Wait here and be grateful

The illusion of colonial hospitality and the decolonial resistance of asylum seekers
in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the pervasive influence of colonality in the lived experiences of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Based in intersectional and decolonial feminist theories and methodology, my aim was to centre the silenced narratives of this marginalised group. By highlighting the conditional nature of hospitality, which perpetuates the asymmetrical power imbalance between the superior ‘host’ and inferior ‘guest’, the aim was to show how colonality impacts the social and ethical dimension of the lives of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Simultaneously, I tried, together with the research participants, to find decolonial options to resist this colonality, while proposing alternatives for a more humane and equitable decolonial otherwise. After conducting conversations with six asylum seeker men, I found that they face multiple colonial encounters on a daily basis, presenting in exclusionary patterns of racialization and victimisation, systems of control that erode their agency, while leaving them in a liminal state of uncertainty. With the use of thematic analysis, I concluded that decolonial resistance against this means the right to speak out, the right to refuse assimilation and the establishment of community that is grounded in relationality and pluriversality, rejecting the conditional nature of the existing colonial system, while welcoming everybody not as just guests, but as full members who are capable of co-creating a better, hospitable society and decolonial future.

Keywords: Agency, Asylum Seekers, Change, Community, Colonialism, Colonality, Crisis, Decoloniality, Dehumanization, Exclusion, Feminist Studies, Forced Migration, Gender, Hospitality, Inclusion, Intersectionality, Liminality, Migrants, Migration, Modernity, Pluriversality, Race, Racism, Refugees, Relationality, Resistance, Victimization.
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Introduction

During the summer of 2022, Médecins Sans Frontières was called to deliver medical aid in the Netherlands for the first time since the organisation was founded. Due to an increased number of forced migrants arriving, who wanted to apply for asylum, the registration centre in the village of Ter Apel was overextended and could not handle the amount of applications (NOS, 2022). There were not enough beds to provide and people were forced to spend the night outside, sometimes for weeks on end. At its lowest point, more than 700 people were forced to sleep outside, including children, sick people and pregnant women. The tents brought by NGOs to provide at least some shelter, were removed at the request of the municipality ‘due to security measures’, while the lack of facilities led to unhealthy conditions, creating an inhumane and unacceptable situation (MSF, 2022).

Although often framed as an ‘immigration crisis’, it is actually a hospitality and solidarity crisis that is going on in Europe. In the context of the Netherlands, we can clearly see how this crisis is manifesting itself within national spheres. Besides the situation in Ter Apel last summer, in July 2023 the longest-ever sitting Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, resigned after the sitting government collapsed because of a disagreement over asylum policies (Bubalo & Greenall, 2023). With the upcoming elections taking place ten days after finishing this thesis, the main topic being discussed is migration. And although asylum seekers make up only 11% of the total number of migrants that arrived in the Netherlands in 2022 (CBS, 2023), it is this group where all debates and discussions are focused on. Asylum seekers are depicted as the ones to blame for the crisis, often framed as ‘invaders’ that come in ‘flows’ or ‘waves’ to the Netherlands and unipple the status quo. These narratives mould the political and public opinion into one that sees any form of newly arriving people as a threat. The political reactions and presented solutions, especially just before the elections, are very limited and hostile, only providing phoney suggestions or proposals of closing borders, all based on the desire to protect the nation state and its citizens (Chiovenda, 2020). Simultaneously, the ‘immigration crisis’ only seems to strengthen the political claim that hospitality should be reduced in order to preserve social order and the harmony of the nation state (Chamberlain, 2019). The fact that this chaos in Ter Apel was
created by the Dutch government itself after years of right-wing political governance that deliberately cut money for asylum (Teeven, 2023), is ignored.

After reviewing the Cambridge Dictionary in order to define ‘hospitality’, I learned that it means ‘the act of being friendly and welcoming to guests and visitors’. This brings along two issues: first, the implication of the act of friendliness that is lacking, as shown above in the context of the Netherlands. It highlights the fact that coloniality, as the continuous colonial framework that determines Eurocentric knowledges as superior, leaks into the here and now and determines how asylum seekers are perceived and treated (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). The scarcity of hospitality makes the lives of asylum seekers more hostile, especially for those who have historically been placed in the lowest ranking of the social hierarchy, and who are, because of their racial differences, considered disposable (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2016). The second issue with the definition of hospitality lies in the notion of the ‘guest’, showing that there is a binary distinction between the ‘host’ and the ‘guest’. In reality, the latter implies many limitations and conditions (Bauder et al., 2023), while the created distinction reproduces and reinforces existing social hierarchies (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022). This shows, for example, in the way in which asylum seekers are reduced to merely ‘receivers’ of help and support, needing to be ‘thankful’ for that, while the host nation is placed in a position of superiority (Savaş & Dutt, 2023).

The way that nation states, in particular the Netherlands, and the society within, deal with newly arrived asylum seekers, and how these ways of dealing are steeped in coloniality, is the starting point of this thesis. I want to better understand and document how subtle and explicit coloniality shows in the lived experiences of those who were forced to flee (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022), and have arrived in the Netherlands. First of all, I will critically question the colonial/modern imaginary that defines the lives of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. This I will do by discussing the colonial encounters that asylum seekers in the Netherlands face, be it the hostile environment they are living in, the liminal space in which they are all but hospitably welcomed, or the confrontation with their racialized identity. Simultaneously, I will, together with my

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research participants, try to think of alternative, more decolonial forms of (understanding) hospitality. With that, I hope to move away from current Eurocentric binary views on hospitality, in which there seems to be an exclusive right of the presumed host to impose conditions of hospitality (Chamberlain, 2019). Instead, my aim is to find decolonial alternatives that seek ways to subvert the ‘normal’ order of things and propose possibilities of an otherwise (Walsh, 2018).

Hospitality in this current global system is under attack, due to neoliberalism and capitalism and coloniality that prioritise some humans over others. It might be realistically impossible to implement some form of unconditional hospitality, in which the ‘stranger’ is accepted and embraced without conditions (Chiovenda, 2020). But, after two years of following a masters programme with the name Intersectionality and Change, I have learned that change is always possible and that it is my duty to think about that change, especially from the perspective of those who need it the most. I still see ‘a horizon of hope’ beyond what is offered by that system (Stein et al., 2020, p.56). I believe that a decolonial approach, as radical or utopian they may be, can provide this hope. The hope for a future in which we are not facing a hospitality and solidarity crisis, but in which hospitality is at the base of our practices.

**Aim, Limitations and Research Question**

The aim of this thesis is firstly to contribute to the discourses on forced migration from a decolonial and intersectional feminist perspective, by showing how these perspectives can critique and meaningfully deconstruct the dominant narratives about forced migrants, specifically asylum seekers. These dominant narratives have a tendency towards a-historical, a-contextual and generalizable frameworks that do not focus on the interlocking systems of oppression that impact asylum seekers’ lived experiences (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). We are thus in need of a more intersectional and decolonial approach to give clear insights how the lived experiences of asylum seekers and the (very conditional) practices of hospitality are intertwined with coloniality as such (Farahani, 2021). Alongside other critical thinkers and activists, I recognize that the lives and livelihoods of asylum seekers are subsidised by violent and unsustainable systems of coloniality. Coloniality means the continuous framework that defines
our lives, in which the Eurocentric social, cultural, ethical, epistemic and ontological norms are presented as superior, universal and good for all (Tlostanova, 2020), while excluding, dehumanising and nullifying the social, cultural, ethical, epistemic and ontological knowledges of people who are ‘other’ (Vázquez, 2012). I want to expose how coloniality shows and impacts the lives of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, by inquiring about the ‘colonial encounters’ they face, i.e. how their lived experiences can be connected to coloniality. Following the twofoldness of this thesis, I will also propose decolonial alternatives to hospitality, by presenting the ways in which hospitality shows up, or not, and how alternative views on hospitality can be understood as a form of decolonial resistance against the colonial encounters. Finding alternatives to current ways of (very conditional) hospitality is important to the task of contesting social exclusion (Squire, 2011) and is thus an intersectional and decolonial feminist responsibility to do.

Therefore, my research questions are as follows:

- In what ways do asylum seekers in the Netherlands encounter coloniality?
- What are decolonial alternatives to hospitality that can resist these colonial encounters?

Although this thesis is way too limited to write down all interconnected colonial issues, it is my aim to at least point out some, as well as show how decolonial and intersectional feminist perspectives can acknowledge the complexity of asylum seekers’ lived realities in this very moment in the Netherlands. I thus will write this thesis following the invitation of Bauder et al. (2023) to seek other, less Eurocentric dominant ways of knowing about forced migrants and hospitality in academic discussions, and Savaş & Dutt’s (2023) demand for more academic research for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of forced migrants, specifically asylum seekers. In addition I will follow Tlostanova’s (2020) attempt to connect decolonial thinking with current global challenges.

This thesis is not a finished research, providing unambiguous factual answers. Experiences of migration are complex and situated and always interconnected with political, historical, economical and social aspects of life. But since I only have a very limited amount of space to write, I had to make a lot of decisions about what to cover. I did not create a thesis that discusses
all aspects of the migrational experiences of my participants, nor did I try to create a sterile, instrumental approach that oversimplified the issues as isolated islands. Instead, it has been a research-in-progress, which is, even after handing it in, still in progress of producing other and less hierarchical and factual types of knowledge.

I am committed to a just, inclusive and dignified environment for forced migrants and other oppressed people (Savaş & Dutt, 2023), especially for those who are waiting for their future to be decided, who are “taken out of the flow of life, sometimes for years on end, when the actual term of his life on earth is stolen and he can never be sure that he would not be finally deported back to the hell from which he attempted to escape” (Tlostanova, 2020, p.21). And so, my decolonial task is to collect the stories of marginalised people who otherwise would remain ignored and silenced, and share them (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022). One way in which that can manifest itself, is by understanding that real listening is the first and foremost decolonial resistance, since colonality is also constantly silencing the ‘other’ (Vázquez, 2012). This voicing is not only important for the sake of the research, but also, if not mostly, because actual change in practice is not possible without firstly listening to the experiences and needs of the people involved (Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020). Following Maria Lugones’ (1987) notion on world-travelling, which is a decolonial approach of making a journey between different worlds of meaning with a loving perception, it has also been my aim to create a space for the participants of this research to feel a sense of freedom and safety to talk openly about their lived experiences. Although I know that I cannot change the world by writing this thesis, I know that by creating the space to talk, in which there is trust and the knowledge that one is heard and that their opinion matters, real connection can appear. These connections can result in deep coalitions between interrelated others that span across differences, towards an alignment of understanding each other (Lugones, 2003), in order to build ground for future solidarity (Tlostanova, 2019).

Situating the research

This research is set in the context of the Netherlands. First of all, it is important to understand that ‘refugees are not the product of the crisis external to Europe, they are the product of
‘Europe’ itself” (Picozza, 2021, p.7), in order to understand that (forced) migration is inherently related to colonialism and coloniality. Secondly, let’s keep in the back of our minds the long histories of Dutch colonialism, which means almost four centuries of imperial interventions across the globe, leaving traces everywhere. The colonial legacy, especially in the Dutch context, is evident in the presence of coloniality in the Dutch society and mindset, i.e. showing up in the othering discourses (Ghorashi, 2018). The term ‘migrant’ has a largely undesirable connotation in the Dutch context, implying a hierarchy that reflects the Dutch sense of superiority over the ‘migrant other’ (Ghorashi, 2018).

Although the Dutch asylum system expects and obliges migrants, especially those from non-Western origin, to integrate well, it is simultaneously creating an environment in which it is almost impossible to meet these expectations. This applies especially for those who are currently in their asylum procedure, like the research participants, who are waiting for their asylum procedure to start, continue or to finish while residing at asylum centres, or Asielzoekercentrum (asz) in Dutch. With almost no activities organised and a very small amount of money provided to them, the residents of the azs are just biding their time. The azs are seen as parallel societies, apart from the rest of the society. They are ‘non-places’ where, according to Agamben (1998), people live in a permanent state of exception. This state can also be described as a ‘limbo’ or ‘liminality’, in which one resides in a transitional period from one into another (Turner, 1994). At the same time, as Fresia and Von Känel (2016) argue, living in an azc should not be completely reduced to a limbo, in which the asylum seekers are merely passive victims. In line with Ghorashi et al. (2018), I want to acknowledge that there are also other possibilities and forms of agency. I will thus focus on a more complex understanding, as well on their resilience strategies within the impossible structures of the azc’s and the Dutch asylum procedure.

In the past few years, the Dutch asylum policies have become more and more restrictive. The governmental organisation that is in charge of arranging shelter for asylum seekers in the Netherlands, Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers (COA), has to deal with many contradictory demands of control (Ghorashi et al., 2018). Research has shown that most of these demands stem from political reasons that try to discourage forced migrants from coming to the Netherlands in the first place (Ghorashi et al., 2018). This does not only show in the liminal environment that
the asylum seekers have to live in, but also in the restrictive policies that asylum seekers face once they apply for asylum, and in the imposed restrictions that limit their ability to participate in society. Since they have to wait for at least six months to apply for a citizen service number in order to work (COA, n.d.), the only thing they can do is wait. People waiting with a Dublin case\(^2\), or those who did not start their procedure at all, cannot apply at all. And even if they apply for a citizen service number and receive it, often after another long waiting period, they are only allowed to work for 24 weeks a year (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2018), if they find work in the first place.

The fact that during their asylum procedure it is made difficult to participate in Dutch society, amplifies the difficulties to integrate well, although that is what is expected of them. Unable to adapt to the ‘authentic’ (white) Dutchness, migrants of colour thus face many challenges (Wekker, 2016). The ideal integration and assimilation requires them to follow Dutch norms, while coloniality manifests as the ‘otherness’ that implies social, cultural and economical hierarchies, claiming that migrants are lacking that and are in need of ‘development’ for successful integration (Wekker, 2016).

**Situating the participants**

I have been thinking a lot about which terminology to use. The participants could be perceived as refugees, which according to the definition of the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 is someone who:

“Owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, [...] is unwilling to return to it.” (UN General Assembly, 1951, p.14).

Although this category of ‘refugee’ is seemingly neutral and objective, it also reflects national interests and priorities that change over time, and is thus constantly formed and transformed in

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\(^2\) The Dublin Convention means that the first EU country of arrival is responsible for the reception and asylum procedure of a refugee. When some continues to another country and applies for asylum again, one can be deported to the previous country.
response to shifting political views and interests (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Also, the creation of categories like ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ as if they simply exist as empty vessels, homogenise and over-simplify the experiences of the people they contain, while distinguishing and discriminating between those on the move (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). This differentiation perpetuates a simplistic dichotomy between the experiences of people on the move, in which the distinction creates their legitimacy of international protection (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). It divides people into those who seem to deserve and those who don’t, while it also creates a situation in which people have to constantly prove themselves to fit into the ‘right’ box to receive international protection.

I thus decided not to reproduce these distinctions, since I see them as colonial, and instead move beyond these binaries like Crawley & Skleparis (2018) suggest. Hence, I will refer to the participants as ‘forced migrants’, since they have been all forced to migrate from their home countries. But since the term ‘forced migrant’ is more of an umbrella term, including refugees, stateless people, undocumented people, temporary visa holders, asylum seekers and so on (Savaş & Dutt, 2023), I had to specify and also use the notion ‘asylum seeker’. An asylum seeker is, according to Amnesty International (2023), a (forced) migrant who hasn’t been legally recognized as a refugee yet, and who is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Since the participants are all in the process of claiming asylum in the Netherlands, this term is most accurate to use. Although ‘asylum seeker’ feels restrictive and limiting, it is also a term that demarcates the broad term of ‘forced migrant’, and best describes current situatedness of the participants in terms of immigration status. This immigration status defines their interaction with the state and is connected to their designated role as ‘guest’ opposing the ‘host’ nation state. Although I rather not reproduce distinctive terminologies to describe individual people, especially terminologies that seem to invalidate other identity remarks, it is for the sake of this thesis that I decided to go along with this term of ‘asylum seeker’.

**Intersectionality - researching men**

An intersectional feminist perspective critiques the binary divisions that are constructed. One issue I critically question is the binary between citizen and non-citizen, trying to understand if there is an absolute distinction or if it is more of a continuum and an assemblage between
multiple categories (Carastathis et al., 2018). Going back to Crenshaws’ (1989) traffic metaphor, and applying it to the participants of this specific thesis, namely asylum seekers who all happened to be male, I can see that they all find themselves at an intersection that comes from multiple directions, namely gender and race, as well as immigration status and age.

Although I will not go deep into the gender aspect in the analysis, it is important to make a few remarks about my choice to conduct research on men. I should firstly mention that this specific group of participants was not deliberate: the idea was to talk to men, women and non-binary people. But as it happened during the recruitment, which I will elaborate more on in the methodology section, it was only men who I got in touch with. This created an interesting intersectional layer. Among many other intersectional feminists, Mohanty (1984) critiques the simplistic construction of women as a coherent group, which only reinforces the binary division between men and women. I think the same thing can be said of the simplistic hegemonic construction of men. Keeping in mind that men of colour, especially when it intersects with immigration status, do not necessarily fit in the notion of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to men in power who have access to domination and privilege (Connell, 1995). Therefore, I want to point out that being a ‘man’ does not necessarily bring along the privileges we normally assign to that category. I even dare to say that in this current climate, the situation is not at all in favour of male forced migrants of colour. The exclusion of racialized men is rooted in orientalist and colonial dehumanising images that supported European colonisation (Cazzato, 2013). As Edward Said writes, Arab men are perceived as ‘gullible, devoid of energy and initiative’ (Said, 2003, p.39). This orientalist and colonial image goes deep: it is through this racialized idea that they are perceived, and which impacts how they are treated. To illustrate this argument, I can refer to Belgium at this very moment, where single male asylum seekers are not provided any shelter (MacGregor, 2023). Shelter and beds in asylum seeker centres are only provided to women, children and families, but the men who travelled to Belgium alone, often with the idea to bring over their families once they get their residence permit, are forced to stay in alternative shelters (provided by activist solidarity groups) or in the streets. The construction of women and children as more vulnerable and more deserving compared to men, increases the gendered query of deservingness of displaced men (Farahani, 2021). Due to their assumed privilege, and the identity markers that are attributed to them as men, they fall out of the system that provides care.
and protection. They are thus excluded on the basis of their immigration status, race and their gender. It also makes clear that the social values that are attached to hospitality are very gendered (Hamington, 2010). It is therefore important to understand the complex and messy social realities of this group, because it challenges us to think more carefully about categorising (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).

**Situating myself**

No form of decolonization can happen without critical self-reflection and self-critique (Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020). Thus, in order to provide a well-conducted intersectional and decolonial study, I will critically reflect on my own intersectional location (Lykke, 2010), by elaborating on my situated knowledge and positionality (Haraway, 1988).

I am writing from the corporeal experience of being a white, Dutch and thus Northern European, almost-thirty and able-bodied ciswoman with no migrational experience. This has been the only way I have experienced the world around me, and which has shaped and influenced all that I think and question and ask (and don’t ask) (Davis, 2014). Although I take a lot of this for granted, I have since a young age been questioning my positionality, trying to understand the ways in which my positionality brings along many privileges, while trying to be aware of the fact that systems of oppression, racism and inequality do not necessarily harm me. Although I consider myself an intersectional decolonial feminist, or maybe because of this, I am aware of my internalised coloniality, my racism and white superiority. And although I know that these systems exist in me because of where I have grown up, I am constantly trying to reflect upon this and know that I still have a lot of unlearning to do. Therefore, I want to state that this research has also been a significant (un)learning process for me.

I have felt a certain anxiety in writing about ‘the other’ from my positionality, especially ‘others’ that are men, and being confronted with certain power dynamics between us. I have also been anxious to objectify the ‘other’ in a colonial way. But I realised that instead of avoiding it, I should take the opportunity to really know the other, and with that, really know myself. By taking a decolonial point of view, I hope to get to other knowledges that not only teach me about
‘the other’, but also teach me about myself. By stepping away from the normalised ‘arrogant perception’ (Lugones, 1987), based on a colonial objectifying othering which fails to love others and thus being the base for racism and (white) supremacy, it is my aim to world-travel, as described above. This journey between different worlds of meaning, with a loving and playful perception, stemming out of a genuine interest in the other (Lugones, 1987), provides a different base to understand each other. By travelling to other people’s worlds of meaning, we can learn what it is to be them, as well as how they see us (Lugones, 1987), which is the ultimate base to learn about oneself.

**Previous Research**

It was not an easy job to find previous empirical research that is closely related to this thesis. Obviously, there is a lot of research done about (forced) migration, also in terms of hospitality, but none made the clear connection to coloniality as such. Although this shows the need for this kind of research, it took me a while to write this particular section.

Migration studies has been a subordinate social science for a long time in Europe, but that has changed over the past few decades with migration studies not only becoming in vogue, but even becoming institutionalised (Dahinden, 2016). There has been an increase in voices from migration scholars, who have been calling for more critical reflexivity in research around migration (Dahinden, 2016). Much of the criticism is focused on the nation state- and ethnicity-centred epistemology that predominates migration studies, in which a lot of new migrational research has demonstrated how the logic of the nation state informs social scientific research (Dahinden, 2016). Although the field of migration studies has also increasingly adopted decolonial and feminist perspectives in recent years, emphasising the continuity of coloniality in human migration, or dismantling the ongoing power dynamics, it is still Eurocentric perspectives, theories and concepts that continue to determine studies about migration (Bauder et al., 2023). There are obvious direct colonial actions that can be linked to forced migration. Many of the places where people are forced to migrate from are the same lands which nations in the Global North extract from and exploit, as well the places where colonial powers have artificially
created borders that have resulted in ethnic conflicts (Davies & Isakjee, 2019). A lot of the research is focused on connecting those dots.

Other research has been done about the living conditions in the asylum centres and the restrictive policies during the asylum process. Many studies have focused on the effects of the long waiting period, such as Dupond et al.’s (2005) study that concludes that placing asylum seekers in secluded areas can lead to feelings of stress, grief, loss, pain and sorrow. In addition to the research that describe this liminality and temporality of life in an asylum centre, and the often negative impact it has on people, there are also studies that focus on the potentiality of that liminal situation (Pozzo & Ghorashi, 2022). For example, Verdasco’s (2019) study, describes how young asylum seekers find deep meaning in friendship and kinship. Also, a study by Pozzo & Ghorashi (2022) that focuses on the multilingual creativity of young asylum seekers, and how their liminal and super-diverse context enhances conviviality and connectedness.

There has also been an increase in research on hospitality and forced migration from a feminist perspective. For example, Kekstaite’s (2022) recent research, that combines the Derridian hospitality framework with feminist ethics of care in the context of hosting illegalized migrants in Belgium. Farahani (2021) writes on the narrative behind the ‘migration crisis’ and the effects of those narratives in studies on hospitality. Furthermore, the research that came up by using the keywords ‘coloniality’, ‘hospitality’, ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘migration’, mostly led to research about the connections between colonialism and migration, or the colonial legacies of asylum policies, like Capri’s (2018) research. Unfortunately, not much research has been done on current forms of coloniality, nor is there much research from a decolonial point of view. Other than theoretical works by feminist theorists like Ahmed (2000) and Rosello (2001), that have been examining hospitality within the context of colonial power relations, I could find little to no decolonial research about forced migrants in which both hospitality, current coloniality and an intersectional/decolonial feminist points of view were combined, especially not in the context of the Netherlands.
Theoretical Framework

In this part, I will introduce the theories that served as the basis for the analysis. Within decolonial thought, theory is understood as situated. So let’s keep in the back of our minds that theory is also formed and shaped by actors, histories and contexts that are marked by modernity/coloniality and thus by the racialized, classed, gendered, hetero-normativized, Eurocentric systems of power and knowledge (Walsh, 2018).

Modernity/Coloniality

Coloniality means the consistent cultivation and maintenance of economic, social, cultural, ethical, epistemic and ontological dependency on Western and Eurocentric norms, while presenting them as superior and universal (Tlostanova, 2020). Although postcolonialism brings in the assumption that colonialism is something from the past and that we entered a postcolonial era right after the second world war (De Lauri, 2020), there are still inevitable colonial influences that determine our current world. Once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed, coloniality stayed as the general form of domination in the world (Quijano, 2007). Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that make us still fully dependent on ways of thinking, acting and interpreting the world through the norms that are imposed by/in Western modernity (Quijano, 2007; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). These imposed norms which are patterns of power stemming from colonialism, define the way we understand culture, deal with intersubjective relations and produce knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2013). Hence, coloniality is part of our modern experience and maintained in our cultural patterns, in our common sense, in our self-images, and so on, and so we, as modern subjects, ‘breathe coloniality all the time and everyday’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2013, p. 243).

Understanding coloniality in a direct way, means understanding that it also stands in relation with ongoing global crises (Tlostanova, 2020), like migration and the treatment of racialized others who are often the ones forced to flee. The ongoing violence of modernity/coloniality has, for example, led to the intrinsic hatred of and the nullification of those deemed ‘others’. Those who do not fit in the modern/colonial view, are excluded, dehumanised and stripped of their validity, dignity and visibility (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009; Vázquez, 2012). One of the main
characteristics of coloniality is the way it divides people into fully- and not-so-fully human beings (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022). As Maria Lugones (2010) argues, it is colonialism that produced the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human. The white, European, bourgeois man became the fully recognized ‘human’, the one ruling, standing for civilization and reason. On the other side, it were the colonised who became the subjects of rule: they were seen as bestial, sinful, promiscuous and hyper sexual (Lugones, 2010). This way of classifying was done with the aim to damn and dehumanise colonised people, to justifying the access to people's bodies through exploitation in all its forms (Lugones, 2010), as well as to to legitimise the dispensability of and rule over certain human lives i.e. the colonial others, which included racialized people, women (of colour) and indigenous groups (and later refugees and forced migrants), and constantly placed them closer to nature (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022). It also justified the colonisation of memory and their sense of self, their intersubjective relations, and their relations to the land, their sense of reality and identity, as well as social and cosmological organisation (Lugones, 2010).

**Coloniality and migration**

The colonial relations to power are very easily traceable in our current societies (Vlachou & Tlostanova, 2022), as we can also see in patterns of global migration. Firstly, it is neocolonialism that retains the geopolitical terrain of colonial imperialism and colonial advantage (Achiume, 2019), reinforcing the power asymmetry between the West and the rest of the world. At the same time, it is the nation state logic, in which citizens are placed above noncitizens, that stems from the same logic of exclusion as colonialism. The existence of coloniality as the consistent maintenance of the social, epistemic and ontological dependency of the West (Tlostanova, 2020), creates a free pass for Western nations in power to claim their right to exclude noncitizens, e.g. by enforcing their borders, as well as creating policies and circumstances that prohibit the inclusion of migrants (Achiume, 2019). This last point connects to the situation of the participants of this research, for whom coloniality shows up in multiple ways, as I will show later in the analysis.

At the same time, coloniality is also visible in the hierarchical systems of rights (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018), in which a distinction is made between different migrants. It is clear that some
migrants are placed in certain categories rather than others, and that they are somehow more ‘deserving’ than others (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). It is only those who assimilate well enough to Western standards, who deserve belonging (Ahmed, 2010). This highlights that ideal assimilation also encourages the idea of a host society and the (white) people within it as superior and something static, while disregarding the harmful processes that forced migrants might encounter during their processes of resettlement (Ahmed, 2010). Simultaneously, the idea that host societies are merely helpful, and the expectation that forced migrants should be thankful for that, fosters both a lack of understanding of the complexities that they face, as well an even bigger hierarchical gap between them and the host society (Echterhoff et al., 2022). Concurrently, it is the dictation of their lives by the ones in power, in which they don’t have the agency to make personal decisions, makes the present for them a non-life, a limbo-like state, and the future an unknown, dark void (Fry & Tlostanova, 2021).

**Decoloniality**

Coloniality thus consistently functions as the social, cultural, ethical, epistemic and ontological power. In terms of the discourse around migration, there are many different ways of opposing the violence that coloniality brings along. But it is often only the mainstream analysis that is followed, in which forced migration is only framed as a product of war and violence far away from Europe, or as stemming from the lack of access to modern lifestyles and access to universalized knowledge and values. The solutions proposed are, for example, an increase in modern knowledge or the application of Western ideas of peacemaking. But these ‘solutions’ are also based in coloniality, reproducing the colonial hierarchy between the West and the ‘others’.

Decoloniality is the school of thought that opposes this. Decoloniality, as a critique, aims towards a dialogue and decolonial understanding (Vázquez, 2012), by describing the ongoing colonial influences on our current ways of doing, acting, knowing and so on. At the same time, it provides us a lens to deconstruct the moral legitimacy of our current world views. Decoloniality can help to unlearn our colonial ways of thinking, being, feeling, sensing and relating, while at the same time creating other ways of doing without repeating harmful colonial systems (Walsh, 2018). It means firstly contextualising and denaturalizing the universalist claims of modernity, building on longstanding critiques of modernity like post-structuralism (Bermúdez, 2011).
Secondly, it means exposing the mechanism of exploitation, disposal and exclusion of othered subjects, revealing the ‘underside of modernity’ (Vázquez, 2012, p.3). Thirdly, decoloniality reaches out to those who have been silenced and made invisible, understanding their suffering, while listening to alternatives from outside the modern/colonial ways of knowing (Vázquez, 2012).

**Hospitality**

As described in the introduction, hospitality is an interesting topic in terms of decoloniality and feminism and finding other ways than what the system is currently offering us. Hospitality relates to the idea of welcoming the ‘other’, as well as the relationship between the guest and the host (Aparna & Schapendonk, 2020). Jaques Derrida (2005) contends, in his work on conditional and unconditional hospitality, that unconditional hospitality demands, even desires, a welcome and direct acceptance of the ‘stranger’, without questioning or setting conditions. Derrida makes a distinction between conditional hospitality, in which the *arrivant* is checked (extensively) before entering, and unconditional hospitality, in which there is no door or check (Chamberlain, 2019). This latter form of hospitality also invites the ‘unknown other’, without the need for reciprocity or the need to know their name (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).

But, as Chamberlain (2019) draws on Derrida’s concept, hospitality has a big internal contradiction, since it always involves a form of conditionality, namely whether or not the host places conditions on who can receive hospitality and on what terms (Chamberlain, 2019). Hence, the idea of unconditional hospitality is paradoxical, as well as impossible. Because to be able to offer hospitality, also the unconditional form, one must know that ‘you are welcome in my home, without any implication of “make yourself at home” but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am’ (Derrida, 2000, p. 14). This implies a clear communication, and thus a clear distinction between the host and the guest. This simultaneously creates a hierarchical relation between those who belong and those who don’t, which, together with the conditions that govern the terms of the host in their act of hospitality, inherently creates an asymmetrical relation between host and guest (Chamberlain, 2019). Unconditional hospitality, besides being impossible to achieve, is thus something that also implies hierarchical power dynamics.
The way that hospitality is performed in reality is always conditional. That which Derrida considers as conditional hospitality, means only an acceptance with (many) conditions in practice. Situating this in the context of the Netherlands and the hospitality towards asylum seekers, it is clear that this ‘hospitality’ is only carried out with a focus on control (Chiovenda, 2020). There seems to be a need to deeply understand who the l’arrivants are and where they come from, while they are placed in designated spaces that are determined by the state. In order to receive a hospitable form of care, they also have to tell their stories time after time to gain recognition (Chiovenda, 2020). That recognition does not come easily, since it is based in colonality and the racialized and gendered beliefs that determine asylum seekers as inherently untrustworthy, until they prove themselves otherwise, in order to decide if they qualify for hospitable treatment (Kmak, 2015). The necessity to make one's case, in order to judge if one is trustworthy and thus worthy of protection, might be seen as a form of (colonial) violence, according to Derrida (2005).

Hence, hospitality is a feminist issue, being discussed by, among many others, feminist theories like Ahmed (2000), Benhabib (2004) and Anthias (2012). The feminist focus lies in the intersection of inclusion/exclusion, belonging/not-belonging and other binary divisions (Farahani, 2021). The feminist perspective is about focusing on a non-hierarchical understanding of hospitality, that mitigates the power differentials ‘while seeking greater connection and understanding for the mutual benefit of both host and guest’ (Hamington, 2010, p.23). A feminist hospitality means evocative exchanges, in which there is space for the guest and host to disrupt each other’s lives, in order to create meaningful exchanges that foster interpersonal connections and understandings (Hamington, 2010).

Methodology

This is a qualitative study, trying to create epistemologies of social issues and understandings of the world, by focusing on the experiences of its actors (Bryman, 2012). As a decolonial feminist, I feel the same commitment as other decolonial scholars like Vlachou and Tlostanova (2022), who try to distance themselves from the modern rupture between theory and praxis or political
action. I wanted to take a pluriversal perspective, which means connecting theory with real lived experiences, and thus ‘reinstate the experiential nature of knowledge and the origin of any theory in the human life-world’ (Tlostanova, 2019, p. 128). I hope to show that the experiences of the participants can be seen as equally valuable knowledge and can coexist alongside academic sources of knowledge.

And so I chose to write a very personal engaging thesis, because I could not do differently. If I would only focus on e.g. migration policies, or the connection between (neo)colonialism and global migration, I would miss the aim of this thesis, which is really, deeply, truly engaging with the stories of the participants. By really engaging on a personal level, I can write something which takes the experiences of migrants from something abstract, and changes them into something accessible which becomes part of the reality of the reader. The stories they tell become real, which makes those who tell them more human. As researchers, we should not be afraid of encounters with real people and real stories. In fact, it’s the opposite. To create change, if that is what we aim for with our research, it is exactly these real encounters with real human beings and their experiences that need to take place in order to understand each other. This should be done by treating the epistemic, political and cultural practices of the subaltern as equal to those of the dominant group, which I understand as my decolonial task as a decolonial feminist.

**Open-plan fieldwork**

Besides this decolonial task, I tried to involve decoloniality in all its forms in the method and methodology. However, decolonial methods are very limited, mostly because decolonial theorists are questioning the concepts of method as such. It has therefore been a bit of a creative process in which I chose different elements. The book *Fieldwork for Future Ecologies* by Cone et al. (2022) helped me to realise that fieldwork is a process that is not fixed but situated in material conditions, processes and situations that cannot be presumed beforehand. After further research, I found the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective, described by Stein et al. (2022), which questions how to interrupt the colonial patterns that reproduce through mainstream theories of change, while recognizing that decolonization is not a single event, but an ongoing, non-linear process. Both approaches brought me to follow Gayatri Spivak’s (2003) ‘open-plan
fieldwork*, which is fieldwork that is formed and informed by the shifting contexts, dynamics and power relations, which not only affect the formation of the field itself, but also of the researcher. It led me to make this into a participatory research, which prioritises the knowledge and lived realities of those who are members of marginalised communities, as well as to focus on their ideas and possibilities for change (De Smet et al., 2022). For this thesis it also meant that my participants were the main and foremost informants, and that their shared stories and information led my research. So instead of using a top down process, following a clear cut idea of what to write about, I approached this research from the bottom up, only deciding after completing the conversation with my participants what I would exactly write about. I believe this has been an attempt to disrupt the hierarchical (colonial) relationship between researcher and subject (Filler et al., 2021), which is in line with my decolonial aim.

**Participants**

As discussed above, the participants of this research were six adult men, between the ages of 20 and 32, who are currently asylum seekers in the Netherlands. They all reside in asylum centres across the Netherlands, and arrived between three months and two years prior to the moment the conversations took place. All of the participants but one are waiting for their procedure either to start or to continue. One of the participants got his residence permit, and is therefore the exception. Nevertheless, he still lives in the asylum centre, while waiting for a house and his integration process to start, in which he will learn about Dutch culture and the language. All participants have come from conflict areas, either Syria, Yemen or Afghanistan, but due to ethical considerations and safety and privacy measures, I will not clarify who comes from where, nor disclose the locations of the places where they are residing at this very moment. In order to make them non identifiable, but also not to make them into abstract beings, I decided to give them fictional names: Ibrahim, Faheem, Naseem, Hamed, Jabar and Saad.

The recruitment of the participants happened in an interesting way. I have known three of the participants for the past 1,5 years, since I was part of a project that organised weekly activities for young-adult asylum seekers between the ages of 18 and 25. The aim was to provide them with some things to do, to let them connect with their new environment and to provide a sense of community, as well as some distraction from their daily lives. Throughout the project I met
many young people who had to wait patiently for their procedure under very hostile and difficult circumstances, ending in feelings of stress, sorrow and a lot of worries and anxiety. This situation made me decide to dedicate my thesis to this topic. Although I finished working with this particular group prior to this research, just before summer 2023, I decided that they would be the first ones I would ask to participate in this research. At first, I was hesitant to involve people more close to me, which came from the doubt that it might create some ‘bias’. But, after a conversation about it with my supervisor, I realised that involving them would actually mean an enrichment of the research: the trust we had built before could only lead to more deep and interesting conversations. The possible ‘bias’ is thus not something to problematize; instead, research can be theoretical, analytical, accurate and emotional at the same time, especially when it includes personal experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). In addition, I have never presented myself as neutral, impersonal or an unbiased researcher (Frankenberg, 1993), so I want to make it clear that I, as a decolonial feminist researcher doing decolonial research, have really valued the interpersonal bonds with the participants, because it has led to a less hierarchical and superficial researcher-participant relation between us (Adams et al., 2015).

The ever-changing process of writing a decolonial thesis

Continuing on the decolonial track, I decided to involve three members of the group, who were all very eager to talk with me. My initial plan was to organise a group conversation, in the style of the artistic practice of Palestinian architect and researcher Sandi Hilal, and create a ‘living room’, in which the space would be dedicated to hospitality and in which the role of guest and host would be subverted. But as open-plan fieldwork is formed and changed by shifting dynamics (Spivak, 2003), so changed the plan during the organisation of the ‘living room’. It happened that a few of the people involved were transferred to other asylum centres far away from their original location, which made it challenging, both timewise and financially, to collect everybody in the same place at the same time. Although this forced me to rethink this method, it is also important to note that these transfers actually showed perfectly the capriciousness of life as an asylum seeker in the Netherlands, on which I will elaborate more in the analysis and discussion.

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3See https://www.decolonizing.ps/site/introduction-living-room for more information about this project.
So I changed my initial plan into a more straightforward one: namely personal one-to-one conversations. Although I knew it could mean different outcomes, I also realised that by talking personally with each of them, this could create more trust to share some issues that they would hold back in a group conversation. It would also mean more time and personal attention for them to be listened to. After conducting the first three one-on-one conversations with members of the group, which all lasted between one and two hours, the last participant I spoke to told me at the end of our conversation that he had some friends living in his azc who would also be interested in talking with me. He offered to organise a meeting with them to have a group conversation about the topic we had discussed. Since decolonizing knowledges also means the act of working together (Icaza & De Jong, 2018), I was very happy with his offer, because it meant more information for me and my research, and more people whose story could be heard. It also meant that I still got the possibility of conducting group conversation, as my initial plan had been, which would also bring in other dynamics and information I might have missed in the one-to-one conversations. And so we discussed a date, and they invited me to the study room of their azc, in which we had a conversation with four people in total: the person whom I already conducted the one-to-one conversation with, and his three friends. This group conversation lasted about two hours.

**Decolonial conversations**

I keep referring to conversations, because I prefer to use this term instead of ‘interviews’, inspired by Ghemmour’s (2020) article on decolonizing interviews. Not only because interviews imply a certain power position for the researcher over the interviewed, which I don’t want to amplify, but also because interviews imply some distance. Conversations, on the other hand, ask for trust. Based on what Icaza and De Jong (2018) argue, decolonizing knowledge means having dialogues as equals and creating horizontal collaborations in the research, which is why I decided to go with this term.

During the conversations and my writing afterwards I have chosen to ‘speak nearby’ instead of ‘speaking about’, inspired by the filmmaker, writer and scholar Trihn T. Min-Ha (Chen, 1992). Coming from an aversion to institutional authority, and instead being grounded in embodied
experiences and self-reflection, Min-Ha describes that ‘speaking nearby’ sets itself apart from ‘speaking about’, since it refers to a form of speaking that does not objectify subjects (Chen, 1992). My aim was to do the same and really listen deeply to the stories told by my participants. This also connected to Vázquez’ (2012) idea that really, deeply listening is something ethical and striving towards bridging colonial differences. Listening can thus be a form of criticising the colonial/modern difference, especially when one listens to those who have been disavowed and silenced (Vázquez, 2012), and lies close to one of my aims which I presented above.

In order to create a space in which they would feel comfortable to talk, I gave my participants the possibility to either choose a location themselves to have the conversation (e.g. in the azc), or let me decide. The three individual conversations took place in three different public cafe’s, while the group conversation took place in the study room of the azc where these participants are residing. All the conversations were conducted in English. I did not follow a ready-made interview guide. Although I wrote down several keywords to keep the conversations a bit aligned with the aim, I wanted to let the conversation happen naturally, just as the research happened naturally through the open-plan fieldwork, and to let the participants take the lead. However, prior to the conversations I did inform them about the possible direction of the thesis, namely research related to their current situation and possible alternative ways, in order to have a starting point to work from. This information was enough for them to start talking and left me just as a listener, who made adjustments here and there to let the conversations flow. I found that there was little difference between the one-to-one conversations and the group conversation, although the one-to-one conversations might have gone a bit deeper, due to the fact that there was prior trust built between us, and full attention was given to only one speaker. Nevertheless, the group conversation was just as valuable. This was due to the fact that the people involved knew each other well and trusted each other, which made them react to each other in a smooth way and created deep reflections.

**Ethical considerations**

This is very sensitive research, involving personal stories of people in a marginalised and vulnerable position, which makes it incredibly important to ensure that the research was carried out in an ethical way. According to Bryman (2012), there are four main issues that need to be
avoided to ensure ethical research: the harm of participants, the violation of participants agreement, violating their confidentiality and engaging in dishonest research. I took all these aspects into account, first of all by not harming or violating the participants or their agreements to participate in this research. Also I made sure that their confidential and sensitive content and data was stored safely in a password encrypted two-authentication storage, provided by Linköping University, while also anonymising information that could lead to identification. With that, and the feeling of great responsibility towards them and truth telling, I ensured to create ethical and honest research.

As discussed, the participants are anonymous, using pseudonyms, and the research will not provide any information that can lead to identifying them. The conversations with them were recorded after agreement. After the conversations, the recordings were transcribed in English, after which the recordings were deleted. Due to privacy reasons, the transcripts are not attached to this thesis, but stored in the password encrypted two-authentication storage provided by the university and will be deleted upon completion of the thesis.

All who participated in the research were required to provide their consent, in order to protect them well (Cohen et al., 2011). The consent form (see appendix 1), was shared prior to the research, highlighting the participants’ rights, as well the aim of the thesis and information regarding the procedure for recording and transcribing the conversations. Thereby it included information that the participants were participating voluntarily, that they were able to withdraw at any time during the research, that their personal information would be left out and that their participation thus would be anonymous. The consent form was read and discussed prior to the conversations and signed by the participants. The consent forms are stored, together with the transcripts of the conversations, in the password encrypted two-authentication storage provided by the university.

**Methods of analysis**

After conducting the conversations, I relistened to the recordings while transcribing them. After that I listened to the recordings one more time, to see if I missed anything important, after which I deleted them. The analysis was done with an inductive approach, in order to identify the
important patterns and potential explanations of certain situations (Brinkmann, 2013). I tried to structure the conversations, making use of the thematic analysis of Braun & Clarke (2006) to ‘identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within data’ (2006, p.79). First, I tried to familiarise myself with the provided information, by reading the transcripts thoroughly while searching for meaning. Secondly, I included general ‘codes’ that could categorise these meanings into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By making use of a mindmap, in order to visualise the interconnections between these different themes, I tried to sieve out the unnecessary information in order to answer my research questions, although this was very hard since it felt like all the shared information could somehow be used. Subsequently, I made a distinction between the first part of the analysis, colonial encounters, and the second part, decolonial resistance, and tried to fit in the themes among one of those. When I finally divided the themes among the two parts, I started writing, including direct quotes from the participants to support the presented arguments.

Analysis

In this section I will analyse the conversations I had with the participants, keeping in mind to be careful with the assumption that all the participants share the same experiences. I divided the analysis into two parts: firstly the colonial encounters, by which I mean the issues the participants face that can be connected to coloniality as such. The second part will focus on decolonial alternatives to these encounters.

Colonial encounters

In the beginning there was hope. Hope for the future, hope for a sense of stability. Arriving in the Netherlands after a long and sometimes dangerous journey, finally reaching their destination, created a sense of hopefulness for the participants. Ibrahim felt a strong sense of hope in the beginning, having the idea that it would maybe take a few months to get his residence permit, and with that a stable place, a “home for me, where I can lie my back on.” Naseem mentioned that he had arrived with a certain energy to really start living a safe and stable life. The other participants also mentioned hope for a home and for a feeling of assurance. But after some
months of waiting, the hope slowly started to fade away into feelings of uncertainty. Faheem, who arrived most recently to the Netherlands, a few months prior to our conversation, described that the energy and hope he felt in the beginning slowly started to blur into feelings of distress and despair.

In this section I will elaborate on these feelings, which can be connected to coloniality. Starting with the liminality, both in the physical and emotional sense, I will continue with a description of the participants’ dependency on the system. After that I will elaborate on the confrontation with their changed identities and how this leads to enmity and victimisation. I will end this section with describing how hospitality shows itself in a very conditional way.

Liminality
The first thing that connected to the feelings of distress was the physical space. The hostile environment in which the participants are spending their days, the azc, can be seen as a non-place, which Agamben (1998) describes as a liminal space where people live in a permanent state of exception. It is within the realm of conditional hospitality (Chiovenda, 2020), which is shown by the fact that people have to share rooms with (sometimes many) other people, and that in some azc’s the residents have no possibility to cook for themselves and are forced to eat what is presented to them. The azc is a temporary place in which it is impossible to build a real home. Jabar mentioned: “People in the azc only eat, sleep and smoke.” Ibrahim said something similar, mentioning that it felt like living in a space “that means nothing”. During our conversations, it became clear to me that some of the participants agreed with the assumption that, as Larruina and Ghorashi (2016) argue, asylum centres are designed in a way to discourage people from entering the Netherlands in the first place.

Although the participants told me about their negative experiences in the azc, such as fights that were provoked by the stressful situation, Faheem assured me that the azc’s are not only bad. It is also their home, although temporary, but at least a space where they live, and thus feel safe in some way. However, he also mentioned that it really depended on the location of the azc: some were worse than others. The one he was residing in at the time of the conversion was good though, while for Hamed it was the opposite: his current azc was “a nightmare”.

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It is not only the physical space, but mostly their lives within the azc that creates a feeling of being in limbo, in which the participants spend most of their days, waiting for an unknown amount of time for their procedure to start, proceed or be finalised. It can take months, but also years. Three of the participants have already been waiting for two years at the time of writing, without any notion of how much longer it will take. The participants were all wondering what the Dutch government was expecting from them: waiting in the present for an unknown amount of time, while seeing the future as a great nothingness, as a void filled with faint hope, as Fry and Tlostanova (2021) describe it. This is the space of liminality or limbo, the permanent state of exception (Agamben, 1998). All the participants mentioned multiple times that the waiting, without knowing exactly on what or for how long, is the hardest and makes them feel very frustrated and numb at the same time. They used different metaphors to describe the feeling:

Hamed told me that he felt like they are “covered in a dark cloth, we never see sunshine in our life”. Naseem described it as a life that feels repetitive: “It’s a copy every day. I have been living a copy of every day for two years.” He also described it as a coma later in the conversation. And Ibrahim told me: “You are living and you don’t see any light in the life. It’s a dark place, because you are without any time limit, waiting for an unknown future. You don’t know if you want to stay here or not.”

Partly, these feelings have to do with a lack of activities. There are NGOs that focus on organising activities for people in the azc’s, but most are focused on either women or children. Adult men are not taken into account, nor young adults like some of the participants. It shows how gendered the acts of hospitality are (Hamington, 2010). “In the azc we have no activities. We cannot learn the language, we cannot work. But we need activities!”, as Jabar told me. Saad explained that “in some places, like here in [anonymous location], the community isn’t very helpful. In some places there will be cultural journeys, helpful people coming to help others speak, maybe teaching them how things go. But not here.”

**Dependency**

Besides the lack of activities, which result in an endless series of days where nothing happens, the feeling of liminality is also due to the dependency on the system. Since they only get a small
amount of money per person per week to spend, something between 14 and 45 euros, the participants are restricted from making their own personal decisions. The dictation of their lives by the controlling government, leads to a great lack of agency, causing feelings of inferiority, especially by comparing themselves with people of the same age. Ibrahim realised that his life is so different from other young adults: “I just want to depend on myself. So for now it is very hard. All the people in their twenties are depending on themselves. And then there is me.” Being in your twenties, arriving with hopes and dreams and a lot of energy to share, and then being put in a waiting room for two years, without knowing when the waiting will stop, without being able to change anything about it or taking control over one’s life, really leads to a deep sense of frustration. Ibrahim continued, with a frustrated tone of voice:

“I don’t know how long I will wait more and what results it will end. It is so bad. I’ve been forced to come here, but when I came here- I lost all this long time. It’s very bad. I want to study, I want to do something, I want at least to work. To do something. I can’t- you’re waiting and you cannot built your life, you cannot do anything”

As Hamed discussed multiple times, the dependency on the system and the dictation of their lives, is a practice of control. According to him, the Dutch government is deliberately creating this system of control, as a way to dictate his life: “I’m still controlled and prisoned under the system. Who controls me? The system. And who controls the system? No one knows.” The case of Hamed is especially intense in terms of control, although not exceptional: in the almost two years that he has been residing in the Netherlands, he had been transferred 13 times to different azc’s all over the country. “For no reason! That is really inhuman. 13 transfers in two years! That is really inhuman, illogical and unacceptable for any human kind!”, as Hamed shared. The transfers, something more asylum seekers are facing at least a few times during their procedure, are creating an even more intensified sense of liminality, holding back the possibility to grow roots in a place and to connect with the local community.

**Identity**

Besides the feelings of being stuck in a liminal space, in which the encounters with procedures, the extremely long and unknown waiting times, their dependency and no prospect to work or
learn the language, and the frustrating feelings of paralysis and darkness, there is also the aspect of identity. As Faheem, Hamed and Naseem all described, they once were people with a normal life, according to their standards. They never questioned their identities, just understood themselves as normal people, living a normal life. But the moment they had to leave their homes, travelling towards more safety, as well the moment when they started their procedure in the Netherlands, they were confronted with their changed sense of self. From one day to the next, they changed from a ‘person’ into a ‘refugee’, becoming a dehumanised subject discharged as an agent of one’s own empowerment and political action or space (Tlostanova, 2020). Their newly achieved immigration status created a sense as if all their other personal identity parts were non-existent any longer. And although all the participants arrived with different talents, skills and abilities, no consideration was given to that. The categorization of ‘refugee’ nullifies their personal aspects, which clearly shows the violence that coloniality brings along, since they are excluded and dehumanised and stripped away from their validity and dignity (Fornet-Betancourt, 2009; Vázquez, 2012). Lugones (2010) describes the colonial dichotomy between humans and non-humans as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity, which became the normative tool to damn the colonised. Although maybe in a different form, it is clear that this coloniality is also vivid in the lives of the participants in the way they are perceived: they are actively damned by being reduced into nullified and less visible ‘others’ (Vázquez, 2012).

I spoke with all of them about this newly achieved immigration status and how it made them feel. They all felt othered and dehumanised, in some or another way. Hamed was very clear that he hated to be called a ‘refugee’, feeling it as something embarrassing. After realising that some of the people he openly interacted with were only interested in him because of his refugee status, and not the other aspects of his being, changed something in how he felt amongst many Dutch citizens. After conversing with a man who seemed interested in him, he realised afterwards that this man looked down on him: “Why did he call me a bewoner [resident of azc]? Why refugee? Why not as myself? I realised there that I’m not equal.” To Hamed, ‘refugee’ means dehumanisation, reducing him into only that single category, nullifying all the other identity aspects that make him into an complex, full human being: “I’m ashamed of introducing myself. The only reason is that after all I’ve come from, my age, my talents, my name, my surname, in the end I’ve to add an extra additional ‘refugee’.” Naseem told me something similar: “I feel like
I’m a number. Refugee is a bad term, because there is no showing plan for it.” Ibrahim realised that to him, the appointed identity mark of ‘refugee’ did create a feeling of inferiority: “You feel that people look at you as only a refugee. They know. [...] But they don’t interact with you as much. They always put lines.” Also Saad realised how the feeling of inferiority was shaped by his newly achieved immigration status: “We are treated as lesser humans. By the system, by your adjective, namely ‘refugee’. It’s true. Okay, we will get rid of this name. But for now this is what we are. We cannot walk away from it.”

The process of being othered, and the feeling of inferiority, is also connected to the encounter with their racialized identity. Hamed explained: “My life is worthless, because the reason that the country where I come from is poverty.” Hence his strong personality, making clear that he is aware of the fact that that ‘worthlessness’ is not how he feels about himself, he realised that this was how the world sees him, since he arrived in Europe. These confrontations with one’s racialized identity are inherently colonial, since coloniality refers to the racialized, classed and gendered categories we’re living in (Lugones, 2010).

They were also confronted with their racialized identities by the encounters with Dutch people, showing how visible the dichotomous hierarchy between citizens and non-citizens is. As Saad explained, when he moved from one azc to the other, he read many hateful comments on social media, which was very hurtful. In general, there are a lot of hateful messages that they encounter online. Saad: “Here in [anonymous location], we read on Facebook when something or someone loses something, they just come here to the azc straight away. Like, whenever a bike gets stolen, they always come and check here. Which is never the case!”

**Victimisation**

Besides hateful comments, many participants had the feeling that they were seen as victims, which for some felt even worse. Having the feeling that people feel sorry for them, feeds the feeling of inferiority. All participants have had encounters with people who tried to help them in some way or another, showing a certain hospitality, but which felt conditional and was based on a binary saviour-victim narrative, as Nasser-Eddin and Abu-Assab (2020) discuss. Hamed was
very clear in explaining the difference between different sorts of interactions with citizens. Calling the persona who helps out of feeling sorry “Karen”, Hamed explained to me:

“Some people, like Karen, feel very sorry for me that I don’t have enough, that I cannot provide myself a meal. But they are only treating me for the things I cannot do. But she cannot stand with me. That is the difference between Karen and someone who stands with me.”

Operating from a superior position over the ‘underdeveloped’, people like “Karen” are reinforcing the hierarchical victim-saviour binary, with the victims as inferior. The idea of helping inferior victims, creates a paternalistic notion that does not take into account the agency and equality of forced migrants (Chamberlain, 2019). Hamed felt this very deeply, continuing: “Karen is only here to help me. But I don’t need help! I just want to be called equal, to be supported from an equal point.”

What I noticed is that the active reduction of the participants into dehumanising categories that fits their classification (Lugones, 2010), being treated like third-rate people, is another attempt to exercise control over them. Their dignity is challenged by the controlling system of the government, by the fact that they are dictated what to do (or not), what and when to eat and where to stay, but also by the people in the community, who also treat them as inferior, either out of pity or enmity.

Being aware of this active reduction and dehumanisation into less visible ‘others’ (Vázquez, 2012), Hamed made clear how he felt about those in control over his life, how they were also producing an inferior image of him: “The government made me look like this, not in the other way!” In a way, asylum seekers are seen as the symbol of their own suffering, while being tucked away to be invisible (Tlostanova, 2020), whilst being exempt from any political space or action or even appearance (Arendt, 1958). Hamed continued: “We’re wasting years under the procedure, keeping us in bed like a cow. Do nothing, eat, sleep, and do nothing. It is to live like that! And it will create an animal, not a human. You are producing an animal!” This point clearly shows coloniality in the very active othering, dehumanizing them into bestial beings (Lugones, 2010), into savages (Hall, 1997) or “animals” as Hamed himself stated. This othering and
dehumanisation, the humiliation and enmity towards them, as well as victimisation, leads to feelings of numbness, while it sparks anger for others. The participants all expressed some form of anger, but especially Hamed and Faheem expressed their anger and frustration during our conversations. Faheem told me:

“I was a good man, and still I am! But when someone says something bad, I feel something inside me that really [growling sounds]... We as young [anonymous nationality] are angry, although we never were like that! But after years and years of hatred, yes.”

**Conditional hospitality**

Discussing all of the above, I realised that the colonial encounters in this part of their migrational process, are set in very conditional hospitality. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Derrida (2000, 2005) divides hospitality into conditional and unconditional, with the latter demanding, or desiring, a welcome and direct acceptance of the stranger, without setting conditions. As Kmak (2015) describes, it is racialized and gendered, thus colonial narratives, that determine if asylum seekers are trustworthy in order to receive help, and thus if they are applicable for hospitable treatment. The Dutch asylum procedure is an evidentiary procedure, and thus very conditional. In order to receive hospitable treatment, the participants must prove whether they are eligible for hospitality or not (Kmak, 2015). As the participants clearly told me, they felt they had to prove themselves time after time in order to get the recognition that they are in need of protection, safety and a hospitable treatment. At the same time, being constantly questioned about their stories and trustworthiness, they are presumed guilty until proven otherwise. This impacts their sense of self: the realisation that they are seen as either threats or victims, creates a distressing feeling, in which they are constantly aware not to make any wrong movement. It feels like “being watched closely”, as Naseem described.

But it also does something with the feeling of belonging, or better, not-belonging: as Hamed described, he felt like the government and the system within were constantly reminding him that he was the one to blame for his situation: “For the system, I am the one to blame. Being a refugee is to blame yourself.” As Wekker (2016) describes, the construction of (forced) migrants as inferior, intellectually backwards and lazy creates this problem in which they are themselves
blamed for being where they are, as well as being blamed for not being able to fit in well. I see this, once again, as a colonial encounter: to blame the people who are most marginalised for their own misery, is a form of control over them, and therefore colonial. It is ignoring the fact that the Dutch government is the one to blame in its production of the inferior and dehumanised category of asylum seekers as we know it.

At the same time, the participants felt that they need to show a certain ‘gratefulness’ for the ‘hospitality’ they receive. Hamed shared his anger with me about his feeling that the government is giving him the idea to feel guilty, after he continued: “What they said, each time: you should be more grateful that you have a mattress and a pillow. You should be more happy that you’re not sleeping in Ter Apel in a tent or on the streets. You should be more grateful.” The need for gratitude for what they receive, whether it’s a bed, a little pocket money or food, shows a (colonial) power dynamic between asylum seekers as merely ‘receivers’ of help, for which they should be thankful, and the superior nation state that ‘provides’ that help (Savaş & Dutt, 2023).

Decolonial possibilities of an otherwise

As described above, the participants all encountered coloniality in multiple ways: not only within the procedure, the liminality, the victimisation and dehumanisation, but also in the very conditional hospitality that they are facing. This part of the analysis is about changing that narrative into something else. After discussing most of their daily troubles and colonial encounters, I asked all participants to reflect on how things could be different. After conducting and analysing the conversation, I realised their needs could be subdivided into four categories: practical changes, the possibility to speak, resistance and the need for community.

But firstly, the decolonial otherwise was already an integral part of our conversations: first in the one-to-one conversations I held with three participants which felt more like a conversation between friends than an ‘interview’, but especially during the group conversation. When I arrived in the azc, one of the participants led me into their study room, welcoming me, while introducing me to his friends who would be part of the conversation. They offered me tea, while I presented them the stroopwafels I brought along. I felt like a guest, entering their space, their
‘home’, in which they welcomed me as hosts. This in itself created an interesting dynamic, which made the rest of the conversation a very equal one. It put a different light on the usual distinction between citizen and non-citizen, showing instead that in reality this distinction of being solely a guest or a host is not as binary, but more of a continuum between these categories (Carathathis et al., 2018).

**Practical changes**

As shown above, most of the colonial encounters of the participants are psychological: the feeling of dehumanisation and inequality, not being seen as fully human, and so on. Obviously, this is related to the policies and the structures of the asylum procedure: not being given a chance to integrate into society from the start, makes people stand outside of that society. Meanwhile, there is a feeling of alienation from life itself, which is in itself a colonial encounter: not being able to feel oneself as a fully worthy human being, is deeply colonial.

When I asked the participants how things could be different, all of them started with some practical changes that would improve their current situation drastically. Ibrahim suggested: “When they enter the Netherlands, I would give them a temporary BSN [citizens service number]. So they can settle their lives, they can work. And make limits for the waiting time! So the waiting wouldn’t be so long.” When I asked him what the need behind this was, Ibrahim answered: “I don’t want to be scared. I want to work freely, have a secure work, secure life, secure home. To have a normal life.” Naseem was very clear about how much it would help to learn the language from the start: “I’m gonna live here! So sooner or later I have to learn the language. If I came here and start the language learning as soon as I’m here, it’s gonna be good for me and for the people here.” Jabar also mentioned that language is one of the most important things that would help them to feel more part of Dutch society. There were also many suggestions of having more activities, as well as the need to have some fun and joy, to get out of the azc and meet other, local people. This would help them “for feeling to be alive, to feel a little optimistic” as Naseem described it.

At the same time, I noticed that they already developed a lot of coping mechanisms. As Saad mentioned: “In the camp it is good, we make a home. Together we make the community.” This
made me realise that their current situation is not as black and white as I first thought, which made me reflect on my own internalised assumptions. Although they might not feel part of Dutch society yet, they feel part of another community. As Verdasco (2019) describes, young asylum seekers often find deep meaning and friendship and kinship in their process of asylum, and that was confirmed by some participants’ statements.

**The right to speak**

Another matter that was mentioned in order to deal with the colonial encounters, was the possibility to resist the system and to feel that one has the opportunity to complain. In general, the participants felt like they had no space to complain about their situation, or to speak out against the system. Being afraid to be punished, for example by cutting off their weekly pocket money, or even worse, by revising their asylum request and possibly being rejected, some of the participants explained to me that they usually don’t make any complaints about their current situation. Being afraid to, for example, lose their possible right to get citizenship when one speaks out, leaves people even more silenced. As Achiume (2019) argues, citizenship thus plays a gatekeeping role, since it is the government that can decide who is deserving or not. Hence, this is a very controlling and colonial system, demarcating insiders from outsiders (Achiume, 2019), and exercising control over the outsiders by silencing them.

Even if the participants speak out, such as to people working for COA or their lawyers, they often don’t feel heard: “Nobody is listening to us. I’ve been talking to them many times, to explain the situation, how many problems I have and my health problems. But nobody is listening”, as Ibrahim told me. Hamed described something similar: “I really want to speak it out. I’ve been really pressing inside me so many stories, and the circumstances I am going through. But I cannot share it with anyone. Nobody is listening!” When I asked if it would help to have someone or a designated space to speak out or to complain, they all agreed that that would be the case. This possibility to talk openly and freely, without the fear of being punished, came with a moving comment that was made after I finished the conversation with Faheem. He commented, after my token of gratitude for his openness and participation, that he felt a huge relief and a certain lightness and positivity after our conversation. I asked him how that was possible, to which he responded that I was the first Dutch person in a long time who talked to him as an
equal, because I wanted to talk to him, not because I had to. He felt like he finally didn’t have to show his validity, trying to convince me of something in order to gain the recognition he needed to get his status, or even to get a recognition of being an equal human being. Being in line with my aims to deeply listen with a loving perception, I thought this comment was worth mentioning.

Resistance
The liminal state in which the participants are situated, is not merely passive. Resistance gives power, and resistance comes in many forms. Achiume (2019) sees migration itself as a form of decoloniality, since it is migration that is the maintenance of individual agency over political horizons. This made me realise that also the migration of the participants is in itself an act of resistance against the modern/colonial system. Although the system and colonial encounters they face create a situation in which they lose their complex identities and their sense of self, all the participants had different ways in which they tried to stay close to themselves. Hamed mentioned that he has the feeling that the Dutch government is trying to change him, but that he does not want to lose his character and instead stay the way he is. Not wanting to assimilate, as expected from them, builds on what Glissant (1997) calls the right to opacity, meaning to try to overcome the risk of normalising and assimilating the singularities of cultural differences by comprehension. In some ways, I could see that some participants were claiming this right, although maybe unaware of it. In a way, their presence in the Netherlands, is already a resistance against the current system that does not want them in it. Their existence is resistance, and knowing that gives at least a slight feeling of power. Hamed was aware of this: “If they are torturing me, I’m also teasing them. I’m not giving up. They only want me to give up, but I’m not giving up. That’s our power!”

Other forms of resistance showed when Faheem mentioned that he is trying to make something out of this situation for himself. Also Jabar, who is trying to learn the Dutch language by himself to communicate with Dutch people, is in his own way resisting the system. Ibrahim and Hamed volunteer often in different places, trying to at least use their time for a good cause. Although these might be small gestures, I see this as their ways of resisting the system that wants them to just bide their time, wait and do nothing. Naseem said:
“I see the people who are very gentle, who can live in this problem and suffering and coming out from it, that is a very strong person. The person is suffering before, and suffering now, and that makes someone more strong.”

This statement shows both his resilient way of thinking, being able to approach the situation from a positive side, and his ability to resist the current situation using a more positive approach. All of this shows their already existing resistances against the colonial power that tries to colonise their senses of reality and identity (Lugones, 2010), in order to make them adjust to Dutch society, although that power does not actually help them at all with that adjustment, which makes this colonial aim very controversial.

**Community**

The last issue to be discussed in this analysis is community. Most of the participants came to the conclusion that it was mostly community that they needed, instead of expecting changes from the government. “Obviously, we need community support. More than the government support - the government never supports”, as Hamed shared. Spivak (2004) differs between two sorts of communities: the responsibility-based community, in which individual rights are ‘neglected’, like Middle Eastern societies, and rights-based communities, like western European societies, where there is a ‘lack of’ social responsibility. As I noticed among the participants, their movements from their previous responsible-based communities to a new rights-based community, was sometimes harder than they would have first expected. As both Ibrahim and Faheem stated multiple times, they understood now that they had arrived in a less social society. “The people are not so social. Because in our traditions, we are very social people. The people, we go very deep with them. And here it is- I don’t know. There is always a distance that I feel.”, as Ibrahim told me. Likewise, Faheem mentioned something similar: “There is more care about you, friends, family, neighbours in our countries. The relations are very strong.” When I asked him to continue on this comment, he started talking about the Arabic notion of neighbour. I realised after he explained more about it and after I talked about it with the other participants, that this notion can be a framework for a more responsible-based, as well as a more hospitable society.
The Arabic word for neighbour is جار, pronounced as jaar, meaning primarily someone who lives nearby, in the same neighbourhood. But the word jaar is interesting in the context of this thesis, since it implies more than just a geographical neighbour: instead, going beyond geographical proximities, a neighbour can be seen as someone with whom you share a social or communal connection. Someone who is a jaar, can be considered as an extended part of one’s family, creating a strong sense of community. Faheem explained:

“In some cases they are family. For example, when I was a child in [anonymous country], my friend and I lived close by. I knew his uncles, his mother, his father. If they needed anything, they called us. They were like my parents.”

Neighbours are expected to provide support and assistance to each other when it’s needed, during celebrations, times of illness, during emergencies and times of stress. Naseem explained: “In our culture, the neighbour, he has the right on you, and you have the right. It means if he is sick, you should take care of him. And you should visit him.” Although seemingly stemming from an ethic of infinite responsibility for the other, which lies under Derrida’s unconditional hospitality (Chamberlain, 2019), there is in terms of jaar also the need to be considerate of the other’s privacy, in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with them. Neighbours should be treated with kindness and look out for each others well-being. Saad told me that there is this saying in Arabic about a circle of seven neighbours around you, and that you should take care of the neighbour of the neighbour, times seven. Faheem mentioned the same, but explained to me that “it’s not per se seven-seven, but it’s really about making sure to have a strong relation to all of them. Because in our culture, without people, we can’t live. We need relations.”

As Spivak (2004) mentions, it is not that responsibility-based communities are per se better. She is only suggesting that they are different, and although at first sight, rights- and responsibility based relationships might seem like the opposite of each other, they can actually be more connected to each other ‘in the hobbled relationship of supplementation’ (Spivak, 2004, p.534). I think this connects well to the ideas that all the participants told me: the fact that they moved to a new country in order to find safety, a place in which they maybe have rights, but lacking the
feeling of a responsibility-based society, has given them all a feeling of not-belonging. At the end of our conversation, Faheem mentioned that he would love to live in a society in which both worlds come together. In which the rights of the Netherlands, and the community and caring part of his birth country would come together: “We have good points, so it would be great in the future, if we take some great points from you and we take some great points from us. This will make a great society!”

**Discussion and future research**

To first come back to where I started, I’d like to state once more that colonialism brought along many dichotomies, separating the human from nature, but also dividing certain categorised people from others, lying at the intersection of gender, class and race as Lugones (2010) argued. In the meantime, the coloniality-based categorizations are still the ruling narrative in our current order of things (Vázquez, 2012), and have more serious implications than only the hierarchical division between people. It is actively shaping the lives of many marginalised people, including asylum seekers. As I tried to show, the situation and encounters that asylum seekers in the midst of their asylum procedure in the Netherlands face, be it in their asylum procedure itself, in the environment where they reside, or in the encounters with Dutch citizens, are grounded in coloniality. Coloniality appears in the way they are made into non-citizens, divided from Dutch society and its citizens, unable to learn the language, to work or connect with the local community. Coloniality appears in their dependency and thus in the control of the government over them, in which they are lacking agency and decision making, while waiting for an unknown amount of time in a dark, liminal state of being. Coloniality appears in the ways in which they, as racialized non-citizens, are facing victimisation and dehumanisation by being called ‘refugee’, which makes them feel inferior to others. Coloniality also appears in the very conditional hospitable treatment they face, in the ways they are being unequally treated and perceived, in the ways they have to constantly prove themselves in order to receive state protection, whilst being damned by the government, unable to speak out or complain.
As discussed at the start of this thesis, as well as something that has been clear throughout the conversations, we lack hospitality towards newly arriving people in the Netherlands. Although the shifting identities of asylum seekers are perceived as problematic for politicians and policy makers, many of whom blame asylum seekers for their existence or failure to fit in well (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018), the biggest problem lies in the hands of those in power, namely politicians. They uphold the colonial hierarchical binary structures between citizens and forced migrants, between those who belong and those who don’t, between those who deserve and those who don’t deserve. From a decolonial feminist perspective, I can thus argue that there is not an ‘immigration crisis’ going on in Europe or the Netherlands, but a hospitality crisis.

A decolonial otherwise

The other area of focus in this thesis has been to find decolonial possibilities of an otherwise (Walsh, 2018). As Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab (2020) argue, it is the adaptation of a decolonial approach that can reject and resist the imposition of certain practices, which I have tried to do. After all the conversations, a lot of thinking and months of writing, I can relate well to Achiume’s (2019) argument that the practices and policies that prohibit forced migrants from entering Europe, as well the policies that prohibit their inclusion, are deeply unethical. What I have also realised, although it is not really covered in this thesis due to the lack of space to write, is the fact that the very conditional hospitality that is offered, is conditional because of the political needs of the nation state. My argument with this, is that it is hard, if not impossible, to find decolonial options and solutions for the hospitality crisis within the state-bounded policies and practices, because they are deeply rooted in coloniality, and thus based in the systemic practices of othering and dehumanisation. Instead, we have to find the solutions to this hospitality crisis in human-to-human relations.

Yet, as we have seen, unconditional hospitality is also impossible to reach, especially in terms of decoloniality, since it requires a clear distinction between host and guest (Derrida, 2005), and therefore recreates an asymmetrical, hierarchical relation between them. To strive towards unconditional hospitality, in terms of this research, would thus mean an even bigger hierarchical relation between those who belong (citizens) and those who don’t (forced migrants). As I have stated above about the participants, it is exactly this hierarchical gap that nullifies them and their
lived experiences (which is a colonial act in itself), and which fails to recognize the agency and equality of forced migrants in relation to citizens. The question is therefore whether it is even desirable to find an unconditional form of hospitality, since it is impossible to create one in which asymmetrical power dynamics between guests and hosts is completely absent.

But maybe it is not about finding this absence. Maybe it is about acknowledging that there are always conditions involved, even in the most ‘decolonial’ forms of hospitality, but that these conditions can be seen as a continuum, instead of a binary. By that I mean that instead of making only a binary distinction between conditional and unconditional hospitality, there can be many forms of hospitality in between. So, to follow former attempts by Hamington (2010), Ahmed (2000) and Benhabib (2004), to create a more feminist form of hospitality, which focuses the mitigation of power differentials and the creation of meaningful exchanges, I argue for a less-conditional, pluriversal and relationality-based form of hospitality. Relationality is based on understanding that we are in constant relation which each other (Vázquez, 2012), while pluriversality shows us how these different worlds can coexist and interact, in many different forms of communication, instead of promoting a universal way of being (Tlostanova, 2019).

**Towards a pluriversal and relationality-based form of hospitality**

In the very conditional Dutch asylum system, a less-conditional hospitality could mean, first of all, to give more agency to asylum seekers in the first place. As the participants argued themselves, it would actually already change a lot if they could learn the language, cook their own food, and work, thus creating some income. This would foster the feeling of independence and agency. Secondly, the belief that asylum seekers should be ‘thankful’ for what they receive, and seeing host societies as merely helpful, feeds the lack of understanding of the complexities that asylum seekers face (Echterhoff et al., 2022). At the same time, perceiving them as merely victims, also reinforces the binary saviour-victim narrative (Nasser-Eddin & Abu-Assab, 2020), while not taking into account their agency (Chamberlain, 2019). I believe that a less-conditional form of hospitality should start with more equal treatment. As all the participants made crystal clear, what they most despise is the feeling of inferiority. Instead, treating them as people with agency, who, in their turn, can complain about policies and bureaucracies, in the same way that citizens can, could again create a feeling of more agency and power.
A less-conditional, pluriversal hospitality could also mean the diminishing of the need for asylum seekers to assimilate completely to their ‘host’ country, because this need promotes the erasure of pluriversal ways of being. It also increases the idea that the host society is superior and something static (Ahmed, 2010), and thus reinforces the colonial distinctions that are at play. So rather than expecting migrants to conform completely to the nations where they relocate, assimilation should be understood as something dynamic and communal (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). This shows the importance of relationality, following Hamington’s (2010) idea of feminist hospitality, which means resisting the hierarchical power relation and instead valuing the exchange as reciprocal. It should be expected of both the host society as well as the asylum seeker to adapt to transformation, stemming from connection, which leads to a diversified community (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). As described in the analysis, this connects to what Faheem came up with: understanding that we all have our strong points, and that combining them could create a more beautiful, just and pluriversal society. It means creating space for deep coalitions, which are coalitions that span across differences, challenging us to align our interests, understandings and intentions with (other) oppressed groups, as Maria Lugones (2003) describes. Leading to deep coalitions of resistance, this approach is crucial for any decolonial effort to create an other-than-modern/colonial world (Tlostanova, 2019). By what Lugones (1987) calls world travelling, one is uninterested in winning, but instead ready to change. As I tried myself in this thesis, to go beyond othering and instead focus on the intersubjective ways of understanding the research participants, while thinking together about alternative ways of being, I hope that I at least made a start in the creation of deep coalitions with these interrelated others.

A less-conditional, pluriversal hospitality should therefore always be based in relationality. One attempt to reach that, can be with the earlier discussed notation of jaar, the Arabic equivalent of neighbour. Engaging with this notion in finding a less-conditional form of hospitality goes beyond the usage of hegemonic academic methodologies. Instead, it means an alternative approach, something that more decolonial thinkers have already tried with other (non Western) notions. For example in the usage of the notion buen vivir, which is used as a decolonial perspective of humans in relation with the cosmos and nature (Vázquez, 2012). Jaar can be used in a similar way, in understanding humans as being in a reciprocal relation with other humans.
around them. This is in opposition to the modern and Eurocentric view that humans are understood as merely individual and secluded entities. Instead, it means a less dualist notion, in which people are seen as dependent and in constant relation with each other. This relationality shouldn’t be seen as a form of gaining domination, or a relationship of power, but instead a form of togetherness (Vázquez, 2012).

The notion of jaar can thus function as a decolonial critique on the colonial dichotomous thinking, while being at the base of a less-conditional, pluriverse hospitality. It can be a meaning to question the ruling dichotomies and their hierarchical classification (Vázquez, 2012), such as the one between citizen and forced migrant, host and guest, belonging and not-belonging. Taking the notion of jaar in this, reminding us that we are all neighbours, can be an attempt to focus on the relationality between us and the ‘other’. The relationality behind jaar means a form of togetherness, an ‘us’ that includes all, while keeping alive the right to be different but equal (Tlostanova, 2019). It is this relationality that can lead us to the prospect of thinking behind the colonial difference (Vázquez, 2012) and towards a possibility of an otherwise (Walsh, 2018).

**Future research**

Asking myself multiple times how I could create a more nuanced and complex story about asylum seekers, and fit the complexities into concrete ideas that can encourage other researchers, policy makers and politicians to make changes in their way of thinking. Although this was just an attempt, I hope that this thesis has been at least a little step in that direction. In this section I will call out a few recommendations for future research, among many others in thought.

First of all, it is important to be aware that the policies that dominate academic research are shaped by political narratives, which in turn also influence academic thinking (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Knowing this, I argue that it is important for all future research about forced migrants (as well other marginalised people) to keep this in mind, and to be critical about the political stance and policies that are part of this political narrative. Because without this criticism, there is the danger that we as academics reproduce the political and thus colonial narrative that shapes the lives of so many marginalised people.
By any means, there should be more intersectional research done to the daily realities of forced migrants/asylum seekers. I agree with Savaş and Dutt (2023) who state that an intersectional and/or decolonial feminist perspective can provide more elaborative understandings of the complexities of forced migrants’ experiences. It can also transform the power imbalances and rethink more inclusive and just practices and policies. For that, I recommend taking the lived experiences of the people involved into account in all future research. Especially in research focused on policies or other systems that come out of a colonial structure, it is important to conceptualise the experiences of those who are living under those colonial systems. Because how can we as (privileged) researchers know and decide what is best for marginalised people? We are not the experts: instead, it is those who live under these policies who know best what needs to change.

Although this research was partly a description of the status quo of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, it is important to facilitate more research that is about transforming this status quo. By taking an intersectional and/or decolonial approach, the aim can be working towards a more just reality for forced migrants/asylum seekers, for example by questioning and reshaping the institutional and political factors that are part of their lived experiences (Savaş & Dutt, 2023).

Another point I like to state is the need for more in depth research about hospitality and the connection to coloniality, with an eye on the historical aspect of it. We live in a globalised modern/colonial world, in which nation-states are the paramount (Chiovenda, 2020), and should remember that in Europe, and thus in the Netherlands, the categories of citizen and forced migrant are produced out of the processes of decolonization of earlier forms of European colonialism (Chamberlain, 2019). To call for hospitality in this context, invokes a big host-guest binary that does not take into account the historical divisions between people (Bhambra, 2017). I thus suggest that more research should be done to this historical colonial connection.

And last but not least, there should be more research done to forced migrant/asylum seeker men. Although I wanted to cover more in terms of gender in this thesis, as I described above, the very limited space I had didn’t allow me a deep analysis. I thus recommend future researchers to focus more on the gendered aspect of the lived experiences of forced migrant men, i.e. in a
research about the gendered notion of deservingness or hospitality. As shown in the example of Belgium at this very moment, it is incredibly important to conduct more research about this particular group.

**Conclusion**

So, in what ways do asylum seekers in the Netherlands encounter coloniality and what are the decolonial alternatives on hospitality to resist this? As I have tried to show in this thesis, coloniality as the consistent cultivation and maintenance of the social, ethical, epistemic and ontological dependence on Western norms and assumptions, shows itself in many forms. The lives of asylum seekers in the Netherlands are dictated by the government and its policies, a system that does not want them here. The coloniality shows itself in terms of control, in the physical and emotional liminality they are assigned to reside in, waiting in uncertainty for months or even years, with nothing but a void as a vision for the future. Coloniality also shows itself in terms of identity, in the confrontation with their racialization and being reduced to merely their newly achieved immigration status. Being viewed as outsiders out of pity or enmity, they feel othered, nullified and invisible, and unequal compared to Dutch citizens. Coloniality also shows in the power dynamic between them as ‘guests’, constantly having to prove their worth to the superior ‘host’ state who has all the power, in order to receive recognition.

By closely listening to the silenced stories of the participants, and together thinking about possibilities for an otherwise, I came to several conclusions. Firstly, that the state should provide more possibilities and less limitations for them to feel like a normal human being. But since the nation state is inherently colonial, the real decolonial answers should be primarily searched for outside of that system. This led me to the conclusion that resistance of asylum seekers against the colonial encounters with the nation state shows itself in many forms, big and small. It shows in the possibility to speak out, to be visible and to be heard, since their invisibilization is what keeps them in a powerless situation. Resistance also shows in being here as a body that the system does not want and in the right to not assimilate to the imposed standards according to the colonial standards. And last but not least, a decolonial resistance means the creation of a
community, one that is based on relationality and pluriversality and one that is not as conditional as the status quo. A community in which everyone, every body, is welcomed, not only as a guest but as a full member who can co-create a society that diminishes the asymmetrical power hierarchies. A community that is based on a non-dichotomous togetherness, one that can lead to the denial of the modern/colonial hierarchies that rule our world, and towards a non-dualist, relational, pluriversal and hospitable way of living together.

**Ending notes**

Although I tried to work my own way around the dichotomizing and simplistic categorizations that describe people, I could not entirely. I am also shaped by coloniality and its narratives, and thus perceive and describe people sometimes in ways that do not resonate with what I try to stand for as a decolonial feminist. I am still unlearning. Although I am aware of the great limitations of a thesis, and the fact that not so many will read this text, and thus I don’t expect to change anything, I still hope that I contributed to at least a little change. Whether it’s by the fact that I documented some stories and connecting them to theories that show us the capriciousness of the colonial world we live in, or by the fact that I have been listening to those who have been silenced for so long and should be heard urgently, or by the fact that throughout the process I myself have become an even more engaged and steadfast decolonial feminist, ready to be a more outspoken activist against our colonial, white supremacist, loveless world. In this way I hope to have contributed at least a little to a decolonial future.
References


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Appendix 1

Research Consent Form

This second-year master thesis research is being conducted in the program Gender Studies: Intersectionality and Change at Linköping University by Valerie van Schaik and is supervised by Madina Tlostanova.

The aim of this research is to learn about participants’ experiences and lived realities of being an asylum seeker, as well imagining a different view and wider interpretation on solidarity and hospitality. The purpose is, besides a contribution to the forced migration discourse from an intersectional and decolonial feminist perspective, to create an understanding about the lived realities of asylum seekers in the Netherlands and find decolonial possibilities of an otherwise.

Ethical procedures for academic research require that participants explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the following information and sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The conversation will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- The actual recording will be deleted after transcription
- The transcript will be stored in a two-authentication password encrypted storage device for two years from the date of the exam board, after it will be deleted
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to the researcher
- Participants are, under freedom of information legislation, entitled to access the information they have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above
- The transcript of the interview will be analysed by the researcher as research investigator and will not be shared with anyone else
- Any summery interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets, will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.

You are free to contact the researcher and supervisor of the research to seek further clarification and information. For withdrawal of consent, please contact the researcher Valerie van Schaik on valva428@student.liu.se.

Questions about data protection are available at Linköping University and can be reached at datasyddombud@liu.se. In the event of a complaint regarding the way in which Linköping University processes your personal data, you are entitled to contact the Swedish Data Protection Authority.

By signing this form I agree that:

- I have read the information regarding this study
- I am 18 years or older
- I am voluntary taking part in this project. I understand that I do not have to take part, that I can decline to answer during the session, and I can stop the interview at any time
- The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used in this research
- I can request a copy of my interview if I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality
- I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future
Signature of the research participant

I hereby consent that Valerie van Schaik and Linköping University process my personal data according to the information above.

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Participants Signature          Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving me informed consent to participate in this study.

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Researcher Signature            Date