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Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Towards a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement

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Abstract

This article introduces a time perspective on protracted displacement, and seeks to theorize 'agency-in-waiting' through a focus on the ways in which people simultaneously move on during displacement, feel stuck in the present, and actively relate to alternative and changing notions of the future. The article analyzes the protracted case of internally displaced Georgians from Abkhazia and the dominant discourse of return that characterizes their lives in displacement. Changing notions of hope are analyzed in order to understanding the role of an uncertain future and the potential for agency that people develop during displacement. Agency-in-waiting and future perspectives, it is suggested, contribute a valuable conceptual and political dimension to the ways in which protracted displacement can be understood and addressed.

Keywords: uncertainty, agency-in-waiting, hope, Georgia, protracted internal displacement, time perspective

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Protracted displacement is often considered a static state of being, and for many people this is undoubtedly how it feels. Individuals feel stuck in a present that they do not want to inhabit, awaiting a future they cannot reach—a future that is often unpredictable and uncertain. Yet, even in this 'protracted uncertainty' (Horst and Grabska, this issue) which is experienced as permanent impermanence, 'every-day time' continues to flow through routinized practices and survival strategies. Scholarship has conceptualized long-term displacement as 'waiting' (Stepputat 1992; Conlon 2011; Hyndman and Giles 2011; Mountz 2011). In this article, I seek to build on and develop existing knowledge and scholarship on waiting by exploring how people's future orientation may change during a prolonged period of displacement. I examine how people's capacities for waiting can be analyzed through the changing dynamics of hope created in the meeting point between their everyday lives and geopolitical realities.

The article argues that we need to move away from understanding protracted displacement as static, towards a notion of it as fluid. This, I argue, requires a critical engagement with the temporality of protracted displacement, and particularly how we conceptualize agency within that temporality. The temporality of protracted displacement may be framed as *protracted uncertainty* as the editors of this journal suggests (Horst and Grabska, this issue) and I attempt to understand the process of protracted uncertainty through the interlinked concepts of 'waiting' and 'hope'. I have organized the article as follows. First, I discuss the meaning of 'protracted displacement'. I then develop existing perspectives on waiting into the idea of 'agency-in-waiting' as a particular way of understanding the time perspective of protracted displacement. In the subsequent sections, I introduce internal displacement[1] in Georgia and the discourse of return that shapes policies, experiences, and strategies of displacement. The case from Georgia helps to illustrate and theorize the time perspective of displacement as protracted uncertainty. It shows how people's orientation towards the future changes during displacement, and I analyze this change through an exploration of how people simultaneously move on, feel stuck in the present, and still actively relate to alternative and changing notions of the future during such displacement. Protracted displacement is filled with contradictions. I argue that the policy category internally displaced persons (IDP) contributes to this contradiction because during prolonged periods of displacement it becomes like a social category that restricts people's opportunities. I conclude by showing how, even when people are moving on and developing their lives in displacement, they remain fixed within a political status and a humanitarian category that continues to produce uncertain futures.

The empirical material used for the analysis is drawn from my engagement with internal displacement in Georgia since 2003. The main body of material originates from 39 interviews with internally displaced persons during two weeks of fieldwork in Tbilisi and Kutaisi (see figure 1) in 2010, and another two weeks in 2012. In 2010, together with an interpreter, I conducted qualitative interviews with 15 people in Tbilisi and 8 in Kutaisi. In 2012, I conducted follow-up interviews with 9 of the interviewees from 2010 in addition to 16 new interviews in the same locations. Most of the interviewees were living in ‘collective centers’ which are buildings such as student dormitories, hotels, kindergartens, hospitals and accommodation built for factory workers. The dwellings are generally not designed for permanent occupation nor for families. Three interviewees had moved from a collective center to alternative accommodation and six interviewees were living in rented accommodation. There were more women (25) than men (14) among the 39 interviewees. Additionally, in 2010 I conducted interviews with staff of altogether 15 organizations (international and national non governmental organizations and UN organizations) and government institutions in the two urban centers. In 2012, I followed up conversations from 2010 with four organizations and two government officials.

Protracted Displacement

Displacement because of war means physical dislocation, the separation of people from their everyday practices and their familiar environments, social disruption, and material dispossession. However, without seeking to romanticize displacement, it may also be said to involve innovation: it is a process of transformation and new possibilities (Brun 2008). Displacement has been described as a “simultaneously split and doubled existence—stretched across the multiple ruptures between ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Bammer 1994: xii). Displacement indicates a state of ‘in-betweenness’, a state of being attached to several places and simultaneously struggling to establish the right to a place. Dis*place*ment, the movement from one place to another, relates to questions of mobility—who moves where and why—which presupposes an understanding of the relations of power that shape that mobility (Gill et al. 2011; Hyndman 2000). These power relations involve processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the identification of those who belong and those who do not. In this article, I explore this in-betweenness—temporal and spatial—between different places, and more importantly between different times—what Gasparini (2004) terms the “interstices of everyday life.”

Protracted displacement represents the experience of being forced to stay away from the place called home over many years.[2] During protracted displacement, people’s hopes of returning tend to remain relatively strong and shape their lives during displacement, but the nature of those hopes also tends to change over time. In 2008, the UNHCR (2008) estimated that, in addition to the case of the Palestinians, there were about 6 million people in 30 long-term refugee situations. One year earlier, the Brookings Institute estimated that there were 35 protracted situations of conflict-induced internal displacement around the world (Ferris 2007). The problem of protracted displacement is now significantly greater in terms of scale than it was two decades ago, and continues to increase in scope (Zetter 2011). Considering cases of internal displacement that have taken place globally over the past

20 years, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2009) estimates that only 25% of those displaced during this period have been able return to their homes.

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to protracted refugee situations (see Loescher et al. 2008; Milner and Loescher 2011; UNHCR 2006, 2008), as is illustrated by the growing acceptance and use of the acronym 'PRS' to refer to the phenomenon. Much less attention, however, has been given to situations of internal displacement. A project focusing on 'unlocking' protracted displacement (Bradley 2011; Chatty and Mansour 2011; Lindley 2011; Zetter 2011) discusses the relationship between durable solutions, policies, and the ways in which displaced populations cope with protracted displacement. From this research, Zetter (2011: 9) concludes that "[p]rolonged displacement is often accepted, albeit reluctantly, as a semi-permanent state of affairs and durable solutions implicitly suggest a fixed, "end-state" solution. Yet ..., the rigidity of these concepts fits uneasily with the need for flexible, experimental, and often politically risky modes of intervention—embracing a range of actors and stakeholders—to tackle the fluid and episodic nature of displacement."

The humanitarian categories of displacement, such as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) – are maintained throughout prolonged forced migration. Hyndman and Giles (2011), however, criticize the use of the term and category 'protracted refugee situations' (PRS). The PRS category and label, they argue, may be useful in terms of ensuring greater visibility of affected populations, and it often covers situations that are quickly forgotten when their news value disappears. However, by understanding people as living in protracted refugee and displacement situations, we risk fixing them to particular locations (such as camps and collective centers): people are being reduced to the de-historicized humanitarian category of refugees or IDPs. Regardless of how their lives change and in which context they find themselves people are represented and understood as living in limbo, passive in their longing for the past and consequently devoid of agency. They are fixed both temporally and spatially. Together with Anita Fàbos, I have elsewhere argued for the move from limbo to liminality to understand protracted situations of displacement (Brun and Fàbos under review). As suggested by the authors of the introduction to this special issue, liminality helps to understand the dynamic nature of protracted displacement. Liminality captures the simultaneous process of marginalization, control and stasis on the one hand, and the transformation and flows on the other (Brun and Fàbos). Even during protracted situations of displacement, the clock continues to tick and movement continues to take place. Through the introduction of a time perspective, then, my aim in what follows is to explore the fluid and episodic nature of protracted displacement.

Agency-in-Waiting: The Temporality of Protracted Displacement

> [E]verything good that happened in my life happened there[3]. Everything good is related to that place. And my father is buried there. Besides another thing has happened: it is that when I look forward there is no light—it is blurred. When you can't envisage the future, the only thing you can do is to think about the past. I have to think about the past. (Interview, woman, Tbilisi, 2010)

Discussions of time in protracted displacement often circle around the past or the future. The quote above indicates that people in protracted situations of displacement often live their lives in a present and at a place where they do not want to be. They dream about a future they cannot reach, which often lies in the past and is represented by the places and lives they were forced to leave. Protracted displacement is therefore often characterized as 'waiting' (Conlon 2011). Waiting may be understood as the time that fills the gaps in our time (Gasparini 1995). It becomes "a temporal aberration"—a feeling of being out of sync with time (Schweizer 2004: 779). It is when we wait that we become conscious of time, because there is a mismatch between expectations and chances. We are awaiting a future that is too slow in coming (Bourdieu 2000). Bourdieu (2000) points to this experience of waiting in his analysis of youth in 1990s France and 1960s Algeria (see discussion in Jeffrey 2008). Here, Bourdieu distinguishes between an abstract future—a time perspective that operates independently of one's everyday life—and 'everyday time'. Everyday time represents our routinized practices, the things we do every day. It involves participating in the safe routines that define our lives, such as getting up every day, making food, getting the children to school, and going to work. For many refugees and internally displaced persons, both the routinized everyday time and the abstract future time may lack content.

Bourdieu's understanding of waiting may be further nuanced by taking into account Gasparini's (1995) distinction between short-term and long-term waiting, which points to the transformation that often takes place as people's expectations about the future change. Long-term waiting creates a relatively stable condition that may lead to a reclassification of a person's status and possibly—or ultimately—transition into a social role: for example, as 'unemployed' or, in this case, an 'IDP'. Long-term waiting may mean passivity, but the routinized practices of everyday time continue while they wait for an alternative future. Waiting becomes, as Gasparini shows, an indication of a particular social status, and may represent the framework of a person's identity.

Waiting comes in diverse forms, ranging from inert waiting to active waiting (Marcel 1967). In active waiting, there is a constant monitoring of the likelihood that the events we are waiting for will occur, and of how much time we are prepared to wait. Marcel's notion of active waiting may serve as the starting point for a time perspective on protracted displacement and a theorizing of 'agency-in-waiting'. Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 962) incorporate a temporality of agency in their discussion of "What Is Agency?", in which they define agency as a "temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its 'iterational' or habitual aspect) but also oriented towards the future (as a 'projective' capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as 'practical-evaluative' capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)."

Understanding waiting must encompass an engagement with the past. Common for the internally displaced people I have interviewed is their experience of violence in the process of displacement. In the case of Georgian IDPs, the past may be expressed as the idealized and harmonious past before the conflict, or as the violence experienced during the war and displacement (Kabachnik et al. 2012a). Violence experienced in the past continues to imprint the present and for victims of violence, Das (2000) maintains, a most important strategy for healing is getting on with one's everyday life. For people living in protracted displacement, however, everyday life may be shaped by waiting and an uncertain future, which affect the possibilities for 'moving on.' In such circumstances, people often dream of return and a future located in an idealized and harmonious past (Kabachnik et al. 2010).

'Projectivity' is the ability of actors to imagine possible future trajectories of action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Knowing the future tends to be based on experiences rooted in the past. Through repeating events and experiencing stable continuities in our lives, we know what to expect from the future (Adam 2007). What we consciously aspire to in the present informs our ideas about how we think the future should be and how we should act to realize those ideas (Groves 2007). Power determines whether a preferred future is reachable (Bourdieu 2000). When people feel trapped in a never-ending present (Jeffrey 2008) where alternative futures cannot be reached, it may feel meaningless to work to achieve future goals because that future lies too far ahead. However, I show below that even during this uncertainty of not knowing and not being able to control the future, people do anticipate the possibility of alternative futures, and waiting becomes a particular way of experiencing this link between time and power. Active waiting implies anticipation and some confidence in the fact that a certain event will occur, and is thus closely connected to hope (Marcel 1967). Hope may be understood to be generative of action and accesses a temporal sense of potential, of having a future (Marcel 1967), it is thus a way of dealing with protracted uncertainty and making uncertainty meaningful. 'Agency-in-waiting' denotes the capacity to act in the present, in everyday-time, based on the experience of displacement from the subject's history and a critical reflection of the future possibilities framed as waiting and hope. It does not indicate that people necessarily are able to control or shape their future (see Brun and Blaikie 2014 for a discussion of the limits to agency). My starting point for engaging with hope is empirical, theoretical, and political. First, hope emerged as a dominant theme in the interviews I conducted in Georgia. Second, as I have argued above, theoretically, ‘hope’ is closely connected with the notion of ‘active waiting’ and helps in the analysis of agency-in-waiting. Third, hope represents visions for the world that create possibilities for change (Zournazi 2002), and is consequently an important perspective for identifying potential for improved lives. In the following sections, then, I will discuss how agency can be explored in relation to waiting and the changing content of hope identified during periods of displacement.

Displacement and the Discourse of Return in Georgia

What are people displaced over many years waiting for? The precise answer to this will vary from context to context, and from individual to individual (see, for example, Conlon 2011; Mountz 2011). People wait for resettlement, or just to be able to move on by escaping the often dire conditions of life in a refugee camp, a collective center, or rented accommodation. Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia (see figure 1) wait to return to the places they left: to their houses, their gardens, their neighbors, their former lives. And it is this hope of one day returning that has often kept them afloat. How is this hope created, maintained, and used? Below, I will explain the context of protracted displacement and the associated discourse of return in Georgia.

(Insert figure 1 near here)

A story of displacement may have many beginnings. I start this one with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the establishment of Georgia as a nation-state and Abkhazia’s subsequent declaration of independence from Georgia in 1992. The Georgian authorities refused to accept Abkhazia’s secession, and Georgian forces entered Abkhazia to regain the disputed territory. The ethnic Georgian population that made up approximately 46% of the prewar population fled Abkhazia following the defeat of the Georgian forces (Kolossov and O’Loughlin 2011). The conflict left an estimated 10,000 people dead and some 250,000 displaced (Amnesty International 2010).

During the mid-1990s, around 40,000–50,000 Georgians returned to Gali (see figure 1), but maintained their status as IDPs because of the volatility of the ongoing situation and the possibility of further displacement. Many other IDPs settled in West Georgia, close to the border to Abkhazia, but a significant number moved to Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, where they continue to live. People who moved out of Abkhazia often ended up in collective centers as explained above. The dwellings were not appropriate for permanent occupation and were often already in very bad conditions when the IDPs moved in. Today, it is believed that approximately half of all IDPs in Georgia live in such collective centers, while the remainder live in rented accommodation (Norwegian Refugee Council 2011) and some very few have bought their own properties.

The Georgian government readily accepted the individuals fleeing Abkhazia as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and established a number of initiatives to assist them. A law on IDPs was adopted in 1996, but a state strategy for IDPs was not put in place until 2007 (Government of Georgia 2007). This slowness in establishing a formal state strategy may be partly accounted for by the fact that return was strongly desired both by the IDPs and by the Georgian government. Indeed, return is still believed by the government and most IDPs to represent the only valid solution to the displacement and the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. Kabachnik (2012), for example, explains the discourse of return with the uncertainty and fear surrounding questions related to Georgian nationality and territorial integrity as "Georgia's cartographic anxiety." He likens the gaining of independence by a separatist region to an "'amputation', leaving 'wounds' and 'scars'" (Kabachnik 2012: 47). Accordingly, the return of the IDPs to Abkhazia is a concern not just for the IDPs themselves, but for the whole Georgian nation.

The first time I travelled to Georgia was in 2003, to undertake an evaluation for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) regarding possibilities for establishing sustainable housing for the IDPs who were living in substandard collective centers. At that time, the only acceptable solution to the displacement for both IDPs and the Government of Georgia was return. 'Local integration' was unheard of as a solution, although some humanitarian organizations had begun to talk about 'temporary integration' in informal meetings with the government, arguing that displaced people could not continue to be held in their current dire conditions, with such high levels of dependency on assistance. It was agreed that measures had to be taken to improve the lives of displaced people, and accordingly some humanitarian organizations had been allowed to renovate some of the rooms in the collective centers in which people lived, though the Georgian authorities would not agree to the establishment of more sustainable and permanent housing solutions.

Under these conditions, many individuals simply nurtured their feelings of loss regarding their homes in Abkhazia and hoped for return. In this context, holding on to the IDP category was an important way of maintaining the right to return and the right to assistance. When I returned in 2010, however, the discourse on internal displacement had changed. Although return was still emphasized, the nature of the hope regarding return was in a process of transformation. Two interrelated events had contributed to this shift. First, the state strategy of 2007 (amended with an action plan in 2008 and updated a year later) aimed to create more sustainable housing and to reduce the IDPs' dependency on the Georgian state (Government of Georgia 2007). In an interview with the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees in Tbilisi in October 2012, the plans to privatize the rooms in which people lived in the collective centers had been nearly fulfilled by the end of 2012, but many of the difficult cases remained unsettled. There were also plans for assisting those living in rented accommodation. This reorientation in the terms of assistance and increased openness towards local integration—termed the 'durable housing solution' in Georgian policy language—had influenced the ways in which people thought about their current situation and their hopes for return.

A second influential event was the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, and the subsequent policies towards the so-called new IDPs. These 'new IDPs,' displaced from South Ossetia during August 2008, were nearly all (95%) resettled in new housing schemes or had returned to their homes before the end of 2008. This represented an extremely quick response by the Georgian government, which was keen to prove that it had learned from past mistakes and wanted to show the international community that it could act quickly and efficiently. The prompt resettlement following the war, along with what many saw as a de facto loss of control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, meant that many people's hopes for return had changed. Importantly, the state strategy for IDPs from 2007 was largely enabled by the fresh inflow of international funding towards both old and new IDPs.

Expectations and hopes related to the possibility of return have shaped both the Georgian government's policies towards the IDPs and the ways in which those IDPs think about the future. Return to Abkhazia remains a strong discourse even after the 2008 war. However, as I indicate below, the geopolitical and policy changes that have taken place have helped to transform the ways in which many people displaced from Abkhazia think about their return.

Moving on, Leading Normal Lives?

> Then I went to Kutaisi. I was just walking around in the streets crying. I didn't know what to do. A stranger came and asked what was wrong, and I told her. She said to me, "You have to go back to your son and take care of him." Without being told that, I am not sure I would have managed to continue. So I went back to my son and I started to take care of my family again. I realized I had to move on. (Interview, woman [Marina], Tbilisi, 2010)

Waiting does not mean that people are idle, although they may often want to sit down and give up. Marina, now in her early 50s, recounted the story of her family's flight from Abkhazia and arrival in Kutaisi, where they lived the first years of their displacement. When they fled, she had a three-year-old son and was pregnant with twins. During the flight, however, she lost the twins. She was devastated, depressed and ill—she did not know what to do or how to cope. But she realized she had to move on to take care of her son. Giving up was not an option. Her life has changed substantially since these first desperate weeks of displacement. During the years in Kutaisi, both she and her husband got paid work. The salary was enough to cover the requirements of everyday life, though not enough to enable them to leave the collective center. In 2004, the husband was offered a job in Tbilisi. Having realized that a return to Abkhazia was not going to happen in the near future, and with the prospect of a better school for their son, they decided to move. In Tbilisi, they bought their current room in the collective center from another displaced family. In 2010 and 2012, when I interviewed her, Marina's son was attending university. The family's members were able to live "modest lives," she said. In fact, life is quite "normal": She gets up in the morning, gives her husband and son breakfast, goes to work, comes back home, and cooks. If there is any free time, she chats with neighbors and goes to church.

Marina's room is beautifully organized, with a sofa bed that unfolds to a double bed for her and her husband, and a divan where her son sleeps. Some of the cups in a glass cabinet come from their house in Abkhazia; though she did not manage to save much from her former home, the cups—a wedding present—have been with her all the time. She has established everyday routines, made a private space, and managed her family—all of which have helped to create a sense of order and control.

Life has moved on; it feels normal. However, as Marina states, "I always feel the loss. My twins, my brother, my house—the loss is always with me when I get up, when I cook, when I come back to this room after a day at work." Even in her daily rhythms, the past is with her—and she continues to wait for return:

> On the one hand, it is difficult to wait. Before, at least we could call to Zukhumi[4] to our neighbors there. I was living in Kutaisi ... because of work, but also to be closer to Abkhazia, so it would be easier to return when we could return. Then, when I started to realize we would not return soon, and also because of work, I decided to come to Tbilisi. If I had known from the beginning that we wouldn't have returned for so long time, I would have lived a different life. (C: What kind of life?) It is hard to say. Maybe I would have tried to get a property.... But if I had known our displacement would last for so long, I am not sure I would have survived. The hope [of returning] kept me alive.

As Marina's story shows, hope can be double-edged. The hope of returning sustained her and enabled her to move on, but at the same time limited what she considered as possible options for improving her life (see Marr 2005). Even in waiting, people move on; they get by; their lives change (people are still sleeping, waking up, eating—finding food—caring for children). Waiting and hope are weaved into every rhythm; the discourse of hope and the experience of marginality in one's daily routines are linked to people's status as internally displaced persons, and to the lives they lost. As a young woman from a collective center in Tbilisi said (2010):

> It is really an unbearable situation. We are living, sleeping, and eating in the same place. We are sharing the toilets with all the other families. We are five people living in this room: my parents, my uncle, my brother, and me.... We cook, but it's not like in Abkhazia—we

> don’t have enough income to cook here—and we do not have the space to have the big family meals we used to have there.

Uncertainty is linked to dispossessions experienced in the past (Ryan-Saha, this issue). For the internally displaced in Georgia, *moving on* also creates challenges and uncertainties for people’s material realities. The second or 1.5 generation IDPs are getting married and having children, though with few resources to help them find additional living space. Living in limited spaces generates tension. Young people I interviewed, mainly 1.5 generation IDPs displaced from Abkhazia when they were children, sometimes felt that they had to delay their plans for a family as a result. The privatization of rooms in collective centers does not allow for any increase in post-displacement family size (interviews with government officials, October 2012). Furthermore, unemployment is very high in Georgia: 20% on average, with the figure for the internally displaced being higher than that of the general Georgian population (Frichova Grono 2011; Tarkhan-Mouravi 2009). Access to the informal sector is believed to be more limited for IDPs, too. Schooling is free, but one text-book costs more than a month’s benefits for an IDP. The struggles of day-to-day life are a constant reminder of the loss caused by displacement, and many IDPs feel like an underclass. As others have shown (Mitchnek et al. 2009), the social networks of the IDPs living in collective centers largely consist of other IDPs living in the same collective centers or relatives. The sense of segregation these IDPs feel has implications for how individuals move on, though it also generates a very strong sense of solidarity among them:

> The difficulties I have been through have cost me a lot, but it has also given me a lot of friends. (Interview, man, Tbilisi, 2010)

Waiting and Queuing: Between Boredom and Hope

> When I wake up in the morning, I don’t know what to do.... I am always thinking about return. We dream about it. (Interview, woman [Julia], Tbilisi, 2010)

Following her displacement and arrival in Tbilisi, Julia had worked as a government official, helping people who lost family members during the war. When her office closed down in 2003, however, she was unable to find another job. Her husband left for Russia to find employment and married another woman there. He continued to send money, however, until his death in an accident in 2009. Julia taught Russian for a while, but after the 2008 war the demand to learn Russian declined. Her daughter, born after displacement, had just turned 16 when I interviewed her in 2010. Julia and her daughter lived in a collective center in central Tbilisi. Besides worrying about the constant struggle for money, she recounted, she was bored—from the moment she got out of bed. Her daily rhythm involved getting up, queuing for the toilet, getting bread, providing her daughter with breakfast, seeing her daughter off to school, queuing for water from the tap that is on for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening, and cleaning her room. In addition to these activities, days were spent chatting with neighbors—often about Abkhazia—and watching TV. For many of the people I interviewed, watching TV took up a major part of the day, and statements such as “the TV is my best friend” were illustrative of the boredom many people experienced.

When Julia goes to bed, she cannot sleep. Usually, she has done nothing during the day to make her tired, yet feels exhausted by worry and by doing nothing. Time is not passing quickly enough. Protracted uncertainty – not knowing what the future brings and not having the power to find ways in which to influence ones future – may be experienced as boredom, as the slowing down or stillness of time (Anderson 2004). Boredom becomes a symbol of the protracted displacement and represents a feeling of being stuck in a meaningless present—waiting for a future that does not come. Barbalet (1999), however, points out that boredom is not simply a passive surrender to the conditions that provoke it. It involves an element of active discomfort; it is a restless and irritable feeling, with the additional dimension of a sense of agitation that expresses the subject’s distress. Boredom helps to problematize agency and define agency-in-waiting by understanding how people structure their experience (Asad 2000) through their capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment as mentioned above (Emirbayer and Mische 1998):

> We talk about the everyday problems, what we need and what we lost. Sometimes I feel I have to talk. I need to talk about my problems every day. Sometimes I miss so much to just talk about girl’s things—without any worries. But everyone just talks about their problems. (Julia)

The meaninglessness experienced through boredom is expressed and materialized in many ways. One feature of everyday life is the queuing. In many of the collective centers, between 10 and 30 families share one or two toilets in the corridor, or have limited access to water. Taps may be on for only an hour in the morning and the evening. Queuing becomes a part of daily life. Thus, in their everyday time, too, people are waiting: waiting for water, waiting to use the bathroom. Sometimes the queuing, sharing, and living in confined spaces leads to conflicts:

> We are all getting nervous and then we can’t control ourselves. Sometimes I say more than I should do.... Sometimes I go to church to calm down. (Julia)

Another noticeable location for queuing is outside the offices of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees. Every day, people can be seen hanging out and queuing outside the ministry in an attempt to sort out issues related to the privatization of their rooms or their allowance, or to seek other forms of assistance. Many come here every month, some even more often than that, in the hope of receiving assistance. They hand in letters about their problems and return to their dwellings to wait for a response—which may or may not come.

Boredom is "the feeling which results from the noncoincidence of two durations, that of the work, which is slow and irksome, and that of the mind which longs to be elsewhere" (Fraisse in Barbalet 1999: 637). Being bored may be understood as the non-coincidence of everyday time and possible futures. We may speak of two scales of boredom related to the slowing down of rhythms in everyday time: people are bored with the routines and mundanity, but also with their overall situation. It is the meaninglessness of their everyday time that gives rise to their feelings of boredom—as well as the feeling of not being able to escape a stigmatized status.

Hopes for a possible return contribute to people's waiting and to some extent gives meaning to people's boredom. Hope contributes to make the two types of time; everyday-time and future-time to interact. Let us think back to Gasparini's statement about what happens when waiting becomes long-term: long-term waiting creates a relatively stable condition that may lead to a reclassification of a person's status – and becomes a framework for a person's identity. In the context of the Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia, waiting does contribute to the transformation of the IDP category from a humanitarian category to a social category. To be an 'IDP' becomes part of people's individual and collective identity and influences how people go about their everyday lives. It becomes a social status in the Georgian society – a status that influences the access to resources, to employment, housing and social life. The hope to return represents a collective discourse which sustains people in the face of despair and loss. Yet, this hope may not simply be related to the desire for things to come, or for an improvement in one's circumstances (Wright 2008). Rather, the duality of boredom and hope is strongly bound up with political and economic life (Wright 2008), and, as I now discuss further, the changing nature of hope must be seen in relation to the social status in which IDPs find themselves.

Negotiating Futures: Between the Uncertain and the Unforeseeable

Giving up hope and deciding to stop waiting can be extremely painful. Hoping is a way to cope with the unpredictability of the future inherent in protracted uncertainty. A female activist and IDP from Abkhazia expressed this very clearly in an interview in 2010:

> People in protracted displacement experience a psychological trauma. You know your future, but we can never know our future. It is difficult for us that it [displacement] takes so long, but if it had gone too quickly to give us a permanent place it would have ruined our hope and that would have been difficult too. It may be easy to say now that we should have fought for better conditions and more permanent solutions from the beginning of our displacement, but it is also too painful to give up the hope for return.

Waiting moves through different stages (from short-term to long-term); changes take place in waiting; and the nature of hope changes during waiting. In this section I aim to show that as hope and waiting change, so do scales of uncertainty. What seemed to be a radical uncertainty in the beginning of a displacement process (the speed and unpredictability of unfolding events, experience of violence) turn into protracted uncertainty as I have shown here, and then into what could be termed 'chronic uncertainty'. The changing experience of uncertainty changes people's future orientations. Lefebvre (2002: 231) distinguishes between "the uncertain and unforeseeable"—the short-term and the long-term future. For many displaced persons in Georgia, hopes for a possible return in the future have changed from the uncertain to the unforeseeable. The hope for a return is still there, but it is now a much more distant hope, and this changes the ways in which people are waiting. The following quotations show that experience of displacement and hopes for the future differ and have changed over time:

> C: If you knew 15 years ago that you couldn't return, would you have done things differently here? I: Yes, I would have a heart issue. Because of the hope I have been able to survive. A lot of people have survived because of the hope. (Interview, woman, Tbilisi, 2010)

> Somehow hope [to return] declined. Personally, I wouldn't consider returning unless someone gave me the key to my door and said tomorrow you can go.... To live all these years with the hope tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. I don't think we can never return, but it is not going to happen soon. (Interview, woman, Tbilisi, 2010)

> Being an IDP doesn't make sense anymore after so many years. Maybe for the government it makes sense, not for us. All the years have passed, they could provide us with a durable solution by now.... Time passes, people think about settling here, they don't think about return anymore. C: When did you stop thinking so much about return? It's just time; its all about time. It was in the beginning, we thought this [displacement] is only temporary. All the years when we were still hoping. But after some time you realize it's not going to happen. (Interview, man, Kutaisi, 2010)

While the discourse of return remains strong, many changes have taken place in Georgia that have contributed to the transformation in hope that can be identified here. Time is passing, as one of the interviewees says. Time works to reorient people's thinking about the future. Connections with the past are still strong in the present, but people say they are now used to living elsewhere; their children are growing up; and more and more of their lives are in the place of displacement.[5] Most people who have visited their home places, or been to Abkhazia, have seen the possible challenges involved in returning after more than 20 years of displacement. A gradual realization about wanting to move on *beyond* waiting is taking shape.

In active waiting, there is a calculated cost which is connected to how long people are willing to wait. As long as waiting is meaningful, people willingly wait. However, the geopolitics of the region has restricted peoples' hopes further. With the 2008 war and the provision of permanent housing for the new IDPs, people have come to think that return lies in the distant rather than the near future. The cost of waiting is becoming too high. Many people made comments similar to what a man in Kutaisi declared in 2012: "I used to hope for return, but after the 2008 war, I stopped." Later, when asked about his hopes for the future, the man replied: "First, I hope for better accommodation. Second, I hope to return." His statement was clearly related to the changes in policy towards the internally displaced. The Georgian government's new privatization policies, whereby more permanent living spaces are being provided for the displaced, have helped to shape their future orientation. Now, people are waiting for housing assistance and possibly assistance to develop sustainable livelihoods in the near future, while hopes for return lie in a more distant future. Waiting has changed character—internally displaced in Georgia have become used to waiting, and while many IDPs continue to wait and continue to feel powerless in their efforts to connect the present with a concrete future, some have stopped waiting. However, despite their changing hopes, the status of the IDPs has not changed. Nana, whom I interviewed in both 2010 and 2012, said in 2012 that she had largely given up hoping to return. This didn't mean, however, that she had stopped dreaming about it:

> It would be good to return. Here, we are rootless. I am no one here. It was always like that from the beginning because I am from another place. Ethnically I am an IDP. We are not like general citizens.

Nana comments illustrate how the lives of the internally displaced may move on and their hopes for the future change, but that their status does not change and consequently they still cannot chose their future. The Georgian government's IDP policies and the geopolitical context of cartographic anxiety continue to impact their possible futures. Nana feels trapped in a never-ending present in which her humanitarian status as an IDP has become her social status, and given rise to "a time with no future and no goals" (Young 2005: 138). For Nana and many other IDPs in Georgia, uncertainty has moved from protracted to chronic.

Hopeful Waiting: Concluding Thoughts

'Agency-in-waiting' contributes to understand the ways in which people are able to move on during a situation of protracted uncertainty, but also how there is a limit to how much IDPs can challenge their status and control their future. The concept helps to nuance the ways in which we understand agency by adding a time perspective to agency when theorizing protracted displacement. In long-term displacement, people's lives are distinguished by protracted uncertainty: living with a status that is not supposed to last, often in dwellings that are temporary, not knowing how long to stay, when to move on, or what will happen when the causes of the displacement change. Many authors have shown that people in protracted displacement settings orient their lives towards the past. Others have focused on protracted displacement as waiting. The past certainly helps to explain a current situation of loss and marginalization. Waiting for a future that lies in the past may lead to passivity and resignation, or it may help to keep people afloat during the experience of despair and loss. Agency-in-waiting indicates the process by which people structure the experience of protracted uncertainty – how people cope with this particular experience of uncertainty. People I interviewed in Georgia framed their future orientation in terms of hope. Agency-in-waiting requires an understanding of waiting as hope for the future. People use hope to cope with an uncertain future, they take on hopeful waiting in the positive anticipation that helps them to keep afloat. However, hope may also indicate resignation as an active strategy, often experienced as boredom and commonly resulting in less investments in the present. However, it is when people stop waiting, when the future time is de-linked from the everyday-time and the past, that agency-in-waiting cannot be realized.

The introduction of a temporality of displacement should not end with efforts to understand the relationship between the past, present and future: it requires an exploration of how the relationship between these elements transforms over time, and how anticipation and hopes for the future change. Regardless of the ways in which people's future orientation changes during displacement, protracted displacement experienced as protracted uncertainty is still problematic when people are defined as in-between places with an uncertain future that can only be located elsewhere and most often in the past: they are seen to be just waiting to return. As I have shown here there may be political interests involved in maintaining the hope for a future in the past. Consequently, while people carve out their own space for agency, they are denied the possibilities of moving from the past to the future. People's lives are kept on hold, and they feel stuck in a present they cannot escape. Efforts to assist and resolve cases of protracted displacement, however, must acknowledge agency-in-waiting in order to help people cope with the waiting, the boredom, the marginalization, and the uncertainty of their futures. Greater emphasis on understanding the ways in which people negotiate the future through anticipation and hope, as well as how these future orientations may transform during displacement, may help to cater for a more fluid understanding of protracted displacement. Understanding the ways in which everyday-time continue to flow during displacement may open up both theoretical and political possibilities: theoretical possibilities for explorations of displacement as transformation and the emergence of new possibilities; and political possibilities through acknowledging the need for people displaced by conflict to move on and be able to define and reach alternative futures.

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[1] The article discusses displacement that takes place within nation-state boundaries—so-called internal displacement. In contrast to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) have not crossed an internationally recognized nation-state boundary. While refugees and asylum-seekers – once they are recognized as such – have certain rights under the UN Refugee Convention, IDPs are still under the jurisdiction of the state to which they belong. It is the role of the state to protect and assist them, even though that very same state may be the reason why they fled in the first place (for an extended discussion of these differences and the status of IDPs, see Brun 2003, 2010).

[2] The UN Refugee Agency defines a protracted refugee situation as "one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile" (UNHCR 2006: 106).

[3] The place from which she was displaced.

[4] Place of residence before displacement.

[5] See Zetter 1999; Brun 2003; Kabachnik et al.2010 for a discussion on the orientation towards a new future through children.

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