

Queer creations between a rock and a hard place

Art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettling Dutch hegemonies

Master thesis

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1. Introduction

Around the world, there are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals that are forced to flee their countries. This may be due to their sexual orientation and/ or gender identity (SOGI)¹ or it may be related to other contextual circumstances such as war. Upon arrival in their countries of refuge, LGBTQ+ forced migrants often report a range of traumatic events from their origin countries, ranging from physical, emotional, and sexual assault; work and housing discrimination; forced prostitution; and forced heterosexual marriage (Shidlo & Ahola, 2013).

Subsequently, LGBTQ+ forced migrants face additional challenges in their host countries. Hopkinson et al. (2017) have shown that LGBTQ+ forced migrants must contend with the possible continuation of harassment by their ethnic community, due to their SOGI. In addition, Shidlo & Ahola (2013) argue that this group of migrants often does not access social support from the wider host LGBTQ+ community due to feelings of shame and trauma as a result of experiences of violence, as well as cultural differences. Furthermore, Elferink & Emmen (2017) claim that LGBTQ+ forced migrants are particularly vulnerable to exclusion and subsequent isolation. The inability to talk openly about experiences before, and after, arrival in the host country may increase anxiety, insomnia, stress and depression (ibid.).

Whilst these studies focus on accumulating challenges, other studies show that victimizing forced migrants is problematic because such victimhood reproduces ways of ‘othering’ and social hierarchies (Ghorashi, 2018). In other words, victimizing, or focusing on incapability reproduces and reinforces hegemonic perceptions of forced migrants as, for instance, ‘dependent’, ‘unimaginative’, ‘deviant’ and ‘deficient’.

Hegemony can be explained as the ability to create a belief that the system of rule is fair and beneficial for the dominant, as well as the subordinate, group (Wade, 2002). In other words, the ability of those in power to make members of society believe that the way it operates is ‘fair and appropriate’ (ibid.). This belief is not established by force or coercion but rather more subtly, via discourse (Young, 2001). Discourse can be defined as a ‘system of knowledge’ that individuals (experts, journalists and citizens of society in general) use to talk and write about certain topics. This system of knowledge then becomes widely circulated, accepted and normalized (ibid.). Thus, cultural and societal rules, norms and values become internalized and taken-for-granted as cultural truths (ibid.). In this way, society members are unconsciously influenced by taken-for-granted assumptions concerning gender, ethnicity, class and culture.

¹ In appendix V you will find brief descriptions of several terms, such as ‘LGBTQ+’, ‘queer’ and ‘SOGI’.

Mepschen et al., (2010) argue that some dominant Dutch hegemonic discourses differentiate ‘the migrant other’, particularly Muslims, as incompatible with Dutch culture. Also, due to the Netherlands’ (assumed) pioneering role regarding women’s and gay emancipation, a dominant (and nostalgic) perception developed that prior to the arrival of Muslims, women’s and gay emancipation was (almost) complete (Wekker, 2009). Islam was then considered to be a threat due to its (alleged) incompatibility with ‘emancipated liberal values’ (Mepschen et al., 2010). This contributed to the fact that the migration discourse increasingly shifted from multiculturalism towards assimilation (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2016). For LGBTQ+ forced migrants this pressure to assimilate then presents a paradox (El-Tayeb, 2012). When queer Muslims, for example, assimilate into ‘Dutch national culture’, they risk reproducing a discourse of being ‘saved’ by an ‘advanced society’ in terms of emancipation. However, when they do not assimilate, they are perceived as ‘backward’ and thus incompatible with ‘Dutch national culture’ (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2016).

Considering the subtle manner in which normalizing discourses and hegemonic ways of othering function, the question arises how such taken-for-granted exclusionary ways of thinking and behaving can be resisted and unsettled. This study will examine such resisting and unsettling potential of art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants.

McGregor & Ragab (2016) claim that art practices by and with (forced) migrants can disrupt structural barriers and challenge discrimination and social exclusion. At the same time, “painting, drama, dance, music, literature, photography, film and other art forms provide immigrants and refugees a creative space for exploration and expression of identities” (McGregor & Ragab, 2016, p. 7-8). On an individual level, art provides an opportunity to express and transform migrants’ experiences of differing origin and host cultures into artistic expressions (McGregor & Ragab, 2016). In fact, Beech (2011) argues that identity can be reconstructed via art practices. I suggest that such reconstructive potential is particularly relevant to LGBTQ+ forced migrants. At a community level, a sense of communal learning and reflexivity can be encouraged via symbols, music, dance, and visual arts (Turner, 1979). At a societal level, (queer, migrant) activists can use pictures, songs and other means to communicate outside of conventional language, to unsettle hegemonic discourses in playful non-discursive ways (Young, 2001). Thus, I shall argue that hegemonies can be unsettled by art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants on micro (individual), meso (communal) and macro (societal) levels.

McGregor & Ragab (2016) further argue that the role of art concerning social inclusion of migrants remains understudied. I suggest that this is even more true for LGBTQ+ forced

migrants. The aim is thus to theoretically contribute to, and fill in the gaps within, the limited knowledge concerning art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettling hegemonies. Firstly, by identifying the specific hegemonies relevant for LGBTQ+ forced migrants and the way in which LGBTQ+ forced migrants are affected by these hegemonies. Secondly, by researching the way in which LGBTQ+ forced migrants (can) unsettle these hegemonic discourses. Thus, rather than focusing on ‘victimhood’, I concentrate on forced migrants’ narratives of strength and resilience that challenge hegemonic perceptions, whilst acknowledging their struggles. I thus suggest that my focus on LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ agency as a starting point is a theoretical contribution in itself. Similarly, the societal relevance of this study lies in recognizing LGBTQ+ forced migrants as agents in creating awareness of such societal blind spots and taken-for-granted assumptions of LGBTQ+ forced migrants as ‘dependent’. This study thus aims to bring subtle, covert, exclusionary processes in Dutch society to the surface.

I aim for a feminist approach, in particular, because of the attention this approach places on power dynamics between researcher and participant (Tracy, 2013). Also, I aim for this approach to be intersectional. Intersectionality is a tool for analysis used in order to understand and describe complex intersecting levels in the human experience. In the context of social inequality, power dynamics are best understood via multiple axes of social division that influence each other, such as gender, ethnicity and SOGI (Gray & Cooke, 2018). Considering that my aim is to shift power more towards participants, I chose to focus solely on the voices of LGBTQ+ forced migrants. Additionally, I chose to focus on knowledge co-creation *with* LGBTQ+ forced migrants rather than *about* LGBTQ+ forced migrants. Hence, I believe that a context-specific understanding from participants’ perspectives is most suitable for this project (Tracy, 2013).

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I decided upon a combination of semi-structured and biographical interviews with an arts-informed (Lenette, 2019) participatory component. Eleven LGBTQ+ forced migrants were interviewed and invited to participate in an artistic knowledge co-creation: *Art for Change* (AFC). Ten out of these eleven LGBTQ+ forced migrants participated and created remunerated artistic works concerning (their) experiences in Covid-19 in AFC. Both the interviews and artistic works were considered as data.

The central research question of this master thesis will be:

(How) can art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettle hegemonies in the Netherlands?

The three sub-questions are formulated as:

- *What are art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' hegemonic challenges, on the micro, meso and macro level, and how do they affect LGBTQ+ forced migrants?*
- *What can be identified as art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' agency in the context of Dutch hegemonies?*
- *How does art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' agency, in the context of Dutch hegemonies, operate on the micro, meso and macro level?*

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Hegemony and normalizing power

When one social group has more authority, status and power than other groups, it can maintain its control either by ‘domination’ or by ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (Gramsci, 1971). Coercive domination is a form of ‘hard power’ which entails forcing others to act in a particular way (Wade, 2002, p. 203). These forms of hard power tend to be overt and self-explanatory and thus more easily recognized. For instance, LGBTQ+ forced migrants may encounter laws criminalizing homosexuality. Such laws can be considered overt forms of hard power.

In contrast, control via ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ is coined by Gramsci as hegemony (Gramsci, 1971 in Wade, 2002). Wade (2002) describes hegemony as soft power: “the ability to make others want the same thing as yourself, as distinct from hard power, the ability to force others to give you what you want” (p. 203). Hence, hegemony entails the ability to create a belief that the system of rule is fair and beneficial for the dominant, as well as the subordinate, group (Wade, 2002). This belief, that the system of rule is fair and beneficial for everyone, makes it harder to envision alternatives or think critically. This is due to this system’s taken-for-grantedness (Young, 2001). Moreover, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (1978) should be understood in the specific relation between a dominant and subordinate group. Thus, hegemony, or rather hegemonies, are always contextual and specific (Wade, 2002).

Michel Foucault conceptualizes power in a different manner. Foucault argues that power is not about domination but rather about routinization and normalization (Foucault, 1978). One is not with or without power, but power is produced, transformed, weakened or strengthened in every relation by dominant and subordinate groups and individuals alike (ibid.). Thus, Foucault’s (1978) explanation of normalizing power differs from Gramsci’s (1971) conceptualization of hegemony. Foucault’s concept of power is all-encompassing whereas Gramsci’s hegemony concerns a relation between a dominant and subordinate one. However, hegemony and normalizing power share similarities in the sense that both are subtle, covert and cannot be pinpointed to a single source. Both concern internalizing processes about beliefs and views on the system and what is considered ‘fair and appropriate’ (Wade, 2002, p. 201).

One way to establish a belief of a fair system of ideas and practices is by referring to them as ‘common sense’ (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013). Another way of establishing the belief of a fair system is via discourse (Young, 2001). Young (2001) defines discourse as “a system of stories and expert knowledge diffused through the society, which convey the widely accepted generalizations about how society operates that are theorized in these terms, as well as

the social norms and cultural values to which most of the people appeal when discussing their social and political problems and proposed solutions” (p. 685). Hence, discourse classifies, categorizes and normalizes (Foucault, 1978).

An example of normalizing discourses is the othering of members of non-privileged groups (Ghorashi, 2018). “The normalizing power of othering is present in the prominence of hegemonic norms constituted of gender, racial, and cultural hierarchies of difference that reproduce structures of inequality in everyday practices” (Young, 2007 in Ghorashi, 2018). Othering processes can be understood as categorizing the self and others, regarding who is more or less superior or inferior (Ghorashi, 2018). Young (2001) uses the term hegemonic discourses to describe the conditioning of the mind via normalizing processes. Hegemonies, or hegemonic discourses, are forms of soft power making them harder to identify and therefore difficult to challenge (ibid.). In paragraph 2.2, I will elaborate further on specific hegemonic discourses concerning LGBTQ+ forced migrants.

In conclusion, hard power is overt, more self-explanatory and evident, making it easier to challenge. Soft power, in the form of hegemony, established via discourse, is more subtle and, therefore, more difficult to recognize because of normalization processes. Hegemonies are multiple and specific to groups and contexts. Also, hegemonies and normalizing power are more insidious than coercive power because it is harder to be critical of them in light of their taken-for-grantedness.

2.2 Hegemonic discourses regarding LGBTQ+ forced migrants in the Netherlands

In light of the subtle nature of hegemonies and normalizing power, I will first introduce a dominant Dutch discourse regarding (forced) migrants without the additional intersection of an LGBTQ+ identity. This discourse concerns the problematization and hierarchical differentiation of (voluntary and forced) migrants in the Netherlands (i.e. the arrival of ‘guest workers’ around 1960 as well as refugees in the 1980s). Around 1960, the need for inexpensive labor in the Netherlands led to the invitation of migrant workers, in particular from traditional parts of Turkey and Morocco (Ghorashi, 2018). The workers usually had very little education and were expected to stay temporarily: hence, the term ‘guest workers’ (ibid.). Refugees who arrived in the 1980s were seen as in need of humanitarian help and were also not expected to settle permanently (ibid.). Until the late 1980s, Dutch policies were therefore aimed at migrant communities maintaining the culture and language of their country of origin in anticipation of their expected return and policies had been aimed at facilitating such a return (Slootman & Duyven-

dak, 2016). Towards the end of the century, it became evident that most migrants settled permanently in the Netherlands without adopting Dutch culture and language (ibid.). Even though policies were never aimed at integration, sentiments emerged that “the “integration” of immigrants failed” (ibid. p. 56). As a consequence, policies have increasingly shifted since the 2000s towards the pressure on migrants to assimilate (ibid.). Slootman & Duyvendak (2016) argue that migrants’ assimilation “not only required [them] to feel at home and identify with their nation of residence, but they are also expected to internalize what is projected as “the” national culture” (p. 56). Thus, this problematization then lead to hierarchical differentiations between ‘the native Dutch’ and ‘the migrant other’ (Ghorashi, 2018).

The hegemonic normalizing discourses that relate to the intersection of an LGBTQ+ identity and a migration background can be considered in three separate but overlapping ways. Bracke (2012) identifies homonationalist, homonostalgic and homonormative othering discourses. Firstly, homonationalism concerns the idea that gay rights and sexual freedom are incompatible with Islam. This narrative became prominent after the murders of two outspoken figures: Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh. Fortuyn was murdered in 2002 by an environmentalist. He was the openly homosexual leader of a right-wing populist political party, which at the time of his death was amongst the highest in the polls (Pleijter, 2017). Fortuyn placed Islam and migration in direct opposition to equal rights for women and homosexuals, repeatedly stating he did not wish “to do women’s and gay liberation all over again” (Bracke, 2012, p. 239). Filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in 2004 by a Dutch-Moroccan Islamist (Mepschen et al., 2010). Both Fortuyn and Van Gogh vocalized strongly that sexual freedom in the Netherlands was ‘under attack’ (ibid.).

Secondly, a component of this homonationalist othering discourse is ‘homonostalgia’. Homonostalgia is a term coined by Gloria Wekker (2009). Homonostalgia can be explained as the dominant idea that western acceptance of homosexuality corresponds with having achieved an advanced stage of modernity. Muslims, for instance, are depicted in opposition to such ‘modernity’ as homophobic and ‘behind’ in terms of emancipation (Wekker, 2009). Sexual freedom was framed in the narrative of modernity, to represent “secularism and rational, liberal subjectivity” (Mepschen et al., 2010, p. 964). In other words, this dominant way of othering frames ‘a modern self’ versus ‘a traditional other’, resulting in a kind of nostalgic longing for an imagined time in which gay liberation was not ‘threatened’ by the arrival of Muslims. Furthermore, ‘nostalgia’ frames racist inequality narratives and feelings of superiority as innocent (Wekker, 2009 in Bracke, 2012).

Thirdly, the ‘new homonormativity’ is a term coined by Lisa Duggan (2012). Duggan argues that homonormativity can be defined in terms of neoliberal politics, which aim for assimilation into heteronormative values and practices, in order to depoliticize gay culture via consumerism and the focus on domestic normative life (Duggan, 2012). For instance, heteronormative values such as marriage and monogamy are privileged, replicated and performed by cisgender homosexual individuals (Halperin, 2012, p. 441). As a result, ‘gay culture’ is depoliticized and “Dutch gay identity does not threaten heteronormativity, but in fact helps shape and reinforce the contours of ‘tolerant’ and ‘liberal’ Dutch national culture” (Mepschen et al., 2010, p. 971). Thus, homonormativity concerns a western dominant view on how individuals are considered ‘properly gay’ by not being ‘too political’ or critical of ‘heterosexual norms’ (ibid.).

As a result there are different meanings of the term ‘queer’. On the one hand, there is a depoliticized definition in which queer is used as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual sexual identities (Jagose, 1996). On the other hand, there is a ‘more political’ definition of queer as an (ideological) nonconformity to stereotypes concerning gender and sexuality, thus resisting heteronormativity and homonormativity (Vijlbrief et al., 2019). Hence, there is a tension within the LGBTQ+ community in which sexuality and gender norms exist in a ‘sex hierarchy’ (Rubin, 1984). In Gayle Rubin’s concept, individuals (with or without migration background) that do not assimilate into homonormativity, such as “transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sado-masochists, [and] sex workers”, can be considered at the bottom of the sex hierarchy (Rubin, 1999 [1984], p. 151).

Homonationalist, homonostalgic and homonormative othering discourses, as well as the ‘hierarchical differentiation’ discourse on migrants (without the intersection of an LGBTQ+ identity), have a common concern. Namely, on the one hand, they differentiate ‘the other’ in such a way that they are perceived as (almost) incompatible. On the other hand, they pressure ‘the other’ to assimilate. Othering is done via the following “central tropes of this discourse – modernity versus tradition; individualism versus the lack thereof; tolerance versus fundamentalism” (Mepschen et al., 2010, p. 970). Hence, the Dutch self-image is one of advanced (gay and women’s) emancipation, individualism and tolerance (ibid.). Correspondingly, Fatima El-Tayeb (2012) argues that there is a growing coalition of homonationalists, homonormatives, conservatives, and white supremacists sharing the belief that “emancipation can only be achieved by assimilating into dominant culture” (ibid., p. 86). As a result, failing to assimilate is framed as the fault of the individual, as opposed to questioning the structural oppressive nature of heteronormativity and homonormativity (Halperin, 2012).

I suggest that these othering discourses, in which LGBTQ+ forced migrants are pressured to assimilate, create a paradox. When LGBTQ+ forced migrants assimilate in a ‘proper Dutch way’ by internalizing ‘the Dutch national culture’ (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2016), they risk reinforcing the dominant narrative that western modern values liberated the ‘victim backward other’. However, when they do not assimilate and express identities that are not considered ‘properly Dutch’ (e.g. Islamic, queer and gender nonconforming), they are accused of not being authentic by opposing sides (El-Tayeb, 2012). Muslims who identify as LGBTQ+, for example, are assumed to choose between being a ‘real Muslim’ or being a ‘real queer’ (ibid.). “This accusation of inauthenticity links minoritarian queers back to the larger group of racialized communities who are neither perceived as proper Europeans by the majority nor properly fit the definition of ‘migrant’ attributed to them, their supposed ‘in-between state’ justifying their silencing and exclusion” (ibid., p. 90).

In response to this ‘accusation of inauthenticity’, I suggest applying Judith Butler’s (1999) theory on identity. Butler understands identity as an embodied daily practice in which one performs different roles (i.e. woman, mother, husband, employee, teacher, Dutch, Muslim, Christian, et cetera) (Butler, 1999). When identity is understood as performance, one cannot *be* authentic, only perform authenticity. Individuals do not possess a ‘true essence’ that needs to be uncovered. Rather, individuals play different roles. Hence, the question is not whether one is authentic but, rather, whether one convincingly performs these social roles. Judging whether one performs a social role accordingly is highly dependent on societal hegemonic norms.

Thus, the question remains, how can dominant Dutch hegemonies be unsettled in order to counter exclusion of LGBTQ+ forced migrants?

2.3 *Liminality*

An answer to this question may be partly found in this state of ‘betweenness’ that El-Tayeb (2012) is referring to. While even though there may be feelings of isolation and anxiety in this state of betweenness (Beech, 2011), it might also be a space for transformations (Anzaldúa & Keaton, 2013). To further examine this state of ‘betweenness’, I propose viewing LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ state through a theoretical lens of liminality. The term ‘liminal’ (in Latin: ‘threshold’) was first used by the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 (Van Gennep, 2019 [1909]) and further developed by anthropologist Victor Turner (1969; 1979). The term liminality can be used to describe an ambiguous transition state, usually to a higher personal or societal level, in which individuals or groups “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt

and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Liminality is a period characterized by anxiety and uncertainty due to the temporal suspension of norms and behaviors (ibid.). It can be regarded spatially as well as temporally. Through a spatial lens, examples may be bridges, elevators, hotels or even beaches (Shortt, 2015). These spaces are considered a transitory ‘no man’s land’ because they do not ‘belong’ to anyone or anywhere but are located between two ‘dominant’ places (ibid.).

Shortt (2015) argues that dwelling in liminal spaces (as opposed to transiting) in which there is a lack of predetermined social codes, creates room for novel ways of acting and behaving. Liminal time concerns a specific duration of liminality as opposed to undetermined dwelling (Turner, 1979). Norms and values are temporarily suspended in this time (and place), creating room for new ways of behaving, a time for playing and reconfiguring (ibid.) In the context of early modern societies, examples of liminal time, in which social rules are temporarily suspended, are festivities such as carnival or performative arts, and for “electronically advanced societies”, an example is film (Turner, 1979, p. 468).

In the case of LGBTQ+ forced migrants, I conceive liminality in two main aspects: their SOGI and their migration background. Firstly, migration or asylum procedures are liminal due to their transitory character in which one is between their former and new country (Manjikian, 2014; Ghorashi et al., 2018). Secondly, in terms of SOGI, I suggest looking through a lens of identity construction. Beech (2011) explains identity construction as a process in which “[t]he co-construction is enacted in the interplay between an individual’s ‘self-identity’ (their own notion of who they are) and their ‘social-identity’ (the notion of that person in external discourses, institutions and culture)” (Beech, 2011, p. 1). He further argues that “liminality can be defined as a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community” (ibid., p. 3). Additionally, Monro (2005) argues in the context of transsexuality for “the queer celebration of liminality, or the spaces between, or outside of, structures of gender and sexual orientation” (p. 8). The author views transsexuality as a liminal space outside the gender binary (Monro, 2005). I propose that this liminality is not limited to transsexual people alone but applies to queer and gender nonconforming people more generally. I thus suggest that queerness and (forced) migration is a liminal space in which there is room to construct LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ multiple identities unconventionally, and in a personalized manner, as opposed to assimilating into societal norms.

2.4 Agency

Although Beech (2011) stresses the psychological burden (feelings of isolation and anxiety) that may be accompanied with states of liminality, it may also be considered “full of experiment and play” (Turner, 1979, p. 466). Turner argues that liminality encourages reflection or can be considered a form of reflection in itself (Turner, 1979). Hence, in liminality there is space for agency. Agency refers to the human capacity to act: the capacity shaped by (non)available possibilities and resources within the social world and its discourses and practices (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015). Turner argues that liminality as reflection can take several forms of agency (Turner, 1982). First, Turner (1979) considers reflection more discursively, for instance “[s]cientific hypotheses and experiments and philosophical speculation” (p. 466). Second, there is a playful form of agency that is creative and entails’ “a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors” (ibid., p. 466).

The former corresponds to what Judith Butler calls ‘discursive agency’, the ability to name one’s subjection to soft hegemonic power (Butler, 1997, p. 127). Discursive agency means practicing a deconstruction, and reconstruction, of social hegemonies via acts of public misappropriation and subversion, in order to counter, and alter, conventional meanings (Youdell, 2006). Thus, reflexivity entails deconstructing fixed categories of oneself and another, and unraveling contextual specificities (Ghorashi, 2017). In addition, discursive agency concerns the ability to be reflexive, in the sense of doing something about one’s own situation by acting upon it (ibid.). In conclusion, one can thus act upon and resist hegemonic soft power via reflexivity. Liminality as a form of discursive agency.

However, in addition to discursive agency, there are also playful forms of reflection that are less intentional in resisting overarching structures of inequality. This non-discursive liminality brings me to Björkdal & Selimovic’s (2015) feminist approach to agency. The authors deconstruct traditional approaches to agency and in addition to reflection (discursive agency) stress the creative aspect of agency that often is neglected in deterministic and rational approaches (ibid.). They perceive agency as the ‘ability to act in an unexpected fashion or to institute new and unanticipated modes of behavior’ (McNay 2000, p. 22 in Björkdal & Selimovic 2015). The authors argue that creative agency takes place in created spaces, challenging normative roles of identity as well as associated narratives. This form of agency has transformative qualities by challenging existing oppressive structures creatively (ibid.). It is often practiced in obscure spaces, hidden in the margins (Björkdal & Selimovic, 2015). In these

marginal spaces there may be “a possibility of creation, a special sense of community with the others in the limbo” (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003, p. 7).

To conclude, hegemonic discourses are hard to challenge because they work through normalized ways of othering that are internalized and taken-for-granted. However, the liminality of LGBTQ+ forced migrants can be considered a space for agency, both through reflection (discursive agency) and playfulness (creative agency). Such a space can offer possibilities of resisting hegemonic power in unsettling normalized ways of othering.

2.5 Art practices' potential in unsettling hegemonies

Having conceptualized agency as both discursive and creative, I now wish to turn to art practices. Studies have shown that art practices can have therapeutic properties: promoting self-esteem, emotional self-expression and aiding the processing of traumatic events (McGregor & Ragab, 2016). McGregor & Ragab (2016) further show that art practices can help express multiple parts of identities concomitantly, such as simultaneously expressing elements of one's cultural identity from both origin and host country. I would like to add here that expressing multiple parts of identities at the same time is important regarding the intersection of an LGBTQ+ and (forced) migrant identity. Moreover, I suggest that McGregor & Ragab's (2016) consideration of this therapeutic potential can be seen in light of Beech's (2011) liminality as (re)construction of identity. In fact, queerness, migration as well as art practices themselves can be considered forms of liminality (Turner, 1979). Thus, on the individual level, practicing art may have therapeutic properties as it allows the reconstructing of multiple intersections of one's identity and facilitate transforming LGBTQ+ forced migrants' paradoxical experiences into artistic expressions.

In addition to these individual beneficial properties, Turner (1979) argues that performative arts are a form of 'plural reflexivity', affecting communities or audiences (p. 465). He describes plural reflexivity as ways in which communities think about, see and present themselves, in different manners, via signs, symbols, music, dance and visual arts (Turner, 1979) thus strengthening a sense of community. In the context of LGBTQ+ forced migrants, I interpret Turner's (1979) plural reflexivity as sharing, negotiating and communicating one's complex, paradoxical experiences via art practices within, and outside, the community. Social norms are challenged, creating a larger understanding of, and for, oneself and the viewer.

Zooming out from a communal to a societal level, Turner argued that *public* liminality, such as carnival in early modern societies, has often been regarded as threatening by powers representing the dominant established group because “[t]he powers of the weak - to curse and

criticize - set limits on the power of the strong - to coerce and ordain” (Turner, 1979, p. 465). The author claims that public liminality cannot solely be considered as an emotional outlet. Rather, as subversive proposals of “innovatory behavior, of crowds generating new ways of framing and modelling the social reality which presses on them in their daily lives” (Turner, 1979, p. 486). I suggest that these subversive proposals, when carried out intentionally, can be considered as forms of activism, although the author does not refer to them as such.

Due to the subtle and masked nature of hegemonic power, Young (2001) argues that the activist is often skeptical of deliberative approaches with the one’s in power. Deliberation forces one to speak within the language of the present hegemonic discourse. Hence, in order to understand one another, and come to agreements, one must speak a language both parties understand. The problem is that the present discourse, due to its hegemonic power, masks unjust power relations and is thus on the side of the established structure (Young, 2001). So, rather than arguing in a deliberative manner, “the activist’s goal is to make us wonder about what we are doing, to rupture a stream of thought” (ibid., p. 687). Young (2001) therefore argues that the activist “must do so by non-discursive means pictures, song, poetic imagery, and expressions of mockery and longing performed in rowdy and even playful ways aimed not at commanding assent but disturbing complacency” (p. 687). Thus, Young (2001) suggests that challenging hegemonies and influencing public opinion can be done via “street demonstrations and sit-ins, musical works, and cartoons, as much as parliamentary speeches and letters to the editor” (p. 688).

In conclusion, based on existing literature, I propose that hegemonies can be unsettled by art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants on an individual (micro), communal (meso) and societal (macro) level. On the micro level, LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ sometimes paradoxical intersections of identity, may be challenged (and reconstructed) via art practices, because art provides an opportunity to express these intersections in a personalized way that makes sense for themselves and others. On a meso level, plural reflexivity can be encouraged and developed whilst educating one another as well as strengthening a sense of community. On a macro level, art practices can rupture hegemonic discourses via activism in playful non-discursive ways, that is, images, songs, pictures and other ways to communicate outside of conventional language.

3. Methodology

Informed by literature, I have argued that LGBTQ+ forced migrants face existing Dutch hegemonies. In researching how art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants can unsettle exclusionary hegemonies, I chose a feminist intersectional approach. An intersectional approach focuses on understanding and describing power dynamics in social inequality via multiple intersecting levels in the human experience that influence one another, such as gender, ethnicity and SOGI (Gray & Cooke, 2018). In order to unsettle these hegemonies, I suggest that the most suitable research approach is a qualitative emic inductive approach (Tracy, 2013). In other words, a context-specific bottom-up understanding from participants' perspectives (ibid.). In order to understand from the participants' perspective I solely collaborated with LGBTQ+ forced migrants, giving more space for their voices as opposed to including voices of 'experts in the field' that do not identify as LGBTQ+ forced migrants. In addition, I aimed to create a space for the various ways in which participants express agency. I suggest that acknowledging all ways in which LGBTQ+ forced migrants express agency (discursively and creatively), is salient for having a full understanding from the participants' perspective.

I will first discuss why I consider the approach being feminist and intersectional (3.1). After having established this, I will elaborate on the methods that I used to collect the data (3.2). Consequently, I will elaborate on the participants and their characteristics (3.3). Finally, I will discuss how I analyzed the data (3.4), and why I consider this research to be valid, taking my own positionality into account, whilst being reflexive and drawing attention to some ethical considerations (3.5).

3.1 Feminist approach

There are several forms of feminist approaches. It is outside the scope of this master thesis to elaborate on these varying feminisms. I will instead focus on the most important overarching commonalities. In contrast to essentialist notions of reality, feminist research critiques the epistemological and ontological essentialist claims of objectivity and rationality, whilst arguing that all knowledge is situated, socially constructed and therefore subjective and partial (Undurraga 2012). Even though feminists oppose essentialism in social science, at the same time there have been discussions among feminists arguing forms of essentialism (Stone, 2004). Stone (2004) highlights four different forms of essentialisms: "(1) metaphysical essentialism, the belief in real essences (of the sexes) which exist independently of social construction; (2) biological essentialism, the belief in real essences which are biological in character; (3) linguistic

essentialism, the belief that the term ‘woman’ has a fixed and invariant meaning; and (4) methodological essentialism, which encompasses approaches to studying women’s (or men’s) lives which presuppose the applicability of gender as a general category of social analysis.” (p. 137). In line with the author, I argue for a non-essentialist approach considering that “every woman becomes a woman by taking over and reinterpreting pre-existing cultural constructions of femininity, constructions which in turn exist as a result of preceding activities of reinterpretation, so that all these interpretations of femininity—and all the women who produce and experience them—come to belong within overlapping chains.” (Stone, 2004, p. 153). Thus, I aim to be inclusive of trans women and individuals that reinterpret ‘pre-existing cultural constructions of femininity’ (ibid.).

Feminists have traditionally intended to empower women by centering women in their analysis (Kingston, 2020). Currently, “feminists aim to free a marginalized group from oppressive situations in society, organizations, families, or relationships” (Tracy, 2013, p. 55). Furthermore, feminist approaches have in common that the produced knowledge should have (practical) use and aim for societal change as opposed to knowing in its own right (ibid.). Participants’ experience is one such form of useful knowledge, because it is context specific and considers their perspective. However, experience cannot be uncritically accepted as ‘evidence’ because individuals’ experiences differ greatly from one another given that they are always influenced by their social context (ibid.). The social context then is informed by factors such as discourse, language and hegemonies (ibid.).

A feminist approach suits this research design best for two reasons. First, I share the epistemological and ontological position of reality and knowledge being socially constructed. Second, in the process of knowledge production, I aim to shift power towards a more horizontal way of collaboration *with participants* as opposed to a more hierarchical research design where the research is *about subjects*. Moreover, a feminist approach due to its attention to power relations, has itself the potential to unsettle more conventional research methods in which discourses about the ‘marginalized’ are being reproduced in less equal power relations (Lenette, 2019).

3.2 Methods

In January 2020 I wrote the research proposal prior to physical distancing measures due to Covid-19. I intended to use participant observation, biographical interviews as well as dis-

course analyses as research methods. However, after having started my field work, due to isolation measures from March 2020 on, I shifted from these methods towards semi-structured biographical interviewing and an arts-informed (Lenette, 2019) participatory research.

3.2.1 Semi-structured biographical interviews

From a feminist point of view, I decided upon a combination of semi-structured and biographical interviews. “Feminist research challenges the ideas of disengagement, objectivity, and the notion that autobiography is not relevant in the research process” (May, 2001 in Undurraga, 2012, p. 422). In addition, several forms of narrative approaches such as biographical and semi-structured interviews allow participants more power to tell their own stories and feeling less constrained (Karimi, 2019). I argue that biographical interviews are a form of storytelling, similar to art practices in the sense that both concern telling stories about (one’s) life (although in art these ‘stories’ may be told in an abstract manner). My aim was to balance biographical interviewing as a form of storytelling, while at the same time keeping my research questions in mind. At the beginning of the interview, I would tell the participants that I am interested in their biographies and that I had prepared some questions. To establish (more) trust, rapport, reciprocity and conversation flow, I first shared parts of my own biography (Undurraga, 2012), knowing that “[i]nsider/outsideers also have to be open and expose themselves, their histories, and stories if they are asking others to critically reflect upon sometimes painful individual and familial histories” (Schensul et al., 2008). At the end of my own story I would ask how they became the person they are right now and what lead them to their art practice. In case the conversation would not flow organically, or cover (all of) the research topics, I could turn to the questions I had prepared. The interview topics concerned: country of origin (growing up); migration story; early perceptions of the Netherlands and whether they changed over time; feelings/ experiences regarding the Dutch LGBTQ+ community; development of their art practice(s); challenges, strategies and dreams concerning their art practice(s); messages in art; activism; and queerness.

Due to Covid-19 I had to change from offline interviews to online interviews. Before Covid-19, I had finished three offline interviews in each participant’s own house and one online interview (via Skype). During Covid-19 I conducted another 7 online interviews via a licensed secured connection in the web application Zoom. Most interviews took between 90 and 120 minutes. This was longer then I had anticipated. Due to Covid-19 and the development of an arts-informed participatory method, questions were added at a later stage. These questions con-

cerned participants' experiences during Covid-19 and artistic works they produced for the project. One interview was shorter (60 minutes) because the participant requested to stop. One interview took the form of an art practice in itself. The participant asked for us both to be naked during the interview in order to create a film (series) called 'the naked honesty'. I liked the proposition because I could reciprocally be of service to their art practice. Moreover, I was intrigued by the idea of combining discursive knowledge with a sensorial visceral layer (O'Neill et al., 2002), further unsettling conventional research methods. We discussed this idea prior to Covid-19 and made an appointment. However, due to the pandemic, we first postponed and later decided to do the naked interview online via Zoom.

3.2.2 *Art for Change, an artistic knowledge co-creation*

In addition to the content of the interviews as the primary source of data, I also consider the content of artistic works created by participants in *Art for Change* (AFC) as data for my research. The idea of AFC as an artistic knowledge co-creation was not part of my initial thesis design. It was later developed during Covid-19 by one of my supervisors, PhD researcher Maria Rast. AFC is part of *Scholarship for Change*, a larger project within the context of prof. dr. Halleh Ghorashi's VICI project '*Engaged Scholarship and Narratives of Change*' (ESNC). ESNC is the stakeholder of this research. ESNC aims at a more comprehensive and transformative understanding of how engaged scholarship can contribute to the societal inclusion of refugees, comparing three different contexts: South Africa, the United States of America and the Netherlands. Due to Covid-19, the PhD researchers in the contexts of South Africa and the US were forced to return to the Netherlands from their field work. Moreover, the field work in all three contexts was temporarily suspended, as researchers and participants adjusted to the new reality of physical distancing. Consequently, questions emerged on how to engage as an engaged scholar in times of physical distancing. As a result, *Scholarship for Change* was developed to find new forms of engagement in this new reality. The idea was to help mitigate the socio-economic and emotional impacts of the pandemic, in an attempt to support forced migrants (emotionally and financially) in the three different contexts. An additional intention was to create a space for forced migrants' stories in order to improve our understanding of their challenges, as well as their resilience during Covid-19. This was carried out with the aim of challenging dominant images of forced migrants as unimaginative and dependent victims.

Meanwhile, my research was suspended also. Before the pandemic, I intended to use 'participant observation' in relevant contexts, such as art events by and for queer refugees. Participant observation concerns observing "the field's rich specificity" (Tracy, 2013, p. 3).

The aim was to gather data in the form of ‘thick’ descriptions of experiences in the field (ibid.). In addition, participant observations could have provided opportunities to connect with participants. Before Covid-19 it was already challenging to connect with participants. Due to my insider experience as a queer identifying person, I know that queer people are often (informed by queer activists) critical of large institutions such as universities. Therefore, I had to engage in different ways (offline as well as online via social media) and ‘prove’ that I identify as queer and genderfluid, as well as not being (fully) white in one instance. I would mostly contact potential participants via my drag artist account (Massiah Carey, n.d.) on Facebook to show that I am part of the queer community and make artistic works myself. I would ask if we could call or chat and continue in their preferred type of communication. Further, I would explain the project, reveal my birth name (as opposed to my drag name), and share links to my online portfolio (Holle, n.d.) as well as links to the research websites of the Refugee Academy (Institute of Societal Resilience, 2020) and ESNC (Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change, n.d.). Consequently, I would ask to meet in person at their preferred location, usually in their homes. Subsequently, we would plan the actual interview.

After Covid-19, meeting potential participants in their houses became impossible due to the rules of the university and society at large. LGBTQ+ forced migrants seemed (mentally and emotionally) preoccupied dealing with the dynamic social changes of the first few weeks of Covid-19. In fact, I could read Facebook posts concerning losses of income due to the cancellation of events, grief expressed due to the sudden lack of physical connection with members of their community, as well as activist content regarding the refugee crises in the pandemic. Correspondingly, many of my first attempts to contact were unsuccessful. Later, by asking possible participants to exchange their experiences of Covid-19 in conversations and take part in a remunerated artistic knowledge co-creation via AFC, participants seemed more interested, not to mention more inspired, to engage in this collaboration.

Nonetheless, I still had to gain trust and build relationships. The offline meetings were replaced by online meetings via chats in social media, followed by audio and/ or video-calling upon which potential participants decided whether they would agree to collaborate. Participants were asked to create a remunerated artistic work about their experiences around Covid-19. In addition, participants were asked to engage in an online interview about both the role of art in their life (for this thesis) and their experiences of Covid-19 (for AFC). The process of the first contact until the actual interview lasted from around two up to seven weeks. After the interviews, we stayed in contact (mostly via WhatsApp) to discuss issues regarding (the publication of) their artistic works, payment or to see how one was feeling. In addition, after having learned

each participant's challenges and ambitions, I shared relevant literature and articles. In one instance, a participant realized, due to his participation in AFC, that he wanted to work as a designer again - despite having neglected practicing his art prior to AFC. I then shared a job opportunity which he decided to apply for. I provided feedback on his CV and motivation letter and around two weeks later, the participant found a paid internship in the field of his art practice (even though it was not the initial job he applied for).

Leavy (2015) argues that an arts based research methodology is relational and aims towards social transformation. The relatively limited literature on arts based research methods is connected to and embedded in the literature on participatory research (PR). Different approaches to PR share a focus on counteracting uneven power distributions between researchers and participants by shifting more power towards the latter (Edwards & Brannelly, 2017). Consequently, similar to feminist research ethics, salient questions arise: who initiates the research issues; in whose interest is the research undertaken; who has the authority; and what counts as knowledge (ibid.). In this case, the participants had somewhat limited influence on the research design because we, at ESNC, wished to respond quickly to community needs we saw emerging at the beginning of the pandemic. However, this research can be considered participatory in the sense that once the project was underway, we shifted power to research participants in several ways: by giving participants full freedom and co-ownership over their artistic products and co-creating (various forms of) knowledge together in AFC. Further, by inviting participants to share ideas on how to proceed with the project as well as by staying in contact throughout the project to discuss how to publish the art and conversations. (Fobear, 2015; Abrams, 2010).

There are several beneficial qualities of arts based participatory methods worth mentioning. First, by asking the artists to create remunerated artistic works, we aimed to convey that we take participants (and their perspectives, knowledge and works) seriously as partners and artists, thereby validating their knowledge, creativity and experience. Moreover, output of arts based projects can be communicated to and inform wider communities as well as the academic world (O'Neill et al., 2002). More importantly, art practices offer the means of imagining beyond the limits of language (or playing creatively with language) via more sensorial, visual or emotional levels (ibid.). Participants may feel more at ease communicating beyond the level of language, especially in cases where speaking in a second, third or fourth language is a challenge in itself (Karimi, 2020). Last, in line with Oliveira (2019) I argue that collaboratively producing knowledge allows for a fuller understanding of complex issues in a process where critical awareness can be developed. Co-creative research methods to a large extent deal with

reflexive processes, affecting both the participants as well as the researcher (ibid.). These reflexive processes are similar to those in art practices, in particular, art practices concerning social justice which are process based rather than focused on an end result. The process of critically developing, choosing material, and deciding what, and how, to share this with the world, is in itself salient (Dewhurst, 2010).

3.3 Participants

The sampling method I used is purposeful sampling (Tracy, 2013). I purposefully aimed for participants that fit within the following parameters: identifying as LGBTQ+; having a forced migration background; practicing art in the broadest sense; and being situated in the Netherlands. Each different parameter narrows the number of potential participants significantly. However, I felt strongly about focusing specifically on LGBTQ+ forced migrants' narratives as opposed to widening the parameters to people that did not fit the parameters such as experts in this field. I felt fairly confident that due to my experience in co-organizing safer space events for queer and trans people of color, as well as my artistic background, I would be able to find enough participants. One aspect that complicated the search for participants lay in the fact that one cannot/ should not see/ assume one's SOGI or migration background (or even art practices). Asking about these highly personal issues is sensitive and can be problematic, especially before having established some form of trust.

As mentioned, due to Covid-19, I was no longer able to meet (potential) participants in person. Fortunately, I had already visited a queer refugee poetry event prior to the isolation measures. In January 2020, I was still in the process of developing the research proposal and I was nervous attending this event because of my agenda as a researcher and not yet having a clear sense of direction. Via Facebook, the event was communicated to be 'a safe space for queer refugees and allies'. However, due to my queer identity and second-generation-migration background, I have easier access to such spaces. I intended to be open and transparent and introduce myself as both queer and a researcher, while asking permission to observe (Tracy, 2013). The performed stories and poems regarding queerness and migration were very intimate. In my perception, the poets felt safe to be vulnerable and I did not want to affect this. Therefore, I chose a relatively silent fly on the wall-approach (ibid.), whilst only revealing my research to three attendees that were not performing. Several weeks later, I had finished my research proposal and had a clearer sense of direction. Hence, I felt more confident to contact four out of five queer refugee poets via Facebook, and three of them participated. On Facebook, there were links to their profiles, so I sent friend requests and messaged them, revealing my intentions.

In addition to these first three participants, I personally knew another three participants from the queer community. I found two additional participants in other relevant events prior to the physical distancing measures. Two participants' contacts were given to me after talking to the director of a larger regularly occurring queer and migrant event. The eleventh and last participant is active in politics and activism. I later realized he also attended the poetry night in January. Ten participants created artistic works in the artistic knowledge co-creation (AFC) and an eleventh participant chose to only engage in an interview for this thesis.

3.3.1 Characteristics of participants

The participants have diverse cultural backgrounds and origins (i.e. Morocco, Iran, Afghanistan, Brazil, Belarus, Congo and Burundi). In addition, the participants are diverse in terms of gender identity and expression: five participants are/ identify as male, four as gender non-binary, one as female, and one as non-binary femme². Although I consider this a diverse gender variety, only two participants were assigned female at birth. From the two people that were assigned female at birth, one is male and one identifies as non-binary. Thus, seven participants are/ identify as transgender (two binary and five non-binary). The artistic works consist of a song, written texts, a 'decolonizing' deejay set, Grindr poetry, video poetry, performance, drag and graphic design³.

Out of these 11 participants, three do not fully fit the parameters of 'forced migration' and 'situated in the Netherlands'. One participant is originally from Iran and was situated in Italy at the time of the interview (and AFC). He feels that his migration was not forced but voluntary, although he states that Iran has changed significantly since he left 5 years ago. I decided to include his data, because he has been in the Netherlands multiple times, and recently returned to be reunited with his partner. Another participant grew up in Belgium and was adopted by a Belgian family at birth. However, after reconnecting with his biological mother he realized the adoption process was involuntary. Therefore, he identifies as Congolese and (somewhat) involuntary migrant. A last participant was not sure whether her own migration was forced or voluntary. Upon reflecting she concluded that it was somewhat forced, because

² Note that I use both 'are' and 'identify' regarding gender identity. For some gender is more an identification, for others it is more an essential truth. 'I identify as male', 'I identify as female' versus 'I am a man', 'I am a woman'.

³ Due to reasons of anonymity I decided to not link the specific works and cultural backgrounds to the artists in table 1. Some use their own (artist) names on the websites of [the Refugee Academy](#) and [ESNC](#), as opposed to the pseudonyms used here. Furthermore, I sometimes refrain from using participants' pseudonyms after quotations for confidentiality reasons.

she did not feel safe coming out to her parents as a trans woman and artist in her country of origin.

Table 1. Participant population (N=11)

	<i>Pseudonym⁴</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender identity</i>	<i>Preferred pronouns</i>
1	Shif	28	Non-binary	They/them
2	Ghano	28	Non-binary	They/them
3	Amina	28	Non-binary	They/them
4	Aram	36	Non-binary	They/them
5	Osa	34	Non-binary femme	She/her
6	Travequinha Safada	28	Female	She/her
7	Arash	30	Male	He/him
8	Yakiv	42	Male	He/him
9	Calvin	27	Male	He/him
10	Rostam	33	Male	He/him
11	Maheen	28	Male	He/him

3.4 Data analysis

All interviews have been recorded and transcribed verbatim, while pseudonymizing all names of people, (work) places and projects. Exceptions are names of countries of origin and residing Dutch cities. In the transcripts I used codes for names of cities/ villages of birth, or other personal information since I aimed to decrease the risk of data being traced back to the participants and I found this information irrelevant in answering the research questions. I saved a separate document in which the codes are connected to the full names. All data is stored in a secured online space protected by a password and solely accessible by my supervisors and myself.

I consider AFC content useful as data because in certain instances the works are less about their experiences around Covid-19 and more concerning the impact of social issues on them personally. Also, the examples show the way the artists position their art in relation to specific societal challenges. Although I asked participants to create a work concerning Covid-19, after our conversations about art and their biographies, I realized their artistic approaches expanded beyond Covid-19. Moreover, participants were free to choose their content and I refrained from pushing participants in a specific direction.

I analyzed the data iteratively. An iterative process “alternates between emic, or emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories” (Tracy 2013, p. 184). In order to not become overwhelmed in the process of open inductive coding, I

⁴ I asked participants if they had a preferred pseudonym, hence some suggested their pseudonyms themselves, while others were imagined by me on their request.

first created a code-tree based upon my research questions, theoretical framework, and the interview questionnaire. I subsequently tried to be especially attentive in remaining open when I approached the data. I used my initial descriptive codes such as those concerning ‘identity’, ‘emotions’ and ‘reasons to migrate’, while at the same time creating new descriptive codes. In the data analysis software Atlas.ti using the ‘word cruncher-function’, I could see that ‘queer’ was one of the most used terms. Hence, I decided to auto-code ‘queer’ in vivo. A second in vivo code was ‘minority within minority within minority’ which I later renamed ‘triple marginalization’. A final in vivo code I wish to mention was ‘dominance’.

At first, I tried to refrain from using my initial analytical codes because I did not want to risk imposing a prior idea upon understanding my respondents, as opposed to remaining open for new discoveries that might be present in the data (Gioia et al., 2013). After I finished the first round of coding but before I started the second, I tried to stay attentive for themes that might occur while using Atlas.ti’s query tool. I checked cooccurrences and made a network in which I visually organized codes and added connections between codes and a few memos I had written. In organizing and visually mapping the data, I noticed the concept ‘dominance’ in a number of instances. ‘Dominance’ was not present in my initial code-tree, although the term ‘dominant’ is linked with concepts in my theoretical framework such as ‘hegemony’. Hence, I decided to explore the concept of ‘dominance’ in a wider sense, as opposed to solely ‘in vivo’. In my second round of coding, I found many more instances of dominant culture, dominant institutions and ‘being dominated’. After finishing my second round of coding, I deleted unused codes and merged several codes together. Then I created four groups that thematically seemed most suitable: biography; personal challenges; hegemonic challenges; and agency (table 2). Within ‘hegemonic challenges’, I then realized that the three subthemes ‘dominant culture’, ‘dominant institutions’ and ‘subordination’ correlated with multiple structural levels. Firstly, ‘dominant culture’ represents the macro level (i.e. societal). Secondly, ‘dominant institutions’ represent the meso level (i.e. institutional). Finally, ‘subordination’ represents the micro level (i.e. individual).

Finally, in reflecting on the question ‘how these hegemonic challenges affect the participants’ (on the micro level), I was slightly overwhelmed by their many contradicting feelings and experiences. At first, I thought that the multitude of contradictions meant that my participants were too diverse to create one (cohesive) analysis. However, after taking a step back, and via organizing these contradictions thematically, I discovered that they could actually be distinguished into four main paradoxes, namely the paradoxes of ‘representation’, ‘desirability’, ‘belonging’ and ‘participation’.

Table 2. Overview of codes in four key themes and additional subthemes.

Biography	Personal challenges	Hegemonic challenges	Agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asylum procedures ● Defining moments ● European dream ● Migration ● Cultural heritage ● Drugs, alcohol ● Family ● Identity: relational ● Not (an) art(ist) ● Personal information ● Religion ● (Gender) nonconforming ● Dating apps ● Gay Pride ● LGBT community ● Openly gay ● Queer ● Sex ● SOGI ● Off limit topic ● Confidence ● Gratitude ● Happy ● Hopeful ● Uninhibited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Mental) health ● Bureaucracy ● Competition ● Covid-19 ● Lack of skills ● Lack of support/ action ● Language ● Money and resources ● Desiring validation ● Depression ● Fear ● Frustration ● Feeling different ● Disappointed ● Missing old life ● Insecure 	<p>Dominant culture (macro)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Privileged ● Superiority ● Dutch feelings of unfairness ● Dutchness ● Modesty ● Cultural differences ● Language ● Repeated messages ● Paradox of authenticity ● (Homo) normativity ● Commodification ● Ignorance ● Societal problems <p>Dominant institutions (meso)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Religion ● (Social) media ● Representation ● Bureaucracy ● Gay Pride ● Institutional (rules, practices) ● Power dynamics ● Power of funders <p>Subordination (micro)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changing to adapt ● Controversy ● Discrimination/ racism ● Dominance ● Double/ triple marginalization ● Internalized homophobia/ racism ● Judging / labeling ● Unforeseen consequences ● Victimizing ● Violence and/or (online) harassment 	<p>Queerness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Gender) nonconforming ● Dating apps ● Gay Pride ● LGBT community ● Openly gay ● Queer ● Sex ● SOGI <p>Collectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community ● Connection ● Friendship ● Belonging ● Identity: relational <p>Art practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Art practice ● Imagination ● Messages in art ● Storytelling <p>Reflexivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alone time ● Interpreting history ● Learning ● Therapeutic properties ● Reflexivity ● Dreams, goals <p>Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activism ● Artivism ● Novel spaces ● Challenging hegemonies ● Safer space ● Speaking up ● Work/ jobs

Meaning of each code color:

● Biography ● Identifications ● LGBTQ+ culture ● Challenges ● Emotions
 ● Hegemonic ● Dutch context ● Agency ● Dreams ● Art practice

3.5 Validity

Feminist researchers argue that researchers should be reflexive about one's position and power to ensure the validity and qualitative rigor of the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Gioia et al., 2013). Reflexivity entails awareness and transparency of the way in which one's position and interactions as a researcher influence the process and the produced knowledge. This includes being transparent about failure (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Caretta & Riaño 2016).

3.5.1 Positionality

In line with Tracy (2013), in considering ethics in qualitative research, I question: "How much disclosure about self-reflexivity is enough?" (p. 234). I will start by being transparent about my own positionality. My father was born in Indonesia and came to the Netherlands alone at the age of 15 years. In my formative years, my father worked in a metal factory. My mother, who was native Dutch, mostly took care of my siblings and myself, whilst working part-time in a factory. She died when I was 10 years old. My father went to prison and consequently I lived in three (white, Dutch, working class) foster families. When I was 17, I left my foster family to study theatre in another city. I identify as a queer, gender-nonconforming person of color. I consider myself a member of the Rotterdam queer community, where other members may know me as my genderfluid drag alter ego. Queer for me, is a non-normative LGBTQ+ identity that resists racism, sexism, ableism and normative beauty standards. Although I do not always have the courage, I attempt to dress how I feel, sometimes more feminine, sometimes more masculine, unsettling gender norms in the process. I try to be aware of my privileges such as being university educated, able bodied, having a relatively normative body (in terms of socially accepted western beauty standards) and being able to 'pass' on several fronts: as cis-gender, male, heterosexual and white. I have a bachelor degree in acting and theatre and my primary income over the past 15 years is derived from this profession. I performed in other people's work, or in projects where we shared authorship by creating collectively. One performance developed collectively, was created for a young audience, specifically people with disabilities from the age of 12 (Ponies theater, n.d.). The performance was created in the context of the art manifestation 'Niet Normaal' (Niet Normaal, 2010). Its central question was: what is normal, and who decides? This question resonated with me, while as a queer person, growing up in different families, I soon realized that norms were context specific and often felt strange instead of normal as their taken-for-grantedness suggests.

In summing up these identifications, I suggest that sometimes I am an insider, sometimes an outsider, and mostly a combination of both (Karimi, 2019). Moreover, I agree with

the author that positionalities are not fixed or static but rather ever-changing, affecting shifts in power as a result (ibid.). Tiffany Page (2017) argues for a ‘vulnerable feminist methodology’ in which the researcher constantly asks “questions about what unsettles, about relations to the unfamiliar and strange, and about the erasure of the complexities of subjectivity” (p. 28). Vulnerability in research resonates with me, because I consider myself mostly an inexperienced researcher, balancing between (expectations from) academia and (expectations from) the queer community.

3.5.2 Reflexivity

My interest in the research topic stems primarily from my queer identity, artistic background and the adjustments to different families, customs and contexts I experienced in my formative years. This partial insider perspective forces me to be highly reflexive about my own biases and positionality. Although I aim to follow an ethics of care that “recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis 2007, p. 4 in Tracy 2013, p. 245), normalizing power can be (re)produced (Ghorashi, 2018). Hence, I reflect on the powerful position I have as a researcher. Firstly, I decide upon the research questions, topics and relevant literature. Secondly, within the form of semi-structured biographical interviews, whilst aiming to provide space for the participants to express agency, I guide the interviews (Fobear, 2015). Thirdly, in the artistic knowledge co-creation, the artists are free to create works how they see fit. Similar to the interviews where the participants are free to decide what to discuss and which questions to answer. However, in collaboration with my supervisors, I will analyze and write the findings as the single analyst (Fobear, 2015; Abrams, 2010). Finally, I approached and selected the sample population thus including some and excluding other voices (Fobear, 2017).

Concerning the last point, I intentionally focused on art *practices* as opposed to art in itself, due to connotations of the word ‘art’ that might have excluded people that did not consider themselves artists, or their practices as art. Participants were able to see my drag social media profiles aiming towards blurring ‘high’ and ‘low’ distinctions of art (Fisher, 2001). I assume that my position as a queer artist affected the data in a way that participants were very open about issues around sex and sex-work. I did not ask for these topics but they came up organically within the conversations. I assume that queer people amongst one another feel more free to talk about these issues with less fear of being judged. Some of the artistic works are also sexually oriented. In addition, it seems unlikely that ‘the naked honesty’ interview would have

occurred in the case that I identified as heterosexual and had not worked as a queer artist myself.

3.5.3 Ethical considerations

There are two points I would like to discuss concerning ethics: remuneration and anonymity. The first point that forced me to be reflexive concerned the modest remuneration (of 200 euro including VAT) for the creation of the artistic works and participation in the interviews. The following two questions came to mind: 1) Did the reimbursement make it harder for participants to refuse involvement? 2) Is it (perceived as) a form of commissioned art and how does this affect the power balance between me and the participants?

Concerning the first question, I realized that several participants (three outspoken) struggled with mental health issues, depression in particular. I wonder whether they would have participated without remuneration. For instance, one participant had agreed to take part and had disclosed that they were dealing with depression. Then, the interview was scheduled and rescheduled a number of times. I wondered if they still wished to participate and communicated that they could feel free to refrain from participating at any time in the process (as is also communicated in the written consent form). When the interview took place, we shared a moving and mutual exchange of life experiences including critical reflections on society and art practices, but the participant requested to stop the interview after one hour. I had asked a question about their dreams and goals and they asked to stop. They seemed to become emotional (with tears in their eyes). They then told me (counter to what they had communicated previously) that they could not create a new work. Instead, they suggested to send a link to a previous work. I replied affirmatively, taking into consideration that I valued our newly formed relationship over the creation of new work.

Another participant was similarly hardly responsive in the process of deciding upon the collaboration. During the interview, they told me that they felt depressed before, but that it was better now. They mentioned that they really liked the project and the fact it was remunerated. I did wonder whether they would have participated without payment. The conditions for the interview were not ideal, since they had to be in a shared space. Two or three other people walked in and out of the room during the highly personal interview.

The second issue regarding remuneration became evident when several participants asked for my advice and approval regarding their artistic works, as if I was in charge. The fact that the artistic works were remunerated thus possibly created an unforeseen shift towards a more unequal power relation. I tried to balance these requests by stressing on the one hand that

participants were free to create whatever they wanted whilst on the other hand I tried to help take away participants' uncertainties by giving some suggestions. One work consists of a dialogue between a participant and a stranger on the gay dating-app Grindr. The participant had modified and adjusted this conversation creatively with consent of the other person. However, it seemed that it were 'just' screenshots taken from their phone. Their original idea was to write thought bubbles, but in the creation process they decided not to go through with this. I then suggested to write an introduction to frame the conversation, which they decided to include.

The last ethical consideration concerns anonymity. This issue is complex due to the addition of the arts-informed research method. Most participants want to use this opportunity to showcase their works with their own (artist) name on a platform (the research websites) to reach outside their communities, possibly increasing work or other opportunities⁵. In addition, the participants have full co-ownership and likely showcase their art on other platforms. Due to ethical requirements of the university, recognizability can be problematic and is thus prohibited. We, my supervisors and myself, aimed to protect the anonymity, privacy, confidentiality and vulnerability of our participants and prevent risk by splitting up this project in two parts: 1) the artistic works in which the participants can choose to use their own (artist) name, a pseudonym, or rather no name at all; and, 2) the biographical interviews in which all the participants are pseudonymized. However, this construction may not be adequate. It may be possible, via the very specific combinations of gender identity, gender expression, country of origin, and the content of artistic works, to trace a participant's work to their pseudonym. None of the participants expressed worries about anonymity, whilst being fully aware and giving their written consent. Most of them have experiences with presenting works in the public domain. Nonetheless, I will do my best to ensure their anonymity regarding the content of this thesis by staying extra attentive with quotations and thus sometimes refraining from mentioning their pseudonyms.

⁵ E.g. one participant is aiming to study art and will (likely) use the AFC content for their application procedure.

4. Empirical findings

In this chapter, I will discuss findings based on the content of the semi-structured biographical interviews as well as artistic content provided by participants in *Art for Change*. In my analysis of the challenges that participants faced in their countries of origin as well as in the Netherlands, I chose to distinguish between overt challenges and hegemonic challenges. I will begin with briefly discussing overt challenges. However, the main focus of this master thesis will be on (unsettling) hegemonic challenges, as these are more insidious and therefore more difficult to address. After having touched upon overt challenges, I will discuss hegemonic challenges that I identified and propose that these hegemonies create paradoxes for LGBTQ+ forced migrants. I will then discuss how participants respond to these paradoxes and how they position their art practices, queerness and collectivity in relation to these paradoxes. Finally, I will discuss the findings in light of participants' agency.

4.1 Overt challenges

Overt challenges LGBTQ+ forced migrants encounter are more obvious in the sense that they are more easily recognized and demonstrated. I distinguished several overt challenges in their former countries, as well as in their new country, the Netherlands.

4.1.1 Country of origin

Before migrating to the Netherlands, participants faced and survived different forms of rejection and violence due to their queer identity. In some countries of origin, (practicing) homosexuality is forbidden. For instance:

In Morocco, there is this article and their penal code 489 that criminalizes homosexuality, and they call it a perversion. (Ghano)

Another example is Iran, where it is also forbidden to *practice* homosexuality although *being* homosexual is permitted. However, it is forbidden to *be* homosexual in military service. Arash, for instance, was required to go to the military hospital and talk to doctors for a period of six months in order to confirm his homosexuality and become exempted from military service. Arash was then diagnosed and registered as 'sexually sick'. This registration was then recorded as a code on his official document and was able to be seen by any (future) employer. This subsequently created hostile and abusive situations in applying for work. Some participants,

such as Arash, experienced discrimination at work or with authorities after being ‘outed’ online. At the same time, however, positive relations were maintained with their families.

I don't know who shared my photos and my real information, even the address, phone and everything to everywhere. I don't know why. [...] Government already knew that I'm gay. [...] But if they know that you do something, then it's not okay. If they know that you have boyfriend, so it means you have sex. So if you don't have sex until that time, it's fine. [...] So me and my boyfriend and my parents, [...] we just said: Okay, there is no solution. [...] You have to leave the country. So everything happened in like two months, three months. (Arash)

Others experienced rejection and violence from their families due to (knowledge of) their sexual orientation. Some participants fled their countries of origin because they were outed to their families by anonymous postings of participants in gay pride celebrations, for instance, or sharing personal information on social media.

That was a threat to their family legacy. And I just had to be gone. I didn't want to accept the fact, I didn't want to accept that violence. (Shif)

In some cases, participants posted queer (activist) content on social media themselves. For instance, one participant’s YouTube video about lesbian love ‘*went viral*’ and created a dangerous situation for themselves (preferred pronoun) as well as their family, forcing them to find refuge away from Morocco to ensure their own and their family’s safety. I consider all these forms of violence, rejection, controversy and laws, overt challenges.

4.1.2 The Dutch context

Upon arriving in the Netherlands, participants faced several new overt challenges. Most overt challenges have to do with asylum procedures, bureaucracy, language, money, resources and employment. These challenges are often caused by exclusive structures such as long standard procedures and complex bureaucratic systems. Several participants mention being frustrated by a lack of help in understanding and dealing with bureaucracies.

Now that I have it, it is okay. But when you were arriving as a migrant from somewhere else, it is not easy. You don't talk the language. They refuse to help. (Travequinha Safada)

I found that many of the challenges mentioned by participants were interconnected and reinforced one another. In general, most participants don’t speak the language, are dependent on social benefits and have limited resources. Although they would like to gain employment, their

limited language skills and lack of qualifications recognized locally are significant obstacles. Their limited participation in the labor market then prevents them from gaining independence from social benefits, as well as developing language and other skills. Hence, participants describe their lives as being on hold.

Yakiv, for instance, has been living in an asylum center for over 2,5 years. His first asylum procedure was rejected by the IND (the Dutch immigration and naturalization service) and is currently in his second procedure. He is eager to find his own place to live, develop his art and earn money. He is motivated to participate, however, he has difficulties learning Dutch and English languages and in the asylum center he only has internet access in a shared space, making it difficult to concentrate.

Look, like first one years I am not completely understand[ing] what's happened with me. What's around? I'm sensing like open country, but [...] for me it's other cultures [...] I'm sensing people said I don't understand you. And for me, it's so difficult. Because [...] my English, I'm starting to learn just here. (Yakiv)

For participants that live outside of asylum centers, including those that have employment, there are several forms of overt challenges. For instance, challenges concerning the access of medical care in gender transitioning.

The following quotation regards one participant's ongoing gender transition. In particular, it explains the delays to the process and points to the experience of subordination to the Dutch medical health system and the mental, emotional and physical consequences this may entail.

[L]ong ago it was very like, the Netherlands was one of the pioneers in legally treating trans people. But today they are very delayed. [...] They make you wait for two years to get assistance. Imagine me, I'm already in transition for more than five years and now I have to wait to see a psychologist who will diagnose me or not as a trans person. And I also have the right to have the treatment. Fuck you, bitches. [laughs jokingly] [...] what they do is really terrible for anyone's mind. A transgender person that's in the beginning of transition is already crazy needing to go to the thing. The first thing that we need is support and not someone doubting and putting you in a psychiatrist situation as if you were a disease person, because you wanna try hormones. It's really horrible. (Travequinha Safada)

There are thus various overt challenges that have mental, emotional and sometimes physical consequences for participants. While some of these challenges may be perceived in terms of individual characteristics (e.g. lack of language skills and resources), it is important to

acknowledge that these overt challenges can be regarded as consequences of institutional structures.

4.2 Hegemonic challenges: 'caught between a rock and a hard place'

In addition to overt challenges, personal histories of violence and/ or oppression, LGBTQ+ forced migrants face hegemonic challenges in the Netherlands. Hegemonic challenges are more insidious than overt challenges because they are forms of subtle 'soft power' (Wade, 2002). I identified hegemonic challenges in relation to three overarching themes: dominant culture (macro); dominant institutions (meso); and subordination (micro).

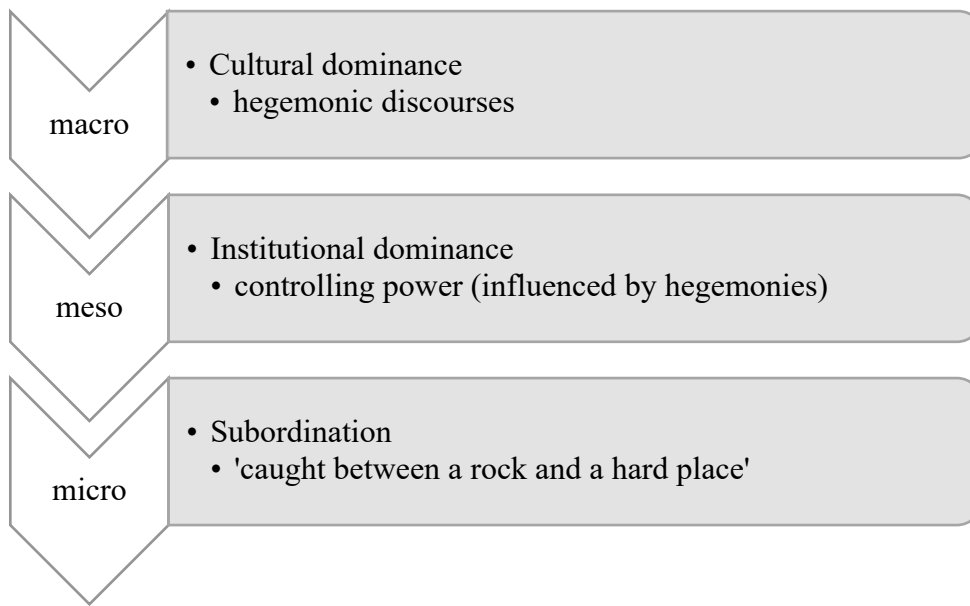
Firstly, the macro level theme concerns issues to do with cultural differences. Participants mention experiences and feelings of being othered by native Dutch people. For instance, participants describe encountering several forms of 'Dutchness' (e.g. 'Dutch' modesty, privileges, expectations or feelings of unfairness). Some participants said that Dutch natives are sometimes shocked when their expectation of 'poor queer refugees in need' was disrupted by, for instance, their beautiful clothes from their countries of origin. Moreover, participants experience feelings of unfairness by native Dutch people in relation to perceived special treatment:

I lost my like two, three relationships just because they came to my house and they said, you are just the refugee, you get uitkering [social benefits] and your house is much nicer than my house. My house is empty and you live in a social house. (Arash)

Secondly, the meso level is influenced by dominant culture, but operates more on an institutional level. This theme relates to art, educational, media and governmental institutions which have controlling power in terms of including or excluding participants and/ or their experiences. Such institutions also control representations of their perceived 'right' or 'fair and appropriate' treatment and/ or behavior. For instance, examples ranging from bureaucratic procedures regarding access to arts funding, as well as exclusive structures in cultural events such as gay pride and general media representation.

Thirdly, there is the micro level theme 'subordination'. 'Subordination' is a consequence of both 'dominant culture' (macro) and 'dominant institutions' (meso). Furthermore, this theme relates to more individual experiences with homophobia, transphobia or racism. For instance, participants mention being judged or labeled and encounter (verbal, physical, online) harassment or assault due to their SOGI or migration background.

Figure 1. Visual representation of hegemonic themes on their respective levels.



In analyzing various hegemonic challenges, I discovered paradoxes emerging in which participants find themselves ‘caught between a rock and a hard place’. In other words, participants find themselves caught between multiple conflicting social expectations. For instance, not being ‘emancipated and liberated enough’ as the ‘Muslim other’, while at the same time being ‘too political’ (in fighting racism, sexism, transphobia for example). In fact, I identified four paradoxes: ‘the paradox of representation’; ‘desirability’; ‘belonging’; and ‘participation’. Although separating these paradoxes implies a certain strict or definitive order, the reality is far less defined, more intertwined and multilayered. However, these paradoxes are used to discuss participants’ issues more comprehensibly and to expose the complexity of different intersecting characteristics of participants’ identities.

4.2.1 Paradox of representation

Firstly, participants mention a lack of societal representation in the media as well as in society at large. For them, representation is predominantly one-sided and stereotypical, as opposed to multi-faceted and well-rounded. In other words, participants argue that marginalized identities are often depicted as either ‘very good’ or ‘very bad’. For instance, some participants mention growing up watching Black people in the news being portrayed as either criminals or successful celebrities. Calvin, who is Black, today has a career as a professional dancer and model. When I asked him whether he could imagine a career outside of art he responded negatively. As a child, his ambition had always been to become ‘the Black greatness’. Thus, dominant images

of Black people as either ‘very good’ or ‘very bad’ may leave little room to construct one’s own (and more nuanced) identity. Instead, Calvin may have felt a pressure to become ‘the great’ because the only alternative was to become ‘the bad’.

Some participants argue that achieving excellence is not only an internalized pressure, but also somewhat forced from outside, as people of color are judged more harshly in comparison to white people and therefore must work harder.

I mean Balkenende [former Dutch Minister President] went skateboarding and fell. A white, cis, straight man, he can continue cheerfully and everyone is smiling, nothing the matter. But a person of color, look at Khadija Arib, the President of the Lower Chamber of Parliament. She has to watch every decimal point and comma in order not to be finished. At the moment she makes a mistake, you will be burnt to the ground [compleet afgebrand]. See how the men of DENK [political party], men of color are treated differently as opposed to white men. (Rostam) [Translated from Dutch].

This quotation is in line with the concept ‘tokenism’ as used by Ghorashi & Sabelis (2013). Tokens are individuals that are perceived as representatives of minority groups, specifically in (work) places where there are few other members of the same minority group. Tokens are often subsequently burdened by the pressure of representing a ‘good example’. Thus, “[b]eing an object of diversity measurements therefore can be quite unattractive over time” (Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013, p. 80). In similar fashion, participants in this research described fear of the burden of having to represent a larger community.

I’m only representing myself. I’m not representing anyone. I’m not. [...] OK. Don’t put it on me. And I don’t want to leader like, you know. Yeah. So this was also a struggle I was facing in my life. (Shif)

Even though participants mention an increase of societal representation, the paradox of representation concerns the fact that this increase does not necessarily mean more societal inclusion, or more equality.

So I see a huge change in art and in classifications where a certain image needs to be portrayed of society. We all know that there are also many commercial purposes and that there is now also a kind of collective consciousness. If you don’t do it *now* you will be pointed out. But a lot of people do not understand the essence of what you do. But the fact that you can watch a Prada show of the 46 models 18 are Black, does not mean that the Black women in [...] the more normal, ordinary layer of society are more accepted. (Calvin) [Translated from Dutch].

In summary, although some participants see an increase in representation in the media as well as in societally respected positions, some argue that representation in the media remains stereotypical and lacks nuance. Additionally, some participants feel that minorities are being judged harsher than majorities. Thus the discourse of either ‘very good’ or ‘very bad’ seems to create unreachable expectations.

4.2.2 Paradox of desirability

In close proximity to the paradox of representation is the paradox of desirability. Due to specific ‘looks’ or ‘behaviors’ in terms of ethnicity and gender expression, LGBTQ+ forced migrants experience being simultaneously desired and undesired. Some participants are fetishized (as Muslim, for instance) by some, while feared or simply rejected by others (for being Muslim). Some participants experience being feared because they “look Muslim” (Shif). Others are rejected because they wear makeup or are perceived as being too feminine. Participants are affected by these forms of othering within their daily interactions, particularly on gay dating apps.

The biggest problems are in the community. [...] We have racist there. You have, just if you check the apps, that's a good example. Like if you are Asian, if you're Black, if you're this don't text me, if you're feminine, if you wear makeup, don't text me. So why do you have to mention that actually? And then it does send you a message, ‘hey, oh, you look beautiful. But are you feminine or manly?’ You know, I hate this kind of conversation. (Arash)

Further, some participants are regularly asked if they are escorts (sex workers) on gay dating apps. This can be considered a form of dehumanizing via objectification and commodification (Constable, 2009), which further reproduces the narrative of ‘the ethnic other’ as being different or inferior. Other participants feel that they are not discriminated against or excluded by the host LGBT community because of their desirability.

No I'm Persian, we don't experience that [excluded or discriminated within the LGBT community]. [laughs] Don't take it as a point of ego, but this is just what I've experienced. People are, people tend to, Europeans tend to or Westerners tend to be more interested after they hear that I'm Iranian. (Maheen)

Thus, the paradox of desirability concerns LGBTQ+ forced migrants being considered as ‘the other’, in which they are simultaneously feared (or rejected) and fetishized (objectified and desired). Hence, the perception of ‘the other’ being fundamentally different and inferior is further reproduced. This is not so different from the paradox of representation; it is reminiscent of the stereotypical and polarized representation of ‘very good’ and ‘very bad’.

4.2.3 *Paradox of belonging*

The paradox of belonging is complex due to the many overlapping intersecting elements of participants' identities. This paradox concerns participants not really feeling like they belong, or are accepted, in any of their respective communities. Often, participants lacked a characteristic that was considered necessary in order to belong to a specific community, while paradoxically, in a different community, it was perceived that they possessed an overabundance of that very same characteristic. For instance, not being Black enough and at the same time being too Black. Calvin, was adopted at birth by a white Belgian family.

So at certain moments it's confusing, also in high school. There I experienced that even Congolese people said you don't belong with us. You're not one of us. Because, first they had doubts about my sexuality and I wasn't raised with the culture. So you're not Black enough, but then at the same time, you're too Black. (Calvin) [Translated from Dutch].

Calvin thus experienced exclusion due to the intersecting combination of his sexuality, 'white' upbringing and Blackness.

Another example involves being queer and being Muslim. The following text is an excerpt of a voiceover in a performance by one of the participants in AFC. The text exemplifies the paradoxical feelings of being queer, feminist, and Muslim at the same time. This corresponds with El-Tayeb's (2012) concept of queer Muslims in Europe in which she argues that queer Muslims are perceived as not being 'proper queers' for not being emancipated according to western European standards. At the same time, they are perceived as not being 'true Muslims' by their ethnic community as well as the Dutch host community.

Doubting and questioning our faith, first as Muslims and then as queers, is a way to express the intersectionality of the oppressions based on our religious identities and ideologies. People have always insisted on asking me, no shame, are you really Muslim and at the same time you're a man? Are you really Muslim while wearing those clothes? Don't you think you are contradicting yourself? Are you really Muslim and practicing feminism? Are you really Muslim and queer? How can you be Muslim wearing those faggoty feminine clothes? Islam is very real and they will throw you down the cliff if they found out you are queer. I know your truth. You are not Muslim by heart by taking Islam as a trend. You contradict yourself being queer and Muslim. Same as Islam and feminism. Did you really read the Quran well? (Participant)

This quotation shows queer Muslims' perceived inability to belong to Muslim communities in particular.

In addition, despite the hegemonic claim that Muslims are incompatible with the perceived advanced, emancipated (Dutch) society, many of the participants considered themselves

more emancipated than members of the Dutch LGBT community. Ghano, for instance, feels that they do not belong to ‘white queers’ because they are ‘not as political’.

It was during the pride and [...] there were a lot of queers but they were white queers I didn't feel like I belonged there. And I guess we shared something, but not everything [...] the privileges that everyone has. [...] And the culture, I guess, is of course different [...] but it's not really queer. [...] I take more of the queerness as more of the political side of it. I don't feel like I belong with such a crowd or such organizations or such things. (Ghano)

Further, participants spoke of their experiences (or feelings of) triple marginalization: *a minority* (a refugee of color in the host society) *within the minority* (a refugee of color in the host LGBT community) *within the minority* (a ‘queer’ refugee of color as opposed to a ‘homonormative’ member of the host LGBT community).

Because it adds the racism into it, with the intersectionality of the struggles, becoming a refugee, becoming like a minority within the minority within the minority. (Ghano)

In conclusion, the intersection of (some) LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ identifications reinforce exclusion in multiple aspects. This results in a paradox of belonging, meaning that participants experience feelings of not belonging to any community due to a combination of characteristics that are perceived as conflicting by different communities. Central to this paradox is a perceived ‘liberated emancipated Dutch culture’ in conflict with the perceived ‘unemancipated other’ despite queer (trans, gender nonconforming) forced migrants arguably being more emancipated than host (cisgender) gay community members.

4.2.4 Paradox of participation

The paradox of participation is in fact a paradox of expectations around participation. On the one hand, participants have an intrinsic desire, and experience societal pressure, to participate in society. On the other hand, participants are rendered as highly dependent on institutions. Participants’ narratives entailed various examples of dependencies on (art, educational, medical, governmental, funding) institutions. Participants express the wish to integrate and follow their ambitions. They are often eager to work or study. They also anticipate feelings of freedom after the overt coercive oppression experienced in their countries of origin. However, it often seems that instead they are not free to societally participate in the way in which they would like to (or are able to).

So and I am still linked to the gemeente [municipality]. They choose for me. And even things I dream of, it cannot be your dreams. It's going to be the bureaucratic dreams. [...] I don't think the institutions is for artists I like. For artists like me. I was just trying to find my way to get integrated into society, but the society don't want me to get integrated. (Amina)

Thus, there seems to be (sometimes unspoken) expectations regarding their participation.

Such (unspoken) expectations of societal participation are exemplified when one participant unsuccessfully auditioned for an art school (in movement and choreography). The justification the institution provided in rejecting the participant was their being “not neutral enough”. The participant in question is non-binary trans, queer, activist and Muslim. There thus seems to be an expectation that applicants of art education should be ‘neutral’, and apparently, people assume that the applicant in question cannot be neutral. ‘Neutrality’ in this context may concern a multitude of things. Using a depoliticized hetero- and homonormative lens in the Dutch context (Duggan, 2012), one way of relating to ‘not being neutral enough’ is in the sense of being ‘too political’ because the participant creates activist performances. Alternatively, the participant may wonder whether this ‘lack of neutrality’ is due to their being Muslim; their being trans non-binary; or their (forced) migration background. Due to lack of specific information it remains unknown to what exactly the institution was referring.

Apparently there are expectations about what art is, or what art should be, and, indeed, about who can be considered an artist. For instance, other participants spoke of funding bodies not supporting certain projects concerning taboo topics such as non-normative sex practices. This seems to be an issue concerning inclusivity; you should participate, but there is only room to participate in a certain way. Due to stereotypical normalized images, people assume that some cannot participate in the way that they expect them to participate. Moreover, these assumptions seem to sometimes force minorities to write, create or express specific topics. For instance, one participant suggests certain topics provide remuneration for young female writers of color, while others do not.

And I also think that the precariousness of a lot of young writers, especially of color, the precariousness in which they are, which also forces us to just write or respond, just to get that 250 or 300, just to get your rent paid. Just to get you know all these things. Where I then see other more established white male writers who have just been working on a book or a project for 5 years. [...] I also try to write less opinions and stuff. I want to write more essays. Because I have a lot more to offer than my pain you know? And that is something that you, as female writers, are very much placed in that sort of experiential. Tell me about your pain you know? Your gender pain, your racist pain, your domestic violence pain. Pain pain pain you know? And then you will be paid. (Participant) [Translated from Dutch].

Simultaneously, there is thus an expectation to participate as ‘the other’ as well as an expectation of ‘neutrality’.

This paradox is further exemplified when Calvin mentions that a reviewer (of color) praises the fact that the solo performance that Calvin co-created is ‘not about color’. The reviewer seems to be relieved that Calvin does not adhere to the pressure of having to talk within a narrow frame of ‘minority topics’. The reviewer, who arguably speaks for a larger audience, thus praises a form of neutrality, much like the former example of the art education. Nonetheless, despite (re)viewers (i.e. critics and audiences) and institutions’ expectations of neutrality, many participants mentioned that they do not wish to consider themselves neutral.

I did a piece with [young white choreographer] and for example, he had developed the concept, but I was a co-creator and I was the only one who performed it. Well, the credits will always go to him, and that boy didn't do shit. It all starts with that. And then things like, oh yes ‘Calvin's dark appearance brings an extra dimension. Fortunately, it's not about color’. How can it not be about color, when I am alone on stage and the only narrator? And regardless of whether it is really about color or not, everything I do is from my perspective and it's my point of view. So to me that means, politically correct, you can't put it that way. Because actually it's kind of glorifying [ophemelen] that you could be a Black person there and completely remove that layer of color. (Calvin) [Translated from Dutch].

Although this example relates to the paradox of representation, I regard it as a paradox of (expectations around) participation. Despite the fact that Calvin works professionally, he is still dependent on how he is perceived by an audience, which is strongly influenced by hegemonies and normalizing power of othering discourses. Hence, participants feel the pressure to constantly explain or contextualize their works.

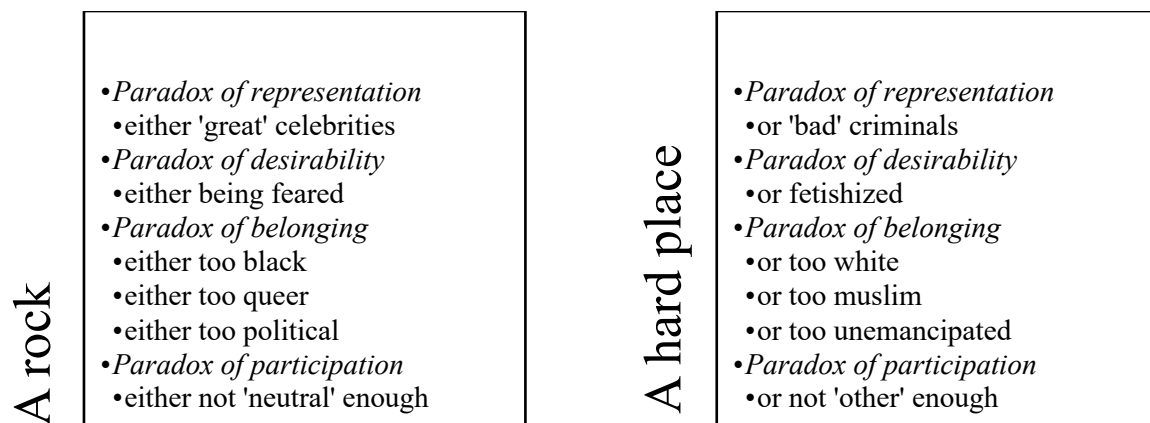
You need to, for me to be able to to to do my performance and, like, get my vision through. I need first to give a lecture on some stuff and then do my performance to make sure that it's not perceived way differently, that I want to give as a message. (Shif)

Artists’ dependency is thus not merely on institutions, but also on (re)viewers and may limit LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ freedom in creating art due to works being interpreted according to hegemonic assumptions.

To conclude, participation is considered important in the Dutch ‘participation society’. At the same time, forced migrants’ experiences of long standard processes and bureaucratic reception procedures results in dependency, rather than participation. Moreover, if one is to

participate in society as an artist of color, as an artist with a (forced) migration background, as a trans (non-binary) artist, one is expected to participate according to certain terms. Firstly, there is an assumption that they cannot fulfill such expectations (e.g. for a lack of neutrality). Secondly, when one attempts to fulfill unspoken expectations, one is restricted to a narrow frame as a ‘refugee artist’ or a ‘trans artist’, who is able to create art (in a narrow range of) refugee or trans topics. Paradoxically, (re)viewers are ‘relieved’ when these artists do not express their assumed topics in this narrow range. Thus, the paradox of participation concerns LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ dependency and lack of control over their own decisions as well as hegemonic expectations around participation and the impossibility of living up to simultaneously contradictory expectations.

Figure 2. Visual representation of being ‘caught between a rock and a hard place’ in summary.



4.3 LGBTQ+ forced migrants’ responses

I found that participants respond to these hegemonic challenges in many different ways. However, I found three themes particularly salient, namely, they responded via queerness, in collective actions and through their art practices.

4.3.1 Queerness

The term queer was often used by participants as an umbrella term to capture identifications outside of heterosexuality and a cisgender identity (Jagose, 1996), as well as politically, in resisting hetero- and homonormativity in general (Vijlbrief et al., 2020). Some participants reasoned that queer as an umbrella term makes the complexities and fluid nature of identifications more simple. For instance, it simplifies questions such as ‘if one identifies as non-binary, can one be homosexual?’. Homosexual is defined by sexual attraction to the same gender.

However, non-binary is defined by being between or outside the gender binary (ibid.). Thus, identifying as queer simplifies these issues that were often regarded as irrelevant by participants themselves. The political meaning of queer, however, has far more relevance to most participants. Identifying as queer thus implies (actively) resisting different cultural norms. Queerness becomes therefore almost equivalent to activism. Participants considered themselves activist due to their queerness.

Oh, queer means a lot of things for me. [...] Like being revolutionary. Revolutionary on the society, not accepting shit that society wants to put on you, [...] just don't give a fuck about anything. Just wear whatever you want to wear and just do whatever you want to do. Queer means to me freedom. Liberation. [...] [J]ust not responding to any norms at all regarding sexuality, regarding love, regarding family things, regarding anything, like regarding religion. I think anyone for me like anyone who does not accept this, how do you call it? Like pre-made thoughts like question them and creating their own revolution as a queer person as long as they are not discriminating others. (Shif)

4.3.2 Collectivity

Another important aspect of participants identifying as queer, is that this identification in turn implies feeling/ being part of the queer community. In general, to distinguish oneself from more normative LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) identifications seems to be important for most TQ (transgender, queer) participants. There seems to be a divide between homonormative LGB and non-normative TQ+ identities. For instance, the artistic work 'TrannyCast' (episode 2, AFC) discusses that the first transgender boat in Canal Pride only took part in 2016, 25 years after Amsterdam Pride began.

However, in addition to distinguishing themselves from LGB identities generally, building or strengthening their own specific (queer and migrant) communities was considered very important. Some explained it as an intrinsic part of their identity, having a more 'relational' sense of identity as opposed to 'a more individualistic identification'. Having left their families or communities in their origin countries, combined with hegemonic ways of being othered in their new country, seems to be very challenging. This is especially evident when one is feeling isolated as became apparent by physical distancing measures experienced during Covid-19.

Giving and receiving community support then is crucial. This support can range from emotional support (e.g. accompanying one to 'get a stamp' in an asylum center, because one participant experienced verbal violence from an asylum center employee), to practical support (e.g. helping move houses; and helping to write funding applications). Without support from

their respective community members, dealing with the several challenges in the Netherlands would be almost impossible.

No, it was not mentally possible to cope, to do things alone. [...] I like to meet people, to meet people, to talk to people and from there creating a personal connection and make the work happen. And now, I know again I'm trying to apply because I want to finish a project. At which I would need some money for it and I'm trying and a friend is helping me because I wouldn't be able to do this by myself. (Travequinha Safada)

Financial support was also mentioned as an element of community support (e.g. collecting money for community members in need).

Yes. It's like first. First community here who helped me. And trust me. And accept me. Yes, it's true. [...] Yes. JH [mother of a drag family] helped me being creative. Of course I don't have that much money in hand. He like give me money, like money for fabric, give money for stuff. I could buy some stuff. Also like [inaudible] Ali-express and stuff. He also cover it, like completely not all. But parts for money to give like this moment. (Yakiv)

On an individual level the collective provides key emotional, practical and financial support.

In addition to this support, queer communities also organize activism such as demonstrations. Such demonstrations (e.g. against the commercialization of Amsterdam Pride) involve collective and independent (from institutions) organization in which initiative and decision making lies only within their own queer migrant community. Further, some express the benefits of becoming more engaged and taking such initiative as well as the importance of resources circulating within the community to make collective actions possible. For example, the community organizes other benefits and events in order to raise funds for the demonstration and may use these funds to pay for train tickets for those from other cities. I found that the LGBTQ+ forced migrants I spoke to differed in terms of active engagement. Some were highly engaged in collectively organizing demonstrations and created spaces, while others participated by simply joining these events at times, and others did neither. Interestingly, it seemed that the more intersections of (assumed paradoxical) identifications one had, the higher the level of active engagement. Especially participants identifying as trans (binary or non-binary) were more actively engaged as opposed to cisgender participants.

Alongside providing emotional, practical and financial support, sharing responsibilities, organizing collective action and circulating capital in the community, there are several participants arguing for the community as safer non-mixed spaces in which artistic and/ or self-expression is encouraged.

So I think that is why for me, non-mixed spaces or performing those specific specific things with a specific group that's intersect with my struggles is important and makes it just safe for me to do. (Shif)

Examples of non-mixed spaces may be queer-refugees-only-spaces or trans-only-spaces. In such spaces, participants may no longer feel the burden of potential misgendering, harassment and other forms of violence, for example. They may be more free from the pressure to explain themselves in terms of their gender or ethnic identity as well as more able to share and negotiate (similar) experiences and develop critiques, techniques and approaches. Interestingly, there are also critical reflections on the notions of safer non-mixed spaces.

I recently organized an event around the idea of Black liberation. I invited all Black people [...] there was one person I also invited who was not Black. [...] [A] two-hour conversation was planned, of which at least half an hour was spent by people who complained, [...] [that] we are not safe to speak [...] [W]hat you need is a safe space. But [...] I'm the only trans person in this event. So am I safe to talk to you guys about Black liberation? Are you safe for me? [...] I'm also one of the most highly educated of them all. [...] Is that a safe space for them? I come from a family that is very rich, super rich compared to what these kids grew up with. [...] Most of the people in the group, have all kinds of gender studies or sociology [...] Is that safe? You know what are we talking about? (Osa) [Translated from Dutch].

Osa prefers the term negotiated spaces and critically reflects eloquently, via an intersectional lens, on the question: 'what is safe for whom?'

To summarize, collectivity entails emotional, practical and financial community support, as well as collective action (activism) and organized negotiated spaces (mixed or non-mixed) where participants can feel free and relatively safe to express themselves (mundanely and/ or artistically).

4.3.3 Art practices

Firstly, participants mention that their art does not necessarily have to be connected to experiences of exclusion, but may also explore notions of beauty, humor or mundane topics. For instance, one participant explained their art was mostly about love, spirituality, spells for witchcraft and sometimes just about their cat. Although these seemingly banal expressions of art, may not unsettle hegemonies intentionally, making art concerning topics other than participants' pain and struggles can be considered expressions of creative agency. Such practices are not reactive but rather take initiative and create something new (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015).

Secondly, most participants mention intentions to practice art, for instance, in terms of its therapeutic properties. Working on art gives life meaning and makes it “bearable”.

Yeah, because I think life is fucking shitty. And I ask myself a lot of times like, why do I have to accept this shit? Like, why do I have [...] to accept that I see my sisters being beat up and killed for being who they are? Like, why do I have to accept myself getting, like, living through all this violence and shit? [...] But when I am writing, when I am doing something it just makes everything worth it. It just makes everything have a reason. (Shif)

In relation to such therapeutic properties, participants explain the potential of art in allowing freedom to other kinds of expression than (conventional) language. This creates a possibility to express oneself and counters experiences of being silenced.

Yes, I actually found out how it helped me as a person to develop or to express myself. So to explain, when I was going to make the first performance I had to think about who I was. And when I was, when I actually thought ‘gosh, these are three layers that are currently significant in my life’. How can I express that without actually using too many words? Because my words have to be corrected and there must be the grammar, someone has to read about that and blah blah. But what if I am not going to use those words? Then nobody has to silence me and correct and control me. Then I am completely in control. (Rostam) [Translated from Dutch].

I interpret therapeutic potential of art practices as evident in exploring modes of expression beyond language, in countering experiences of being silenced and, thus, enhancing feelings of independence.

However, others nuance this perspective (of art practices as having therapeutic properties) by arguing that such practices may entail hard emotional labor.

The story we tell ourselves, about who we are and who we were, have a lot of power. [...] And I think for a lot of people, who are not often introspective, it can be very therapeutic. To see for the first time, on paper, what stories they are telling about themselves, right? [...] But I think there is another form of writing that is less introspective as such. But which is more inventive, which confronts your ideas and your conceptions of the world much more. Or say the limits of how much you can imagine about the other. About other experiences than yours. And then [...] it can also be very destructive [...] [W]hen you write or write regularly, these are painful things. (Osa) [Translated from Dutch]

Mundane artistic expressions, as well as therapeutic and counter-silencing potential of art practices can be considered properties on the individual or micro level. However, there are properties that reach outside the personal realm which can reach different communities. Most

participants consider their art practices as an important increase of (very little existing) representation.

And people would know about it [their writings] and people would feel connected to it. And because I wrote it in like a Moroccan dialect, in Darija, and people, it was like the first time they see someone writes in their own dialect about these kinds of things. So they felt some kind of connection with a person that they didn't know about. (Ghano)

In addition, participants witnessed queer representation in art [film] and documentaries which inspired and motivated them.

But somewhere back of our mind, we know that the word of the word gay is not associated with success, is not associated with pride. It's associated with struggle it's associated with being a loser. [...] At least where I grew up [...] but not only I saw gays are expressing themselves thoroughly through their work, through their documentaries, through their art, what they have to say, their performance, everything. But also, it's a good job. It's art. And people like to see it. (Aram)

Hence, LGBTQ+ forced migrants' art seems to have representational and educational properties (on the meso level) for members within and outside their communities.

Finally, in several instances, participants perceived their art as activism. While the above examples (mundane, therapeutic, representational) can be considered forms of creative agency, where dominant hegemonies are challenged less intentionally, some consider their works more explicitly activist. Some participants create political activist performances with the direct intention to create awareness about societal inequalities on a macro level. These critical performances include topics concerning 'Palestine', 'white supremacy' and 'white feminism', for instance. Another participant uses deejaying to decolonize spaces in order to remove western dominant influences.

My my art, my music, my painting, my writing is my way of activism, is my way of fighting. And I am actually painting to heal or to be therapeutic as a way of resistance against everything that is going wrong in my life and with the system and also with the music. I've already told you like decolonizing the spaces, bringing back cultures and creating community building. And with the writing is the same. It's vocalizing. The things, the struggles, sharing and connecting. To experience it. (Participant)

In sum, participants argue that art practices can be mundane, therapeutic, introspective, emotional labor, voicing (outside conventional language to counter silencing), representational and/ or explicitly activist.

4.4 LGBTQ+ forced migrants' reflexivity

In researching art practices' role in unsettling exclusionary Dutch hegemonies, I found that it is not only art practices that participants use to express their agency, but also queerness in itself as well as community practices that resist and unsettle hegemonies and the paradoxes that result from them. Queerness, collectivity and art practices are all different expressions of LGBTQ+ forced migrants' agency.

Interestingly, there seems to be a mechanism connecting these ways of dealing with their challenges, namely 'reflexivity': "people's ability to reflect on, and understand themselves" (Monro, 2005, p. 18). I found that queerness, collectivity and art practices are interwoven and revolve around 'reflexivity'.

I think for most writers, first time writers, you realize that you also get agency on shaping what the story actually is as you are writing. You make choices about what is important, what is not important, you make choices about the correct order and you get agency in realizing 'oh and this is what that meant.' [...] I don't see the therapy. It's a lot of work. [...] I hate it. But I also love it. And I think that the thing it does for me is that it brings a certain depth to my life, but also a very deep social emotional cultural political depth that I'm very grateful for. And that keeps bringing me back to the writing table. Because it's addictive, it's addictive to be deep. To think deep. To put things at risk, to doubt deeply, to hope deeply. (Osa) [Translated from Dutch].

In order to understand reflexivity as a mechanism, I propose viewing it through Beech's (2011) lens of identity construction within liminality. As mentioned in 2.3, Beech (2011) argues that "liminality can be defined as a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community" (p. 3).

I thus suggest that being queer, engaging in community, and art practices are such forms of reflexive identity construction. Considering that LGBTQ+ forced migrants face complex paradoxes, a sense of negotiating one's identity and their place in the world, seems crucial. One participants' performance concerning their queer and Muslim identity is an act of knowing and understanding oneself, while concomitantly presenting and explaining oneself to an audience.

What is my definition to Islam? What is the tajdid [revival of Islam], renovation, innovation I propose? What queer, Islamic, feminist, revolution I'm talking about? But my faith is to Allah Azza Wa Jall [Allah is higher]. And my belief is a feminist Shia belief. I come from all creatures of Allah. And there I learn my Imaan based on how Allah enlightened me. For me the Shi is a way queers and feminists, cis and trans, become the renovators in din [religion]. The revolutionists in understanding

the meaning of the din. And the renovators and the jihad against patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, racism, religious supremacy and arrogance in din. Anyway, Allahu Akbar. (Participant)

This performance is a strong act of agency in the form of individual self-reflection and identity construction, considering a hegemonic assumption that the combination of queerness, feminism and Islam is highly contradictory. However, the participant negotiates these paradoxes – via their art practice – which enables them to integrate them into a personalized identity. Moreover, the performance encourages plural and public reflexivity (Turner, 1979).

Other participants, that were raised Muslim, have either completely, or partially, distanced themselves from religion by choosing to practice only certain elements at certain times. In fact, both rejection and integrating elements of religion can be considered as significant acts of agency in themselves. Participants applaud queer Muslims for interpreting Islam in a way that unsettles conventions, and they acknowledge the necessary courage and strength to do so.

For me, like when I hear now the queer Muslims talking about interpretation of texts and how they. I'm like, oh, you fucking smart. Because I was also like told when I was Muslim, that I don't have the right to question those texts and explanation and interpretation of those things. [...] For me, you just have to be like a fucking genius to be able to interpret the text, including your experience and including your path. And just like be, yeah, be comfortable in your own zone with all this, and be accepted, accepting of yourself. I just have a lot of respect for queer Muslims. (Shif)

These reflexive identity constructions seem to be crucial and inevitable. Inevitable because it seems highly unlikely, or rather impossible, to not reflect on and construct one's identity within the various (by society perceived) paradoxes that participants contend with. Thus, participants must position and explain themselves, especially when an identity is perceived paradoxical or ambiguous. Having a trans non-binary identity may serve as an example for ambiguity, because of the perceived social requirement to know or tell whether a person is male or female. Participants share their frustrations with having to explain themselves on a daily basis to 'ignorant' people (participant's term). Therefore, in spite of this daily burden, art practices addressing these issues can be seen as powerful acts of agency unsettling hegemonic assumptions. Furthermore, I suggest that reflection, as an internal process, may lead to action in the external world.

However, I would like to comment on one downside, dare I say, paradox, of reflexivity. Reflecting on one's life or works within the Dutch context results in a higher sense of agency

and power, however it also results a loss of naivety and innocence. Loss of naivety and innocence concerning specific issues, in turn leads to a loss of joy about these issues as a seemingly inevitable consequence. A loss of joy can make life harder for the simple fact that one is more aware of inequalities and injustices. This may be especially relevant in the case of hegemonies due to their subtle and covert nature.

I found that several participants shared a lost sense of naivety and innocence about their (former) dreams of being liberated from oppression. In migrating to the Netherlands, most participants brought with them hopes of being free to express themselves. However, it turned out to be far more challenging than expected due to Dutch hegemonies. As they engaged with communities, negotiated queerness and practiced art, they became more reflective and at the same time feelings of disappointment arose. Therefore, some participants expressed that they no longer maintained long term goals because such feelings of disappointment were becoming harder to deal with. Other examples of a loss of innocence and naivety concern pride celebrations more specifically.

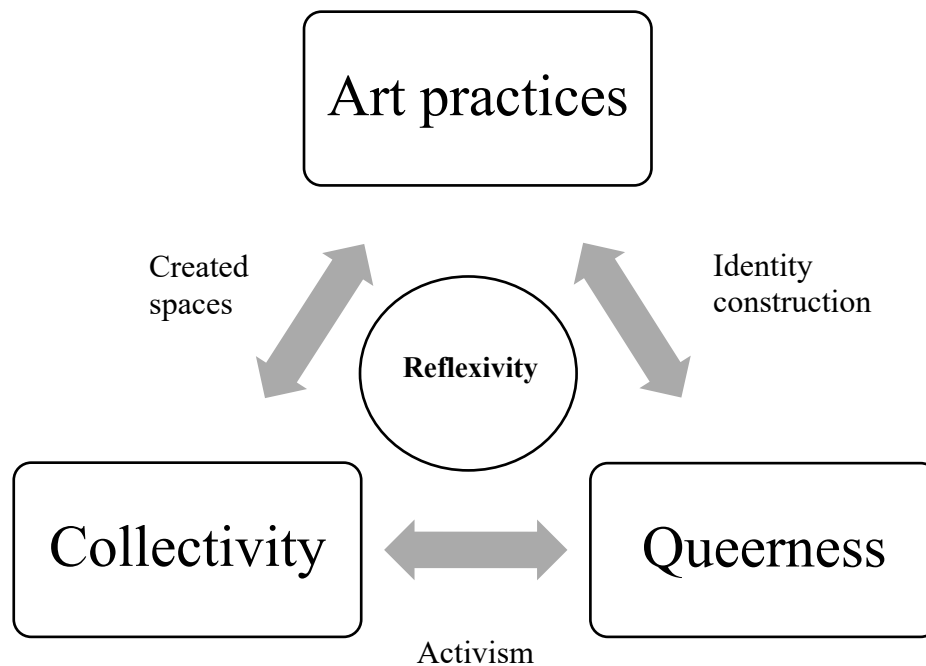
It was my very first pride, was a big pride. The first day, big pride in my life, and I was 22, almost 23. And yes, it was a life changing experience. To see all the taboos, that... You think they were wrong, it's out in the open! And not only everybody is expressing themselves and other people are rooting for them. And they're happy for them and they're supporting from all this age and all different. [...] I didn't know it's like a capitalism thing. And people go drink and the hetero is taking the piss out of gays. [...] But at that time, for naive, I mean 22 years old me, it was a big deal.
(Aram)

For most, pride was once a liberating and joyful experience. However, after realizing the subtle forms of exclusion, particularly due to homonormativity, participants would now rather protest against it.

In conclusion, participants find that identifying as queer both challenges forms of normativity and is in turn related to the notion of belonging to the (or a) queer community. According to participants, collectivity (community building and support) creates a sense of belonging and mental, emotional, practical and financial support as well as collective action (activism). Organizing negotiated spaces may enable participants to feel more free and safe to express themselves. Thirdly, participants respond via art practices, which involve sharing works within and outside these communities and contain potential to negotiate and communicate ideas of queerness. Art practices may be mundane, therapeutic, introspective, emotional labor, counter-silencing, representational or explicitly activist. Furthermore, engaging in com-

munity, expressing queerness and practicing art all revolve around and feed reflexivity. Reflexivity is important: in the identity construction of participants; in organizing created spaces; and in activism. Finally, reflexivity is paradoxical in itself. The more reflective one is, the more one may be burdened by the awareness of subtle forms of exclusion and inequality.

Figure 3. Visual representation of key themes in a reciprocal relation to reflexivity.



5. Conclusion & discussion

How can art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettle hegemonies? To answer this main research question, I draw upon both the theoretical as well as the empirical findings and discuss how I view these findings in relation to one another. I will do so by first answering each of the three sub-questions separately.

What are art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' hegemonic challenges, on the micro, meso and macro level, and how do they affect LGBTQ+ forced migrants?

The hegemonies I identified are aimed at 1) expecting LGBTQ+ forced migrants to assimilate into 'Dutch national culture of perceived tolerance and advanced women's and gay emancipation', and 2) differentiating LGBTQ+ forced migrants as (nearly) incompatible with the latter (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2016). As a result, there is a perception of hierarchical differentiations between the native Dutch 'self' and the migrant 'other' (Ghorashi, 2018). Participants in this research are accused of not being 'properly Dutch', while at the same time, participants are accused of not properly performing the 'good example of otherness' (El-Tayeb, 2012). Furthermore, failing to assimilate is rendered the fault of the individual as opposed to the fault of societal structures (ibid.).

LGBTQ+ forced migrants are affected by these hegemonies of assimilation and hierarchical differentiation by 'catching' them in several paradoxes (of representation; of desirability; of belonging; of participation). To give an example, the paradox of participation deals with the unspoken expectations of societal participation, but of participation in a particular (impossible) way. For instance, a participant is expected to 'be neutral' in order to be accepted in an arts institution but simultaneously must contend with the idea that LGBTQ+ forced migrants are incapable of being neutral. This is reminiscent of both the homonationalist discourse that frames 'Islam as incompatible with Dutch culture...' (Mepschen et al., 2010); and its homonostalgic component that adds '...and before the arrival of Islam, Dutch women's and gay emancipation was (almost) complete' (Wekker, 2009). LGBTQ+ forced migrants are often asked, and remunerated, to work on topics specific to their SOGI, ethnicity and migration story to perform the 'good example of otherness' (El-Tayeb, 2012). Paradoxically, (re)viewers often wish to experience works by LGBTQ+ forced migrants 'beyond their assumed topics' (i.e. uncritical of issues concerning SOGI, ethnicity or migration background).

Furthermore, participants note a trend towards increasing representation in the media as well as in (respected) societal functions but are burdened by their token position (Ghorashi

& Sabelis, 2013). Not only are they not allowed to make mistakes but they are also reduced to their role as representatives (ibid.). Some participants argue that they do not wish to carry this burden of representation. Due to this burden, and in comparison to native Dutch peers, they experience an ongoing pressure to perform perfectly (i.e. to fulfill expectations of their assumed social roles).

Another paradoxical affect concerns the commodification of participants, in particular, on gay dating apps. I suggest that this commodification can be explained in light of the politics of homonormativity (Duggan, 2012) in combination with Rubin's (1984) concept of sex hierarchy. I propose native Dutch people may perceive themselves superior in Rubin's (1984) sex hierarchy to the 'ethnic other'. Further, considering that transsexuals and sex workers are perceived as on the lowest ranks of the sex hierarchy (ibid.), notions that it is appropriate, as a 'consumer', to objectify and commodify 'the other' may be reinforced. This mode of othering entails the 'ethnic other' being fetishized (objectified and commodified), as well as simultaneously being feared (or rejected).

A further example of how hegemonies affect LGBTQ+ forced migrants, concern the intersection of various characteristics of participants' identity making it harder to 'belong' in any particular community. LGBTQ+ forced migrants' reasons for exclusion from their respective *ethnic* communities, can be explained by the *LGBTQ+* component of their identities. (e.g. one cannot be Muslim and queer). Queerness, as a form of resisting heteronormativity and homonormativity (Vijlbrief et al., 2020), is neither considered properly Muslim, nor properly Black, nor properly native white Dutch, in dominant hegemonic discourses. Finally, homonationalism, homonostalgia (Mepschen et al., 2010) and homonormativity (Duggan, 2012) can be considered reasons for exclusion of *TQ* forced migrants from the Dutch *LGB* community.

However, I claim there is a paradox between homonationalism and homonostalgia on the one hand, which argue that the 'western self' is advanced in women's and gay emancipation (Mepschen et al., 2010), while on the other hand, homonormativity pressures emancipated LGBTQ+ forced migrants to 'not be too political' (Duggan, 2012). The narrative of the 'western modern self' versus 'the traditional other' thus contradicts itself. 'The traditional other', in the case of LGBTQ+ forced migrants, actually seems to be more emancipated than the 'modern self'. Hence, LGBTQ+ forced migrants often explicitly resist forms of inequality and oppression, such as sexism, racism, and transphobia. In contrast, it seems that the 'modern self' rather forces 'the other' to stick to the role of 'depoliticized traditional other', whilst valuing its own Dutch traditions more (e.g. the widespread support of the figure of Black Pete [Zwarte Piet] (Rademaker, 2020).

What can be identified as art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' agency in the context of Dutch hegemonies?

I suggest that hegemonies lead to paradoxes which can be considered as forms of liminal spaces (Turner, 1979). Next to paradoxes as liminal spaces, I argue that liminality can also be found in 1) queerness, due to notions of betweenness in gender and sexuality (Monro, 2005); 2) forced migration, due to the transitory character of migration and asylum procedures from former to new countries (Manjikian, 2014; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013); and 3) art practices, due to the reflexive processes and betweenness of creation, rather than the end result (Turner, 1979). These liminalities provide challenges as well as opportunities for reflection and reconstruction of identities (Beech, 2011).

To withstand and challenge Dutch hegemonies, I thus suggest that queerness, (forced) migration and art practices represent a liminal space in which LGBTQ+ forced migrants' societally perceived paradoxical identities can be reconstructed (Beech, 2011) - as multilayered, personalized, unconventional, as opposed to assimilated, normative identities. I found that practicing queerness establishes a notion of belonging to the queer (refugee, migrant, artist) community. Within the community, participants do not have the burden of having to explain oneself to others. Community then offers emotional and practical support for identity construction to be further encouraged and negotiated in a relatively safe way. Furthermore, because they have less fear of being misunderstood within these communities, participants feel safe to share art practices, further reconstructing identities and ideas of queerness. Hence, engaging in community, expressing queerness and practicing art are all reflexive (discursive agency), as well as playful (creative agency), elements in identity construction, both for individual as well as group identities.

Turning then towards Butler's (1999) concept where identity is argued as performance, I propose the following: instead of judging one's ability to convincingly perform social roles according to hegemonic expectations and thus further reproducing them, society could appreciate personalized, unconventional and multilayered interpretations of these societal roles that rather unsettle hegemonies.

How does art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' agency, in the context of Dutch hegemonies, operate on the micro, meso and macro level?

Considering that queerness, collectivity and art practices are forms of liminalities, they are as

such interwoven and revolve around reflexivity. I propose that this reflexivity can be both discursive: intentional and reactive to hegemonies (Butler, 1999); as well as creative: playful and unintentionally unsettling hegemonies (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015) (see table 3).

Firstly, on the individual or micro level, being queer, engaging in community, and art practices are forms of reflexive identity (re)construction (Beech, 2011). For instance, one participant's performance on queerness, feminism and Islam can be considered a form of individual self-reflection and identity construction in which the participant discursively negotiates and integrates perceived paradoxical identity components – via their art practice – into a personalized identity. In addition, there are 'mundane' expressions of art, that can be considered expressions of creative agency. Such expression are not reactive, but rather take initiative and create something new (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2015) as well as resist expectations of assumed topics of LGBTQ+ forced migrants (i.e. pain, struggle and trauma).

This brings me to the meso potential of unsettling hegemonies. Returning to the performance on queerness, feminism and Islam, this particularly challenges the homonationalist/homonostalgic idea of Muslims not being emancipated and thus being incompatible with 'liberal Dutch values' (Mepschen et al., 2010). Turner (1979) argues that arts are a form of 'plural reflexivity', affecting and informing the viewer (p. 465). In the context of the participants in this research, I interpret plural reflexivity as sharing, negotiating and communicating one's experiences via art practices, creating representational and educational properties for members within and outside their communities.

On a societal or macro level, most participants regard their art, as well as their queerness, as activism. In terms of art, participants mention making political activist performances with a direct intention to create awareness about societal inequalities. In terms of queerness, participants (collectively) demonstrate against the commercialization of Amsterdam Pride, for instance. Both performative art and demonstrations address issues such as hegemonic gender norms, homonormativity, racism, islamophobia and sexism. I suggest that these are forms of public liminality in which "[t]he powers of the weak - to curse and criticize - set limits on the power of the strong - to coerce and ordain" (Turner, 1979, p. 465). Hence, public liminality can counter hegemonies by publicly suggesting new social propositions (ibid.).

In table 3, I briefly summarize the several forms of discursive and creative agency and how I perceive them on the societal levels.

(How) can art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettle hegemonies in the Netherlands?

Firstly, the answer to the main research question: ‘*Can art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettle hegemonies?*’ is simple. Based on reflections of these specific participants in their specific contexts, the answer is ‘yes, they can’. *How* LGBTQ+ forced migrants can unsettle hegemonies needs more elaboration.

First of all, I argue that the very existence of LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettles Dutch hegemonies. The societally perceived paradoxical identifications (e.g. one cannot be queer and feminist and Muslim at the same time) are challenged by exposing that this societal perception is false. The silencing and invisibility of LGBTQ+ forced migrants is thus arguably the biggest challenge to overcome. This silencing is countered by constructing and expressing one’s identity (via queerness, collectivity and art practices in liminality) and establishing a strong sense of self and a strong sense of community, making it possible to counter such silencing (and thus resist and unsettle hegemonies).

I found that participants discursively and creatively challenge and unsettle several hegemonic norms (i.e. gender norms, relationship norms, sexual norms, religious norms, societal participation norms, norms in terms of individuality, and norms of what is considered to be art). Moreover, in light of their exclusion from several communities, practicing queerness establishes a notion of belonging to the queer (refugee, migrant, artist) community. This sense of community creates mental, emotional, practical and financial support and unsettles norms concerning individuality. Hence, LGBTQ+ forced migrants value and practice a ‘relational sense of identity’ as opposed to a more individualistic one. Further, community creates the opportunity for collective action (activism) that can trigger public reflexivity (Turner, 1979).

Art practices have the potential to entice and/ or provoke individual, plural and public modes of reflection within and outside the community (ibid.). Engaging in community, negotiating ideas on queerness and practicing art reinforce and encourage reflexivity and playfulness. Queerness, collectivity and art practices offer individual opportunities, as well as communal, or even societal, opportunities to reflect and unsettle hegemonies. I therefore consider reflexivity as a central mechanism in each of these three practices. Further, it serves as a starting point to concrete actions in the form of organizing created spaces or activism. I suggest that reflexivity can be both discursive and creative. Thus, despite the challenges, reflection and playfulness (in liminality) results in LGBTQ+ forced migrants acting upon their own situation and resisting hegemonic power by unsettling normalized ways of othering.

Table 3. Discursive and creative agency on micro, meso and macro level

	Discursive agency (reactive, intentional)	Creative agency (playful, unintentional)
Micro	-Being queer, and art practices as <i>reflexive</i> identity construction -Therapeutic and counter-silencing art practices	-Being queer, and art practices as <i>playful</i> identity construction -Mundane artistic expressions
Meso	-Engaging in queer communities, and art practices as <i>reflexive</i> identity reconstruction -Mental, emotional, practical, financial community support -Representational, educational, counter-silencing art practices within and outside communities - Organized negotiated spaces and collective action (activism)	-Engaging in queer communities, and art practices as <i>playful</i> identity construction -Created spaces to safely attend or share, negotiate and communicate via art practices or queerness within and outside the community
Macro	-Activism (demonstrations, sit-ins), activist art practices, queerness as resisting societal norms	-Playful queerness, and art practices outside of conventional language to unsettle in non-discursive ways

Limitations

Firstly, I wish to point out my fear of my own possible unintentional (re)production of hegemonic images of LGBTQ+ forced migrants as victims of a ‘backward culture’ or as threats to a ‘liberal western’ society (Bracke, 2012). For instance, my mentioning of the criminalization of homosexuality in Iran and Morocco may reproduce and strengthen dominant (pre-existing) notions of LGBTQ+ forced migrants as victims of a ‘backward culture’.

Secondly, by inviting LGBTQ+ forced migrants to participate and by asking them to share their experiences (and art works), I inevitably encourage participants to narrate such experiences and achievements through the lens of this identity. This may also reproduce tendencies for participants to be reduced to their ‘label’, ‘struggle’, or their ‘pain’ as ‘victims’. However, the feedback I received from participants themselves was positive.

Finally, I would like to discuss the diversity of the participants. I consider the participants diverse in terms of gender, ethnic and religious background. However, only two participants are Black, one participant is white and seven participants had origins from countries where Islam is the dominant religion. Also, despite diversity in terms of gender identity and gender expression (with cisgender and transgender including non-binary participants), there is less diversity in terms of gender assigned at birth. However, in terms of trans visibility should

a participant's gender assigned at birth ever be considered above the consideration of a participant's actual or identified gender? I find this a difficult question. Nonetheless, an increase of diversity in gender, ethnic and religious background may bring (other) relevant perspectives.

Further research

Considering that identity can be constructed via queerness, collectivity and art practices, the methodological approach itself proved to be an enabling experience for most participants. AFC in particular had transformative properties for some. Most participants expressed gratitude and some reported renewed direction in work and life. For example, prior to AFC a participant had neglected his art practice. However, the work for AFC, in combination with the interview, triggered reflection which caused him to renew his professional commitment in the creative field. He subsequently found a paid internship. Other participants expressed how this project informed their practice and some of their works were shared widely online.

Even though I received personal feedback from participants, it would be interesting to further research whether and how works in AFC affected participants themselves as well as their communities and wider audiences. Currently, I only have my own experience which I consider to be transformative in the sense that I am deeply moved (emotionally and intellectually) by the things I have learned. Particularly, I am moved and unsettled by participants' artistic works, their resilience and their sense of community in supporting one another. It would be interesting to investigate further how their respective communities, as well as the academic audience, have been affected, as well as how participants were affected themselves by the process.

In addition, to my contribution of how art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants' agency functions on the micro, meso and macro level in the Dutch context, a following interesting step would be to investigate the relations of art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants, and their respective connections, on a more global scale. Participants have mentioned specific connections between themselves and other queer refugee artists in Berlin, Munich, Brussels, London, Marrakesh and New York, for instance. I have witnessed some of these connections on social media and noticed that ideas about queerness are further negotiated via these (digital) global connections through specific individuals that seem rather influential. Looking into these global, digital, queer, communities may prove very insightful, in particular in terms of a sense of belonging to these communities and how ideas about queerness are negotiated there.

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Appendices

I Art for Change

Art for Change is a sub-project of *Scholarship for Change*. Here is the [link](#) to the research website ([ESNC](#)). There you will find the following text, written by our research team (Maria Rast, Alexandra Greene, Miriam Ocadiz and myself). In addition, you will find webpages to the individual artists in AFC and their artistic works embedded in the context of the conversations I had with them.

Scholarship for Change

Addressing refugees' challenges and resilience during COVID-19

Around the world, refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented folks are suffering from the social, economic, political, and health effects of COVID-19. In both the Global North and Global South, longstanding structural inequalities (for example, inequalities in healthcare, income, education, housing, water and sanitation) disproportionately impact refugee communities and increase their precarity.

At the same time, it is necessary not to overemphasize refugees' vulnerability, seeing that images of 'dependent', 'unimaginative' and 'victimized' refugees can also be a source of hierarchical relations and structural exclusion. Importantly, when we only focus on refugees' vulnerabilities, we neglect that refugees have directly experienced, and developed strategies to deal with, crisis, chaos, danger, uncertainty, anxiety, insecurity, fear, loss, waiting, isolation, loneliness and separation from loved ones.

Refugees' resilience could, thus, serve as inspiration, and contribute to establishing creative strategies and solutions to struggles provoked by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, stories of refugees' resilience also present the potential to challenge and unsettle taken-for-granted exclusionary images of refugees as either victims or threats, and, instead, position them as resilient (co-)producers of knowledge and expertise.

Scholarship for Change is an expression of engaged scholarship, an effort to practice solidarity during the pandemic. It entails taking time to build spaces of (online) dialogue with refugee communities, with an eye towards forming long-term relationships of reciprocity throughout, and (hopefully), post- COVID-19. These relationships will inform opportunities, as well as challenges and limitations, of engaged scholarship in times of isolation.

Thus, *Scholarship for Change* is also an ongoing process of mutual learning between engaged scholars and refugees. With this in mind, *Scholarship for Change* aims to contribute

in the following ways: first, the project is conducted in close collaboration with our refugee community partners in each context, and responds to specific challenges addressed by them. Second, through processes of co-creation, collaboration, and curation, we will document stories of refugees' challenges, strategies and resilience, which can both inspire creative solutions, as well as challenge and unsettle taken-for-granted exclusionary images of refugees.

Scholarship for Change consists of three context-specific sub-projects:

- *Art for Change – The Netherlands*
- *Food for Change – South Africa*
- *Education for Change – The United States of America*

Together with our refugee community partners in each context, we will agree upon ways to share their stories with a broader audience, depending on the participants' wishes and the types (and media forms) of the stories created. The stories created in the Dutch context (*Art for Change*) will be shared on our website in the coming month. The stories of the other two contexts will be shared at a later time, and in a way that suits the particularities of each context-specific project.

Art for Change - The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, one of our researchers (Master student Fabian Holle, supported by PhD researcher Maria Rast) is conducting research on the role of art practices in the lives of 10 LGBTQ+ artists with a forced migration background. Due to COVID-19 (and measures taken to contain it), these artists are dealing with uncertainties, anxieties and separation from their communities and loved ones. Additionally, seeing that most artistic assignments and events have been cancelled, some experience a loss of income. Through *Art for Change*, we try to find a way (and learn more about how) to show solidarity through engaged scholarship in times of a pandemic. We began by connecting with these artists (online), engaging in conversations and interviews, and inviting them to develop remunerated artistic works (using creative writing, music, graphic design and film) about (their) experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through processes of (knowledge) co-creation, collaboration, and curation, we documented stories of these artists' challenges and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking into consideration that arts-based research methods bear the potential of creating a novel space for alternative narratives, critical voices, emotions, hope, and creative ideas, our aim was

also to establish a space for stories that challenge and unsettle dominant negative images of refugees.

The stories and artistic works are moving, unsettling, and profound, as the artists express their experiences and feelings at the intersection of gender, sexuality and (forced) migration. At times, the artists challenge, call out and resist exclusion in their stories and works with anger and defiance: *“We are tired and not going to shut up about it”* (Sadiqa). While at the same time, they express beauty, humor and vulnerability in collectivity: *“A hurricane of queer voices, coming together in solidarity”* (Mamakil). The works break down stereotypes concerning refugees, queers, gender norms, sexuality and sexual practices. Unquestionably, COVID-19 and its physical distancing measures have brought real challenges for these artists and their communities. However, the stories reveal that it has also been a time for reflection and inspiration. In fact, most artists have (re)connected with their art practices, (re)considered what they found important and/or explored new paths...

Together with these artists, we have decided on how to share their stories (based on their artistic works and interviews/conversations) on our website. They are free to share their stories in their own name, anonymously or via a pseudonym, and they have co-ownership of the final products and may use them for purposes other than *Art for Change*. The stories will be published [here](#) in the coming month [July 2020].

II Recommendations on 'engaging as scholars with art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants'

'Queer creations between a rock and a hard place'



Above: *LGBT Warning* by M.R. in 'Art for Change'

Below: Figure 1. *Caught between a rock and a hard place*

A rock

- either 'great' celebrities
- either feared
- either too black
- either too queer
- either too political
- either not 'neutral' enough

A hard place

- or 'bad' criminals
- or fetishized
- or not black enough
- or too muslim
- or too unemancipated
- or not 'other' enough

SUMMARY

Due to the inclusion of queer, trans and gender non-conforming participants of color in this study, their experiences of exclusion within the host gay (Dutch, white, cisgender) community became apparent. Such exclusion serves as an example of how specific intersecting identity characteristics (e.g. queer, Muslim, Black, trans, activist, artist), 'catches' them in several paradoxes 'between a rock and a hard place' (figure 1).

These paradoxes, as well as queerness, migration and art practices can be considered as 'in-between' spaces (Monro, 2005; Turner, 1979). Turner argues that these states or spaces of 'in-betweenness' trigger reflection and potential for creation (1979). Indeed, I found that participants reflect and create from within these 'in-between' spaces and consequently challenge dominant societal perceptions.

I identified participants' reflection and creation from within this 'in-betweenness' on individual, communal and societal levels. At the individual level, queer identities, for instance, are sometimes literally 'in-between', such as trans non-binary individuals who identify as neither male nor female (Monro, 2005). In terms of individual reflection,

(How) can art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants unsettle Dutch hegemonies?

This was the main research question of this study. A simple answer to this question is: art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants challenge dominant narratives that portray refugees as 'dependent', 'incompatible' (with society), 'unimaginative' or 'unemancipated' via queerness, collective actions and art practices.

In this document I will briefly summarize relevant findings of this study together with my research approach. I will then formulate recommendations for engaged scholars about how to engage with art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants, based on what I have learned.

participants often intentionally resist social norms such as gender, sexuality and monogamy. On the community level, reflecting on and expressing queerness is shared in created spaces. In these spaces art works and practices may also be shared. On the societal level, dominant exclusionary narratives are often challenged by art practices, queerness and collective action in the form of activism (e.g. demonstrations), or via playful means such as images, songs or performances (Young, 2001).

Hence, 'being in-between' can be challenging, but at the same time it has value since it is a state of reflection and creation in which dominant exclusionary taken-for-granted assumptions are, or can potentially be, unsettled.

APPROACH

To answer the question 'how to challenge dominant societal perceptions of refugees as 'dependent', 'incompatible', 'unimaginative' or 'unemancipated', one needs the knowledge and experience from individuals that are "not limited to the Eurocentric variety" (Wekker, 2017). I thus engaged and co-created knowledge with a group of eleven art practicing LGBTQ+ forced migrants in the Netherlands,

that are diverse in terms of gender, sexuality, art practice, ethnic and religious background. Seven participants are transgender (including five non-binary), and their origin countries include Morocco, Iran, Afghanistan, Brazil, Belarus, Congo and Burundi.

A feminist participatory approach itself has the potential to challenge conventional research methods in which narratives about participants as victims are sometimes being reproduced (Lenette, 2019). Thus, to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, I aimed to co-create knowledge *with* participants as opposed to create knowledge *about* participants via conversations and an arts-informed participatory approach *Art for Change* (AFC).

Participants were asked to create remunerated works in response to Covid-19. During the month of July 2020, 10 artists' works were then published⁶ accompanied by text extracts from conversations with the artist-participants.

In conversations with participants about their works and life in general, I shared my own story to establish trust, reciprocity and conversation flow. We then talked about participants' *art practices*, as opposed to their *art*, to take away questions of what is considered art. Moreover, the discussion focused on (reflexive, creative) processes themselves rather than the success of particular works.



Under The Flag by M.R. in 'Art for Change'

HOW 'AFC' AFFECTED SOME

Due to the fact that participants' art works were remunerated, and by focusing on art practices and creativity, I found that participants felt valued and taken seriously. In fact, one participant realized via reflecting and creating in *Art for Change* that he wanted to work professionally in graphic design

again. He then created a CV and online portfolio, and recently found a paid internship in which he currently feels happy and excited. Two others bought equipment for their art practices and have been successful in sharing their works with messages of queerness and decolonization to larger online queer communities in the Netherlands and Morocco.

The project itself was an ongoing process of reflection and mutual learning between myself and the participants. Next, I formulated some recommendations for other scholars to consider, based on my experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How to engage as engaged scholars with queer refugee artists in order to (find ways to) challenge dominant societal narratives that portray refugees as 'dependent', 'incompatible' (with society), 'unimaginative' or 'unemancipated'?

1) Value participants' art and knowledge by inviting them to create remunerated artistic works and create an (online) space for the sharing of works, embedded in the conversation, with an audience.

2) Focus on artistic/ creative practices as a point of departure, instead of pain or trauma.

3) Work from an appreciation (and assumption) of participants' creativity, strength and resilience, and keep on critically reflecting on your own assumptions about LGBTQ+ forced migrants.

4) Try and engage with diverse groups in terms of gender, sexuality, art practice, ethnic and religious background. Participants, queer Muslims in particular, mentioned feeling silenced as well as being a 'minority within a minority within a minority'.

5) Invest in building a relationship of trust by showing up to relevant events, memorials or demonstrations. Due to queer activists' focus on unequal power relations, they sometimes distrust 'more privileged' people.

6) Be vulnerable by sharing (bits of) your own biography, to establish trust and reciprocity.

7) Think of ways to continue and solidify the relationship of mutual learning, by for instance collaboratively negotiating terms for an online or offline safe(r) space to share art works and have discussions.

8) Finally, have lots of patience in co-creating knowledge with participants. Some may hardly respond, but still want to be part of the project.

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⁶ Art For Change, (2020). In *Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change* from <https://engagedscholarshipnarrativesofchange.org/scholarship-for-change/art-for-change>

III Reflection on feedback of recommendations from stakeholder

August 5, 2020 via Zoom

Presentation for stakeholder(s):

VICI Engaged Scholarship and Narratives of Change in Comparative Perspective

The Refugee Academy

Present: prof. dr. Halleh Ghorashi, Maria Rast, dr. Tara Fiorito, Alexandra Greene,
Miriam Ocadiz, Timo Korstenbroek, Younes Younes and Simone Aumaj

On August 5, 2020, I presented and summarized the findings of this study, together with my research approach, to the stakeholder (including my supervisors). When I finished my online presentation there was a silence. I wondered if I should have prepared a PowerPoint presentation, for instance. Then, one of my supervisors, thanked me for the presentation, the interesting research with beautiful findings, and recommendations.

A critical question was asked: ‘How can the Refugee Academy, as a learning infrastructure, be a space for the participants in this study (queer, refugee, artists) for mutual learning? What can be the added value of the Refugee Academy for the participants?’ My answer to this question was that the research approach enabled reflection and creation which I consider a form of learning, due to its focus on art practices. However, this answer did not really satisfy. The participants in this research, of which some are queer activists, do not always trust people in powerful positions, or ‘privileged people’. Thus, the question was reframed as: ‘What are recommendations to close this gap and enable mutual learning?’

In line, with this question, my other supervisor asked if, and how, I see a possible continuation for *Art for Change*, with this specific group of participants, and what role the Refugee Academy could play in this continuation. I then answered, that a continuation could be a great possibility for negotiating a space and mutually deciding upon terms with the participants in regards to how such a space could feel safer(r). This could further enable a mutual valuable learning experience, and solidify the relationship between a queer refugee artist (activist) community and scholars in the Refugee Academy and VICI research team. I can imagine online or offline possibilities for such a space where artistic works and stories can be shared. For instance, a performance evening with discussions and music, or maybe a film or YouTube series where participants are co-authors and co-decide upon topics.

Other reflections were made by one researcher who has personal acquaintances identifying as LGBTQ+ forced migrants with Islamic backgrounds. Questions then arose on what

institutions such as municipalities can practically do to make spaces more inclusive and safe for this specific group. My thesis, unfortunately, does not provide any such recommendations for institutions although I found these questions very relevant.

Another question concerned an ethical consideration I had mentioned. It regarded the possibility of an exploitative aspect in the remuneration of participants for their artistic works. I claimed that one or two participants may not have participated in case it was not remunerated due to their mental health issues. The question was asked: ‘By bringing up this consideration, do I assume that the experience was not beneficial for the participant in question?’ An additional question was: ‘What did I do to make the research experience (encounter) itself positive, or beneficial for participants’ sense of wellbeing?’ I answered that it was first and foremost a consideration of a possible exploitative element to remuneration. I then explained that I do actually think it was a beneficial and beautiful experience for these participants. Having reflected more on this issue after the presentation was finished, I realized that the term ‘exploitative’ is not appropriate here. I therefore, reframed this ethical consideration differently in the methodology chapter. Some participants had mentioned that in comparison to former experiences with research(ers) they had not experienced ‘opening up like this before’, and that ‘I touched their life’. My supervisor then suggested that a recommendation to the brief could be added: ‘The Refugee Academy can be a safer space, due to its diverse members in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and (forced) migration background’.

Finally, it was pointed out that my research was beautifully embedded in the topics of engaged scholarship and how many issues connected to the online literary discussions we had within the research team over the past few months (concerning engaged scholarship, positionality, decolonizing and polarization, for instance). I left the Zoom meeting feeling thankful for such interesting and critical reflections which I then included in the ‘recommendations document’ above.

IV Interview questionnaire

Thank you for meeting me to share your story. I'm interested in your life story in general, where you were born, how you grew up, when you came to the Netherlands, how life is here for you, and which experiences were important and made you into the person you are today. Furthermore, I'm specifically interested in what practicing art/ dance/ film/ drag meant for you throughout your life, in relation to your identity, the world around you and the world you would like to see. What your art is about and things you are proud of. I would love for it to be more a conversation as opposed to just asking you questions. I can start if you like?

I grew up in different foster families from when I was 10 years old. My biological father is from Indonesia, my biological mum is Dutch. She died when I was 10 and my father went to prison. So my sisters and me got split up and I stayed with three different foster families over time. They were all white Dutch working class families. I always felt different, the odd one out. In each family I had to adapt to their different rules, norms and values, which they took for granted. I was a very shy and quiet kid. Growing up, I was usually drawing female superheroes and I played a lot of female and male superheroes. I secretly wanted to do ballet just like my sister, but I didn't dare to ask my parents because my father really wanted me to 'become a real man'. So he wanted me to do judo and karate, but I hated it. Then my sister suggested that I should do theater and that's what I did. Theater was more boyish than ballet, but I could still be feminine and soft. A few years ago I started developing my drag persona. I then realized how scary it was to go out on the street with heels and some makeup on. That was an eyeopener for me. I started reading more about gender and queerness and became interested in sociology. That's what I study now.

- And what about you? How did you become the person and artist that you are today and what did and does art mean to you throughout your life? Feel free to start at one of the first important experiences in your life (which might even be in your childhood).

Country of origin and host country

- Where were you born?
- Why did you come to the Netherlands?
When was that?
- What were some of your first impressions and early experiences in this country?
- Could you think of moments that you felt something like: 'a sense of belonging'?

Could you describe a moment?

- Are there moments or places that you feel: 'I don't belong here' / excluded?

Can you describe a moment that you feel excluded?

- Do you feel represented (enough) by the LGBTQ+ community in NL?

Do you ever feel discriminated within the LGBTQ+ community?

How do you deal with that?

- How do you feel about Gay Pride?

Corona

- What challenges do you face in this COVID-19 pandemic?

How do you deal with those challenges?

- What role does your art practice play in these times of COVID-19?

- Do current experiences (challenges and strategies) relate to earlier experiences in your life?

- How do you envision the world after the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Could you tell a little bit about the ideas behind the works?

Art practices

- Can you tell me how you got involved in your art practice?

What got you interested?

- What are challenges or difficulties in practicing your art here in the NL?

The audience? Personal challenges? Language? Financing? Public discourse?

Discrimination? Violence? Ethnic community? Practicing it anonymously?

Why?

- What helps you practicing this art form?

Support from the community? Inspiring people? Frustration?

- What are you most proud of regarding your art practice?

- What do you want to achieve?

What's your goal or dream?

- What kind of messages do you try to get across through your art practice?

- Do you consider yourself an activist? When yes:

What would you like to see change or improve?

Would you say your art is activist?

- What does queer mean for you?

Final questions

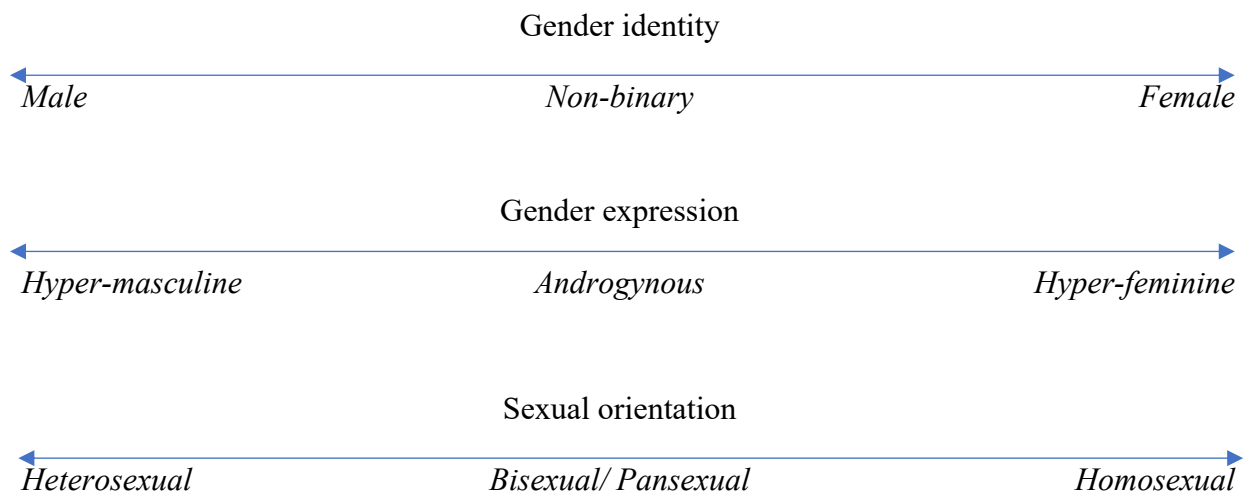
- Are there any things that you want to tell me that we didn't cover?
- If you think back on all the things you just said, are there certain things that are especially important for you?

Thank you so much for your openheartedness and time. I really appreciate it. I want to remind you again, that you will be pseudonymized, as mentioned in the consent form. If there are any things you remember and want to add, please let me know.

- Do you have a preference for a name?
- Which pronouns should I use in writing?
- Do you have any questions or remarks for me?

V Queer terminology

Figure 4. Visual representation of sexuality and gender on the spectrum.



LBGTQ+

In addition to the previous LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) abbreviation, nowadays it is considered more inclusive to add QIA (queer or questioning, intersex, asexual) or simply Q+, to cover identities that are not included (Gold, 2018).

SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity)

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation concerns romantic, physical and emotional attraction towards the same, the opposite or both male, female and everything in between or outside the gender spectrum (Vijlbrief et al., 2019). Heterosexual is a term for people that are attracted to the opposite gender. Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) concerns attraction towards the same gender or both male and female genders (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). The Netherlands Institute of Social Research (SCP) estimates that 4% to 6% of the Dutch population identifies as LGB (Kuyper, 2016).

Gender identity

Gender is constructed in specific sociocultural contexts: it concerns feelings, behaviors and attitudes about one's gender. Gender can be masculine, feminine or something in between or outside. Judith Butler argues that society constructs gender in masculine and feminine, based on the essentialist concept of two biological sexes: male and female (Vijlbrief et al., 2019).

Gender is constituted through a repetition of acts in time; how one identifies is a result of public discourses and social validations (Butler, 1999). However, gender as a result of repetitive acts and public discourse creates a paradox: ‘Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all’ (Butler, 1990 in Rivkin & Ryan, 2004, p. 908).

Gender expression

Gender expression can be different from gender identity. It is a form of agency that enables unsettling essentialist ways of thinking about sex and gender by non-compliance to social expectations. Drag artists are an example of subverting social expectations of gender (Vijlbrieff et al., 2019).

Transgender

Transgender is an umbrella term for those whose gender identity or gender expression does not match their assigned sex at birth (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). Thus including “cross-dressers, transsexuals, androgynes, intersexes (people born with a mixture of male and female physiological characteristics), drag artists, third gender people, and other “gender-complex” people, for example, “gender queer” people—gender queer is defined roughly as any type of transgender identity which is not always male or female, i.e., as a mixture of male and female or as no gender” (Monro, 2015, p.). Transgender people can be binary or non-binary trans. Binary trans people usually refer to trans men that are assigned female at birth (female to male, FTM), or trans women that are assigned male at birth (MTF) (Vijlbrieff et al., 2019). Gender non-binary people do not conform to stereotypical gender expressions and identities and label themselves in many different ways: gender neutral, genderfluid, non-binary and genderqueer for example (ibid). Sometimes they choose neutral pronouns such as the singular ‘they’ and ‘them’ to refer to themselves and other non-binary people.

Cisgender

Cisgender people are persons where one's gender identity and gender expression match the gender they were assigned at birth (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018).

Queer

Queer is generally used as a term to cover culturally marginalized sexual identities (Jagose, 1996). There are however, more specific uses of the term: whereas LGBT identities can be

(homo)normative, queer deviates (actively) from the norm (Vijlbrief et al., 2019). Members of the Rotterdam queer community describe queer as: “not exclusively gay and lesbian; it is an independent, equal, borderless, D.I.Y., provocative and genderfuck way of thinking, behaving and acting” (Gender Bending Queer Party, 2019). For the latter it is a chosen political position, that resists racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, ableism, ageism, body-shaming and normative beauty standards (ibid).

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