom I learnt a lot during my time in London. I would like to thank all participants of the international conference Decolonising Political Concepts (University of Aberdeen) and the annual ACGS Conference (University of Amsterdam) who provided insightful feedback on earlier drafts of my chapters.

Nima Shirvani, you are a true friend, but I want to especially thank you for our very inspiring conversations and your contributions during our first visit to Kara Tepe. Daniel Gerdes, many thanks for taking the time to review the Dutch summary of my dissertation. Your translation of Hafez is a great achievement. Zoë Robaey, I am very happy, lucky and honoured to have a kind and committed colleague like you. Many thanks for being my paranimf. Anna Blijdenstein, I am grateful for your last-minute advice.

My mother and brother played an important role throughout this journey and gave me unconditional love and support through ups and downs of my life. My father—who was a professional mountain climber—is not among us anymore to, probably, tell me that I just have ascended one the peaks of my intellectual expeditions, and that I should prepare myself for the next one.

Finally, Leila, in fact, there is no need to mention you here. Together, we are the manifestation of what quantum physicists call ‘entanglement’. In the intellectual realm, you are my companion, my interlocutor, and my knowledgeable guide who opens windows for new
explorations. Your presence always allows me to see the limits of my own thought. In the political realm, you are my comrade, a source of inspiration, and a compassionate advocate of political care and resistance. In the private life, you are the expression of true friendly love (dusti) and what our great poets call liberation (azadegi). I cannot wait to see the final result of your fascinating research.
Rethinking Freedom from the Perspective of Refugees: Lived Experiences of (Un)freedom in Europe's Border Zones

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