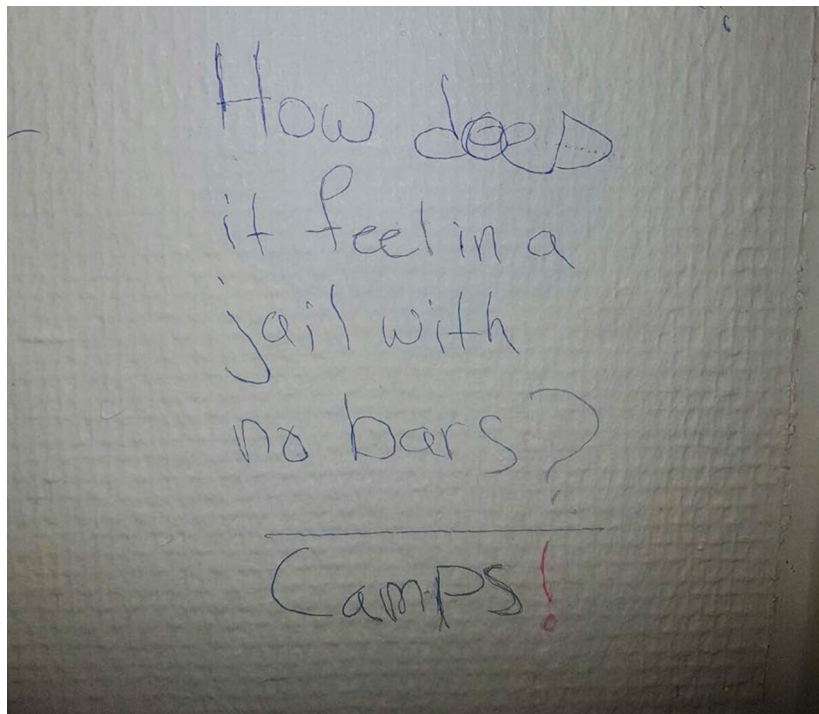


Syrian refugees and their experiences with the Dutch asylum policy



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3 August 2016

A Thesis submitted to the Board of Examiners in partial fulfilment of the requirements
of the degree of Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Supervisor: Dr. Lauren Gould

3 August 2016

Program Trajectory: Research & Thesis Writing only (30 ECTS)

Word count: 21.518

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The text 'How does it feel in a jail with no bars? Camps!' is written by Nadir, one of my informants, on the wall in his room at the asylum seekers center in Utrecht [25 April 2016]

Acknowledgements

When entering for the first time the asylum seekers' center (AZC) in Utrecht, I felt a bit overwhelmed. What I saw were long and very white corridors with on both sides doors to different rooms. The smell was strange to me, and I did not know any person who lived there. After coming there a couple of days a week, I started to feel more at 'home' in the AZC. When I entered the AZC at the end of my 'fieldwork period' I even liked it. "Emma! You want to come over for some tea? I just made some food, come join if you like" I heard frequently coming out of different rooms. I could not be happier with all the wonderful people I have met during my four month fieldwork period in Utrecht. The most important people I would like to thank here are those people: all the people who I have met in the AZC. I am so grateful that you wanted to tell your stories to me, and that you trusted me enough to share these (sometimes painful) stories. 'Informants' are they called in the academic world. For me they are people who became my friends. A special thanks I would like to give to my 'key informant' Cemal, with whom I spent so many hours at the AZC, and where I felt always more than welcome. Thanks for that Cemal, and also to your brother, who made the best Syrian (vegetarian!) meals for us. I cannot describe how thankful and happy I am I have met all these wonderful people. I am sure, with many of them, I will stay in touch.

Next to that I would like to thank New Dutch Connections (NDC) and the great time I had there during my internship. Thank you Esther and Stef, for the warm welcome at NDC and the great supervision you gave me. Thank you Marleen, Sanne, Lydia, Piraye, Henriette, and Frederike, for being '*supermaatje*' with me, and the days we spent working together for NDC and discussing our research. Without all of you, the experience I had at NDC would by far not have been the great experience that it was.

But it has not always been great and easy. There were also moments I did not know anymore what to ask, what to write, and what it was that I was actually doing. When these moments were there, I could always go to Tilburg where my mother and stepfather could calm me down, and ensure me that I was heading in the right direction. If Tilburg was too far to go to, I could have a tea with my sister in Utrecht. They always cheered me up and gave me new energy to continue. Thanks for this, Charlotte, Arjan, and Amber.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank my supervisor Lauren. For the feedback you gave me on my writings, and the new insights I gained during our meetings. This good advice was not only about the 'academic stuff'. You also comforted me in that I am able to do this, and that I should trust myself within this writing process. Thank you so much for this.

I hope you enjoy your reading.

Emma van Ameijde

Utrecht, 2 August 2016

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation in English	Explanation in Dutch
<i>AZC</i>	Asylum seekers centers	Asielzoekerscentrum
<i>COA</i>	Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers	Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers
<i>DJI</i>	Custodial Institutions Agency	Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen
<i>DT&V</i>	Repatriation and Departure Service	Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrek
<i>IND</i>	Immigration and Naturalization Service	Immigratie en Naturalisatie Dienst
<i>NDC</i>	New Dutch Connections	Nieuwe Nederlandse Verbindingen
<i>NGO</i>	Non-Governmental Organization	Niet-Gouvernementele Organisatie
<i>OIET</i>	Entrepreneurship In your Own Future	Ondernemen in je Eigen Toekomst
<i>ROC</i>	Regional Education Center	Regionaal Opleidingscentrum

Terminology

Almost every day you will find news items in Dutch newspapers about aliens, asylum seekers or refugees. These terms are often used interchangeably. They do, however, have different meanings. As I use these three terms in this thesis, I want to give a concise overview of the meaning of these words. The definitions are stated on the website¹ of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) as follows:

Alien

An alien² is a person who does not have Dutch nationality. Within this thesis I will not use the term, only when describing the 'aliens act'³ and the 'aliens' chain'.⁴

Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is an alien who left his country and applied for asylum at the Dutch government.

Refugee

A refugee is an asylum seeker who is being granted asylum.

You will be eligible for asylum if:

- You have sound reasons to fear persecution in your country of origin because of your race, religion, nationality, political beliefs or because you belong to a certain social group.
- You have sound reasons to fear inhumane treatment in your country of origin.
- You are a family member of someone who now holds an asylum residence permit and you travelled to the Netherlands together with this family member or you have arrived in the Netherlands within 3 months from the date on which this family member was granted asylum.

¹ <https://ind.nl/organisatie/informatie-jongeren/wat-is-asiel> [Accessed at 26 July 2016]

² Translated to Dutch: *vreemdeling*.

³ The Aliens Act regulates the admission and expulsion of aliens, the monitoring of aliens residing in the Netherlands, and border control.

⁴ The aliens' chain is a network of governmental organizations that, as a 'chain', provides services with regard to the aliens domain in the Netherlands.

These stipulations are (partly) based on the Geneva Convention on Refugees and on the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECPHRFF).⁵

The focus group of my research are all male refugees from Syria. They are granted asylum and therefore recognized as refugees. Sometimes I will use the word 'asylum seeker', for example when the procedure is being described and a person is not being granted asylum yet. Further explanation of my focus group can be found in the following chapter.

⁵ <https://ind.nl/EN/individuals/residence-wizard/asylum> [Accessed at 26 July 2016]

Date: May 23, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

If you are planning to apply for asylum in the Netherlands, this letter provides you with information about what you can expect. Many asylum seekers are currently arriving in the Netherlands. For that reason the reception facility is very busy and austere and there are long waiting times. Nor is it certain that you will be granted asylum. [...] Owing to the arrival of a large number of asylum seekers in the Netherlands the overall period in which the IND⁶ is required to make a decision has been extended to 15 months, with the option of extending that period by another three months if required to make the right decision. [...] The Netherlands does not have enough reception places for asylum seekers in normal reception centers. Many asylum seekers are therefore being accommodated at temporary emergency reception locations with limited amenities. It is possible that you will be transferred on several occasions to another reception location. [...] If you have an asylum permit, there is currently a very long waiting period before you are assigned accommodation. [...] There are no guarantees that you will be able to have your family come to the Netherlands. The statutory period in which the IND has to make a decision on an application for family reunification is currently six months.⁷ This means that all told it could take over two years before your family can come to the Netherlands, depending on your personal situation.

I realize that this is not good news for you, but it is important for me to inform you honestly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. K.H.D.M. Dijkhoff

State Secretary for Security and Justice⁸

⁶ Immigration and Naturalization Service.

⁷ The decision for family reunion has been extended from six to nine months.

⁸ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/familiehereniging-vertraagd-om-asielstroom-te-temperen~a4335658/>

⁸ [file:///D:/Mijn%20downloads/160523-verwachtingsbrief-grens-engels%20\(1\).pdf](file:///D:/Mijn%20downloads/160523-verwachtingsbrief-grens-engels%20(1).pdf) [Accessed at 10 July 2016]

Introduction

Honesty or discouragement?

Every asylum seeker who arrives in the Netherlands receives a letter from the Dutch state secretary for security and justice; Dr. K.H.D.M. Dijkhoff. According to Dijkhoff, this letter is handed out to ‘inform the asylum seeker honestly’. Deputy director of the Dutch Council for Refugees⁹ Jasper Kuipers would argue, on the other hand, that this letter is meant to discourage asylum seekers to come to the Netherlands. About the letter he said the following: “He [Dijkhoff] hopes that asylum seekers will tell people in their country of origin: do not come to the Netherlands.”¹⁰ Apart from the question whether this letter is intended just to inform people, or is a letter of discouragement, the information provided in the letter is a daily reality for asylum seekers and refugees who have already arrived and are coming to the Netherlands. They face long waiting times, accommodation for asylum seeker with limited amenities, transferring to different reception locations, and uncertainty about the ability to bring their family to the Netherlands. On the 26 of July 2016, 34.486 people were living in reception centers spread over the Netherlands.¹¹ Over fifty percent of those people are waiting for their procedure to start, their asylum decision to be (dis)approved, or to leave the Netherlands. The other 15.956 (46 per cent) are permit holders, which means that they are (temporarily) granted asylum, and are waiting for a house. The five main nationalities living in these reception centers are: Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Eritreans, and Iranians. The largest group are Syrian people: 13.849, which is 40 per cent of the total amount of people living at reception centers.¹² As the war in Syria is still going on, the influx of Syrian refugees coming to Europe and the Netherlands is not expected to end soon.¹³ Ninety per cent of the asylum request from Syrian asylum seekers is approved.¹⁴ For that reason, this research has taken Syrian refugees as its research group. It is a

⁹ Translated to Dutch: *VluchtelingenWerk Nederland*, an independent, non-governmental organization that defends the right to a fair asylum procedure, and subsequently access to adequate housing, education, health care and work. Their website: <http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/english> [Accessed at 10 July 2016]

¹⁰ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/36361/Vluchtelingen/article/detail/4248111/2016/02/19/Nieuwe-welkomstbrief-voor-vluchtelingen-is-afschriktbrief.dhtml> [Accessed at 10 July 2016]

¹¹ <https://www.coa.nl/nl/over-coa/cijfers-en-jaarverslagen> [Accessed at 30 July 2016]

¹² Ibid. Next to that,

¹³ Prof. Dr. Spijkerboer (2016) quoted in <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/03/19/realitycheck-vluchtelingen-blijven-vluchten-1600441-a442620> [Accessed at 1 July 2016]

¹⁴ <http://www.werkwijzervluchtelingen.nl/feiten-cijfers/aantallen-herkomst.aspx> [Accessed at 27 July 2016]

relevant group to study, as it is the main group that is applying for asylum in the Netherlands at this moment (2016).

Most of the Syrians who are granted asylum perceive Status-B. This means that people can stay in the Netherlands for five years, unless the situation in Syria improves. If this situation has not been improved within these five years it is possible to 'naturalize' and become a 'Dutch citizen' by obtaining a Dutch passport.¹⁵ As can be read in the letter on the previous page, it can take up to fifteen months now before the Immigration and Naturalization Service¹⁶ (IND) has made a decision on the asylum request for the initial five years, with the option of extending that period by another three months. When this decision is made, it can also take months before a person is assigned (their own) accommodation. When an asylum seeker enters the Netherlands, he or she is accommodated in different asylum seekers centers. This accommodation is regulated by the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers¹⁷ (COA). Due to this long procedures and long-term stay at different accommodations for asylum seekers and refugees, this thesis will argue that, even when people are granted asylum, they are still excluded from Dutch society. Regardless of how long asylum seekers and refugees stay in the Netherlands, they are here now, and will probably stay here for potentially quite a few years.¹⁸ For that reason, it is very important and relevant to look at this phenomena, as different studies have shown the importance of the first years of refugees in a new country, and the impact these years have on 'integration'¹⁹ in the long run (see for example Bakker et. al 2013; Szczepanikova 2012). The quantitative research of Bakker et. al show that a longer stay in asylum accommodation increases the risk of social benefits dependency and it decreases employment chances, permanent job chances and refugees' occupational status (2013:441).

¹⁵ <https://ind.nl/EN/individuals/residence-wizard/dutch-citizenship/naturalisation> [Accessed at 10 July 2016]

¹⁶ The IND is an agency of the Ministry of Security and Justice. The IND assesses all residence permit applications of people who intend to live in the Netherlands or who want to obtain Dutch citizenship.

¹⁷ COA is an independent administrative body, that falls under the political responsibility of the Ministry of Security and Justice. COA is responsible for the reception, supervision and departure (from the reception location) of asylum seekers and refugees coming to the Netherlands. To be explained further in chapter two.

¹⁸ <http://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2007172-syrische-vluchtelingen-zullen-in-nederland-blijven.html> [Accessed at 23 July 2016]

¹⁹ Integration is a debated concept. The aim of this research has not been to bring that academic debate into picture. For further readings on integration see for example:

- Berry, J.W. (2005) Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29: 697-712.
- Li, Peter S. (2004) On Immigrant Integration: Reply to Stoffman. *JIMI/RIMI* 5(4):505-514.
- Freeman, G. (2004) Immigrant Incorporation in Western Democracies. *International Migration Review* 38(3):945-69.

As became clear in the conversations and interviews I had with Syrian refugees, they do not feel useful or active when they live in an asylum seekers center. This research aims to unravel the 'asylum world' they live in, and show how different rules, regulations and practices effect, according to them, their lives and behavior. It is important to first get a clear overview of how things are going, before changes can (or should) be made in the asylum policy. With regards to 'the asylum policy', it is not possible to look at every aspect of this policy. I therefore have chosen to focus on the COA for my research. As the time living at asylum seeker accommodation can take more than a year now, I believe that their role of arranging accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is of the utmost importance.

This research is twofold: on the one hand it has looked at the 'macro levels of power' (COA), and on the other hand to the micro-relations of power (Syrian male refugees living in the AZC in Utrecht and their experiences with COA and their policies/practices). This research aims to show the 'larger picture' (structure) and the effect these practices within the larger picture have on the ground. For that reason, theories about Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' and his ideas on power lend themselves perfect for this research. These theories do not argue that it is only systems and structure that creates the behavior of individuals, nor would it emphasis the agency of people. It places 'the subject' within a power-relations field, where the subject is both created by- as a creator of this field (Isin et. al 1999:125). However, this research shows that the system and structure the asylum seeker (and later refugee) enters into is of high importance to how the asylum seeker and refugee lives his or her life while still living in the asylum seekers centers. This is probably not a great start for integrating in the long run within Dutch society.

But does the Dutch asylum system aim to integrate refugees into Dutch society? Broeders (2007), who did research on irregular migrants in Europe, argues that Europe is turning into a 'panopticon Europe'²⁰ (Engbersen 2001:242 in Broeders 2007:74). According to his research, policies to counter irregular immigration have increasingly turned inwards. Because there are different 'structural flaws' concerning border control, these controls have to be "[...] supplemented with policies of discouragement of those unwanted aliens that have passed the border" (Broeders 2007:73). Broeders describes

²⁰ The 'panopticon' as a metaphor comes from Foucault (1977), and can be traced back to Bentham's (1791) design for a prison, where individual prisoners could be watched by a guard at all times, without knowing them if they were watched, because the guard was invisible to the prisoners.

different policy measures, such as employer sanctions, exclusion from public services and surveillance by the police, that are built into society to exclude these irregular migrants from society. My research analyzed if and how this process is playing out in the Netherlands. The research that I have conducted is not about irregular migrants, but about Syrian refugees who have received asylum in the Netherlands. However, I would argue that even when people are granted asylum, they are still excluded from Dutch society, due to the long procedures and long-term stay at different asylum seekers centers. Does the Dutch asylum system aim to integrate refugees into society, or discourage and separate them from society “[...] to tell people in their [refugees] country of origin: do not come to the Netherlands”?²¹

Stories of Syrian refugees

The main objective of this research is to give voice to the Syrian refugees. As Sarah, the project leader of the non-governmental organization (NGO) New Dutch Connections (NDC)²², said to me:

I think there hasn't been one policymaker that had a real conversation with refugees. The first time the minister [Dijkhoff] came to one of our events, he just became speechless. He prepared a speech that didn't make sense at all, and he was ashamed to say it in front of all the refugees. It was terrible.²³

This example shows that too often policy makers are quite out of touch with the realities on the ground. In my opinion, the gap between policy makers and the people whom these policies concern is too wide. I would argue that it is important to not only talk *about* the people you are writing policies for, but to talk *with* these people. This research aims to contribute to this idea by telling the stories of Syrian refugees and their experiences with the Dutch asylum policy. Next to the political relevance, this thesis hopes to make a contribution to existing academic knowledge of governing practices concerning refugees, from within the Netherlands. It aims to understand, describe, and

²¹ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/36361/Vluchtelingen/article/detail/4248111/2016/02/19/Nieuwe-welkomstbrief-voor-vluchtelingen-is-afschrikbrief.dhtml> [Accessed at 10 July 2016]

²² NDC is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works with refugees between the age of fifteen and thirty.

²³ Author's interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

theoretically explain how a governmentality lens can be used to analyze how Syrian refugees experience the asylum policy in the Netherlands.

That brings us to the main research question this thesis addresses, that is formulated as follows:

How do Syrian refugees in the Netherlands experience efforts by asylum policies to turn them into 'governable subjects' through various governing practices to control, normalize, and shape their conduct?

In order to answer this question, the main research question is divided into the following sub-questions:

1. What are governing practices to control refugees in the Netherlands?
 - What is the asylum policy in the Netherlands?
 - Who implements these policies?

2. How do Syrian refugees experience these asylum policies?
 - What is the effect of these governing practices, according to the Syrian refugees, on their conduct?

To answer these sub-questions, I have used different research methods in the period from February 2016 until June 2016. In the next section, I will elaborate on these methods and the limitations of this research.

Methodology and limitations

As can already become clear by using the word 'experience' in the main research question, this thesis is one of a qualitative research. It aims to understand Syrian refugees and their experiences with the asylum policy in the Netherlands. The first sub-question asks for a different method than the second question. To answer the first question, I did a **document analysis** on the official Dutch governmental website²⁴, the website of the IND²⁵, and COA's website.²⁶ The idea was that, for the first two questions,

²⁴ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/asielbeleid/vraag-en-antwoord>

²⁵ <https://ind.nl/>

²⁶ <https://www.coa.nl/>

I would interview COA employees. Unfortunately, it appeared to be hard to get access to COA employees. As I did not get access to COA, I gathered information in another way. I interviewed a woman who used to work for COA (2005-2008), and I interviewed a woman who did her internship at COA (2013). Next to that, I have interviewed a woman who is doing voluntary work for COA, and I asked the people I interviewed from NDC about their relationship with COA, and what they think COA stands for. I conducted six **semi-structured interviews**.²⁷ I recorded and transcribed these interviews. After the transcription, I segmented the data and compared the themes that come out of the different interviews. I coded these themes and structured them in a 'nodes-tree' with the program NVivo (Boeije 2009:75-90).

For the third sub-question, I started with **informal conversations** with Syrian refugees. To get access to this group, I worked as an intern from January 2016 until June 2016 at NDC, where I participated in a project called 'entrepreneurship in your own future'²⁸ (OIET). This project worked with a group of fifty refugees between the age of eighteen and thirty.²⁹ As I was part of the 'recruiting' process of people for NDC's project, I went to the AZC in Utrecht many times. I went to rooms of people to drink tea, have food with them, or just have a chat. Being there in the AZC, I could observe and see how the life is like in the AZC. **Participant observation**, closely linked to informal conversations, has been my second research method. As my interview had some sensitive topics, it was important to build rapport with people, so they trusted me before I conducted the interviews (DeWalt et. al 2010:267). I conducted these **interviews** in a **semi-structured** way. That paved the way for people to also bring in their topics that they found important, but not in a completely unstructured way (DeWalt et. al 2010:139). I conducted eleven interviews with Syrian refugees. Seven of them still lived at the AZC in Utrecht, and four of them live in a house in the area of Utrecht. I recorded all my interviews, and also these interviews I transcribed, segmented, coded and structured them in a 'nodes-tree' with the program NVivo (Boeije 2009: 75-90). What I want to emphasize here, is that these are stories from eleven Syrians, who do not represent the group 'Syrian refugees' in the Netherlands. What I aimed to do with these stories, is to bring the theories (that will be discussed in the next chapter) 'down to

²⁷ Page 81 gives an overview of the conducted interviews.

²⁸ Translated to Dutch: *Ondernemen In je Eigen Toekomst*.

²⁹ As all the Syrians who joined the project, except for one, were men I have chosen to focus on male refugees. Next to that, there are twice as many male asylum seekers and refugees than women living at the asylum accommodations

earth' and, hence, add a bottom-up perspective, which, eventually, will help us to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena we encounter.

Limitations

Due to time constraints and the complexity of the research, there are different limitations within this research. First of all, when I started this research I had in mind to interview COA employees. Unfortunately, as mentioned before, it was very hard to get access to the organization. I tried via different ways to get to speak to people from COA, but none of them gave me access to the people I hoped I could speak with. However, for the topic of my research this is interesting data as well: not getting any access to the employees of COA for an interview. As I could not get access, I had to change my research plan. Fortunately, COA has a very clear and accessible website, with clear information about their organization. It is from this website where I obtained a lot of information about them. Next to the stories of the Syrian refugees about COA, I also heard stories about COA from the people who work for NDC. These stories reflect how these people experience working with COA, and what their ideas about the organization are. I want to make clear here that it is *their* perception about COA, and *their* ideas about COA, and they do not reflect the 'truth' about the organization. Next to that I have interviewed a former COA employee (2005 – 2008), a woman who did her research internship at COA (2013), and a volunteer who works for COA at the AZC in Utrecht.

Secondly, as most of my 'participant observation' has been at the AZC, I have a very clear image of how the life at the AZC is for the people I have spoken with. While spending many days at the AZC, drinking coffee, tea, participating in meals, playing games, I got a very clear insight in the world of my informants. However, for the refugees I have spoken with who already have a house, I do not have such a clear image as with the ones still living at the AZC. I conducted four interviews with four different refugees who live at a house. For this reason, large part of this thesis is about the life at the AZC and the governing practices of COA. A smaller part is about the 'transition' from the AZC to a house, and the way refugees experienced this transition. I will elaborate more on this in the conclusion, where I argue that this part could be interesting for further research.

Lastly I would like to highlight a limitation not based on my empirical research but on the theoretical part of the thesis. As will be described in the next chapter,

governmentality is about relations of power, networks of power, and so many aspects that play a role in a person's life that 'internalize' the way a person behaves and is being disciplined to govern themselves in a certain way. This thesis tries to shed a light on the different organizations that are 'built' around the asylum seeker and refugee in the Netherlands, but because it is such a complex world it is impossible to bring this into picture within the time limit of this research. As such, I have chosen to zoom in on one organization (COA) and the relationship this organization has with other (non-governmental) organizations. The choice for COA has been made, because it is such an important player within the 'asylum landscape' and for the first year(s) of the life of the refugee in the Netherlands.

Thesis outline

This thesis is structured as follows. First, it will give an overview of the academic debate this research is placed in, and the 'theoretical lens' that is used during the data collecting and analyzing of the data. It will describe the ideas of Foucault, who introduced in the 1970's the term 'governmentality'. Foucault's idea shed another light of the idea of power. He challenges the idea of power that can be 'possessed' by a certain actor, but instead he would argue that power is diffuse and that power relations are everywhere. It gives an overview of different important scholars that are relevant for my research, who have elaborated on this term after Foucault. It shows where these ideas overlap and differ from each other. I will then zoom in on the 'spatialization of the state', a concept introduced by Ferguson et. al (2002). In their article, they provide a clear idea on how to do research on power relations, by looking at certain images, metaphors, and representational practices through which the state comes to be understood as a concrete, overarching, spatially that encompasses reality (2002:998). Their ideas on how to analyze power dynamics are being used as a theoretical lens through my research. The chapter will end by giving an overview of different studies that have been done on asylum seekers, ending with research conducted on asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands.

The following chapter will be the first chapter that presents the findings of this research, with a 'governmentality' analyses woven into it. In this chapter, the 'governing practices' of the Dutch asylum procedure will be brought into picture, with a main focus on the COA. Their responsibilities and activities within the asylum centers are brought

into picture, and also their relation with other organizations. This chapter is followed by the second empirical chapter, that looks at how both NDC employees, who work closely together with COA, and (former) COA employees reflect upon the different governing practices of COA that are described in the previous chapter. The third empirical chapter tells the stories of Syrian refugees. How do Syrian refugees experience the asylum policies and governing practices? What is the effect of these governing practices, according to the Syrian refugees, on their conduct? Also within this chapter, the stories are interspersed with theory. This thesis will end with a conclusion, where I will give an overall overview of the research and where I will also make suggestions for further research.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Governmentality is a broad and abstract concept, coined by Foucault in the 1970's, and it has been a very influential concept, used by many scholars in different academic fields. As it has so many aspects, I will not get into detail about every part of the concept, as I will zoom in on specific parts of governmentality that is relevant for this research. In this chapter, I will first look at two different forms of power Foucault talks about: sovereign power and governmentality. There are different important authors that have written about- and explored the concept of governmentality after Foucault introduced the term. I will discuss these different authors, and see where they overlap and differ in the way they write about governmentality. Thereafter the term 'neoliberal governmentality', closely linked to the idea of governmentality, will be described. The next section will describe the work of Broeders (2007) who did research on irregular migrants in Europe, and argues that Europe is turning into a 'panopticon Europe'. On the one hand this system aims to keep irregular migrants out, but on the other hand; once people entered Europe, Broeders (2007) describes how there are different practices and mechanisms build into society to exclude those people from society. The thesis I present here is not about irregular migrants, but about refugees who are granted asylum in the Netherlands. However, I would argue that, even when people are granted asylum, they are still excluded from Dutch society, due to the long procedures and long-term stay at different asylum seekers centers. The last part of this chapter will give an overview of different authors who has done research on asylum policies in the Netherlands; long stays in AZC's; how this can influence integration into Dutch society in the long run; and why I think the analytical framework of governmentality best helps us research and understand the outcome of these policies.

Practices and diffuse forms of power

The concept of governmentality can be seen as a "key notion" of Foucault's work (Allen 1991:431 in Lemke 2002:51). With this concept, Foucault challenges the idea of power that can be 'possessed' by a certain actor, but instead he would argue that power is diffuse and that power relations are everywhere: in the form of social control in disciplinary institutions (hospitals, schools, psychiatric institutions, asylum centers), but

it is also connected to knowledge. By producing certain discourses that are 'internalized' by individuals (a 'regime of truth') that will guide the behavior of populations. It will lead to a form of social control where knowledge enables individuals to govern themselves (Burcell et. al 1991). Lemke states that Foucault challenges:

[...] the common assumption of these very heterogeneous conceptions is the idea that power is something that can be possessed (by a class or the state, an elite or the people), that it is primarily repressive in its exercise, and that it can be located in a single, centralized source like the state or the economy (2002:51).

Instead of focusing on the idea of sovereign power – power as something that can be possessed – Foucault would argue to focus on the microphysics of power and anonymous strategies, instead of taking the macro perspective of the state and centering on the “power holders” (Lemke 2002:51). Hardy elaborates on this idea of power as well, and also states that power is not a phenomenon of the “consolidated domination by one individual, group, or class over others”, instead power is to be found in a network of relations that captures everyone in its web: the ‘advantaged’ and ‘disadvantaged’ (2003:464).

Andrejevic however ‘warns’ scholars for the idea that Foucault dismissed or discounted the exercise of power at a “macro” level (2008:609). Andrejevic quotes Foucault, where he argues that rather “[...] one needs to look [...] at how the great strategies of power encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the level of the micro-relations of power” (Foucault 1972:199 in Andrejevic 2008:609). This shows that indeed, Foucault would not dismiss the idea of ‘macro’ levels of power (“great strategies of power”), but that you have to look at how these macro levels of power work out on- and are depended of the micro-relations of power. This is exactly what this research has done as well: by looking at both the ‘macro levels of power’ (COA) and the micro-relations of power (male Syrian refugees living in the AZC in Utrecht and their experiences with COA and their policies/practices) I tried to show the ‘larger picture’ (structure) and the effect these practices within the larger picture have on the ground.

Governmentality

Since the term 'governmentality' has been introduced by Foucault, there has been a lot of writing and discussion on the term, and what Foucault wanted to say with it. One of these key authors who have elaborated on the term is Rose (2006). He argues that governmentality should be understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior. Together with O'malley and Valverde he ask the questions: who or what is to be governed? Why should they be governed? How should they be governed? To what ends should they be governed? (2006:84). They quote Foucault, by saying that he argued governmentality is an "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power..." (Foucault 1979:20 in Rose et. al 2006:86). With this complex form of power they mean the way a population is governed, not by force or power 'from above', but through these institutions, procedures, and 'relations' of power. A very important aspect in this idea of governing is knowledge about the population, and to govern in light of that knowledge (Rose et. al 2006:87).

Moore et. al discuss this idea of knowledge in light of the relations between 'truth' (knowledge) and power. Who has the power to classify? Who determines categories of thought? And what is the impact of those categories and classifications on people's understanding of others and of themselves, on their actions and on their ambitions? (2006:13) They also state that instead of seeing power as substance or thing, "something to be held", it must be seen as act; power as something that is exercised through social relations (Moore et. al 2006:13). According to them, this requires empirical research at the level of individual practices as well as at the level of institutionalized practices.

Another author who has given a clear overview of Foucault's work is Fimyar (2008). She also discusses the more decentralized and diffused forms of power exercised by multitudes of institutions, and the interdependence between the exercise of government (practices) and mentalities that underpin these practices. She would give another definition to governmentality than Rose et. al (2006), where she focuses more on the 'governable subject'. According to her, governmentality can be described as follows: "[...] the effort to create governable subjects through various techniques developed to control, normalize and shape people's conduct" (2008:5). So on the one hand governmentality has to do with *various techniques* (by institutions, techniques,

procedures, practices) that are developed to control a population, and on the other hand it has to do with people's conduct; creating governable subjects, through these techniques. 'Conducting conduct': it is about modifying people's actions to a certain goal. Creating 'governable subjects' who are able to govern themselves, who 'do things to themselves'. Springer would add to this description of Fimyar that through these ensemble of rationalities, strategies, techniques that produce knowledge, a certain 'mentality of rule' is created that de-centers government because it is meant to 'teach' people to 'auto-correct themselves' and that facilitates "governance at a distance" (2012:137).

'Real effects'

Gallagher (2008) would argue that Foucault would not ask the question 'what is power?' but instead focus on how power is exercised in particular contexts, and with what effects. A very interesting and important point Gallagher emphasizes is that people who exercise power do not have a monopoly on the effects of their actions. In other words, the effect some deeds can have from a person(s) in a powerful position is not always the intention of that action. For this, he argues that studies who investigate power should do this at the point where its intention (if it has one!) is invested in its real and effective practices: "[...] where it installs itself and produces real effects" (Foucault 1980:97 in Gallagher 2008:400). Hardy (2003) argues that power is exercised through the above described network of relations. It empowers actors and disables others, but not in a conscious, predetermined way. In this way she also puts emphasis on the part where Gallagher pays attention to as well: this idea of 'power' being everywhere, it does things and has 'real effects' on the ground, while not to think this is in a predetermined, before-hand calculated way by one 'powerful actor' from above.

The state, however, is seen and experienced by people as a 'powerful actor'. According to Ferguson et. al, people have to 'imagine' and experience the state as an entity with certain spatial characteristics and properties (2002:982). They introduce the concept of the 'spatialization of the state'. There is this idea in society and in the academic world that the state is something that is 'above' society; something that is 'up there'. Ferguson et. al would argue that the point is not that this idea of the state being 'up there' is false, but that it is constructed. They point out that there should be more attention drawn to the imaginative and social processes through which state verticality

(being 'above' society) is made authoritative and effective. Ferguson et. al argue that through certain images, metaphors, and representational practices, the state comes to be understood as a concrete, overarching, spatially that encompasses reality (2002:998). They talk about 'vertical encompassment', which means that through these metaphors and practices, the state represents itself as a 'reified entity' that has particular spatial properties. By doing this, they represent themselves as encompassing of (they mean the idea of the state being located within an series of circles, that starts with family, local community, and it ends with nation-states), and superior to, other institutions and centers of power. They secure their legitimacy and naturalize their authority. The operation of these practices and metaphors is what Ferguson et. al call the 'spatialization of the state'.

But what do they mean with these images, metaphors, and practices? In their article, Ferguson et. al describe their ethnographic research in India about the Integrated Child Development Services program, that was launched by the Indian government in 1975 (2002:985). One of the most important practices of state spatialization (vertically encompassment) in that project was that of surprise inspections, from people who worked 'higher up' in the organization, checking on people in the villages who worked for the organization as well. These surprise visits meant checking how many children where present, and if these children were on the list, where they were supposed to be registered. Most of the activity during these visits were irrelevant to the needs of the state, meaning that the logic of this kind of "recursive regulation" cannot be explained in functional terms. Ferguson et. al state that what it is that these "rituals of surveillance" actually accomplished was "[...] to represent and to embody state hierarchy and encompassment" (2002:987). Meaning with 'state hierarchy' the vertically encompassment explained above.

A second practice they discuss in their article is the documenting and generating statistics by Angandwadi Workers³⁰. This documenting consist of an attendance register, a travel log, an inspection register, a nutrition register, etc. When there were surprise visits, the inspector could ask for these registers and check if they were in line with the kids who were attending the place. According to Ferguson et. al, these inspections were to "[...] discipline, reward, encourage, and punish", in the name of the state, and by doing that establishing an image of the state of both being 'above' society as a 'powerful entity',

³⁰ Employees of the Integrated Child Development Services program.

but also of 'encompassment', by letting local Angandwadi Workers be the face of the organization in the villages (2002:987). The research that I have conducted has also looked at the different practices the Dutch state uses to 'control' (the conduct) of refugees. What are these 'governing' practices? And how are they experienced by Syrian refugees within the AZC?

A second argument Ferguson et. al present in their article is that this idea of the state that is imagined as a powerful, hierarchical entity, is being challenged. The term 'transnational governmentality' is introduced, and with this concept they mean the network of international organizations and transnational NGOs, that "confound" established understandings of state spatiality (Ferguson et. al 2002:982). Later in their article, transnational governmentality is being described as "[...] the outsourcing of the functions of the state to NGOs and other ostensibly nonstate agencies" (2002:989). Familiar metaphors and practices of vertical encompassment are being disturbed due to processes of globalization (international organizations and NGOs), and a new landscape is emerging. However, Ferguson et. al argue that these new organizations should not be seen just as "challengers pressing up against the state from below", but rather as horizontal contemporaries of "the organs of the state". They can be servants; rivals; watchdogs; or parasites, but whatever these organizations are or how they are seen, they all operate on the same level as the state, and also in the same global space (2002:994). My thesis aims to bring into picture what (and if) other organizations are involved with (the governing of) refugees who are living at the AZC. I have mainly looked at the relationship between COA ('state actor') and non-state organizations.

Bio-politics

Another concept Fimyar (2008) writes about that is closely linked to that of (state) governing practices and also introduced by Foucault is that of 'bio-politics'. Demmers would describe the concept as follows:

[...] where geopolitics is a form of politics where power is executed through a control over territories, bio-politics is the exertion of power through the disciplining and regulation of people. Bio-politics is primarily about governing the life (and death) of the population (2012:17).

It thus comes down to governing the life and death of people, through different practices. It entails the administration of the cultural, social, economic, environmental, and geographic conditions under which humans live, maintain healthy, become ill, reproduce, and die: “It is concerned with the bio-sphere in which humans dwell” (Dean 1999:99). Bio-politics divides populations into sub-groups for the purposes of more effective administration of life on the level of population. Sub-groups such as: employed/unemployed, children/elderly, criminals/non-criminals, refugees/non-refugees. Fimyar quotes Dean, who states that bio politics is concerned with what is called ‘lifestyle’: the family, housing, living and working conditions. But also with public health issues, the standards of living, levels of economic growth, and *patterns of migration* (Dean 1999:99 in Fimyar 2008:6).

This leads us to the article of Broeders (2007) who uses the governmentality/bio-political lens to analyze the development of policies aimed at keeping asylum seekers, irregular migrants and ‘unwanted immigrants’ in general, out of (Fortress) Europe. He argues that Europe has turned into ‘panopticon’³¹ Europe, where governments protect their labor markets and public institutions against irregular immigrants, by means of identification and control systems (Engbersen 2001:242 in Broeders 2007:74). These are aimed at excluding non-citizens (irregular immigrants) from social services, opportunities for work, or simply “unperturbed existence” once they did enter the territory (inwards irregular immigration control). Where governmentality processes are aimed at ‘disciplining’ people into ‘good citizens’, Broeders argues that irregular immigrants are ‘watched’ not with the ultimate aim of turning (disciplining) them into good citizens in line with socially accepted standards, but instead “[...] the aim is not to get them in line, but to get them out” (2007:74). But isn’t “getting them out” also a way of disciplining people: exclude them from all (social) services and rights for citizens, and in that way make them leave themselves? Or even better: it makes the people who were thinking about coming after them, not even come at all anymore. This thesis is not about irregular migrants, but instead about asylum seekers who are granted asylum, hence ‘refugees’. It will bring into picture the governing practices of the Dutch asylum policies; these practices starts when the asylum seeker enters, continue when the person is granted asylum, and change again when a refugee gest a house. After being ‘excluded’

³¹ The ‘panopticon’ as a metaphor comes from Foucault (1977), and can be traced back to Bentham’s (1791) design for a prison, where individual prisoners could be watched by a guard at all times, without knowing them if they were watched, because the guard was invisible to the prisoners.

from Dutch society for months, sometimes even years, – as it can take now fifteen months before there is clarity about the asylum request – it is hard for refugees to transit from the AZC into being self-governing citizens in Dutch society.

Neoliberal governmentality

Another important part of (neo-liberal) governmentality is the idea of ‘responsibility’. Responsibility that lies at the person itself; the actions of a person made a person of where he or she is now in life. Lemke calls this “technologies of the self”, and links it to neoliberal forms of government: “The strategy of rendering individual subjects ‘responsible’ (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, and so forth, and for life in society, into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of ‘self-care’” (Lemke 2002:59). This means that a person himself is responsible for things that happen to him or her in their lives. An example could be the research of medical anthropologists about the health care system in the U.S. The individual responsibility is emphasized as a critical component of wellbeing, and the health system tries to make individuals govern their own bodies. Instead of relying on the state that will provide a necessary service, individuals must take responsibility and govern their own access to care (Maskovsky 2000).

Other authors who have written about neoliberal governmentality and this idea of ‘responsibility’ are Ferguson et. al, who state that there has been a shift from a ‘Keynesian welfare state’ towards a so-called free market policy in Western democracies (2002:989). According to this idea, there is an extension of “quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations” that are taken over the social and regulatory operations of the state. They call this “de-statized”. This does not mean that there is less government. Instead, Ferguson et. al argue:

[...] it indicates a new modality of government, which works by creating mechanisms that work “all by themselves” to bring about governmental results through the devolution of risk onto the “enterprise” or the individual (now construed as the entrepreneur of his or her own “firm”) and the “responsibilization” of subjects who are increasingly “empowered” to discipline themselves (2002:989).

Again, this comes down to the 'responsible self'. It is not the government who is the only actor that 'possesses' power and forces this power upon their citizens. Instead, it is the person itself that is seen as "the entrepreneur of his or her own 'firm'", and risk is being put onto this 'enterprise' (and thus the individual), so if a person makes a fault, he or she is to blame for it, and not the government. On the one hand COA aims to 'control' refugees living at an AZC by different techniques, but this thesis will show that on the other hand it also emphasizes the idea of the 'responsible' person (refugee), who needs to take initiative in his or her own life. How does this work out on the ground? How do Syrian refugees experiences this?

Governmentality and refugee camps

To bring the discussion back to a lower level of abstraction, how to combine the governmentality lens with refugee research? An author who has asked the same question is Lippert (1999), who made a historical overview of the international refugee regime, and pointed out different practices and technologies applied by, among others, UNHCR, IRO, and the Red Cross, that allowed intervention into diverse populations and places. According to him, two such practices were the refugee camp and the refugee passport. It is remarkable what he has to say about the refugee camp. These camps came into being during World War II in Europe. They promised to be an efficient way to provide aid to people and segregate refugees of different nationalities. Lippert argues that it was not just food, water and medical aid that was distributed through the camp, but that it was discipline:

Comparable to prevailing assumptions about long-term effects of institutionalization or of receiving welfare, prolonged exposure to the receipt of free food, water, and medical aid in a refugee camp came to be thought, beginning in the 1980s, to ruin camp inhabitants. The refugee camp was deemed to strip inhabitants of their potential as liberal citizens, while simultaneously creating within them less palatable propensities, as a settlement worker notes during an interview that '[...] the longer you have been living in a refugee camp, the harder it makes it for people to settle in

Canada and they create a very high amount of criminals who get into the country and then become a burden to the whole social network' (1999:399).

This shows that, according to Lippert, the longer people stay in a refugee camp, the more they are 'ruined' and their 'potential as liberal citizens' is taken away from them, as everything is given to them and they do not have any choice in this situation. This does not make them into self-governing citizens once they move into society. What about the Netherlands, that has a history of being a welfare state and, compared to the U.S. (see section above), has a lot of social institutions, also for refugees, that, on the one hand, do 'take care' of people, but on the other hand also put a great emphasis on 'own responsibility'? For this it is important to see what research has been done already on refugees in the Netherlands and what influences these kind of institutions had on their first years of their lives in the Netherlands.

Refugees in the Netherlands

There are different authors who have written about the techniques of the Dutch welfare system to govern the lives of refugees. According to these researches, the Dutch welfare states turns refugees into 'passive victims', by only seeing them as victims, who do not take part in Dutch society. Ghorashi, who did research on Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, states "[...] the way these refugees are treated within the asylum seeker centers results in a loss of self-image as independent and active people, and instead making them 'passive victims'" (2005:91). This means that, according to this research, the system influenced the behavior of refugees, turning them into 'passive victims', who could not take care of themselves. Korac, who did research on refugees from Yugoslavia in the Netherlands also refers to the asylum procedure:

A majority of refugees I interviewed in Amsterdam stayed in asylum centers for several months, sometimes for over a year. This was almost unanimously described as a waste of time, because of their limited rights of access to professional language training, education or retraining and work, or simply as the experience of isolation from the 'outside world', which was often described as a humiliating one (Korac 2003:55).

Both of these studies, however, have been conducted more than ten years ago, and different things have changed within the 'asylum landscape' in the Netherlands.

Another research that has been conducted on refugees in the Netherlands is done by Bakker et. al (2014). In their study, they did research on the four largest refugee groups in the Netherlands: Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian and Somali, and looked at the impact a long stay in an asylum accommodation had on their socio-economic integration in the Netherlands. According to them, there are two key issues in refugee integration: the asylum procedure (or more precisely: the asylum accommodation) and the eventually granted residence status. In the Netherlands, asylum seekers must stay in an asylum center, or different asylum centers, waiting for a decision to be made on their asylum request. They argue that, in order not to create false hope, during their process asylum seekers are discouraged from integrating in Dutch society. This can be seen in several aspects of the asylum accommodation: (1) often the centers are situated in rural areas; (2) asylum seekers have limited access to the labor market; (3) all activities are tightly scheduled and controlled, and all aspects of life are conducted in the same place (2014:435). A second key issue they refer to is the eventual granted residence status. When having a refugee status, especially a temporary residence status, this hinders full socio-economic integration, as people are unsure if they can permanently stay in the Netherlands and are not full Dutch citizens (they for example do not have the right to vote). The results of their research showed that the average stay in asylum accommodation is about 21 months. The longer the stay in asylum accommodation, the higher the social benefits dependency and it decreases employment chances and permanent job chances (2014:435). According to their research, integration starts upon arrival and has long term consequences.

The research of Bakker et. al (2014) is a quantitative research. The research that I have conducted has been a qualitative research, where this thesis aims to give an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Syrian male refugees with their asylum procedure and their stay in asylum accommodation. Next to that, the research of Bakker et. al (2014) has been conducted before the higher influx of refugees from Syria coming to the Netherlands. This group is, anno 2016, the largest group of refugees coming to the Netherlands.³² My research has also been about the asylum procedure, with a main focus

³² <https://www.coa.nl/nl/over-coa/cijfers-en-jaarverslagen> [Accessed at 30 July 2016]

on asylum accommodation, and the rules and governing practices that are in place at these accommodations. It has looked at how Syrian male refugees experience their asylum procedure and their stay in asylum accommodation. As we have learned from Andrjevic (2008), Foucault did not dismiss the exercise of power at a “macro” level. For this it is important to know what kind of rules and regulations are in place at these asylum accommodations. This relates to the first sub-question: what are practices to control refugees in the Netherlands? These policies are created from ‘above’ but are depending on the micro-relations of power, what leads us to the second sub-question: who implements these policies? And how are these policies implemented and reflected upon by (ex-)employees of COA? The last sub-question refers to the ‘real effects’ these governing practices have on the ground: how do Syrian refugees experience these governing practices?

Conclusion

In summary, Foucault’s work on governmentality has brought about many ideas and discussions on how to look at- and work with this concept. One of the key feature of governmentality is that it is a different notion of power. Instead of sovereign power, the idea of power that can be ‘possessed’, power must be seen as diffuse; as an act; as relations between people; as discourse that create ‘regimes of truth’; and question such as ‘who has the power to classify and create these ‘regimes of truth’ and with what consequences?’ are important to ask. A very strong saying by Gourevitch, quoted by Demmers: “Power consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality” (Gourevitch 1998:48 in Demmers 2012:116). As governmentality is concerned with the ‘conduct of conduct’, for me the definition given by Fimyar (2008) described on page 22 is a very clear and concise definition, that, in combination with the ‘governing practices’ (Ferguson et. al 2002:985) was leading for this research in creating the main research question:

How do Syrian refugees in the Netherlands experience efforts by asylum policies to turn them into ‘governable subjects’ through various governing practices to control, normalize, and shape their conduct?

It takes the idea of Andrejevic, who states that it is needed to look at how the great strategies of power (*asylum policies*) encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the level of the micro-relations of power (*experience of the refugees with these policies*) (2008:609). It does this through the above described ideas of Ferguson and Gupta about the 'spatialization of the state': what governing practices are in place? Who implements these policies? Are there other non-state actors next to the state-actors (COA) who 'challenge' the legitimacy of the state? How do these governing practices work out on the ground? How are they experienced by Syrian refugees? The first three questions will be answered in the next chapter.

Together with Cemal I pass the reception of the asylum seekers' center in Utrecht. A security guard beckons me: "You didn't register right? You have to register before you go inside the building!" I replied: "I am sorry, I have been here for so many times now that I forgot to register." Irritated the guard responds: "Well, that could be the case, but still you can't just walk in and out here. There are more people who could say the same, but maybe they don't have good intentions."

I remember that I've left my stuff at Cemal's room in the AZC, including my wallet that includes my identity card. I turned to Cemal and asked: "Could you get my stuff from your room? I'm not allowed to enter the building now without registering." Cemal runs into the building, and disappears out of sight. The man behind the desk looks at me: "Did you leave your stuff in his room? You always have to watch them and bring them with you!" I then replied: "Well, I know Cemal for a long time now and he is my friend, so I trust him." The guard stated: "That could be true, but still it's always better here to keep your stuff with you. You never know all the people inside and what their intentions are; maybe they have bad intentions." Cemal returns with my bag. I hand over my ID card to the man behind the desk: "Okay, van Ameijde... Who are you visiting? What is his name? And room number?" I replied to him: "Cemal Loukili. Room K008." The guard said: "Thanks. Here you have your visitor pass. Don't forget to bring it back when you leave. This must be before 22.00, because then you have to leave the terrain." When we walk away from the reception Cemal asks me: "Why did you register at the reception? Now you have a visitor pass and you have to hand it in tonight. Nobody cares about the COA!"³³

³³ Descriptive notes 18 May 2016

Chapter 2. The ‘Asylum Landscape’

Introduction

The aforementioned situation is one that depicts the rules that have to be followed at every AZC in the Netherlands. When visiting an AZC, one has to identify him or herself at the reception, and need to tell the name and room number of the person one is visiting. Because this research has been conducted at the AZC in Utrecht, I can only speak in regards to this particular organization, and confirm that they are particularly strict about the registration rule. This situation is an example of one of the ‘governing practices’ implemented by COA in Utrecht; something this chapter will expound upon in detail. It will do that in the following order: first, it will explain what different asylum seeker accommodations there are in the Netherlands. After that, the asylum procedure is being described, showing that it is a fragmented process, where I argue that it can be seen as one of the governing practices within the asylum procedure. Thereafter it will go deeper into the exact responsibilities of COA. The next paragraph will elaborate on COA’s governing practices concerning the lives of asylum seekers and refugees at the AZC. The chapter will end with shedding light on the relationship between COA and other (non-state) organizations.

The asylum procedure: a fragmented process

The asylum procedure in the Netherlands is a fragmented process. The location where people stay depends on the current phase of their asylum procedure. The different locations³⁴ a person is being accommodated are the following:

Before the asylum procedure starts

- **Central reception location:** COA houses asylum seekers at the central reception location in Ter Apel (Province of Groningen) immediately after they arrive in the Netherlands. They are given provisions including a roof over their heads, pocket money and supervision focused on the preparations for their request for asylum. The meals are provided in a central canteen. However, due to the high influx of Syrian refugees in 2015, there is not always enough space in Ter Apel to host all

³⁴ <https://www.coa.nl/en/about-coa/coa-locations/types-of-reception-locations> [Accessed at 26 July 2016]

the people. Because of that, different emergency shelters and crisis emergency shelters opened.

- **Crisis emergency reception location:** These are locations where people stay for a maximum of 72 hours. After this location, a person will move to another location of COA. Many sports halls have been used for crisis emergency shelter.
- **Temporary emergency reception location:** These are locations where people stay for six until twelve months. It can also be a sports hall, or an empty office building. People will get meals three times a day on set times. As they are waiting for their asylum procedure to start, they do not have any rights. People cannot start to learn the language, they are not allowed to study, or to (voluntarily) work. The time before the procedure starts can now take fifteen months.

During the asylum procedure (interviews with IND)

- **Process reception location:** Asylum seekers in the first phase of the asylum procedure (the general asylum procedure) are housed at a process reception location. These process reception locations are always near the IND's office handling the asylum seekers' request for asylum. The process reception location gives particular attention to the meetings between asylum seekers and their lawyers, the provision of information by the Dutch Refugee Council, information about the COA and medical advice.

After the asylum procedure

- **Asylum seekers' center:** Most of COA's reception locations are regular asylum seekers' centers. It could be that the IND cannot make a decision within eight days. A person then is housed at an asylum seekers' center pending their decision. This is a different location than the process reception location. But also people who are granted asylum (refugee) go to an asylum seekers' center. COA, in collaboration with the municipality, starts looking for a house for the refugee. This has been the focus group of my research: Syrian refugees who are living in the AZC in Utrecht and who are waiting to be accommodated in their own house. Next to that I have interviewed four Syrian refugees who live in their own house in (the area of) Utrecht. They have told me about their experiences with the

asylum procedure and their time in the AZC. Next to that they reflected on the transition from the AZC to their own house.

How then does the asylum procedure go, when asylum seekers enter the Netherlands? There are two different procedures: (1) Entering the Netherlands by airplane and (2) entering the Netherlands by land. It is the latter that I will focus on, as all the refugees I have spoken with did not come by airplane but entered the Netherlands by land. When asylum seekers arrive in the Netherlands, they have three days to go to the central reception location in Ter Apel. Once in Ter Apel there are different steps to be taken³⁵:

- **Notification and Registration:** the asylum seekers get a list of questions about who they are, who their family is, and where they are coming from. Their fingerprints are taken, and with these fingerprints there is a check if the person did not apply somewhere else for asylum, and if the person is not on the 'list of wanted persons'.³⁶ Their picture is taken, and the luggage of the asylum seeker is being searched by a person from the aliens' police. Documents, such as a passport, a plane ticket, or diploma's, need to be handed in for research. This is all being done in the central reception location in Ter Apel.
- **Rest- and preparation period:** after this registration there is a rest- and preparation period of at least six days. In this period, the asylum seeker is being informed about the asylum procedure by a lawyer. He also has an appointment with a nurse, who does a medical research, after this is approved by the asylum seeker. Because of the higher influx of asylum seekers coming to the Netherlands, these six days can now become fifteen months. During this waiting period a person is located in an emergency shelter, and sometimes at a regular AZC.
- **The initial interview:** the IND has the first interview with the asylum seeker about who this person is (identity), where this person is coming from (nationality), and how this person came to the Netherlands (itinerary). This interview is always with a translator. After this interview, the asylum seeker receives a report of the interview. The next day this report is being discussed and checked if it is correct by the asylum seeker, together with his or her lawyer.

³⁵ <https://ind.nl/organisatie/informatie-jongeren/wat-is-asiel> [Accessed at 1 July 2016]

³⁶ Translated to Dutch: *opsoringsregister*.

Additions and adjustments can be made to this report, on request by the asylum seeker. When the initial and second interview take place, the asylum seeker lives at a process reception location.

- **The second interview:** after this ‘correction day’, the asylum seeker has a second interview with the IND. This interview is about the reason for applying for asylum. The asylum seeker has to tell why he or she left his or her country of residence.
- **The evaluation:** after these two interviews, the IND has to decide if the asylum request can be handled within eight days. There are two options: (1) no further research is needed and the IND expects to make a decision within eight days and (2) more time is needed for further research. The common asylum procedure ends and the asylum request is further handled within the extended asylum procedure. This procedure can take up to a year, or even longer. It is the first one this thesis focuses on, as all the refugees I have interviewed have gone through the common asylum procedure, except for one.
- **The decision:** after the second interview, the asylum seeker meets his lawyer again, to see if any adjustments need to be made to this report. After this, the IND makes a decision if the asylum seeker has the right to asylum. If this is the case, this person (now being called ‘refugee’) is being transferred to an AZC.

Within this asylum procedure, many techniques of the Dutch government to ‘govern’ these people can be found: the taking of a fingerprint, and thereby registering a person within a system that is connected to all the countries in the European Union³⁷. A picture is being taken, and this person becomes a ‘digital number’ within the asylum system. Next to that, papers have to be handed in, and there are two interviews that ask (very detailed) questions about a person’s life and his or her family. One could argue that this needs to be done in light of a fair asylum ‘investigation’. But, besides that, I would argue that it can also be linked to the idea within governmentality, where Foucault states that a very important aspect in this idea of governing is knowledge about the population, and to govern in light of that knowledge (Rose et. al 2006). With these interviews, there is so much knowledge gained about the ‘newcomers’ who arrived in the Netherlands. Who is your family? Where are they from? What is your religion? What are your political ideas?

³⁷ <https://ind.nl/Documents/6076.pdf> [Accessed at 16 July 2016]

These are just some questions that can be asked during these interviews. All being asked in light of finding out if this person 'really' has the right for asylum and if this person is a 'real' refugee. The decision made by the IND if the request is being honored or not, is also a very clear examples of the ideas within bio-politics, where people are being divided into sub-groups for the purposes of more effective administration of life on the level of population (Dean 1999:99). Are you a 'real refugee' or an 'irregular migrant'? Next to that, the question can be asked: who has the power to define? Asylum seekers who come here would probably all call themselves 'real refugees', but they are not the ones to decide. It is the IND, working as a governmental organization, who has the power to define who is a 'real' refugee and therefore has the right to stay in the Netherlands.

COA

COA is part of 'the alien's chain' in the Netherlands. The aliens' chain is a network of Dutch governmental organizations that, as a 'chain', provides services with regard to the aliens domain in the Netherlands.³⁸ The overall objective of its policy states the following:

*A regulated and controlled admission of aliens regarding the admission to the Netherlands, stay in the Netherlands or departure from the Netherlands, that is socially responsible in national and international terms.*³⁹

COA is the organization that, within this chain, provides the reception and accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees. This chain consists of many different actors, and within this chain interaction and coordination is needed. Due to the time constraints associated with my research, it is not possible to zoom in on all these

³⁸ Basis Start Architectuur van de Vreemdelingenketen, Buitenlandse zaken, 2013, p.9

³⁹ <https://www.digitaleoverheid.nl/images/stories/architectuur/architectuur%20van%20de%20vreemdelingenketen.pdf> [Accessed at 24 June 2016]

actors⁴⁰ within the aliens' chain. I have chosen to focus on the COA for my research, as I believe that their role of arranging accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is of the utmost importance. Because of the increased influx of asylum seekers in the past years, the time from entering the Netherlands until moving to their own house can take (more than) one year. During this time the asylum seeker (and later refugee) stays at accommodations that fall under the responsibility of COA (described on the previous page). Therefore these people have to follow the 'governing practices' set out by COA. I argue in this thesis that these practices have an impact on the lives of refugees from they enter the Netherlands until receiving their own house. To do that, it is important to know what agency COA is, and what these practices are.

COA is responsible for the reception, accommodation, supervision and departure (from the reception location to a house) of asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands.⁴¹ They are an independent administrative body, that falls under the political responsibility of the Ministry of Security and Justice. Their mission, as stated on their website, is the following:

We ensure in a professional manner that people in a vulnerable position are accommodated and supported in a *safe* and *livable environment* in a manner that ensures that the reception of aliens *remains controllable for politicians and society* and enables us to give account for our acts.⁴² [Emphasis mine]

The words 'safe', 'livable environment', and 'remains controllable for politicians and society' are emphasized by me, because I will argue that those words are important 'guidelines' for the way the lives of asylum seekers and refugees are governed at the reception centers. Further discussion on the effect of this language is included later in

⁴⁰ The aliens' chain consists of the following governmental organizations:

- *Immigratie & Naturalisatiedienst*⁴⁰ (IND) - they decide if the alien can or cannot stay in the Netherlands;
- *Dienst Terugkeer & Vertrek*⁴⁰ (DT&V) - the retention of the alien to their country of origin, or to another country that is willing to 'take' the alien;
- *Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen* (DJI)⁴⁰ - 'Alien' custody;
- Foreign Affairs (and their posts) - the first physical contact with the alien takes place mainly on a diplomatic post; Immigration police - supervises the legality of the residence of the alien, in the context of enforcement and investigation;
- the Royal Military Police - supervises the legality of access to the Netherlands and the legal residence of the alien;
- Seaport Police - supervises the legality of the access;
- Ministry of Security and Justice;
- *Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers*⁴⁰ (COA) - reception of asylum seekers

⁴¹ <https://www.coa.nl/en/about-coa> [Accessed at 30 June 2016]

⁴² Ibid [accessed at 30 June 2016]

this chapter. First I will give an overview of the official responsibilities of COA, that are also described on their website⁴³:

- **The reception of asylum seekers and refugees:** COA receives asylum seekers and houses them at COA locations until the Immigration and Naturalization Service has decided on their request for asylum and the court has reviewed the decision. After this decision has been made, COA houses refugees at AZC's who are waiting for their house.
- **The supervision of and provision of information to asylum seekers and refugees:** Asylum seekers and refugees are responsible for their choices. COA supervises them in making these choices. COA encourages the independence, initiative and self-development of asylum seekers and refugees they need to enable them to give shape to their future in the Netherlands or elsewhere.
- **The provision of necessities to asylum seekers and refugees:** COA provides asylum seekers and refugees bed linen, the basic household effects for their room and other necessities.
- **The payment of pocket money to asylum seekers and refugees:** The Asylum Seekers and Other Categories of Aliens (Provisions) Regulations (Rva) provides for the payment of pocket money.⁴⁴
- **The opening, management and closing of reception locations:** COA is responsible for the availability of sufficient reception places for asylum seekers and refugees admitted to the asylum procedure. COA opens reception locations throughout the Netherlands and holds negotiations with the municipalities on opening reception locations.
- **The maintenance of the safety of the reception locations:** COA staff are trained in conflict management. Security guards are at the reception locations 24 hours a day.

COA is a prime example of spatializing the state vis-à-vis asylum seekers and refugees. By different procedures, rules, and practices they control the everyday life of the asylum seeker and refugee, much more than normal Dutch citizens. In chapter four it will

⁴³ Ibid [accessed at 30 June 2016]

⁴⁴ All my informants receive is €57,- pocket money per week.

become clear what kind of 'effect' these practices have on the lives of the refugees at the AZC.

The second dot point above states that asylum seekers and refugees are *responsible for their own choices*. COA encourages the *independence, initiative, and self-development* of asylum seekers. This is a very clear example of the idea behind neo-liberal governmentality and the 'responsible' citizen, who is responsible for his or her own actions. This is, however, contrary to certain practices implemented by COA, that discourage asylum seekers refugees to take initiative and develop themselves while living at the AZC. The next paragraph will give an overview of these practices.

COA's governing practices

After the common asylum procedure described on page 37, the person – who from then on is being called refugee – is being transferred to an asylum seekers center. As can already be read in the name, these centers used to be for people who were waiting for the decision on their asylum request (asylum seekers). However, since there has been for many years now a problem with 'social housing', this makes the process of waiting for a house, in combination with a higher influx of refugees coming to the Netherlands, longer. On the 26 of July 2016, the total amount of people living in accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees is 34.486. Of these 34.486, 15.956 are refugees. This corresponds to 46 per cent of the people living in an asylum seekers center having a (temporary) permit to stay. With this permit to stay, a refugee has the right to go to school, and to do (voluntary) work.⁴⁵ However, because of certain rules and practices of COA, I would argue that refugees living at an asylum seekers center are being discouraged to already start their lives in the Netherlands and 'integrate' within society. For that I will describe the different governing practices of COA at the AZC. There are practices that concern asylum seekers and refugees living at the AZC, as well as practices that concern people who want to visit the AZC.

The first governing practice of COA concerning people⁴⁶ living at the AZC in Utrecht is the weekly reporting requirement. Every Thursday between 14.00h and 16.00h, all the people who live at the AZC have to come to the reception to scan their (temporary) ID-card. Exceptions can be made, when COA is informed beforehand why it

⁴⁵ <https://www.coa.nl/nl/actueel/veelgestelde-vragen/wonen-in-een-azc> [Accessed at 27 July 2016]

⁴⁶ For either asylum seekers as refugees.

is not possible to register yourself that day. All the refugees I have spoken with are very aware of the fact that this reporting requirement is important, and that you should attend every week. If you do not register, Wael, a 23-year old Syrian refugee, told me that the consequences can be serious. The first time you do not register, you will receive a warning mail from COA. Second, you do not receive your weekly money anymore. After that, Wael thought they could send you away from the AZC and send you back to Ter Apel. He told me that he was not sure about this.⁴⁷ I would say it is not the point whether if these consequences are real or not, the point is that people at the AZC know the importance of this reporting requirement and in this acknowledging the power of COA, and therefore the power of the state. It is a very clear example of a practice of the state through which state verticality is made authoritative and effective (Ferguson et. al 2002:998). Through this practice, COA (and the state) legitimizes their authority: 'you have to register at our office every week, otherwise there will be serious consequences'.

The second practice concerning refugees living at the AZC are the rules about work. If a refugee works while living at the AZC, this person has to pay 75 per cent of his or her salary to COA. Next to that, they no longer receive their weekly 'pocket money' (€57) anymore.⁴⁸ In chapter four I will elaborate more on this practice, and it will become clear how refugees experience it. Similarly for the third practice, which is the fragmented asylum process, described on page 34. Chapter three will show how both COA and NDC employees reflect upon this practice, and chapter four will explain how refugees experience this practice, and what it does to their lives in the AZC.

A fourth practice of COA that concerns people from outside the AZC is described on page 33. Every person who wants to enter the AZC – COA territory – has to identify themselves at the reception. Besides that, the security guard writes down who they are visiting and in what room this person is staying. A visitor pass is handed out, and needs to be handed in before 22.00h. Visiting hours at the AZC in Utrecht are from 08.00h until 22.00h. When a visitor pass is not handed in after 22.00h, a COA employee will come to the respective room and send the visitor away. Also this practice is a clear example of a practice of the state through which state verticality is made authoritative and effective (Ferguson et. al 2002:998). As for asylum seekers and refugees who have their weekly reporting requirement, so do visitors have to identify and register themselves at the

⁴⁷ Author's interview with Wael, 23-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 22 May 2016.

reception. The guards at the reception – working for COA and thus for the state – are in a powerful position, where they can decide if someone is allowed to enter the AZC or not.

Another practice I would like to highlight is the urge of COA to ‘maintain control’ about different situations. This practice concerns housing for refugees and education for refugees. In cooperation with the municipality, COA takes care of the departure of refugees from an AZC to their own house (social housing). One of the reasons why refugees have to stay for such a long time at the AZC is because there is a shortage of social housing in most of the municipalities in the Netherlands.⁴⁹ The first example is the story Sarah told me about housing.⁵⁰ She arranged a year ago for a house in Utrecht for Omar and Khaled, two 18-year old Syrians. Sarah had "a big fight with COA about this", because, according to her, COA does not know who does and who does not like each other. For this reason, COA is afraid that when two people live together, they do not like each other and that there will be trouble. COA has to maintain a good relationship with the municipality, and when there are ‘troubles’ with the people who are coming from the AZC (COA’s responsibility), it may deteriorate this relationship. According to Sarah, COA prefers refugees to live in accommodation found by them, so they can keep control of the situation.

Another similar story relates to three refugees for whom Sarah arranged that they could go to ROC⁵¹ while they were still living at the AZC.⁵² Also after arranging this, COA became angry at Sarah that she arranged this for these refugees. I asked her the question why COA was so angry about this, and her response was as follows:

[...] because they [COA] don’t want to be responsible when something goes wrong. [...] they [COA] told me: ‘when people still live on our territory, we don’t want them to sign up for schools because you have to pay tuition fees, money for books...’, and if that doesn’t go well, COA is afraid that they will be held responsible.⁵³

I asked her: “but are they responsible for this?” Sarah replied: “no, they are not.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ <https://www.woonbond.nl/nieuws/groot-tekort-sociale-huurwoningen> [Accessed at 16 July 2016]

⁵⁰ Author’s interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

⁵¹ In Dutch: *Regionaal Opleidingscentrum*. English: Regional Education center.

⁵² Author’s interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

These two examples of NDC who arranged housing and education for people at the AZC, could be seen in the light of the idea of Ferguson et. al, where they state that the idea of the state as a powerful, hierarchical entity is being challenged by the network of (international) organizations and (transnational) NGOs (2002:989). The organizations that want to work with refugees and also NDC are not international organizations, but they are organizations that do not fall under the state. The examples Sarah gave challenge the idea of COA being in full control of what happens and what does not happen to the people who live at the AZC. As is being stated by Ferguson et. al: they [new organizations] can be servants; rivals; watchdogs; or parasites. It is definitely not the case that NDC is seen as a 'parasite' by COA, however, the examples Sarah gave do show that COA sometimes was not content with the activities Sarah took while working for NDC.

Other organizations

This leads me to the relationship of COA with other organizations who are working with asylum seekers and refugees. New Dutch Connections is one of the few who, as an organization, can enter the AZC in Utrecht. Other organizations who work at the AZC in Utrecht are:

- *De Vrolijkheid*⁵⁵ - they organize activities for children at the center and outside the center
- The (protestant) church – they organize activities for women groups and children
- Next to that there are other activities that are being organized at the center itself by volunteers who work for COA, such as: Dutch language courses; a crèche; yoga lessons.

According to Anna there are quite a few things that are being organized at the AZC, in collaboration with organizations who have been working for a long time with COA (such as *de Vrolijkheid*).

At the moment there is an increase of (volunteer)organizations that want to do 'something' for or with refugees. At a meeting in Utrecht about 'citizen initiatives' who want 'to do something' with asylum seekers and refugees, the location manager (COA) of the AZC in Zeist said the following: "There is no budget coming from The-Hague, to work in a structured way with these organizations and volunteers. As much as we would like

⁵⁵ Translated to English: the mirth.

to do it, at the moment there is no room for this.”⁵⁶ From all the interviews conducted with people who work for NDC and how are (former) COA employees, it became clear that it is hard for new organizations to start a collaboration with COA. According to the location manager in Zeist, it has to do with money. There is simply no budget from The Hague to do something with all these initiatives.

When not only looking at NDC, but the (non-)relationship COA contains with other organizations, it becomes clear that this is not a form of transnational governmentality. Ferguson et. al describe the concept as “[...] the outsourcing of the functions of the state to NGOs and other ostensibly non-state agencies” (2002:989). The Dutch government does not allow other organizations to enter ‘COA territory’. They make it very hard for organizations to get in contact with COA, and to start a collaboration. They try to ‘ensure that the reception of aliens remains controllable for politicians and society’, as is being described on page 39.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to show the asylum policy in the Netherlands, with a focus on COA and their ‘governing practices’. What became clear is that there are policies and practices that concern the people inside the AZC, but also people and organizations from outside the AZC. The weekly reporting requirement for people who live at the AZC, and next to that the identification requirement for people who want to enter the AZC. Next to that there are certain rules concerning work, and also the attempt of COA to ‘remain control’ over education (while still living at the AZC) and the accommodation refugees are assigned to. There are activities being organized for the asylum seekers and refugees, but those activities are mainly *inside* the AZC, instead of *outside* the AZC. There are many initiatives from different organizations that want to do things for- and with asylum seekers and refugees, but according to the COA location manager in Zeist, there is no budget to work in a structured way with these organizations.

I consider the questions asked by Rose et. al important to ask within this context. They ask who or what is, in fact, to be governed? Why should they be governed? And, if we have agreed that indeed they are in need of governing, how is it that they should be governed, and to what ends? (2006:84). The ‘who’ in this story are asylum seekers in the

⁵⁶ Location manager (COA) of the AZC in Zeist, speaking at a meeting about citizen initiatives and refugees on ‘Cultural Sunday’, Utrecht, on 1 May 2016.

Netherlands, and who, in my research, became 'recognized' refugees. Why they should be governed is an answer this research cannot claim, but this chapter aimed to set light on how it is that they are governed. When an asylum seeker enters the Netherlands, there are different data collecting techniques of the Dutch government to gather knowledge on the 'new' population that enter 'their' territory. After the asylum seeker is granted asylum, there are different governing practices present at the AZC where the refugees are waiting for their new house. As this research cannot claim the 'why' and the 'ends' these refugees should be governed, what this research can shed a light on is the way these governing practices is reflected upon by (ex)employees of COA, and by employees of NDC who work together with COA. As is being stated by Andrejevic (2008), Foucault would not dismiss the idea of 'macro' levels of power, but it is important to look at how these macro levels of power work out on- and are depended of the micro-relations of power. The next chapter will look at what happens in reality and how it is reflected upon by employees.

“Maybe it is not possible to have a ‘humane immigration policy’. Perhaps that is a contradiction in termini.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Author’s interview with Hellen, COA employee from 2005 until 2008, Utrecht, on 5 May 2016.

Chapter 3. Reflections of Employees

Introduction

In the previous chapter, an overview is given of the policies, procedures, and ‘governing practices’ concerning asylum seekers and refugees. In this- and the next chapter I will describe what happens in reality and how it is reflected upon by employees and experienced by Syrian refugees. When looking through a governmentality lens at the asylum policy in the Netherlands, this chapter is crucial. As there is not one sovereign power that, from above, dictates what has to happen on the ground. Power relations are everywhere, and more complex than one actor who ‘possesses’ the power (Burcell 1991). For that reason it is important to nuance the ‘dry politics’ that are implemented by COA in the AZC’s. This chapter aims to do that by first looking at the larger political picture COA is part of. After that, it shows how both NDC employees, who work closely together with COA, and (former) COA employees reflect upon the different governing practices of COA that are described in the previous chapter.

COA – The Hague: complex picture

As COA is an independent administrative body, that falls under the political responsibility of the ministry of security and justice (who are located in The Hague), it is important to put COA in the larger ‘political picture’. They have to work within a constantly changing political landscape. Sarah told me that things are changing within the ‘COA-landscape’ at the AZC’s⁵⁸ and I asked her if she knew why this is changing. She said: “That is purely politics. It depends on how the political wind is blowing.”⁵⁹ Marije also referred to COA as a “very political organization”, that has to work with the idea that everything what happens with refugees in- or outside the center, they will be held accountable for.⁶⁰ Hellen gave me different examples of the constantly changing policies, regarding budget and ideas concerning asylum reception and accommodation. At one AZC she set up a Dutch language school and told me: “When I walked through the corridor where the lessons were given I felt really proud of myself. We did this!”⁶¹ One

⁵⁸ According to Sarah, there are more activities at the centers than a few years ago, and people from outside are allowed, when identifying, to enter the AZC’s.

⁵⁹ Author’s interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

⁶⁰ Author’s interview with Marije, Founder of NDC, Utrecht, on 11 March 2016.

⁶¹ Author’s interview with Hellen, COA employee from 2005 until 2008, Utrecht, on 5 May 2016.

year later, they had to close the school. There was no budget anymore. The same she told me about an entire reception center: “In the three years I have worked for COA, I – not me alone of course – set up an entire reception center, and that same reception center I had to close as well.”⁶² According to Hellen, there is a difference between the policy makers of COA - who are located in Rijswijk and have a much closer link with The Hague - and the people who work at the different asylum seekers’ centers. She told me that the people who work at the centers, they care for the people [asylum seekers/refugees] “[...] otherwise they would be policymakers, instead of working at the centers.”⁶³ Hellen was a COA employee who worked at different centers.

Identification requirement

The first governing practices that is ‘understood’ by all the employees I have spoken with is that of the identification requirement for people who want to enter the AZC. I asked the question ‘what is COA according to you and what are their responsibilities?’ From both NDC employees and an ex-employee of COA I got these answers: reception asylum seekers; safety and ‘controllability centers’; it facilitates, COA makes sure people can live (safe) at an AZC.⁶⁴ Because of this, as well as Marije – founder of NDC – as Anna and Sarah understand why, being it an individual or an organization, you cannot just enter the AZC. The people who live there are a vulnerable group. Some people at the AZC still fear the idea of, for example, being chased.⁶⁵ When going deeper into this subject, Marije tells me the following: in the context of safety and ‘remaining control’, COA can do everything. She finds this a logical thing, because you have a small living area where a lot of people live together under stressful circumstances. How do you make sure that you can guarantee safety at this center? Thereafter she mentions this:

A central thing for COA at the center is that everything remains controllable. It is a monopolist in the accommodation for asylum seekers, and at the moment there is such a massive increase and fast increase of that

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Author’s interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 27 February 2016;

Author’s interview with Marije, Founder of NDC, Utrecht, on 11 March 2016;

Author’s interview with Hellen, COA employee from 2005 until 2008, Utrecht, on 5 May 2016;

Informal conversation with Pien, Research internship COA 2013, Utrecht, on 25 May 2016;

Author’s interview with Anna, COA volunteer for activities children at the AZC, Utrecht, on 6 June 2016.

⁶⁵ Author’s interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

organization, that you have incapable people working there. I'm sorry, I mean inexperienced people. And those people get the message: everything needs to be under control. But there is something else with keeping things under control. I'm sure there is some sort of theory about this which I don't know right now, but the tighter your control is, the more opposing force you get. So the less you control, the more space there will be for doing things, the less trouble you have of the individual. And that is something that COA bothers: they close the door because too many things [organizations and volunteers] are coming, but maybe it's better for them to think: we just open our doors.⁶⁶

On the one hand Marije understands why the COA is so strict about who can and cannot enter 'their' territory. On the other hand she asks the question why they do not just 'open their doors', instead of closing it for people and organizations who are coming from the outside.

Overstrained

Another subject being mentioned several times by my informants is that COA employees are so extremely busy now, and that the people who work there are trying so hard to do it 'right'. Anna – who works for NDC and also as a volunteer at COA – told me this:

Everybody is trying so hard. You'd like to see that everybody [at the centers] has the guidance they need, but you also see that people [from COA] work so hard and that people who work for COA leave with burn-outs. [...] You see that people [from COA] are willing to help, but there is a limit. [...] If there was a higher budget than this problem would maybe become smaller.⁶⁷

Also Sarah told me that she thinks that COA is "overstrained" and "so busy".⁶⁸ In this "overwrought" and "keep everything under control"⁶⁹ context I would like to give an example of the cooperation between NDC and COA. For the project of NDC to start, they needed a list of names of the people living at the AZC and their room numbers. It took

⁶⁶ Author's interview with Marije, Founder of NDC, Utrecht, on 11 March 2016.

⁶⁷ Author's interview with Anna, COA volunteer for activities children at the AZC, Utrecht, on 6 June 2016.

⁶⁸ Author's interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

⁶⁹ Author's interview with Marije, Founder of NDC, Utrecht, on 11 March 2016.

Sarah over a month to finally get this list, and because of this the project needed to be postponed with a month. As NDC is working, only within this project, with over a hundred volunteers, this month was crucial, as there were volunteers who could not do the project anymore, because summer vacation would already start before the end of the project. For this list, Sarah got a new contact person, and this person was the only one she was allowed to contact about this list. With this example, it might give the impression that 'COA is in the way again', and not supporting the work of NDC. However, at the end of the project, Eveline told us that the contact person of COA she spoke with said that COA was so pleased with the work NDC accomplished with the refugees.⁷⁰

The above sketched situation can be linked to the ideas of Gallagher (2008), where he states that people who exercise power do not have a monopoly on the effects of their actions. The effect some deeds can have from a person(s) in a powerful position is not always the intention of that persons' action. Was it the intention of the employee of COA to delay the NDC project, and for that reason NDC loses volunteers, by not giving the list of names? Or could it have been that this person was so overwrought and, maybe, is given the feeling from The Hague to 'keep everything under control', and for that reason worked on other things? In line with Gallagher, Hardy states that power is to be found in a network of relations that captures everyone in its web: the 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' (2003:464). Power is exercised through this network, rather than it is 'possessed' by an actor. Within the story I have described above, there are so many different actors: policymakers in The-Hague, policymakers of COA in Rijswijk, employees of COA who work at the centers, people who work for NDC and who 'want' something of COA. This is indeed a network of actors, where there is not one person dictating from above how things are supposed to be. This 'network' can be broadened by so many more people and actors. As Anna described: "For policy makers in The-Hague it is of course also so hard, because it [asylum; asylum seekers; refugees] is such a precarious thing, because whole Dutch society is involved and has something to say about it."⁷¹

Fragmented process

The second practice that is reflected upon by (ex-)COA and NDC employees is that of the fragmented asylum process. According to Hellen this fragmentation creates a lot of

⁷⁰ Whatsapp conversation Eveline, project leader of NDC since May 2016, on 26 June 2016.

⁷¹ Author's interview with Sarah, project leader of NDC, Utrecht, on 2 June 2016.

unrest to people.⁷² They do not know for how long they have to stay at a certain place (days, weeks months?), and what their next accommodation will be. Hellen pointed out that she thinks there is a tension between on one side the (pragmatic) procedure and on the other side the asylum seekers and refugees: what is more important? Anna said about the fragmented process the following:

In the past, I know they [COA] did this [fragmented process] as a discouragement policy, because otherwise they [asylum seekers/refugees] would integrate too much in the community. If after a while these people would not be granted asylum and had to be deported, then those people were too much integrated in this city or village. [...] When you are settled in a community and then you are deported, everybody in that neighborhood will say: "Wait, stop! You cannot do this!" And you will probably not have that situation when a person is being moved every half a year.⁷³

After saying this, she told me that she does not know if this is still the case right now, but that there are many things in this 'relocation process' that she does not understand. What is remarkable about this process, is that COA makes the following statement on their website: "We try to reduce the likelihood that asylum seekers have to move several times within a short timeframe."⁷⁴ During my research, I found out that it is more an exception to the rule that people have not lived at at least three or four different places in the Netherlands within a time frame of a year.

This relocation process can be seen in light of what Broeders states about 'unwanted immigrants' (2007:22). He argues that there are different policies that aim to keep asylum seekers, and irregular migrants out of Europe. When these people do enter the territory, there are policies that are trying to control inwards irregular immigrants. The relocation process concerns three 'categories' of people: irregular immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. As for the first it is clear that they are not granted asylum and have to leave the Netherlands. The second group is still not sure if they are granted asylum. For the third, however, it is clear that they are granted asylum and that they have a permit to stay. It is this group that this research has focused on. Even though they

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Author's interview with Anna, COA volunteer for activities children at the AZC, Utrecht, on 6 June 2016.

⁷⁴ <https://www.coa.nl/nl/wonen-in-een-azc> [Accessed at 30 June 2016]

can stay and will end up in their own house, the period before having their own house they have been 'relocated' many times. This means that they have been part of this 'discouragement policy' before living at their own place. This is very important to notice, as different studies have shown that integration starts upon arrival. The first year(s) in a new country are important (Korac 2003:54).

Conclusion

Three important things can be said both COA (ex-)employees and NDC employees emphasized while reflecting on COA as an organization. First of all, COA as an organization and the people who work there are 'overstrained', and do try to do the 'right' thing. All these people work within a very political organization, and therefore have to work within a constantly changing 'landscape'. Secondly, in line with this, is that power is to be found in a network of relations that captures everyone in its web: the 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' (Hardy 2003:464). The effects certain actions have do not have to be an intended effect (Gallagher 2008). Thirdly, all my informants agreed upon the fact that the fragmented process, and linked to that the 'relocating of people', gives a lot of unrest to asylum seekers. Anna argued that, in the past, this was meant as a discouragement policy, so that people could not integrate too much in the community. For what reason this fragmented process is there up until now, she did not know. Apart from the fact if this fragmented process is meant as a discouraging practice, it does have 'real effects' on the ground to the asylum seekers and refugees. What are 'the real effects' of these policies to the people who these policies concern? By telling the stories of Syrian male refugees who live in the AZC in Utrecht, the next chapter aims to bring that into picture.

Where did you arrive in the Netherlands, and where did you go after this place?⁷⁵

*Nadir: "I had stayed in Ter Apel for five days, then I went to Goes where I stayed for 95 days. After Goes I went to Wageningen. 25 days later, I traveled to Arnhem for my interviews with IND. After having had the interviews, and when I got the positive, I moved to the camp in Utrecht."*⁷⁶

*Nassim: "First, I went to Ter Apel. From Ter Apel to Wageningen. From Wageningen to Arnhem. From Arnhem to Sint Annaparochie. After eight months in Sint Annaparochie I moved to my house in Utrecht."*⁷⁷

*Gaith: "From Ter Apel we were transferred to the Jaarbeurs in Utrecht. There, I stayed for a week. Then we went back to Ter Apel. From Ter Apel I went to Zaandam where we stayed in tents. Then, I moved from the tents to another camp in Zaandam. From Zaandam I moved to Wageningen for my procedure with IND. When I had received my positive, I moved to Utrecht. I am here now waiting for family reunion and my house."*⁷⁸

*Cemal: "I had stayed 1 day in Ter Apel, then I moved to the camp in Utrecht on the 4th of August. That is eight months and two days ago."*⁷⁹

*Diwan: "The police gave me a train ticket to Ter Apel. There, I waited for three days. After these days, I moved to Assen. After fourteen days, I had to go back to Ter Apel, and after this time [I had to go] for about four days to Rosmalen. After Rosmalen to Budel for my interview with IND. After Budel, I had to go back to Rosmalen. After Rosmalen I went to Doetinchem. After Doetinchem I went to Utrecht. And now, I have a house in Leusden."*⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Question I posed to all my informants.

⁷⁶ Author's interview with Nadir, 27-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 1 April 2016.

⁷⁷ Author's interview with Nassim, 29-year old Syrian refugee living Utrecht, Utrecht, on 30 March 2016.

⁷⁸ Author's interview with Gaith, 44-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on May 4 2016.

⁷⁹ Author's interview with Cemal, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 6 April 2016.

⁸⁰ Author's interview with Diwan, 29-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 3 June 2016.

Chapter 4. Stories of Syrian Refugees

Introduction

Last week, Marije – the founder of NDC – said during one of our meetings: “They [refugees] are being pushed around as if they are pawns.”⁸¹ She said this while we talked about five Syrian guys who had taken part in our project, but who – in the middle of the project – were obligated to move to Doetinchem to start their procedure. In fact, some of them were waiting for more than seven months for their procedure to begin. When the moment was there, they were not thrilled though. They said: “Because of NDC, we have met people in Utrecht and have made friends there. What if it turns out that we cannot return to Utrecht after our procedure in Doetinchem?”⁸² Subsequently, when my fellow interns, who had wanted to do something about this, called COA in Utrecht to ask whether it was possible that these guys could come back to Utrecht after their procedure, Sam – the co-founder of NDC – told them: “Wait with this call to COA. We don’t want COA to think that NDC is in the way of their work.”⁸³ My fellow interns still asked COA in Utrecht this question though, only to receive the message that they would “[...] have to ask in Doetinchem.”⁸⁴ When they, subsequently, posed this question in Doetinchem they were told: “No, people cannot choose where they want to go.”⁸⁵

This example, together with the quotes on the previous page, indicates what this chapter aims at: telling the stories of refugees in Utrecht and their experiences with the ‘governing practices’ described in chapter three. Agreeing with Gallagher, I think that studies investigating power dynamics should do so at the point where its (alleged) intention is invested in real and effective practices: “[...] where it [power] installs itself and produces real effects” (Foucault 1980:97 in Gallagher 2008:400). What are the ‘effects’, as experienced by refugees, of the asylum policy – governing practices - in the Netherlands? This chapter will answer this question by following the steps the refugees took when they arrived in the Netherlands. It starts with their arrival in Ter Apel and after that the waiting for their procedure to start; the procedure itself; life at the AZC as a refugee; ending with the transition from the AZC to a house. In every phase described

⁸¹ Translated to Dutch: *Ze worden als pionnen heen en weer geschoven*. Descriptive notes [5 July 2016]

⁸² Descriptive notes, Utrecht, 8 June 2016.

⁸³ Descriptive notes, Utrecht, 8 June 8 2016.

⁸⁴ Descriptive notes, Utrecht, 9 June 2016.

⁸⁵ Descriptive notes, Utrecht, 11 June 2016.

here, I will reflect their experiences in light of the rather abstract theories about governmentality. By doing so, I seek to bring these theories 'down to earth' and, hence, add a bottom-up perspective, which, eventually, will help us to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the problems we encounter.

It's like that farm thing where they put horses in and cows

Before the procedure starts

Every asylum seeker who arrives in the Netherlands first has to go to the central reception location in Ter Apel. The procedure people go through has been described in chapter two. When people arrive in Ter Apel, it is possible that they have to wait and stay in Ter Apel for their procedure to start. However, all the people I have spoken with (except one who had "health issues"⁸⁶) were transferred to other 'camps'⁸⁷ to wait there. The waiting, or more specifically: the not knowing of when your procedure starts while having absolutely nothing to do is what my informants remembered the most. As Nadir, a 27-year old Syrian who owned different coffee bars in Damascus, said:

We were just waiting. He [COA employee] just handed out blankets to us, and we had to wait. I asked a lot, but they just said: you have to wait. [...] How long is it going to take? How long are we going to stay? How long is our stay? They never applied. It's always: 'we don't know anything'.⁸⁸

Nadir also referred to the camp in Goes where he has to wait for his procedure as "[...] that farm thing where they put horses in and cows."⁸⁹ He explained to me:

We were with 400 people inside. It was just really thin wood walls, separating the rooms, with no roof. They had rules when to have breakfast, and when to have lunch and dinner and when they turn on and off the lights. What you can and cannot do. It was very strict. [...] They [COA] told us: 'before you enter the room, you have to knock on the door'. But we didn't have doors. They just had a small curtain.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Author's interview with Asim, 28-year old Syrian refugee living in Zeist, Zeist, on 9 March 2016.

⁸⁷ By all my informants the AZC's are being called 'camps' (deriving from 'refugee camp').

⁸⁸ Author's interview with Nadir, 27-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 1 April 2016.

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

Nadir's 'It was very strict' reflects much of what I have heard about my informants' lives in the different reception centers before their procedure started: everything was controlled. Breakfast, lunch and dinner, for instance, were all prepared for them. Before the procedure starts, asylum seekers are not allowed to learn Dutch at a language school or at the camp, to study, to work, or to do voluntary work. This time, before the procedure starts, can take up to fifteen months.

IND: the procedure

"You look so different here. You don't have a beard", I said to Cemal when I see his picture on his five-year temporary Dutch ID card. Cemal looked at me: "Yea, well, my aunt [who already lives in the Netherlands for twenty years] tells me 'you must shave your beard' because the IND is not friendly." "I like your beard", I tell him. "Yes, you like, but the IND doesn't like it. You're ISIS or a terrorist."⁹¹ Cemal changed his appearance before having his interviews with IND. His procedure went 'fast'. After 1.5 months he knew he had a positive status. Wael, a 23-year old Syrian who wants to finish his study business administration, had to wait longer. He is the only Syrian refugee I have spoken with who went into the extended asylum procedure. He told me he did not understand why, and that he became so sick of not knowing his status:

I'm thinking about going back to Turkey [where he had lived before he came to the Netherlands]. And I'm very, very sick before I get decision. When I get the decision, I just think about I go to IND, documents for passport and I want to come back to Turkey. Because here very hard to live and I cannot complete my life here.⁹²

Wael, in fact, told me several times that he had thought about going back to Turkey. Also, when he was granted asylum, he was still thinking about leaving the Netherlands. This changed for him though when he joined the project of NDC, where he "[...] finally met Dutch people."⁹³ When I talked with Nassim, a 29-year old Syrian who worked as a civil

⁹¹ Author's interview with Cemal, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 6 April 2016.

⁹² Author's interview with Wael, 23-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 22 May 2016.

⁹³ Informal conversation with Wael, Utrecht, on 18 April 2016.

engineer in Saudi Arabi, about the waiting (either before the procedure starts; the decision is made; or getting your house) he told me:

Some people who are still in Syria ask me: 'I want to come to Europe, which country, which city, what do you think? The Netherlands? Or Germany? Or maybe Sweden? What is best for me?' Right now, nobody says: 'come to the Netherlands'. No, ha ha.⁹⁴

Again, the question Rose et. al (2006) ask should be asked with this example: is the 'nobody says: come to the Netherlands' the 'ends' these governing practices aim to achieve? To tell other people, in their 'home countries', not to come to the Netherlands? These 'restless feelings' are created through different governing practices that try to 'control' their lives, which means not allowing them to do anything, except waiting. The not knowing how long the waiting will take, made my informants feel very restless. Is it the aim, and here I quote Broeders, to make people "habituated to their status of the *excluded*?" (2007:74). The above quoted people are people, however, who in the end were granted asylum, and through acquiring this asylum their rights changed. They can start learning the Dutch language, they can start their studies, and they can work. However, even when refugees have finally acquired these rights, they still stay at the camp and feel excluded from Dutch society. The next chapter aims to shed a light on that situation.

Smoking weed, eat, sleep, repeat

Life at the camp

After being granted asylum, new periods of waiting start. The waiting for a house, for a message of the IND about family reunion, or for an appointment with COA. Also, with these cases, the refugees usually have no insight into how long the waiting will take. They are wondering whether they will get their house next week, next month, or next year. When people inform about this at COA the usual answer is "I cannot say anything about that."⁹⁵ Because of this unclear situation, the refugees I have spoken with cannot –

⁹⁴ Author's interview with Nassim, 29-year old Syrian refugee living in Utrecht, Utrecht, on 30 March 2016.

⁹⁵ Author's interview with Nadir, 27-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 1 April 2016.

and are still afraid to – start building their future in the Netherlands. As of September 2015, Cemal is waiting for his future house in Bunschoten-Spakenburg:

The waiting is so hard. Maybe tomorrow I go to the reception and I have mail: ‘your house is ready’. Maybe tonight. Maybe tomorrow. It’s so hard for me. I want to know. One year I can wait, two years I can wait, but I want to know when. Don’t tell me only to wait. [...] After tomorrow I cannot have something. I have a meeting with you next week. When I take the house now, I cannot see you.⁹⁶

Because of this ‘not knowing’, Cemal also did not start his ‘integration course’⁹⁷, as he is scared that he cannot switch schools when he has to move from Utrecht to Bunschoten. The waiting, combined with the unclearness of the situation, makes the refugees I have spoken with hesitant to start with a job, education, or learning the Dutch language. Where you live at the AZC does not have to be the municipality where COA will find a house for you. Due to this, people do not have the feeling that they want (and can) start their life in Utrecht.

Fimyar’s theory (2008), describing the process of modifying people’s actions to a certain goal, to create ‘governable subjects’ who are able to govern themselves, who ‘do things to themselves’ seems helpful to understand the process I have observed. It is through an ensemble of rationalities, strategies, and techniques that produce a certain ‘mentality of rule’, that de-centers government, because it is meant to ‘learn’ people to ‘auto-correct themselves’ that facilitates ‘governance at a distance’ (Springer 2012). An important ‘governing practice’ in this story is the relocating of people. Even when people have a status, and hence will likely stay at the same center, it is also likely that that particular center is not located at the city or village where these people will be allocated their house. This means that, even though people stay at this center for eight, nine, or ten months, they will still have the feeling that they cannot build up their lives as it is likely that they will not stay there.

What is it, next to the waiting, my informants do when living at the AZC? Anwar – a Syrian man who is 22 years old – lived for nine months at the AZC and has a house in

⁹⁶ Author’s interview with Cemal, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, 6 April 2016.

⁹⁷ Translated to Dutch: *inburgeringscursus*

Houten now. His answer to this question: “Smoking weed, eat, sleep, repeat.”⁹⁸ Anwar told me that he came to the Netherlands with a lot of energy. He wanted to do things, work, study, start his new life here. But after months of only waiting at the AZC he lost this energy. Besides losing this energy, he also went ‘crazy’:

The last time in the AZC I was just wearing a red boxer and no shirt, with my joint in my mouth walking at the entrance of the AZC. I became crazy. If I was still there one month more, then you would see me walking in the streets and just say: “HEEEEEY!!” or just doing something stupid. My patience was out. I can’t take any more. So the house was in the exact right time.⁹⁹

After many visits at the AZC, it struck me that many people are in bed until 13.00h or 14.00h. When I had conversations about this, people would say to me: “But what is it that I should get out of bed for?”¹⁰⁰ What I also heard in these conversations is the stress people experience during their time in the AZC, and this is one of the reasons they do not sleep well. At the end of January I met Emir, a 30-year old man who worked with refugees at a NGO in Turkey, who proudly told me that he quit smoking for over a month now. In May I saw him outside at the AZC, smoking a cigarette. I asked him: “Hey! Didn’t you quit smoking?” He looked at me and said: “I did, but the situation in the AZC and the waiting for my house made me start smoking again.”¹⁰¹ Zayn has epilepsy. In Syria, once every two years he would have an epileptic seizure. Since he lives in the Netherlands, he had many more seizures than he would have in Syria. About the AZC he said: “I hate this place. It’s the most ugly place in the Netherlands.”¹⁰²

However, it is not the case that refugees do not work when they live at the AZC. Some of them work in the informal sector. According to Cemal “[...] it is around 50 per cent of the people who live at the AZC who work at the black market.”¹⁰³ I cannot confirm this number, since this work does not happen ‘out in the open’. It also took a couple of weeks before people started to trust me enough to tell me about their ‘illegal’ activities. Nadir said about work: “She [case manager of COA] tells me ‘if you get this job

⁹⁸ Informal conversation with Anwar, 22-year old Syrian refugee living in Houten, Utrecht, on 27 January 2016.

⁹⁹ Author’s interview with Anwar, 22-year old Syrian refugee living in Houten, Utrecht, on 18 March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Informal conversations Ziyad; Mohamad; Cemal, in February and March 2016

¹⁰¹ Informal conversation with Emir, 31-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 11 May 2016.

¹⁰² Informal conversation with Zayn, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 19 May 2016.

¹⁰³ Informal conversation with Cemal, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 18 April 2016.

we will stop your weekly €57,- and you pay us 75 per cent of your salary'. And I'm like: 'okay, thank you, I don't want it'.¹⁰⁴ For the same reason, Cemal works at the black market as well. Also Gaith, a 42-year old man who was the owner of different jewelry shops in Damascus, tells me the following. A friend of his living at the AZC is fruiterer: "the king of fruit".¹⁰⁵ He has a status so he can work, but he has no idea how to start his business here:

He's trying to do his business here but nobody is helping him. He met a Serbian man in the camp who said that he could help him. Now he's doing business with him on the black market. We need a guide who can show us how everything works here! Explain us why we pay so much taxes, and tell us about the investment climate in the Netherlands.¹⁰⁶

On the one hand it is the 75 per cent of their salary people have to pay COA while working. Besides that, it could be the case that people have no idea 'how it works here', and because nobody is really guiding them, it is easier to start a business with people you know from the AZC. With regard to the first reason, Wael told me: "I don't work and he [a friend] does work, and like me the same money. So I tell him: sit and take money from COA, like your work. If you work or do not work, it's the same."¹⁰⁷

All the people I have spoken with about work told me they did not understand the system: why pay so much money to COA? Why do you not get the €57,- anymore? What sense does it make if I work, and in the end the money I receive is almost the same as when I am not working? I do not know the full extent of this problem, neither if another system would work. However, I can say that I have heard dissatisfaction about the current system on countless occasions. The above questions do play an important role for people in their decision to work while still living at the camp, or to start working at the informal market. I would like to put this in light of Gallagher (2008) who talks about 'the real effects of certain power practices' and Hardy (2003) who states that these effects are not always 'calculated' or 'predetermined'. The effect of the rules concerning work is that, according to my informants, people start working at the black market. Is

¹⁰⁴ Author's interview with Nadir, 27-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 1 April 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Author's interview with Gaith, 44-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 4 May 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ Author's interview with Wael, 23-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 22 May 2016.

this what this rule intended to do? Is it aimed to govern people towards working at the black market? How does it affect the governability of these individuals once they leave the AZC?

They want to keep us from the outside world

Relationship with COA

When looking at the above described experiences and feelings about the lives at the AZC, what role does, according to my informants, COA play in this story? Responses to the question about the relationship people had with COA were the following: Nadir:

With the COA it's good. And they are very kind. But they don't help [...] If you ask about what is going to happen they just leave: 'I need to leave', 'I have work to do', 'I'm very busy'. Always same excuses.¹⁰⁸

Cemal said about his contact with COA:

Pauline [contact person COA] is only contact person in the name. Pauline is so busy. [...] The COA helps me about the life in the camp, the bus money, or that you have to clean. Only this. But other things about the life here, I learned alone.¹⁰⁹

Nassim: "My relationship with the COA wasn't so good. [...] Every day I spoke with my contact person and he didn't give me any clearness."¹¹⁰; Omar: "The COA doesn't help me find a school. They just say: 'go to language school' [...] COA say: 'we are busy, do whatever you want'"¹¹¹; Anwar:

They [COA] want to keep us from the outside world. [...] They don't want to take any risks. COA is responsible for the reception of asylum seekers and money. [...] They say: 'it's not my job about the school. Here is a school in the

¹⁰⁸ Author's interview with Nadir, 27-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 1 April 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Author's interview with Cemal, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 6 April 2016.

¹¹⁰ Author's interview with Nassim, 29-year old Syrian refugee living in Utrecht, Utrecht, on 30 March 2016.

¹¹¹ Author's interview with Omar, 19-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 10 May 2016.

AZC and you can follow it if you want, and I'm not responsible about outside the AZC'.¹¹²

These examples show different things; the awareness of people that COA is very busy, and that the people require guidance 'outside', which they do not receive. From my conversations with informants I learned that COA is 'only there for the reception and life inside the AZC'. In sharp contrast to COA's website, where they state that they: "[...] supervise them [asylum seekers] to their future in the Netherlands or outside the Netherlands."¹¹³ This 'supervision' is defined as follows: "Asylum seekers are responsible for their choices. COA supervises them in making these choices. COA encourages the independence, initiative and self-development of asylum seekers they need to enable them to give shape to their future in the Netherlands and elsewhere."¹¹⁴ This, again, is very much in line with the ideas of neo-liberal governmentality and the "responsibility" of citizens (Lemke 2002:59). Here I believe that the crux between, on the one hand, this idea of COA encouraging refugees to be responsible for their own choices, and on the other hand this strictly controlled live of refugees while still living at the AZC becomes visible. It almost seems like a paradox that the COA actively fends off organizations and volunteers who want to enter 'COA terrain' and do things with refugees outside the AZC. The holding off of organizations and volunteers who want to enter 'COA terrain' and do things with refugees outside the AZC, strict controlling and identification obligation when entering the terrain, but also COA themselves who do not have time (and responsibility?) for the guidance of people within the Netherlands: a completely new world for all the refugees I have spoken with. But how then become an, as formulated by Ferguson et. al, "entrepreneur of your own 'firm'" in a society you did not grow up in and do not know at all? (2002:989). The transition from the AZC into being self-governing citizens in Dutch society have been hard for the refugees I have spoken with.

A house: and then?

Housing was an important topic in my conversation with refugees. My informants, without exception, were very happy that they finally had their own place to stay. As

¹¹² Author's interview with Anwar, 22-year old Syrian refugee living in Houten, Utrecht, on 18 March 2016.

¹¹³ <https://www.coa.nl> [Accessed at 13 July 2016]

¹¹⁴ <https://www.coa.nl/en/about-coa/responsibilities> [Accessed at 13 July 2016]

Anwar told me: “In the AZC you are nobody. In your own house you can finally start building your future.”¹¹⁵ On the other hand, they also told me that it was lonely and hard the first months in their new place, as they did not know so many people. On top of that, they did not know how things work in Dutch society. Asim said to me:

I’m new in the Netherlands and I don’t know it here. I want to do something but I don’t know how it goes in the Netherlands. I only stay at home, but he [his language coach] told me: ‘you have to go outside. You have to do this and that.’ [...] Really, without my language coach I am nothing in the Netherlands.¹¹⁶

Next to the guidance of a coach, I heard from Anwar and Nassim that they were frustrated about the fact that they could not start where they want to start. Anwar explained that when he tells people he want to start university, they tell him ‘yeah, but you have three years, then you can learn the language.’¹¹⁷ Being annoyed, he continued: “Okay, shall I waste another three years of my life in learning the language? No! I already lost three or four years of my life.”¹¹⁸ Nassim, who is seven years older than Anwar, worked as a civil engineer in Saudi Arabia. He is frustrated about the fact that it is impossible for him to find a job in the Netherlands with his diploma from Syria: “I worked for four years in Saudi Arabia in the largest company, and here I have to go back to school.”¹¹⁹ These examples show some of the difficult dilemma’s refugee’s face. In the first place they did not know where to go and ‘find’ things in Dutch society. Next to that, if they know where to go, they cannot start their (university, work), because in most of the times their diploma is not recognized.

Next to how refugees experience their transition from the AZC to a house, this and other information concerning refugees can be found on an official Dutch governmental website. Information like: ‘Asylum seekers with a residence permit pay their own rent for their house. They pay, like everyone else, the normal rent. This is possible because people with a residence permit have the right to social assistance.’¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Author’s interview with Anwar, 22-year old Syrian refugee living in Houten, Utrecht, on 18 March 2016.

¹¹⁶ Author’s interview with Asim, 28-year old Syrian refugee living in Zeist, Zeist, on 9 March 2016.

¹¹⁷ Author’s interview with Anwar, 22-year old Syrian refugee living in Houten, Utrecht, on 18 March 2016.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Author’s interview with Nassim, 29-year old Syrian refugee living in Utrecht, Utrecht, on 30 March 2016.

¹²⁰ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/asielbeleid/vraag-en-antwoord/huur-woonruimte-asielzoeker-met-verblijfsvergunning> [Accessed at 24 July 2016]

This is an example of an answer to the ‘frequently asked question’: ‘Who pays the rent for an asylum seeker with a residence permit?’ What is remarkable about the answer, is the fact that it seems that asylum seekers can only pay their rent with their social assistance¹²¹, while they are also allowed to work. Apart from the fact that many refugees who move into their own house might get social assistance and pay their rent with this money, it is not the case that this is the only way refugees can pay their rent. By showing this on an official website of the Dutch government, it can become a certain ‘truth’ for people. For Dutch citizens, but also for refugees themselves. “Power consists in the ability to make others inhabit your story of their reality” (Gourevitch 1998:48 in Demmers 212:116). The ‘(story of) reality’ in this case is that refugees are dependent on the Dutch social welfare system, and are not able to take care of themselves, some readers and eventually part of the Dutch public will read it as a fact.

Conclusion

From my findings in chapter four, it has become clear that refugees experience the governing practices of CAO to be frustrating, leading to an overall apathetic feeling. What is remarkable though is that they are not really ‘held inside the AZC’. They are free to leave, they are free to go to school, and they are free to work. Still, many refugees stay at the AZC and do not really start their lives yet. It is a very clear example of the idea of governmentality: there is no sovereign power that, with force, keeps people inside and prohibit them to start their new lives in the Netherlands. Instead, there is an environment created by different governing practices where people stay inside *themselves*. Next to that, COA states on their website that they want asylum seekers and refugees to become ‘responsible’ and ‘develop’ themselves while living at the AZC.¹²² But what if a person comes from a totally different society, where it is maybe not so self-evident to be a ‘entrepreneur of the self’ and to ‘be your own “firm”’? (Ferguson et. al 2002:989). Most of the time, refugees do not know the Dutch system and society, and they are discouraged to ‘develop’ themselves the first months or years when they are still living in different COA accommodations. When refugees do get a house, they need to find their own way within this (unknown) society. In my opinion, there is a huge gap between life in an AZC versus an independent life in Dutch society. Lastly, the message

¹²¹ Translated to Dutch: *bijstandsuitkering*

¹²² <https://www.coa.nl/en/about-coa/responsibilities> [Accessed at 24 July 2016]

stated on the website of the Dutch government about refugees who pay their rent with their social welfare, is a strong and remarkable message. There is this idea in society, upheld by the Dutch government, that all refugees pay their rent with their social welfare.

“I don’t like this word. Asylum. When I want to buy cigarettes and they ask for my ID, I give my ID-card and put my finger on the word ‘asylum’. [...] I don’t only want to be the word asylum. If anybody asks: ‘hi, where are you from?’ and I reply with ‘from Syria’, people say ‘ah, asylum’. I don’t want that. I want to be a Dutch man.”¹²³

¹²³ Informal conversation with Cemal, 18-year old Syrian refugee living in the AZC, Utrecht, on 18 April 2016.

Conclusion

This research aimed to tell the stories of Syrian refugees and their experiences with various 'governing practices' within the asylum policy in the Netherlands. The main findings of this research are presented in this conclusion. First of all, the 'governing' of these refugees start upon arrival in the Netherlands. Fingerprints and pictures are taken, and the person becomes a digital number within the asylum system. Very detailed questions are being asked about the person's nationality, their lives in their country of origin, and their family. This is being done in light of a fair asylum 'investigation'. But, besides that, much knowledge is gained about these 'newcomers' who arrived in the Netherlands, which is a very important aspect within the concept of governmentality; knowledge about the population and govern in light of that knowledge (Rose et. al 2006:87). But it does not stop after the asylum seeker is being granted asylum. This person, being called 'refugee' from now on, needs to wait for his or her house at an AZC. This waiting process can take up to months, even a year, because of the shortage on social housing.

At the AZC in Utrecht, where this research is been conducted, different governing practices are present. First of all there is the weekly reporting requirement (for the asylum seekers and refugees), and the identification requirement for people who want to visit the AZC. Both are examples through which state verticality is made authoritative and effective (Ferguson et. al 2002:998). Second, there are strict rules about work. When a refugee works while living at the AZC, he or she has to pay COA 75 per cent of its salary and this person does not receive the weekly 'pocket money' anymore. Lastly, there is the 'relocating' practice. When an asylum seeker enters the Netherlands, until this person gets his or her own house, it is very likely this person has lived at different centers. Also the last AZC, from where the refugee will depart to his or her own house, does not have to be in the same area as his or her house.

How do Syrian refugees I have interviewed experience these practices? One thing all my informants emphasized was the frustration about the waiting and the unclearness of how long this waiting will take. This waiting can be for the interviews with the IND, for a transfer to another location, for family reunion, or a house. It makes people hesitant to start with, for example, their integration course, as they are afraid of not

being able to cancel the course anymore once started. The second practice that is of major influence on how the refugees live their lives when still in the AZC are the rules concerning work. Why start working when you will get almost the same amount of money from COA while not working? This is very much in line with the research Ghorashi conducted on Iranian refugees (2005). According to this research, the Dutch welfare state turns 'active agents' into 'passive victims' by making them dependent on the Dutch welfare state by not taking them seriously and only seeing them as victims.

Lastly, what is of great influence on the lives of my informants is the guidance they need and want into Dutch society, but which they do not get. COA states on their website that they want to encourage asylum seekers and refugees to take initiative, and to be responsible for their own lives to start here. This idea is very much in line with the ideas of neo-liberal governmentality and the 'responsible' citizen (Lemke 2002:59). Here the crux can be found with on the one hand the idea of the 'responsible' citizen (refugee) and on the other hand this strictly controlled live of refugees while still living at the AZC, that discourages them to take action and start their new. The holding off of organizations and volunteers who want to enter 'COA terrain' and do things with refugees outside the AZC, strict controlling and identification obligation when entering the terrain, but also COA themselves who do not have time (and responsibility?) for the guidance of people within the Netherlands: a completely new world for all the refugees I have spoken with. During my research it became clear that none of my informants really 'started' their lives (in the form of studying, working, the Dutch language) when still living at the AZC. The gap between this live and the transition to being a self-governing citizen in your own house is very wide. It is hard for the refugees I have spoken with to transit from the AZC into being self-governing citizens in Dutch society.

What is remarkable in this whole story is the fact that refugees are not held inside the AZC. They are free to leave, they have the right to study, and they have the right to work. There is no sovereign power that, with force, prohibit refugees to start their lives in the Netherlands and to leave the AZC. Instead, there is an environment created where people are being 'disciplined' into staying inside the AZC *themselves*. This is precisely what governmentality is about. Through the ensemble of rationalities, strategies, and practices that produce knowledge, a certain 'mentality of rule' is created that de-centers government because it is meant to teach people to 'auto-correct themselves' (Springer 2012:137). Governmentality is about the conduct of conduct. In the case of my research,

it is about the conduct of refugees. Refugees that have almost the same rights as Dutch citizens, but still are not taking part in Dutch society when living at the AZC. According to different informants, when people who are still in Syria ask advice about which country for them is the best to go to, 'The Netherlands are not recommended'.

That brings me to the research of Broeders, who argues that borders and immigration policy alone cannot stop irregular migration, and for that reason many governments turn to internal migration control on irregular migrants (2007:73). Broeders quotes Engbersen, who state that 'Fortress Europe' is turning into a panopticon Europe in which governments shield their public institutions and labor markets against irregular migrants by means of advanced identification and control systems (Engbersen 2001:242 in Broeders 2007:74). The aim of this system is not to discipline and correct undesirable migrants into 'good citizens', instead its aim is to exclude people and to make people habituated to their status of the excluded (Engbersen 2001:242 in Broeders 2007:74). The asylum seeker centers in the Netherlands are, in the first place, meant for people who are pending their decision on their asylum request. Due to the social housing shortage, a significant part of people who live at these AZC's are people, like the Syrian refugees from my research, who are granted asylum. Despite that, like Broeders argues in his research, many policies and practices at these AZC's are aimed at excluding people instead of integrating people into society, for asylum seekers not to get 'false hope'. What long term consequences does this have when looking at 'integration' when already being granted asylum, but you are still living in this system of 'discouragement'?

That brings me to two suggestions I would like to make on further research, concerning the Dutch asylum policy, refugees and integration. First of all, as I touched upon in the introduction, due to time constraints I focused more on the Syrian refugees living at the AZC, than on the Syrian refugees who already have a house. it would be very interesting to interview the people I have interviewed for this research in the coming years. how are their 'new' lives in their own house? How do they reflect upon their time in the AZC and the effect these first months/year(s) had upon their lives in their own house? Second, the municipality of Utrecht is the first municipality in the Netherlands that want to 'bind' asylum seekers and refugees to the city. They made an agreement with COA that asylum seekers who are staying at the 'emergency shelter' in Utrecht will stay in Utrecht. When these asylum seekers are going to a regular AZC, this will be the

AZC in Utrecht. When these people will get a house, this will be a house in Utrecht. next to that, the municipality of Utrecht wants to offer COURSES to both 'newcomers' (asylum seekers and refugees) and Dutch people that live in the neighborhood of the emergency shelter and the AZC. As two governing practices are being changed within this story – no relocation of people anymore, and contact between newcomers and Dutch citizens is being encouraged instead of discouraged – it is an interesting case to research.

Concluding can be sad my informants were and are not happy with their lives at the AZC. 'It makes you sick', as being said by one of them. I did not become proud of 'our' asylum system, where it looks like it is more focused on excluding people than integrating them into 'our' society. I hope this thesis brought a part of this world into picture, with stories of Syrian refugees for whom this live is a daily reality.

Epilogue

When I walk through the botanical garden in Utrecht with a friend of a friend, we talk about refugees in the Netherlands. Without him knowing what my research is about, he starts talking about the following:

“I would really like to do something with music and dance together with refugees. I started making music, and I realized how much I like it, and that I want to do it with other people. I contacted COA about this, but it was a little bit vague what I had to do, so I decided to go directly to the AZC in Groningen. Also there, they told me they could not really help me. I did not know how I could approach asylum seekers and refugees at the AZC, so now I ended up doing nothing. I am so motivated to do something, but I don't know how! Do you maybe have any idea how I can get access?”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Informal conversation with Pjotr, 24-year old Dutch student, Utrecht, on 5 July 2016.

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Governmental organizations

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COA. Actueel. Veelgestelde vragen. Wonen in een AZC

<https://www.coa.nl/nl/actueel/veelgestelde-vragen/wonen-in-een-azc>

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Nongovernmental organizations

VluchtelingenWerk. Official website <http://www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl/english>

Appendix

Interviews

Name	Age	Arrived in the Netherlands	Residence (at the time when the interview took place)	Date interview
Asim	28	June 2014	Zeist, since October 2014	9 March 2016
Anwar	22	October 2014	Houten, since July 2015	18 March 2016
Nassim	29	February 2014	Utrecht, since November 2014	30 March 2016
Omar	19	December 2014	Utrecht, since December 2015	10 May 2016
Emir	31	January 2016	Utrecht AZC	26 March 2016
Nadir	27	August 2015	Utrecht AZC	1 April 2016
Cemal	18	August 2016	Utrecht AZC	6 April 2016
Gaith	44	September 2015	Utrecht AZC	15 April 15 2016
Wael	23	October 2015	Utrecht AZC	22 May 2016
Diwan	29	January 2016	Utrecht AZC	3 June 3, 2016
Kadeem	35	November 2015	Utrecht AZC	3 June 2016

Table 1. Interviews conducted with Syrian refugees

Name	Organization	Function	Date interview
Sarah	New Dutch Connections	Project team leader	27 February 2016
Marije	New Dutch Connections	Founder of NDC	11 March 2016
Hellen	COA	Employee from 2005 until 2008. Residential supervisor, program facilitator, and case manager.	1 May 2016
Pien	COA	Research internship COA 2013	25 May 2016
Sarah (second interview)	New Dutch Connections	Project team leader	2 June 2016

Anna	COA, New Dutch Connections	COA: volunteer for activities children at the AZC NDC: support project team leader	6 June 2016
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Table 2. Interviews conducted with employees and employers from New Dutch Connections and COA