

Queer Refugees, The Art Institution and The University

An exploration of the integration of exilic art narratives of the queer refugee community in the decolonization process of Dutch art and academic institutions.

Master thesis

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Executive Summary

LIMBO

In the collaboration LIMBO it is explored how queer refugees' knowledges and narratives can offer a perspective that challenges hegemonic discourses in academic and art institutions. LIMBO consisted of a series of workshops for people who identify as queer and/or migrant and/or refugee. The workshops were held in art institution Framer Framed for 8 consecutive Sundays and concluded with a month long presentation in the same institution, with an accompanying opening event. In all LIMBO workshops, creativity took a central role. We combined and experimented with artistic practices from various disciplines ranging from drawing to clowning. The main goal of the workshops was not to create 'quality' artworks, but rather using the creative praxis as a tool to own and formulate your own narrative.

Approach

In this research I aimed to employ methods that fall in line with engaged scholarship, which can be conceptualized as a 'social justice oriented' form of academic research (Beaulieu et al., 2018). Engaged scholarship aims to be reflexive of power and therefore uses collaborative and democratic means for knowledge production (Edwards and Brannelly, 2017; Kajner, 2013). Disparaging lines of the hierarchy between the researcher and 'the subject' (Ibid.). Therefore I aimed to co-create knowledge with the participants of this research and it was of importance that the research was based on a reciprocal relationship.

Due to the research including an art institution, using an art-based approach seemed natural to me. Including creative practice in research has multiple benefits. Firstly, creative practices can have healing properties (Lane, 2005), which could also be concluded based on the results of my research. Participants mentioned that the LIMBO workshop did have an effect on their emotional wellbeing. Another benefit of creative praxis is its ability to encourage change without using deliberative methods, which can be seen as the language of the ones in power (Young, 2001).

Summary

The research shows that working together with the queer refugee community has the potential to open up a semi-public space, such as academic and art institutions, as a "safe space for unsafe discussions" (Schavemaker, 2019, p1). In this research I continued with the work of Holle et al. (2021) and argue that queer refugees have this ability partly due to their liminal status as liminality is a space of in-betweenness where there is room for creativity and reflexivity (Turner, 1979).

Although there were challenges encountered during the collaboration, such as the ever-changing composition of participants and mental health challenges that were caused by the sharing of traumatic stories, we also encountered opportunities during the research. The most prominent opportunity was that the collaboration provided a network for all parties involved. This sharing of knowledges between all parties has kept evolving, even after the end of the research period as it was always intended to continue LIMBO after the research period was concluded. Framer Framed has continued to open up the space for the queer refugee community to come together. Furthermore, there have been multiple connections made between the queer refugee community, Framer Framed and the university.

- Framer Framed has joined the Amsterdam All-Inclusive research project by the *Kenniscentrum Ongelijkheid* and led by two researchers from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the Universiteit van Amsterdam,
- An exhibition of the works made during the LIMBO workshops in the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
- Framer Framed has offered additional working hours to continue LIMBO at Framer Framed,
- LIMBO participant starting as a graphic design intern at Framer Framed,
- Performer from the LIMBO opening started working as Framer Framed's audio technician,
- A Queer Poetry Night event at Framer Framed including two performances of LIMBO participants, organised in collaboration with the collective *Unwanted Words* initiated through one of the LIMBO workshop facilitators,
- Events planned in Framer Framed with the collective of a LIMBO workshop facilitator *Marok Kueer Zawya*,
- Activists coming together at Framer Framed, organised by a LIMBO participant, to create banners for a protest.

Recommendations

On the basis of this research I have formulated recommendations for art- or academic institutions who aim to create a meaningful decolonial collaboration with the queer refugee community:

- Defer from short term projects, instead aim for long term sustainable collaboration.,
- Be prepared to invest, emotionally and financially, in the relationships with the collaborators,
- Be aware and reflexive of existing power structures. Purposely search for ways to redistribute power amongst the collaborators in practical (i.e. financial) ways. Make the art- or academic institution penman, if they are more likely to receive funding. Redistribute the funding afterwards in manner that reflects the goal of changing power structures,
- Be aware of the (societal) precarious circumstances and history of trauma when working with a marginalized community. Prepare a mental health infrastructure from the start of the collaboration to cover possible emotional challenges,
- Create a team of 'spaceholders'. These are the people that are not the official coordinators, but form a team that the participants can confide in in an unofficial manner. It is important that the 'spaceholders' are participants themselves, but receive (financial) compensation for their work.

Index

Introduction	1
Main research question and sub-questions	2
Societal relevance.....	3
Scientific relevance	3
Theoretical Framework	4
Liminality	4
Power.....	5
Decolonial critique	5
Light community	7
Conclusion.....	8
Methodology	9
Community Engaged Research.....	9
Research Methods	9
Participants	11
Data and analysis.....	12
Reflexivity.....	13
Empirical Findings	15
Decoloniality	15
Challenges	19
Opportunities.....	21
Conclusion & Discussion	25
Suggestions for further research	27

Introduction

“(...) we need to begin listening to that which has been silenced by coloniality, by our cultural archive, by our narratives and our privilege.” (Rolando Vázquez, 2017, p185)

In this research, the focus will be on decoloniality. Vázquez provides us with a framework for decolonization that forms the outline for a community engaged research project named LIMBO queer exilic narratives. The Amsterdam art institution Framer Framed supported LIMBO by providing space and resources for queer refugees in an attempt to decolonize their cultural institution. In this research, the effects of this decolonizing attempt in combination with the involvement of the academic institution are explored. The decolonial perspective is not only about practical forms of decolonization, but views decoloniality in its broader perspective. For the purpose of this research it is imperative to understand how coloniality still has a hold on Dutch institutions. Therefore, I consider Edward Said's (1985) critique on historicism that puts the history of the West as the center of human history: “What was neither observed by Europe nor documented by it, was therefore ‘lost’ until, at some later date, it too could be incorporated by the new sciences anthropology, political economics and linguistics” (Said, 1985, p10).

The first step of a decolonization process according to Vázquez (2017) is recognizing the limits of the episteme modernity. An episteme as Foucault (1985) deployed is a conceptual frame that defines a certain time period. This conceptual frame consists of various discourses and practices, but its shared correlation mostly goes unchallenged. According to Vázquez (2017) the episteme modernity is inherently linked to coloniality. The episteme has a Eurocentric character which denies the existence of untouched by modernity non-Western centered philosophies, ways of life and knowledges. This means that in the episteme modernity everything exists inside, and because of, modernity (ibid). The second step is recognizing the implicated role of cultural institutions in the upholding of the colonial hierarchal order. Although there are various layers and paradigms within this colonial hierarchal order, the essence of the order is that non-Western people are seen as inferior in comparison to Western people (Grosfoguel, 2011). The third step is starting to listen to all that was, and is, silenced under coloniality (Vázquez, 2017). I view this entire process as the creation of a counter-discourse challenging the dominant power structures already in place in Dutch society.

This process is challenging for cultural institutions. Decolonizing processes take time and effort, because according to Vázquez (2017) museums constructed and archived the normative self, which is based on Western epistemology, with the control they have over which narratives are heard and which are not (Dodd & Sandell, 2001). In the last years the heritage and art world in the Netherlands has slowly begun reflecting on this position and some have tried to start a decolonizing process. One practical example is the debate on the use of the Gouden Koets (Golden Carriage) by the Dutch royal family, because of its colonial imagery and history (NOS, 2021).

Academic institutions have their own struggle in deconstructing power relations as they are ‘entrenched with exclusive structures (e.g., regarding gender, race, sexuality and class), conceptualizations (e.g., regarding normality/abnormality, sameness/difference and agency/structure) and assumptions (e.g., regarding which groups are considered vulnerable or agentive)’ (Rast, 2021, p2). Rast (2021) explains that some scholars argue for critical engagement, where the researcher reflects on their own (historically developed) thinking, for academic research

to be truly transformative. In this research, I perceive community engaged scholarship as a way of decolonizing the relationship between the researcher and the research participant. Therefore, not only the decolonizing process of the art institution is important in this research, also the methodology of community engaged scholarship by the academic institution is explored as a crucial element of this decolonial collaboration as well.

In this study we, my supervisor and myself as representatives of the university, collaborate with queer refugees from non-Western countries of origin. Given that in the colonial hierarchal order, the people within this community, their knowledges, ways of life and cultures are seen as inferior (Grosfoguel, 2011), their queer identities challenge, whether intentional or not, the colonial perspective of heteronormativity (Smith, 2010). Heteronormativity as explained by Robinson (2016) is the “(...) hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality.” (p1). Furthermore, Holle et al. (2021) argue that queer refugees’ ‘limbo’ status makes room for reflexivity on these dominant power structures and that their art practices can be seen as a form of creative agency which (both intentionally and unintentionally) challenges and resists the dominant power structures. Therefore, the community of queer refugee (artists) form an excellent group to listen to the cultural institution due to their liminal status that encourages reflection and their experiences with dominant power structures (Turner, 1979, in Holle et al., 2021).

The research proposed in this study design aims to contribute to the knowledge on the challenges and opportunities of the decolonialization process within the art institution by constructing a community engaged research project with three important stakeholders: the queer refugee community, the art institution and the academic institution. In this research the intersectional connection between these three stakeholders is prevalent. The decolonial collaboration has both negative and positive outcomes for all parties involved. This research does not focus on how to create the safe space, but rather explores the challenges and consequences of an established safe space. It is therefore not a practical tool for the art institution to use as check boxes on their diversity checklist, but provides a critical view on the role of the art institution and academic research within a decolonial collaboration.

To answer the research questions stated below we conducted an arts-based research approach combined with interviews. The arts-based research approach was based on the creating of safe spaces to share stories through artistic practices. The interviews were held with LIMBO participants and workshop facilitators to gain more insight into their experience during the collaboration. Furthermore an interview was conducted with two representatives from Framer Framed to understand Framer Framed’s position and its relation to the collaboration. To create more insight in engaged scholarship and how it translates into practice, an interview had been conducted with a PhD researcher and engaged scholar, who was also a participant of LIMBO.

Main research question and sub-questions

The research questions were formulated to shape this research that focuses on the collaboration between the queer refugee community, the art institution and the university. I focus on how the concept of decoloniality could be recognized in the collaboration and what challenges and opportunities were present during the collaboration. The research questions are formulated as follows:

Main question: *What are the challenges and opportunities of a decolonial collaboration between the queer refugee community, an art institution and academic research?*

Sub question 1: *Why is LIMBO labeled as a decolonial collaboration?*

Sub question 2: *What challenges did the three parties encounter during the decolonial collaboration?*

Sub question 3: *What opportunities arose and lay ahead due to the decolonial collaboration?*

Societal relevance

This research aims to contribute to insights on decolonization processes of art institutions which will eventually lead to more inclusive art spaces. This meets the demands of the many publics of these art spaces as well as practice critique from museum professionals on the previous mono-vocal narratives that dominated these spaces (Mears & Modest, 2012). Inclusive art spaces are important, because they are places where society comes together, where narratives are displayed and opinions formed. According to Dodd & Sandell (2001) all heritage- and non-heritage art institutions have a social role to contribute to all of society by inspiring, educating, informing and bringing together.

Another point of societal relevance is the fact that different perspectives exist from which to learn, due to the diversity of the collaborators involved. The collaborators include community organizers, artists, queer refugee participants with various backgrounds, the art institution with its team of different expertise, and the university represented by myself as a Master student and my supervisor, for which this project is a continuation of their earlier research on scholarly community engagement. This way both the perspectives ‘lifeworld’ i.e., the queer refugee community as well as the ‘system’ i.e., the academic- and art institution are heard and combined. Furthermore, the research attempts to situate community engaged decolonial research collaborations in a broader societal context. Shining light on the way societal systems and hegemonies are intertwined in the collaboration.

Scientific relevance

The research proposed in this study contributes to the scientific discourse of decolonization of the heritage- and art world. It coincides with recent studies about reimagining heritage- and non-heritage art institutions like the Constituent Museum (2018), a book in which the authors envision the museum as a collaborative project instead of a mono-vocal story teller. Furthermore, the research provides an opportunity to learn more about engaged scholarship in practice. This will contribute to the exploration of engaged scholarship and its potential to be transformative for the participant communities as Kajner and Shultz (2013) argue. At last, the research contributes to the (queer) refugee scientific discourse. It builds on the knowledge of the Refugee Academy research group of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, as well as contributing to its knowledge by exploring a meso-focused case study in the art world.

Theoretical Framework

Liminality

To understand how and why the queer refugee community could have an impact on the decolonization process of the non-heritage art institution it is important to first understand their position in terms of power in society. According to Elferink & Emmen (2017) LGBT refugees are among the most vulnerable groups in the world, because of experienced violence and isolation. According to Shidlo & Ahola (2013) queer migrants are unlikely to find support from their ethnic group in the host country due to cultural negative perception of their SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity). Simultaneously, they also do not receive support from the local LGBTQ+ community in the host country due to their own shame or cultural differences (ibid.). This causes queer refugees to have little to no support system, which translates to the inability to speak openly about their traumatic experiences. This may cause mental and/or emotional issues, such as anxiety, stress and depression (Elferink & Emmen, 2017).

Although these issues are serious and severe, the victimization of refugees in media and research contributes to the hegemonic discourse on refugees (Ghorashi, 2018). In this research the hegemonic discourse is seen as the negative perceptions of refugees that are uncontested in Dutch native culture. I propose that we can counter these issues, not by victimization, but by focusing on creative agency of queer refugees. Not starting from the perspective of victimization within this research can be perceived as decolonial in itself, as it counters the hegemonic academic discourse of victimization. Hegemonies as explained by Gramsci (1971, in Wade, 2002) are not an all-encompassing form of power, but a relation between a dominant and subordinate group in society. Hegemonies are a way for the dominant group to make themselves and the subordinate group believe that an unfair system in society is in fact fair and beneficial to all (Wade, 2002). An example of a hegemony in Dutch society is the dominant discourse where refugees are seen as victims who need to assimilate into the dominant 'culture' as perceived by the native dominant group in society (Holle et al., 2021). This example shows that certain hegemonies in Dutch society can be harmful to the queer refugee community, because it victimizes them, but they also have an ability to challenge them according to Holle, et al. (2021) due to their liminal status.

Liminality as Turner (1969) explains is an ambiguous transition state "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (p. 359). By this description the queer refugee community can be seen as liminal entities, considering that they are in between nations and as explained in the words of Edward Said (2000) exile is a 'discontinuous state of being' (p. 183). In addition, queer refugees' SOGI contributes to the liminality argument. Considering Beech's (2011) view on identity construction as a liminal practice and viewing identity construction as "(...) the process through which the individual agent constitutes and is constituted by their social setting and the discourses available to them and those around them" (p. 286). Therefore, in this research I follow the ideas of Holle et al (2021) and consider queerness as well as refugeeness as "liminal spaces in which there is potentially room to (re-)construct queer refugees' multiple identity markers in a personalized way, as opposed to forcing them to assimilate into societal norms" (p. 4).

By having liminal status, the queer refugee community can challenge certain hegemonies in Dutch society, because of their ability to be reflexive about normalized power and social hegemonies (Holle et al., 2021). Because as Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) discuss in their article,

the liminal can provoke thought, action, experimentation and feeling, moreover liminality not only encourages reflection, but also ‘playfulness and the exploration of new possibilities’ (p. 525).

Power

As explained in the section before, I agree with Holle et al . (2021) and their argument that queer refugees can challenge hegemonies due to their liminal situatedness. In LIMBO we have tried to facilitate a space where the queer refugee community feels safe to do so. In this research it is examined how these safe spaces and their creation have furthermore an effect on the decolonization process of the non-heritage art institution. To do that I use the theoretical lens the ‘power cube’ by Gaventa (2006). According to Gaventa (2006) there are different ways in which power occurs in community engagement and there are multiple theories about spaces where marginalized people have the opportunity to challenge existing power structures. To examine and define levels and dimensions of power, Gaventa coined the term ‘power cube’. This power cube consists of the levels (global to local), how spaces for engagement are created (closed, invited, claimed/created) and what forms of power are present (invisible, hidden or visible). All these dimensions are in relation to each other, comparable to a Rubik’s cube. According to Gaventa (2006) claimed/created spaces are the most empowering spaces for participation. It is in these spaces where less powerful actors in society ‘claim’ space and shape their environment (Rast & Ghorashi, 2018). I propose that claimed/created spaces can therefore be perceived as decolonial. For it is in those spaces where voices and narratives who are normally overlooked, by colonial structures, fill the space.

The collaboration between Framer Framed, the queer refugee community members and VU Amsterdam, fits Gaventa’s concept of invited space. Given that the queer refugee community is invited by researchers from VU Amsterdam to participate in the research as well as the workshops. In turn, both parties are invited into the physical space of Framer Framed to conduct the research and the workshops. In this research, Gaventa’s power cube (2006) was used to examine the challenges of such an invited space and the observed levels of power and to understand what spaces and levels of power are beneficial to the decolonization process of the art institution.

Decolonial critique

There are different paths within the decolonization discourse. One path is focused on repatriation of artifacts and incorporating acts of inclusion in heritage institutes. Repatriation is generally known as the return of cultural objects to their country of origin (Roehrenbeck, 2010). In the Dutch context this is mostly a big issue for museums such as the NMVW National Museum for World Cultures, whose collection partly exists of non-native artifacts which were acquired during the colonial era, for which the NMVW published a guideline called ‘‘Principles and Process for addressing claims for the Return of Cultural Objects’’ (NMVW, 2019). The need for these guidelines exists because in the repatriation discourse there is dissension about who can lay claim and when that claim is legitimate (Al Quntar, 2017).

Acts of inclusion are another part of the decolonization discourse which fits more into the concept of decolonization for this research. According to Vasquez (2017), the way museums have historically organized themselves, whether intentional or unintentional, has been to strengthen the colonial hierarchical order as constructed in modernity. The decolonization process can be seen as a way to challenge and transform this power. Inclusivity therefore is a hot topic in the heritage and arts field, with policy makers demanding museums and other art/heritage institutions to transform into ‘‘radically shared public spaces’’ (Vasso Belia et al., 2019, p2). In the editorial by Belia et al.

(2019) they argue for the Museum of Mutuality, a democratic ideal where there is space for reflective practice amongst museum professionals and welcoming multiperspectivity. Schavemaker (2019) challenges the role of the museum as a “safe space for unsafe discussions” (p1), because she observes that the museum maintains and reproduces hegemonies. Schavemaker (ibid.) argues for radically opening up the museum to actually change the narrative. However, she acknowledges that this is not an easy task and questions whether the institution can be radically open to all whilst still remaining a safe space for unheard narratives that have the potential to transform the institution. Although the art institution *Framer Framed* does not identify as, nor is considered, a museum, the public role it plays in our society is similar and comparable to that of a museum. Which is why this discourse on the role of museums in our society applies to this research. As Schavemaker (2019) puts it “Not only in museums but across all of our institutions and social interactions, new and suppressed voices are demanding access, fundamental research, a rewriting of conventional narratives, and the deconstruction of the hegemonic powers that be” (p1).

To answer the main research question, I furthermore explore the decolonization discourse regarding universities. According to Charles (2019) this has been an ongoing debate starting in the nineties of the last century with the term ‘inclusive curriculum’ to ‘decolonizing the university’ in 2011 and now the continuation of this with the term ‘decolonizing the curriculum’. On a wider scale Charles (2019) explains decolonizing as “the need to diversify the voices included in the curriculum as well as in those teaching it, and the need to be more inclusive, but on merit, not as a tokenistic gesture or tick-box exercise” (p. 2). Zooming in on the term ‘decolonizing the curriculum’ in sociology, Connell (2019) argues for a radical change in the curriculum, in order for sociologists to have adequate knowledge of the major social questions humanity is facing now. This radical change in our curriculum is grounded in changing our epistemological structure of postcolonial sociology to acknowledging that ‘one’ social science cannot work for all (ibid.). Instead, Connell (2019) proposes using a mosaic epistemology, where different knowledge resides besides each other, or a solidarity-based epistemology or ‘connected sociologies’ (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2019) where you look for connections between knowledges. I propose that combining ‘connected sociologies’ with the concept of ‘continuity’ where “difference side by side, without sameness as the norm or the anchor by which difference is constituted” (Oseen, 1997, p. 55; in Ghorashi, 2014) could contribute to LIMBO being a decolonial knowledge production system.

To continue with the question left by Schavemaker (2019) on how to radically open up the (semi)-public space whilst being a safe space for unsafe discussions and Bhambra’s ‘connected sociologies’ (2014; Connell, 2019), I propose working together in solidarity in these semi-public spaces with communities whose narratives and knowledges are usually overlooked and unheard. Hence, the queer refugee community is proposed as possible collaborators in the decolonization process. For the purpose of radically opening up the (semi)-public space i.e., the art institution, I propose a connection between the liminal status of queer refugees, as well as their marginalized place in society, with processes of decolonization. According to Vázquez (2017) decolonization can be seen as a way to challenge and transform normalized power, which is what queer refugees are able to do due to their liminal status. Vázquez (2017) further argues that “[...] we need to begin listening to that which has been silenced by coloniality, by our cultural archive, by our narratives and our privilege.” (Vázquez, 2017, p185). Queer refugees’ narratives, especially from non-Western countries, have repeatedly been overlooked in the public discourse. Following this idea of decolonization as a process of reflexivity and listening to ‘the other’, incorporating queer refugees’ expertise and liminal narratives in this research seemed a natural connection to me. This process of

reflexivity can furthermore be enhanced by the coming together of individuals who identify as, or feel affiliated with, the queer refugee community in what Ghorashi (2014) calls a 'light community'. She argues that "one of the most durable manners to unsettle normalised structures is to facilitate connections which are 'de-normalised' and inclusive of difference" (p.50). In the next paragraph, I will explain how the concept of 'light communities' applies to LIMBO.

Light community

Bauman (2000) argues, our present world is no longer rooted, but rather rhizomatic. Meaning it is unpatterned and indecisive at its core, liquid modernity is the metaphor employed by Bauman (2000) which refers to this fluidity of our time. In liquid modernity there is the necessity of having to be reflexive individuals as a coping mechanism for the ever uncertain 'speeded-up' world in which quick decision making is vital (Blackshaw, 2010). In this liquid modernity the 'need' for communities has shifted to a 'yearning' for communities "only when we were no longer sure of community's existence that it became absolutely necessary to believe in it" (Blackshaw, 2010, p33). It is furthermore acknowledged in modern psychology literature that the feeling of community is vital for human wellbeing, as Gilbert (2019, in Pillay et al., 2021) describes "Humans crave connection. Feeling accepted for who you truly are can give you validation and self-worth. Knowing there are people who support you and will be there for you when you're struggling provides a sense of safety. And knowing you're needed, that you have a purpose, reminds you that you are valued. Community provides all these qualities and more" (p. 53).

In liquid modernity people seek the comfort of rootedness and a sense of belonging, because their world is characterized by ever changing social structures, fragmentation and uncertainty (Blackshaw, 2010). Liquid modern individuals are the sole central point of their world and their happiness. However, this individualization is paired with the inevitable and intermittent loneliness for which they find a solution by commodifying communities to their individual needs "Community has been stripped of its original identity and turned into a commodity for private consumption" (Blackshaw, 2010, p36). Bauman (2000) refers to this phenomenon as 'cloakroom communities', which can be described as concerning communities that have individual members who step in and out whenever they please disregarding the collective needs. We've encountered this behaviour during the research in the collaboration LIMBO. With individuals joining one workshop and then leaving or not joining every workshop, rather intermittently. However, in the results section it is shown that members did feel a sense of community and strong connection to the group.

The concept of 'light communities' could be applied to explain this phenomenon. According to Ghorashi et al. (2017) there is a growing need for communities that focus on not evident connections and consist of individuals who share engagement for certain public topics or issues. This falls in line with the group of participants from LIMBO who are all in different stages in their life, most evidently their asylum procedures, as well as differences in gender identity and sexual orientation. Ghorashi et al. (2017) describe light communities as having a changing nature that requires flexibility which can prove difficult for the community members. However, they argue that if the community members manage to develop skills to cope with these ever-changing environments and composition, these 'light' communities could prove to be a source of social creativity and vitality that today's liquid modern society demands.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I propose that through co-creating knowledge as an academic researcher together with a marginalized community we can rise up to Schavemaker's (2019) challenge and radically open up the art institution in an effort to decolonize. Whilst co-creating knowledge we must keep in mind the different knowledges must not only exist beside each other, but must be considered a form of 'connected sociologies' (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2019) where we deliberately try to find connections in our different knowledges.

I furthermore propose that the queer refugee community form an excellent collective of unheard narratives to work with. Because, in our effort to radically opening up the institution, their liminal status provides them with the ability to challenge hegemonic discourses. For this to work, the co-creation must happen in a safe space, where the power hierarchies are examined through the lens of Gaventa's 'power cube' (2006). Even though both the academic institution as the queer refugee community were invited into the art institution, I will explain in the empirical section how I conceive the LIMBO collaboration resembling more a claimed/created space as coined by Gaventa (2006) rather than the invited space.

Acknowledging the problematized concept of community in our 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000), I believe that LIMBO can be considered a light community (Ghorashi et al., 2017). It expands and grows, but it not dependent of its individual members. LIMBO was aimed to be a safe space for the queer refugee community to share stories and expertise with each other. This falls in line with the nature of light communities, where you value differences amongst community members and seek for 'unevident' connections (Ghorashi, 2014).

Methodology

Community Engaged Research

Different scholars use different terms to describe engaged scholarship. Rast (2021) employs the term critically engaged scholarship and views it as a way for academic research to be truly transformative for societal change. Originating from a long history of feminist scholars, critical race scholars and other critical scholars, engaged scholarship has developed itself generally as a 'social justice oriented' form of academic research (Beaulieu et al., 2018). Critically engaged scholarship aims to be reflexive of the all-encompassing power as conceptualized by Foucault (1978) and therefore uses collaborative and democratic means for knowledge production, blurring lines of the hierarchy between the researcher and 'the subject' (Edwards and Brannelly, 2017; Kajner, 2013). I view community engaged scholarship as a specific direction under the cupola of critically engaged scholarship. I do however prefer the term community engaged scholarship, because it covers the load of this specific research better than critically engaged scholarship. This is mainly because the collaboration with a community is the core and starting point of this research.

This research aimed to be a community engaged collaboration within the context of the PhD research of my supervisor Fabian Holle, which focuses on co-creating knowledge with queer refugee community organizers and artists through community engaged research. Their research is embedded within the research project *Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change* and affiliated with the Refugee Academy (VU). The research project *Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change* aims to comprehend the notion of engaged scholarship as a means to contribute to the societal inclusion of refugees. The research is situated in three different continents and aims for a comparative perspective from the countries consisting of South-Africa, the United States and the Netherlands. I share the same social justice orientation as the research project *Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change* as my aim for this research is to contribute to societal inclusion of (queer) refugees.

In line with the research methods of my supervisor, I too will employ a community engaged research approach combined with an arts-based participatory approach. Arts-based participatory approach is defined as 'artistic expressions in all the different forms of art as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies' (McNiff, 2008, p. 29; Clover, 2011). In practice the combination between community engaged scholarship and an arts-based participatory approach translates to a collaboration with the queer refugee community where the research is beneficial for all parties involved, particularly in terms of knowledge and resources. One way of trying to be mutually beneficial is by organising creative workshops and focusing on artistic practices. This particular angle of using artistic practices aligns with my own values and expertise as a graduated heritage professional employed and active in the contemporary arts sector. By employing the arts-based participatory approach I acknowledge art practices potential to challenge dominant power structures (Holle et al., 2021), it's potential therapeutical qualities (McGregor & Ragab, 2016), and consider it to be a communication method that transcends language barriers (Karimi, 2019).

Research Methods

As mentioned, this research is a form of community engaged scholarship that aims to be reciprocal in terms of knowledge and resources for both the community, academia, as well as the art institution

(Kajner, 2013). For that reason, the qualitative research methods 'in-depth interviewing' (Tracy, 2013) and an arts-based participatory approach were selected to answer the research question and sub-questions. Both methods have distinct advantages for answering the research questions which I will describe below.

The collaboration is partly based on Vazquez' (2017) three steps of decolonization with the following intentions: 1) recognizing and understanding the limits of the episteme modernity, 2) addressing the role of institutions in upholding hierarchical order, 3) listening to all that is silenced under coloniality. This is done by following the creation of a 'safe space', which creates space for unheard narratives and reflexivity (Rast & Ghorashi, 2018), for the queer refugee community to engage with their own creativity within an established art institution in Amsterdam. In practice this community engaged research project explored the workshop series LIMBO within Framer Framed, an acclaimed Amsterdam art institution. For eight consecutive Sundays there were workshops held at Framer Framed given by community organizers and artists who identify as queer and/or refugee and/or migrant. The focus lay on participants that identify as queer refugee, but there were some participants that identified as either queer or refugee/migrant. Fabian and I took part as participants. By participating ourselves we could create a non-hierarchical connection with the group (Tracy, 2013). Before the start of every workshop Fabian and I introduced ourselves and reminded participants that we were both doing research next to participating in the workshops ourselves. After the workshop series, the participants and artists curated amongst themselves an exhibition which was on display for one month in Framer Framed and launched with a grand opening for the public with a program curated by Sehaq Queer Refugees group.

Employing an arts-based approach has multiple benefits. Research has shown that creative practices can have healing properties for humans as Lane (2005) explains 'when people engage in creative or spiritual acts, even as passive observers, the process creates hope, restores optimism, and helps them cope with debilitating problems' (p122). In all LIMBO workshops creativity was embedded, combining and experimenting with artistic practices from various disciplines ranging from drawing to clowning. The main goal of the workshops was not to create 'quality' artworks, but rather using the creative praxis as a participatory activity, which according to Karkou & Sanderson (2006; De Witte et al., 2021) aides therapeutic change in 'regular' art therapy. Although LIMBO is not considered art therapy, the results show that the creative praxis did have an effect on the emotional state of the participants. An additional benefit is that according to Young (2001) art and creativity play furthermore a role in the democratic system as ploys by activist to demand change without using deliberative methods. According to Young, the activist stays away from using deliberative approaches when seeking change in structures of power, this is because deliberation can be seen as the language of the ones in power (ibid.). Instead, activist use "street demonstrations and sit-ins, musical works, and cartoons, as much as parliamentary speeches and letters to the editor" (ibid, p. 688) as a means to challenge power structures and hegemonies.

After the workshop series finished, I conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews (Tracy, 2013). An important benefit of planning interviews after participating in the workshops, is that the participants felt safe with me because of the existing connection. We already shared stories, had fun, ate together, which combined contributed to feelings of safety. My interview partners can be distinguished into three groups: queer refugee workshop facilitators, participants, as well as representatives of the art institution. I prepared some topics. However, I aimed to minimize the influence I had on my interview partner to a minimum during the interview and let myself be guided by their input.

Table 1. Topic list overview by participant group

Participants of LIMBO	Framer Framed	Academia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LIMBO experience • Sharing stories • Creativity • Future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art • Decoloniality • Collaborations • Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged Scholarship • Communities • Decoloniality

Participants

The participants for this research consisted of participants and workshop facilitators of LIMBO, Framer Framed employees and researchers. In the table below there is an overview of the people I have interviewed for this research.

The sampling method used to find LIMBO participants and workshop facilitators for this research is known as purposeful sampling (Tracy, 2013). Specifically searching for participants in the Netherlands that fit into the parameters identifying as LGBTQI+ and having a refugee background. In practice not all participants and/or workshop facilitators of the LIMBO workshops fitted within these parameters. The reason was that next to purposeful sampling, many participants joined through a snowball sampling method (Tracy, 2013). Participants invited their own community members and friends to join LIMBO which then resulted in a dynamic group of people from all backgrounds who fitted in either one, but mostly two of the parameters. By having participants invite new participants we wanted to contribute to the participants feeling of ownership over the collaboration which would have been problematized if we curated and denied ‘entry’ to participants’ friends. We did however denied researchers that wanted to participate solely for their own research purposes as we felt this would particularly have jeopardized the ‘safe space’.

To gain insights in the perspectives of the art- and academic institution within this collaboration I interviewed Emily Shin-Jie Lee and Emma Regeni from Framer Framed and PhD researcher Lila. The latter two also joined LIMBO workshops which gave them a unique insight into the collaboration in practice. Lila’s experience in combination with her work as an engaged scholar provided insight in the challenges and opportunities she recognized in the collaboration from the point of view of a researcher. Emma’s perspective provides a unique insight taken into account that she was the only representative of Framer Framed, apart from me, that joined the workshops. Emily Shin-Jie Lee, was not involved in LIMBO, but was aware of the collaboration and its vision of co-creating knowledge. Emily has experience working within decolonial collaborations inside and outside of Framer Framed. Her perspective gave insight into the systems and structures of the art institution and how they relate to decolonial collaborations.

Conducting interviews with representatives of all stakeholders within the collaboration gave me insight into the different perspectives. This was imperative to answer my research questions considering it is the collaboration between the stakeholders I am interested in. I did, however, focus mostly on interviewing the participants of the LIMBO workshops. The aim of the decolonial collaboration was to give space to unheard and/or marginalized narratives. For that reason, the main focus lay on the experience of LIMBO participants. It were their perspectives and narratives that needed to be heard in order for this collaboration to be deemed successful. Although I did not interview all participants from LIMBO, the arts-based approach provided me with data from 8

different workshops. This means that I have experiences with and data from, in the form of art works, almost all participants of LIMBO. In total there were 29 participants in LIMBO that identify as LGBTQI+ and have a refugee background.

Table 2. Participant population (N=10)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Status</i>
<i>Lila</i>	Researcher & Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Emily Shin-Jie Lee</i>	Framer Framed
<i>Emma Regeni</i>	Framer Framed
<i>Faadin</i>	Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Jenny</i>	Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Miriam</i>	Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Edith</i>	Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Gonza</i>	Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Afiya</i>	Participant (Pseudonym)
<i>Longcan</i>	Workshop Facilitator & Participant (Pseudonym)

Data and analysis

Written consent was asked given for all data during for this research which consists of art works made during the LIMBO workshops and the interviews held.. In addition, after each workshop, my supervisor and me recorded a reflection of the day which provided useful information. Coinciding with the knowledge about consent forms being the ‘bureaucratization of moral reasoning and ethical practice’ (Rallis, 2010, p381) and being aware of the cultural and linguistic limits of research consent forms, Fabian and I reminded the interviewees and participants verbally during interviews and workshops that they were allowed to decide to withdraw their consent at any time. We also started the workshop series with a consent workshop by Maha Youssef in an effort to overcome the cultural and linguistic limits of research consent forms and translating it’s meaning into the artistic practice of rope play. The participants were furthermore made aware in the consent form and asked for their permission, to record and analyze our conversations. The participants were also made aware, in the consent form, that all records will be deleted, but transcripts with pseudonyms will be stored for research transparency. All of the data was stored on my laptop which is secured by a password and on surfdrive, an encrypted data storage, where only my supervisors have permission to view my work and data.

The interviews were verbatim transcribed. The transcripts were coded in three phases. Starting with open coding where relevant labels were assigned to fragments of the interview, in the axial coding step I renamed them to limit the amount of open codes, in the third step I made connections between the labels. In the code tree, as seen below in table 1, the codes used in this research are made visual. In the last step of coding, I decided to divide the codes into three themes: *Decoloniality*, *Challenges* and *Opportunities*. However, most codes overlap within multiple themes.

Table 3. Code tree

Decoloniality	Challenges	Opportunities
<p>Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal information ● Welcome ● Institutional rules ● Bureaucracy ● Tenderness <p>Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mutual ● Reciprocally ● Family ● Tokenism ● Personal information ● Commodification ● Power dynamics ● Holding eachother <p>Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflexivity ● Unlearning ● Freedom ● Own narrative ● Value system ● Representation ● Language 	<p>Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sharing stories ● Commodification ● Tokenism ● Institutional rules <p>Mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Societal problems ● Therapy ● Stress ● Trauma home country ● Asylum procedure 	<p>Network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workshop ● Events ● Queer community ● Research participants ● Community newcomers ● Diversity in participants ● Learning from each other <p>Art</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Art practice ● Creativity ● Therapy ● Sharing stories ● Own narrative ● Unlearning ● Language <p>LIMBO experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informative ● Cultural differences ● Learning ● Therapeutic properties ● Reflexivity ● Confidence ● Gratitude ● Happy ● Hopeful ● Language

Reflexivity

For this research I aimed for feminist communitarianism: “Feminist communitarianism suggests that researchers should collaborate with their participants, keep their promises, and put relationships and communal well-being at the top of their priorities” (Tracy, 2013 p. 245). This means that I aimed to be truthful at all times about my position as a researcher towards all participants of this research. In practice it meant that I had to walk a fine line between befriending and researching. I was furthermore transparent and reflexive about my (unconscious) bias, positionalities and sympathies both as an individual as well as a researcher during the entire research process. The feminist communitarianism aim is furthermore of importance in this research, because members of the particular community that were participating in the research hold a marginalized position in society. It was therefore necessary for me to be aware of the potential dangers that they could face whilst partaking in the research.

Apart from the potential dangers I had tried to foresee before conducting the research such as prosecution for the undocumented participants and fear of recognition for participants who were not yet ‘out’ in terms of their sexuality. There were other dangers that I did not foresee beforehand.

For example, some participants were anxious of doing interviews with us, because the previous time they were interviewed by IND was a traumatic experience. Even though they knew me and felt safe with me personally, it did take time for them to feel comfortable during the interview and they expressed their concerns and feelings at the beginning of the interview. I did not realize beforehand how solely the word interview would raise concerns and trigger previous trauma for some participants. There were other instances where I was made aware of my privileged position in society by realizing my ‘taken for granted’ safety. In the results chapter I will detail these ethical challenges further, for it is a prominent element of my empirical results.

My professional background as a heritage professional provided me with some theoretical understanding of the decolonization discourse in art institutions. At the time of the research, I also worked as an employee in the art institution where the LIMBO workshops took place. This puts me in a position where I had to critically examine the decolonization process at my place of work. Although I must, and was held aware of my position as the researcher in this context by my supervisors, it is important to inform the reader of my professional position, because I aim to be transparent and reflexive of potential biases I might have due to my position. However, my employers were made aware of the critical research I did and supported the research throughout and financially contributed to the LIMBO workshops. Framer Framed was founded on decolonial critique of the art world. Therefore, I am fully supported and encouraged to explore new depths and possibilities of the decolonization process with a critical lens.

Considering my own positionality in this research I was made aware of my privileged place in society, for I am able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, academically educated and financially stable. I grew up in a safe home environment and was not subjected to a lot of traumatic events. Outside of the home I experienced a similar safe environment growing up in a relatively small town in the Netherlands. However, as most Dutch small towns, there were mostly native Dutch inhabitants. This caused me to be one of three, in a class of 25 to 30 children, to not have a white skin tone during my formative years in primary education. This caused me to experience ‘otherness’ (Ghorashi, 2018), while not being able to label those experiences at the time. Even though these experiences were traumatic at certain moments, I do not consider myself a victim of ‘hard’ forms of discrimination and/or racism. I am aware that my middle-class safe home environment could have had an effect on the prevention of those experiences. Even though I am a woman of color, and have experienced the racism and sexism that accompanies that identity, my (financially) stable environment has given me safety and privileges. This part of my identity and history could have linkages, but also fundamental differences between me and the queer refugee community. I believe that due to both my closeness and distance, I was able to identify with their experiences with racism and/or sexism. While at the same time when doing my research, I was aware that there was and is a fundamental difference in our experiences of marginalization due to mine and their specific sexuality and citizen status.

Empirical Findings

If I came here [LIMBO] I always feel happy to go and feel relief. No, you really helped me a lot. Being in one place to stop and people to talk to with. (Faadin)

In this chapter, I present the empirical results of my research in an effort to answer the main research question: *What are the challenges and opportunities of a decolonial collaboration between the queer refugee community, an art institution and academic research?* The empirical results are based on data consisting of interviews, the reflections of Fabian and I, and the artistic content made by participants and workshop facilitators during LIMBO workshops and the opening. Following the structure of the research questions I firstly present the empirical results for the first sub research question *Why is LIMBO labeled as a decolonial collaboration?* Secondly, I present the results concerning the second sub research question *What opportunities arose and lay ahead due to the decolonial collaboration?* Finally, I present the empirical results for the third sub research question *What challenges did the three parties encounter during the decolonial collaboration?*

Decoloniality

In this section I present the results that answer the first sub research question *why is LIMBO labeled as a decolonial collaboration?* Therefore, I compare the perceptions on decoloniality as expressed by LIMBO workshop facilitator and Framer Framed employee Emily Shin-Jie Lee, intern Emma Regeni and researcher Lila with literature on decoloniality. After this comparison, I present the results that provide insight in whether LIMBO actually was a decolonial collaboration based on my own reflections of the LIMBO workshops and the experiences of the participants and/or workshop facilitators.

As described in the theoretical framework, decoloniality is an overarching concept in which you can take different paths. For that reason, it is imperative to understand how that concept is perceived by participants of this research. For workshop facilitator and participant Longcan, decoloniality is about unlearning western narratives of your own history, as well as finding the knowledge of one's history in the oral stories by one's family and ancestors and then consequently feeling proud of that history. This view aligns with the idea of or 'connected sociologies' (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2019) where you look for connections between knowledges, instead of seeing western knowledge as the main source of valuable knowledge.

I think decolonizing is a way of coming back to our roots and owning what we own without having to feel that we are ripped out of it. (Longcan)

Emma Regeni shares this view of decoloniality being about unlearning and deconstructing western narratives. She perceives decolonial thoughts as lights filtering through the darkness of our colonial western structures and systems.

I think decoloniality is to deconstruct this almost indestructible like heap of culture and behaviors that serve society that is colonial and that is oppressive, because it is colonial and patriarchal and violent. And decoloniality is somehow to also allow lights to filter and reach other areas of the being that have been hidden and killed sometimes even. (Emma Regeni)

Emily Shin-Jie Lee has multiple experiences with, and has done, her own research on decolonial practices inside and outside *Framer Framed*. She views decoloniality as a collective practice where the core element is the making of space for unheard narratives in privileged and powerful institutions. She does however, point out the importance of making sure that the ‘new’ community in the space truly feels welcome and safe. According to Emily Shin-Jie Lee this can only be done if the entire institution believes firmly in the decolonization efforts. A statement in which I see a firm connection between her thoughts on welcoming spaces and Gaventa’s (2006) theory on invited and claimed/created spaces. Emily further emphasizes that in order for decolonization processes to work, you must create a space where the ‘new’ community feels not only invited, but also feels room to create and claim that space into something new and their own.

And there's a lot of different communities coming in, and I feel that it's so important, not just only to think about making space for others. But it's also about how do we create the values of making space for others because it's so easy to say that okay, we just open our institution, and then you can do whatever you want, in the space. But absolutely if the institution itself, the way it operates is not welcoming or [...] not providing a comfortable or welcoming atmosphere for these groups or these participants who are coming in, then it's no use just to say that ‘yeah we're making space and time for others to come in’. (Emily Shin-Jie Lee)

Emily furthermore highlights the importance of trust when engaging with marginalized people and/or communities. Trust, as she considers it, is an invisible and essential element in any decolonial collaboration. Adding to this, PhD researcher Lila also highlights the aspect of trust in her academic work as an engaged scholar. She explains that trust is crucial in engaged scholarship, especially with marginalized communities and furthermore stresses that it has to be mutual. This underlines that trust is a crucial element in the collaboration for all parties involved.

Trust is mutual, so also I had to trust them as well, (...) I cannot do this long term deeply form of engagement, when there is not a mutual trust. (Lila)

What was furthermore stated as a crucial element of decoloniality was the notion of actually doing it in practice, instead of only theorizing or talking about it. The LIMBO collaboration sought to decolonize, without actually using the word decolonization. Unlike many other events, projects and programs, the LIMBO workshops did not incorporate long talks, lectures and discussions about ‘how can we decolonize’.. Contrary to this, the actual decolonizing aspect was having a space by providing tools in the shape of artistic practices to tell one’s authentic story and be yourself.

I think with what we did in a lot of them [workshops] was unlearning what we do know about ourselves and trying to just let ourselves become again, so I think in this way, I would say, we did learn a thing or two about decolonizing the thoughts that were raised to believe. (Longcan)

It was not only in the content of the workshops that the importance of ‘decoloniality in practice’ was noticed, it was also in its organization as Emma Regeni mentioned in our conversation. She highlights that is it not only about talking about decoloniality, the ‘mundane’ work such as washing dishes are just as (if not more) important to creating safe spaces for telling and owning your own narrative.

(...) what does it mean to do decolonial work, it also means sometimes to wash dishes for the people that are working on a project about decoloniality and about [...] actual just very mundane work. And I remember you being really tired after the limbo workshops. And having

to like tidy up the space and having to communicate with the people what would happen and organize the other workshops and handle data of the previous workshops and it was just like work that had nothing to do directly with ideas on decoloniality and what does it mean to deconstruct et cetera. It's just honest work that is needed to reach the goal, so I thought it was very interesting how institutions actually don't have to talk much about it. Sometimes it's not about talking much about decoloniality but about doing the work and understanding that it is work and it's not only talk. (Emma Regeni)

In line with theoretical research by Vazquez (2017) and Schavemaker (2019) LIMBO was intended to produce an 'unheard' narrative of a marginalized group and not to replicate hegemonies and/or narratives of victimization. Therefore, it was of the utmost importance that participants and workshop facilitators felt safe and welcome in the space. The creation of this safe environment went surprisingly fluent in contrary to what was expected before the start of this research. The safe and welcoming environment has also been acknowledged by the participants of LIMBO that were interviewed, who confirmed feeling comfortable to share their stories with us and with each other.

[LIMBO] Was really, really nice for me, because there is a lot of things for me, my thinking, my way of life, there are really lots of thing for me to be confident about. For me to be able to talk to people that I relate to people that understand. So, really, I liked it a lot. I like the people that I talk to and sometimes before you don't know where to start. So, when I talk to people here, when you have a lot of stress a lot of worry and you talk to people that is in your situation you feel relieve and you do not feel left alone, and maybe you are not nobody. So, it really helped me. (Faadin)

I really do enjoy hearing stories and seeing illustrations and feeling people from different places just emerged in one same space so in a way, it was very. It was very mind opening to me to learn about new cultures new people there are ways of life, how they got to the Netherlands. (Longcan)

It was furthermore important that workshop facilitators identified themselves as queer and/or migrant and/or refugee, just as the participants did. By creating this connection between facilitator and participant we anticipated that it would contribute to the feeling of a claimed/created space connected to the well-known motto 'nothing about us without us'. By having workshop facilitators who identified as queer and/or migrant and/or refugee, the queer refugee community were truly contributors to the collaboration and not only participants. Some workshop facilitators also joined other LIMBO workshops, this created a community where the hierarchal order between participants and facilitators blurred. A quote from a workshop facilitator below shows that the LIMBO workshops and the feeling of the group had a positive effect on their creativity.

My initial idea was I was just coming to do the [concealed] workshop and just not do so much because I went to I have a lot going on in my life as well. And, but within time within having to come witness what the other people were doing, I found more like a sense of newer community as well, and I really do enjoy hearing stories and seeing illustrations and feeling people from different places just emerged in one same space so in a way, it was very. It was very mind opening to me to learn about new cultures new people there are ways of life, how they got to the Netherlands. And this also became like a fuel to some of the works that I created during this time, and I just keep kept on yeah just allowing myself to experience this group of people. (Longcan)

[about the workshops facilitators] Yeah, it was actually comfortable. Because he points, but you know when a teacher gives you a boost to the on the right track yeah it felt like you're actually there. (Jenny)

Beforehand it seemed challenging to get the queer refugee community to feel welcome in the art institution considering all these questions of power and whether someone could truly transform and feel safe in an 'invited space' (Gaventa, 2006). From the empirical results it seemed that the participants did not feel withheld by the art institution and rather saw it as 'just a space' where the LIMBO workshops were held. Therefore, I argue that the LIMBO collaboration can be considered a claimed/created space rather than just an invited space. This was an important transformation that occurred during the collaboration, because claimed/created spaces are according to Rast & Ghorashi (2018) the spaces where less powerful actors in society can share their narratives.

Interviewer: Did you know anything about Framer Framed? Apart from Limbo?

Faadin: No, I don't know anything apart from Limbo.

Another argument for the transformation from invited space to claimed/created space was the opening of the LIMBO presentation. In this presentation the participants curated a space within Framer Framed with the artworks they made during the LIMBO workshops. The opening was curated by Sehaq Queer Refugees group, some of whom also contributed as participants during the LIMBO workshops. The academic and art institutions were not involved in the curating of this opening and Sehaq Queer Refugees group furthermore made a program that used Framer Framed's space in a way it had not been done before. Apart from the opening speech, there were again no long talks nor lectures, but there were drag, poetry and techno dance performances. In this sense the queer refugee community truly claimed the space and created a whole new experience for Framer Framed and for some participants in LIMBO that were newcomers.

It [the opening] was so amazing. I've never been to a place where people are doing such things. I was like wow does this even exist. (Miriam)

Giving the community the authority of the opening created furthermore a space for self-celebration. Emma Regeni explained in our conversation how she viewed the LIMBO opening as challenging the narrative of victimization. Which is in line with what Holle et al. (2021) argued for in their work on how queer refugee exilic art practices actually challenge hegemonies.

This idea of fearing to be too much, and fearing to disrupt, and therefore to be given unwanted attention that sometimes can be dangerous even. I felt the opening was exactly on this line of thought sort of like. A rebellion to this phenomenon. And yeah it was instead a way to decide what attention you're getting and how and to celebrate those elements that make you feel unsafe and make you feel excluded. (Emma Regeni)

Having LIMBO be a claimed/created space did raise questions to me about what the role of the art institution actually was. Was it truly a collaboration or was the art institution merely a 'space'. For me it primarily raised the question of the actual added value of having the workshops in an art institution. A possible answer could be that in the art institution the value of artistic practices is reinforced, especially in Framer Framed where they have a longstanding collaboration with an intercultural psychiatry collective that offers art therapy in Framer Framed's building. In that sense there is a more open position towards the use of artistic practices and its benefits within the art institution Framer Framed. I furthermore believe that the creative environment within Framer Framed, with constantly changing exhibitions and its art works showing many artists of colour,

contributed to the feelings of safety and comfort to many participants. You can tell by the many videos and photos that were taken of the space by the participants.

Challenges

In this section, I answer the research question *What challenges did the three parties encounter during the decolonial collaboration?* A challenge for a decolonial collaboration as LIMBO is the risk of ‘tokenism’. Durability is important for LIMBO to be considered a decolonial collaboration, because when the privileged institution opens up an ‘invited space’ (Gaventa, 2011) only for a short period, you risk using marginalized narratives as ‘tokenism’. In the quote below Emily Shin-Jie Lee shares how she has seen that go wrong before in the arts sector.

(..) a lot of the artists, of course, they are aware of their possibilities of being tokenized or being seen as representatives of the institutions to say that ‘Okay, we have done our job’ or ‘we are now starting to decolonize our institution’, so I think there’s always this kind of risk and struggle of starting from a good intention but ending in like the absolute opposite and I think that’s often happening when there’s such a different hierarchy and power dynamic. (Emily)

Charles (2019) also mentions tokenism in her view of decolonization. According to her decolonization can only happen when there is inclusivity based on merit not on tokenistic gestures. This concept of tokenism was furthermore an aspect of an interview where the participant mentioned they do not want to represent anyone, i.e., ‘being tokenized’, because he did not want to feel the weight or responsibility to represent his respective communities. Along these lines one can read that being tokenized can be perceived as a harmful experience, because you are not viewed nor valued for your individual actions.

I just do not want to represent, I just want to be. I don't want to represent, I don't want to feel the responsibility that I am black and I'm responsible for every black person. I don't want to feel that I'm responsible for every queer person (...). (Longcan)

Another challenge lay in the damage that the sharing of stories could inflict. Sharing stories of trauma was experienced as good and healing, but at the same time also difficult and too traumatic as described in the quotes below from a workshop facilitator and a participant.

By the time you go to talk about your story it is so emotional. It's like bringing in pain, because I haven't been able to say really deep things about my time, because when I bring up those stories I'm in pain and increasingly pain about my life. There was a lot of things happen to me in the past. So you see what I want, what's nice for me, is for me to out of the pain, for me to be free. That's what I want. (Faadin)

Not only sharing your own stories was perceived as damaging by some participants. Also, the hearing of other people’s stories was at times difficult as described in the quote below. This put the ‘safe space’ we created in a difficult position. At one hand people felt safe enough to tell their stories, on the other hand these same stories could be damaging to the listeners. Another participant pointed out that they felt ‘low’ for an entire week, after one workshop ended on a to them perceived negative and heavy note. It is important to keep that in mind, because the group only came together once a week.

(...) when people share their pain, it reminds me you of your pain. Everybody have difficulty, everybody has pains, You see everything is always disclosed, we cover everything about us.

Everybody has their weak points. Sometimes when people share their story it affects me, because somebody like me my emotional reality is heavy. Because I remember things about my life that... yeah, it's not easy. (Faadin)

(...) it's not about me but you can feel the person's pain and then you end up sharing the burden. (Jenny)

Even though the sharing of stories caused difficulties, according to Emma the group handled it with warmth and 'tenderness' for each other. She was surprised by the easy going and lighthearted feeling that was present in the group, even when there were traumatic stories shared. This didn't mean that people took the stories lightheartedly, but there was a freedom to share and subsequently feel free to let go of the feeling and to go back to enjoying yourself again.

And I felt again on a very personal level, a lot of just tenderness in the group and I don't know somehow a lot of easy going goodness. Considering also some of the things the things that the participants were going through and the themes that were often brought up, which were really not something, like not lighthearted theme, but somehow it was really just like a group of friends being there for each other and hold each other and that was very powerful and beautiful. (Emma Regeni)

What we derive from these experiences is that emotional care is a challenge for the future. Working with a vulnerable community as the queer refugee community, whom have a lot of trauma, this safe space puts the art institution in a difficult position. People might 'feel' safe to share and to join, but this does not mean that people 'are' truly safe. Considering there was no formal health care supervision, it was hard to conclude if the workshops were not damaging. This situation started the conversation about what would be necessary for LIMBO in the future. When asking participants, they explained that they do see benefits of having a formal health care provider present during the gatherings, but to not let the workshops become a therapy session. They said they would benefit more from someone being there 'just in case', rather than the workshops revolving around therapy.

(...) you may find that the way open up to the therapist in my shelter is not the same way I open up to the therapist in Limbo. So, a therapist is needed. But it shouldn't be like a session. (Jenny)

When we continue with the LIMBO collaboration the question of mental health care will be explored by experimenting with different forms of care. By following this path of experimentation, we aim to find a mental health care structure that fits the needs of the group.

Furthermore, the emotional challenges were also noticeable on the side of the researchers. For me personally, the research affected me on a personal level. As an engaged scholar I have developed emotional connections to the participants. Hearing their traumatic stories, whilst also feeling powerless in helping them was not an easy task. In the conversation with Lila, she reflected on the personal investment you put in as a researcher and how building trust only works if it is not only based on an academic pursuit.

And I think we have to see it more, as you know, personal relationship more than an academic goal to build trust, now it's something that is ongoing it's constant and it really boils down to your humanity. (Lila)

This falls in line with Emma Regeni's view on how engaged scholarship could also be potentially dangerous for the scholar. She views 'getting lost' as a necessity in engaged scholarship, but highlights how that also puts the scholar in a vulnerable position.

And you have to get lost in it, if you wanted to go in a direction that is not rigid and that is not pre-decided. And to lose yourself means to really become aware of how your own vulnerabilities come into into discussion as well, and how you cannot really avoid participating completely. (Emma Regeni)

The discrepancy between the expectations, rules and structures of the academic institution and the investment of the engaged scholar is also a challenge for decolonial collaborations like LIMBO. In my conversation with Lila, we talked about the academic expectations, such as publishing articles, take away time that you could be using to build connections with the community. This forms a challenge for the engaged scholar when trying to find a balance between academic expectations and contributing to the needs of the community.

And then you have, I don't know, you help some of them to get into school or find a job or a house or things that really changed people's lives like really contributed, or if you were part of a social movement and you went to protests and manifestation and meetings and knew, you were really active, but if you don't publish anything and you didn't finish your master dissertation academia would never notice those other things so that's really, really sad. (Lila)

Another challenge, that was noticed during the LIMBO workshops, was the changing group formation. Some participants only came once, some came twice, some came every week. This resulted in an ever-changing composition of the group. Which meant that every week the established safety of the week before, could theoretically be dismantled by new members. In reality the safety of the group stayed the same, because of a couple of regular participants who became 'space holders' of LIMBO. I use the term space holder for someone that takes responsibility for (psychological or social) care during the sessions. After experiencing a lot of emotion during the first two workshops, we made a more formal remunerated collaboration with one participant that has experience working with refugees and art practices in a large humanitarian organization during war and situated in a conflict zone. Their continuous presence created an environment and small team that could accommodate the new members, which relieved Fabian and myself of some responsibility having to care for all new members. In that way the LIMBO group facilitated and self-regulated the safety and care within the group, because of these space holders.

Opportunities

In this section, I answer the research question *What opportunities arose and lay ahead due to the decolonial collaboration?* The first opportunity I noticed was the opportunity to further incorporate art practices in community work. The results show that art practices create a positive impact. The participants and workshop facilitators of the workshops said they enjoyed the creativity and that this is what made it different from the other classes and workshops they normally do. The intent of the workshops was furthermore not an artistic work, but rather having the artistic practice be the way to tell a story.

It [Limbo] was really fun. We also did some other things, jumping, walking talking. So about getting together I think Limbo is unique, because for other things we normally sit and just talk about this and this. But this was different. (Miriam)

I think poetry, it surpasses just words, I think they're more like illustrations and they're like colors. They are stories. And having to have this background of illustrations and art making, I allowed somehow the people to really tell their stories, even without words and this was the intent. (Longcan)

It's hard to talk about your pain, it's also good because you can still learn from them. (Faadin)

LIMBO furthermore proved itself as a network for the art institution. There were queer artists facilitating workshops and performing during the opening that did not work with Framer Framed before. In the quote below one of the workshop facilitators describes how they experienced the space at Framer Framed and how they would want to continue working together in the future.

(...) for the future also organize an event at this location, because I felt maybe I do know it, and I would of course would want to do more because it's a space I love and yeah I think Framer Framed, in short, is now home. (Longcan)

Apart from events, Framer Framed has acknowledged the potential of LIMBO and has decided to continue with the Sunday gatherings. This makes LIMBO not a short-term project, but rather a long-term collaboration. In this way LIMBO participants and facilitators continue to bring in people from their specific communities, further contributing to the 'radically open space' as Schavemaker (2019) intended. There have already been a number of collaborations that emerged from the LIMBO collaborations which I list below.

- LIMBO participant starting as a graphic design intern at Framer Framed,
- Performer from the LIMBO opening started working as Framer Framed's audio technician,
- A Queer Poetry Night event at Framer Framed including two performances of LIMBO participants, organised in collaboration with the artists collective of one of the LIMBO workshop facilitator,
- Events planned in Framer Framed in 2023 with a collective by one LIMBO workshop facilitator ,
- Event planned in Framer Framed with the Queer Network Alliance Amsterdam through the collective Sehaq Queer Refugee Group,
- Activists coming together at Framer Framed, organised by a LIMBO workshop facilitator, to create banners for a protest.

The collaboration furthermore provides a network for the academic institution. It is difficult to create trusting relationships with communities that have been abused or overlooked by academic research as Lila mentioned in our conversation. During her research she was confronted with people who were critical of her work and questioned her intentions.

Like I remember one of the women who is from Congo and she's in her 30s, she's highly educated, she's really nice, is very sharp and she will be like. She will be really sharp, like first time we met she said 'you are white, you don't have the same issues, everything we discussed we experience, you don't want to. So, we can tell you everything, our every single detail of our problems, our needs were concerns and then what did you want to do? Because you're not the first one to come for this information, many people have talked to us, academics, journalists, artists and nothing happened in, so why are you different'. (Lila)

There are always questions about your intentions as a researcher and this can make it difficult to find participants from particular communities. During LIMBO however I have noticed a snowball method of new participants coming in, because they hear about the good experiences their community members have had. We've mainly seen this with community organizers or social workers who came to LIMBO and afterwards invited people from their own network to join. This created a continuous stream of participants.

M told me that it was a workshop. They do different things like arts. I didn't have a whole good idea about it but was like if you have an idea or something you want to do. Share share and you do it so. It was a surprise, because I didn't know exactly what I was going into. (Miriam)

LIMBO also provides a network for newcomers within the queer refugee community. Newcomers who seek asylum in the Netherlands, because of the danger their sexuality brings them in their country of origin, have to 'prove' their sexuality to be able to stay in the Netherlands. This was the case for some participants of LIMBO. Participating in events and programs specifically for people who identify as LGBTQ+ contributes to the evidence the IND (Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service) requires. The system for newcomers can be daunting, especially for LGBTQ+ newcomers who have to 'prove' their sexuality to be able to get asylum here. In the quote below Faadin describes how access to information is crucial for their asylum procedure and links it to power.

(...) information is power, and when you don't have it you don't know it, you can't do anything (Faadin)

LIMBO furthermore provides a place where people can connect and learn from each other, by being a place where people from all stages of the asylum procedure are present, as well as a place where multiple community organizers are participants and/or facilitators. It can practically connect people to other queer community projects and events that people who still need to gather evidence for their procedure can go to. At the same time it offers emotional support, because the group can learn from each other's experiences as newcomers in the Netherlands. This falls in line with the concept of 'light communities' where you actively seek engagement based on the notion that one can learn from 'the other' and vice versa (Ghorashi, 2014). According to interview participants, this idea of learning together, especially for people new in the Netherlands searching for a community, is a crucial element of LIMBO and should be continued in the future.

(...) in the future, I would want limbo, to be more like a collective or foundation and very, very interactive with the migrant community and yeah having workshops, skill learning, adventures. Allowing the community artists to really have a shine and a better bigger stage and just building up a community of people who are maybe new to our country or feeling hopeless and with no community. (Longcan)

Apart from LIMBO being a network for participants as well as for the art institution, it also provided a stage for unheard narratives by opening up the presentation space. This was a sensitive part of the collaboration, moving from the closed safe space to an open uncontrolled environment, but participants did look back on it fondly. It gave them the opportunity to share their thoughts and narratives to a broader public.

[about the opening event] awesome yeah yeah it was actually fun, actually I feel like a celebrity.
Because, after my poem a few friends who wanted me to show them what I actually did upstairs.
(Jenny)

Conclusion & Discussion

To conclude and to answer the main research question *What are the challenges and opportunities of a decolonial collaboration between the queer refugee community, an art institution and academic research?* I will combine the knowledge from the theoretical framework with my empirical results. I will do this by answering my three research sub-questions.

- 1: Why is LIMBO labeled as a decolonial collaboration?
- 2: What opportunities arose and lay ahead due to the decolonial collaboration?
- 3: What challenges did the three parties encounter during the decolonial collaboration?

Why is LIMBO labeled as a decolonial collaboration?

LIMBO can be considered a decolonial collaboration for multiple reasons, one being that it revealed an ‘unheard’ narrative of a marginalized group. However, it is not only because of the space that was provided for this unheard narrative, it was foremost decolonial because of the way it was provided.

Following Gaventa’s power cube (2006) to understand the power relations in different ‘spaces for change’, the LIMBO collaboration can easily be perceived as an invited space. This can be underlined with the claim that the art institution and the university, two powerful and privileged contributors, provided the space and curated the program. However, based on observations and conversations, I argue that in time the space transformed into a claimed/created space. A space which can be acknowledged as decolonial, for it is in these spaces where less powerful actors in society ‘claim’ space for their narratives (Rast & Ghorashi, 2018).

The claimed/created space was noticeable through participants forgetting or not realizing they were in the art institution *Framer Framed*. The typical ‘rules’ of art institutions, such as being quiet, etc., were not prevalent during the LIMBO gatherings, where people danced, ate, cooked, ran, sang and laughed in between the art works. Furthermore, the workshop facilitators, although curated by a representative of the academic institution, were all people that identified as queer and/or migrant and/or refugee, who had creative freedom to fill in the workshops as they pleased. This made the queer refugee community not only participants, but true collaborators and owners of LIMBO. In addition, LIMBO can be perceived as a claimed/created space because of the opening of the LIMBO presentation. Curated by *Sehaq Queer Refugees* group, LIMBO opened an exhibition space with all the works made during the workshops for the public. Both the art and academic institution were not involved in the curating of the opening program and the art institution only contributed by offering space, equipment and volunteers. In this way the queer refugee community members truly claimed the space and created a new experience for *Framer Framed*’s visitors and employees.

This transformation from invited to claimed/created space shows that there was mutual trust between the different parties involved, which is a crucial element of decolonial collaborations as mentioned by Emily and Lila in the results section. The signs of mutual trust are noticeable in the sense that the academic and art institution hand over control and have queer refugee community members organize the opening. Equally, from the side of the queer refugee community they felt safe enough to invite their friends and community into the space. This also links to what I perceive

the biggest opportunity for LIMBO, which I will further describe in a following section after acknowledging and describing the challenges.

What challenges did the three parties encounter during the decolonial collaboration?

A prominent challenge that came out of the empirical results was that the feeling of safety during the LIMBO workshops could also work against the actual safety of the space. Participants in the workshops felt safe enough to share their stories, which at times could be about traumatic experiences from their past. In the theoretical framework it was already mentioned that according to Shidlo & Ahola (2013) queer migrants lack a support system due to negative perceptions of their SOGI by their ethnic group and negative perceptions based on their migrant status by the queer community in their host country. This translates to an inability to have a support system to talk to about personal problems. Therefore, it is not surprising that the participants of LIMBO took the opportunity to tell their stories once they felt safe with the group.

The sharing of traumatic stories was at times difficult to hear for other participants. It reminded them of their own pain or leaving the workshop with negative feelings. This could be damaging considering that LIMBO did not have formal structures to cover and deal with these emotionally loaded experiences. In practice this meant that the organizing team took on the emotional care role which in turn affected them emotionally. At times these emotions felt overwhelming. The lack of mental health structures during LIMBO is a challenge that needs to be considered when continuing the collaboration. For both participants, as workshop facilitators and LIMBO's 'spaceholders'. A recommendation could be to create or provide a formal (back up) mental health structure when continuing the LIMBO collaboration.

At first it seemed that another challenge would be the ever-changing composition in terms of participants of the LIMBO workshops. Eventually this did not jeopardize the feeling of safety in the group as I had expected beforehand, due to our space holders. On one hand it is not a fixed group as it grows and learns despite the changing members., At the same time I have noticed the importance of the space holders. In that sense there are certain members on which the LIMBO community is dependent on or have a significant influence on the feeling of safety within the group. There thus needs to be (some) stability of recurring space holders in the changing formation.

What opportunities arose and lay ahead due to the decolonial collaboration?

The opportunity that can be recognized in both the theories as the empirical results is the creation of a network of different types of knowledges. And LIMBO, the collaboration, has proved itself as a network for all parties involved. For the participants it provided a network within the contemporary arts field in the Netherlands through Framer Framed's network and public. For Framer Framed and the queer refugee community it created new opportunities for co-creation. LIMBO has provided a new network for Framer Framed of artists and creative collectives that they were not familiar yet before the start of the collaboration. LIMBO's workshop facilitators, participants and performers introduced furthermore a new audience for Framer Framed. A few practical examples of the multiple connections that were made, because of the LIMBO collaboration are workshop facilitators planning to program events in Framer Framed with their own collectives, a participant of the workshops starting an internship as a graphic designer in Framer Framed and a performer from the opening being hired as Framer Framed's audio technician. All these new connections furthermore contribute to the decolonization of the art institution by creating a stream of individuals that bring 'new' perspectives and narratives into Framer Framed.

By continuing this co-creation and collaboration in all these new ways seems a way to ‘radically’ open up the space as Schavemaker (2019) argued for, but making it a long-term commitment to each other. This way the danger of ‘tokenism’, as described in the empirical results, and by Charles’ (2019) warning for ‘tokenism’ when the collaboration is not based on merit, is also limited. This is because the collaboration with the queer refugee community is not isolated in a short-term project, but is continued in various paths and connections on a long-term basis.

LIMBO has furthermore created a network of possible research participants for the researchers from the university. Creating reciprocal relationships in research collaborations can take time, because marginalized communities have had negative experiences with researchers as discussed in the empirical results. The collaboration with the queer refugee community during LIMBO has strengthened the relationship with some participants that were already familiar with Fabian, but it has also connected new artists and community organizers from the queer refugee community with the university.

Suggestions for further research

As mentioned, the LIMBO collaboration was faced with the challenge of mental health care. The safe space led to people feeling safe enough to share their stories, which proved to be traumatic at times for both the narrator as the listener. In the future of LIMBO this means that some form of mental health aid is needed. However, as seen in the results section, the participants do not want LIMBO to be a therapy session. Instead it needs to exist somewhere in between a creative workshop and art therapy.

In the future of the LIMBO collaboration we aim to experiment with different forms of mental health aid to find a form that fits with the group. It is even not unimaginable that when there is a ‘solution’ found, that after some time and evaluation, this will change again. This journey to a form of mental health aid that suits the participants could be explored in research that seeks to find ways for our mental health structures to fit into the lives of queer refugees.

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