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Hajer, M.; Bröer, C.

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We Are Here! Claim-making and Claim-placing of Undocumented Migrants in Amsterdam

Minke Hajer [a] and Christian Bröer[b]

[a]Universiteit van Amsterdam & Università degli studi di Milano; [b]Universiteit van Amsterdam

ABSTRACT
Through everyday practices, excluded and marginalised undocumented migrants struggle for citizenship, question bordering practices, and can achieve forms of inclusion incrementally. Based on an ethnographic case study in Amsterdam, this article evidences and theorises these piecemeal struggles of undocumented migrants. We show how undocumented migrants—discursively and spatially—claim 'the right to have rights'. We demonstrate how forms of inclusion emerge as the result of 'claim-making': by making appeals to human rights, the use of (limited) legal rights, and identity claims. We combine the analysis of claim-making with research into an understudied but highly relevant process of 'claim-placing', which refers to how the use (public) spaces and places can add weight to discursive claim-making. We demonstrate that an incremental process of 'claim-making' and 'claim-placing' leads to a slightly increased recognition as political subjects and forms of inclusion.

When undocumented migrants claim rights and claim presence in immigration countries, they challenge the state's power to determine who is allowed to live on its territory in general, and challenge everyday practices of bordering (Jones & Johnson, 2016; Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, & Cassidy, 2018) in particular. Their active presence also undermines a static and binary insider-outsider understanding of citizenship. As Isin and Turner (2002) state:

> The modern conception of citizenship as merely a status under the authority of a state has been contested and broadened to include various political and social struggles of recognition and redistribution as instances of claim-making, and hence, by extension, of citizenship. (Isin & Turner, 2002, p. 2)

CONTACT Minke Hajer ✉ minke.hajer@unimi.it

Notwithstanding their precarious situation, undocumented migrants often manage to become included in society to some degree, or obtain some forms of citizenship. To understand migrants' diverse attempts to achieve inclusion it is important to differentiate between formal and substantive citizenship (Isin, 2008, p. 17), between citizenship as a legal status referring to membership, for example a nationality, or a passport, and on the other hand the social, material, and political practices and ties that citizens actually develop.

In the case of undocumented migrants, current research has already shown that even in the absence of formal status, migrants can to some degree achieve substantial inclusion (Ataç, 2016; Bhimji, 2016; Cappiali, 2016; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Nicholls & Vermeulen, 2012; Raimondi, 2019; Rygiel, 2011; Swerts, 2014). The mobilisation and struggle of (undocumented) migrants for substantive citizenship is referred to as a 'new era of protest' (Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016; *From the struggles collective*, 2015). Within this overall framework, we add empirical and analytic refinement to the existing literature. Our article investigates how marginalised undocumented migrants claim citizenship and question bordering practices. We assess the mechanisms that make claims to citizenship by undocumented migrants powerful (Bloemraad, 2018). To distinguish these 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) analytically we introduce the concept of 'claim-placing', as a spatial addition to claim-making.

Undocumented migrants face a particular dilemma: they lack citizenship rights on the basis of which they can make (political) claims. Therefore, they first have to assert the 'right to have rights' (Isin, 2008, p. 18; Nicholls, 2013a, p. 84; Oudejans, 2011, p. 84). Our study focuses precisely on this paradox: how do undocumented migrants achieve to be seen and treated as deserving enough to have their claims to citizenship heard, and their acts of citizenship recognised, in the situation in which this recognition cannot be based on (formal) citizenship? Claims to citizenship need recognition from established citizens and need to resonate with the context in which they are made to be successful (Bloemraad, 2018, p. 5). Therefore, politically active migrants and their supporters have to balance between latching on to existing order and challenging this order at the same time. Their practical critique exceeds the boundaries of citizenship while at the same time reinforcing these boundaries (Nyers, 2015, p. 31). Citizenship in this sense is an institution of both domination and empowerment, where acts of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen, 2008) are disruptive, and constitute new political subjects (Squire, 2016 paraphrased

in Darling, 2017). This structures the claims to citizenship that undocumented migrants can make.

The details of the analysis stem from an ethnographic case study of undocumented migrants in Amsterdam. The study covers a period in which undocumented migrants in Amsterdam formed a publicly visible action group called 'We Are Here', a claim which they literally substantiated with seising places–hence claim-placing–in the city.

Differential inclusion

Undocumented migrants are confronted with exclusion and bordering practice, and struggle to achieve some form of citizenship. To understand undocumented migrants' struggles, following Bloemraad (2018), we consider citizenship both as membership of a (political) community and as a relationship with a (national) government or community. More precisely, we differentiate between formal or legal citizenship, and substantive citizenship (Isin, 2008, p. 17), which enables us to analytically include a wide variety of observations: from migrants' claim for legal recognition to their everyday attempts to sustain a life as de-facto citizens, from campaigning for rights to actively negotiating entitlement (Anderson, 2010, p. 63).

We specifically focus on *Acts of Citizenship*. Acts of citizenship are moments in which non-citizens establish themselves as citizens, to whom the 'right to have rights' is naturally due (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). By behaving in certain ways, for example by asserting their spatial presence, non-citizens can convey claims to citizenship. This means that non-citizens need to comprehend the 'modes and forms of conduct that are appropriate of being an insider' to legitimately perform acts of citizenship (Isin, 2009, pp. 372–373). If successful, these moments of inclusion challenge the everyday processes of exclusion, and exemplify the 'micropolitics of border struggles' (Dadusc, 2019).

We employ a process perspective to study how undocumented migrants' aim for and partly achieve incremental inclusion (see Bulmer & Rees, 1996; Cockburn, 1998; Das, 2011) or differential inclusion (Mezzadra & Nielson, 2013, pp. 157–159). With this, substantive citizenship is brought about at least partially and temporarily in a process with many partial successes and setbacks. The concept of differential inclusion emphasises the persistent differences in terms of gender, class and race, instead of repeating and reinforcing a 'myth of full citizenship' (Anderson & Hughes, 2015; Cohen, 2009)

So far we have treated inclusion largely as claims or acts. However, migrants' struggles are fundamentally located in space. This article, therefore, emphasises the importance of (public) visibility and the city for claim-making and citizenship struggles. Undocumented migrants can become a political subject when they make themselves and their demands visible in public space (cf. 'space of appearance' Beltrán, 2009, p. 616). They use the city, the (public) space in Amsterdam, to locate, make visible, and substantiate their demands (Borren, 2008; Chauvin & Garcés Mascareñas, 2014). More generally, Maestri and Hughes (2017) argue that citizenship is fundamentally spatial. New and old political subjectivities are contested and resisted in spaces of encounter and struggle: spaces can generate opportunities to rethink political subjectivities (Maestri & Hughes, 2017). Here, the city is not merely a background of claim-making, or a 'container' of activism (Martin & Miller, 2003, pp. 143–156). Rather, claims can be made *through* the city (Isin, 2002). In a similar vein, Tilly (2000) argues that locations and spaces in the city are important because they offer protection from authorities, in the form of visible safe places for claim-making, but can also become an important part of political contention itself, by using strategies of 'spatial claim-making', where the 'changing locations, activities and spatial configurations of people themselves constitute a significant part of contention' (Tilly, 2000, p. 146). Ataç, for example, describes the special strategies of a migrant protest movement in Vienna, where new political possibilities arrived though the transformation of locations into political spaces (2016, p. 643). Our case study shows a group of undocumented migrants that actively use the local specificities to construct social and political relations, and perform acts of citizenship. They use a spatial strategy of claim-making which we call *claim-placing*, in reference to turning geographical spaces into politically meaningful places. Claim-placing works by either latching on to the political and/or historical meanings of these places (*Yellow vests* occupying Place de la République, for instance) or by infusing spaces with political meaning and turning them into places (for example, occupying an empty factory building and turning it into a communal space)(see Miller & Martin, 2000; Seamon & Sowers, 2008). The concept of claim-placing brings to the fore how highly visible and meaningful political places can be used as a claim to citizenship, *and* how interstitial spaces generate opportunities for political action (Isin, 2012 paraphrased in Maestri & Hughes, 2017).

By attending to space and place, it becomes visible that the city provides a spatial, political, symbolic, and organisational infrastructure for protest

and claim-making, and functions as a hub of both supporting organisations and the audiences for claims to citizenship. As Van Haperen (2019) describes, even predominantly digital movements like *#blacklivesmatter* for example, are rooted in, and depend heavily on, local offline organising structures for their protest. The empirical study below portrays the collective struggle for citizenship of a group of undocumented migrants in Amsterdam. We examine their acts of citizenship empirically to identify the mechanism they use to make their claims and establish their right to have rights, and how they eventually try to manifest their inclusion in the (local) community.

Methods

This research is based on an ethnographic case study, conducted from January 2015 to June 2015. The study is predominantly based on participant observation, supplemented by five in-depth, open-ended interviews with key figures (mostly group leaders), an analysis of documents (flyers, newspaper articles, and opinion pieces) distributed by the 'We Are Here' group, and analysis of the 'We Are Here' Facebook page. Using Netvizz, we downloaded and analysed all posts in the period from 1st January to 17th May 2015. The analysis was generally inductive and guided by interpretive principles (Silverman, 2010). More precisely, it combined thematic analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2004) and frame analysis (Entman, 1993). Our relational analysis focused on claims and action repertoires, namely the identification of meanings within claims, the moments in which they were made, how they were communicated, the organisational and personal infrastructures, and the use of places. Preliminary codes were discussed with other researchers.

'We are Here' in Amsterdam

In Amsterdam, undocumented migrants became politically visible when they united in the 'We Are Here' group in 2012 (see also Nicholls, 2016; Nicholls & Uitermark, 2016; Spijkerboer, 2013). What started as a tent-camp in the garden of the Protestant Diaconate in the city centre of Amsterdam grew to become a larger tent-camp in the west of Amsterdam. Later, the occupation of a church turned out to be the first of many squats scattered over the whole city. The group consisted of about two to three hundred undocumented migrants that had exhausted all means for asylum and were 'uitgeprocedeerd' ('out-of-procedure'). They mainly

originated from Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and West-African countries, and were expected to leave the Netherlands on their own recognisance, as in practice, denied asylum seekers often are not actively removed from the country (Kalir, 2017).[1] One of the main messages of the group on this matter was that many of them simply could not be deported because their countries of origin were either not safe or did not cooperate, for instance, because the necessary *laisser-passez*'s were not granted, as in the case of Somalians (Spijkerboer, 2013). Meanwhile, these migrants were in a, what they themselves termed, 'legal limbo', in which their status was quite unclear because they fall out of all asylum procedures, yet also cannot return. While most out-of-procedure migrants remain invisible, the 'We Are Here' group has actively been struggling for a legal existence in the Netherlands over the past years. The group was very active in organising all sorts of activities. By asserting they were (still) here, and by literally occupying space and a place in Dutch society, they exposed the space of ambivalence left in a dichotomous approach to citizenship. Moreover, their claim-making and their enactment of rights questioned what it meant to be a citizen or to have citizenship rights in the Netherlands. In so doing, they performed citizenship, and achieved incremental forms of inclusion, in the hope of ultimately obtaining full rights of citizenship.

We distinguish various ways in which migrants showed that they have the 'right to have rights', and were entitled to citizenship. Each of these ways was aimed at distinct people or institutions, had its own logic of claim-making, and had its own particular goals. Below, we elaborate on the different combinations of steps migrants can take to become more 'in' than 'out', more included than excluded. Of course, there is a kaleidoscope of possibilities of how one could claim citizenship, in which overlapping claims are almost inevitable. However, we here distinguish four types of claim-making activities in which the migrants of the 'We Are Here' group made their claims for citizenship. Firstly, we see the struggle for citizenship through the pursuit of entitlement. This was primarily based on international legal treaties that gave undocumented migrants certain rights that are in principle granted to all humans. Secondly, the migrants of the 'We Are Here' group used the civic political rights they did have because they happen to be in the Netherlands, such as the right to demonstrate. Moreover, we observed the group making identity claims. Lastly, we look at claim placing, to identify the way in which the geographical space and meaningful political place were used to claim political rights and to carve out a life in Amsterdam.

Pursuit of entitlement

Undocumented migrants are excluded from Dutch society and the rights that come with it for its members in many ways, but they are not entirely without legal rights. The juridical activism, through the pursuit of their rights, using existing legal channels, is a first and important category of claim-making. Together with a lawyer who specialised in human rights questions, the 'We Are Here' group fought several important legal battles at the local, national, and international level. The pursuit of entitlement was based on several international human rights treaties. These juridical struggles were framed as claiming rights they already had or were entitled to, and just needed to be enforced by the government. Through legal battles, they tried to ascertain whether the Dutch government should also actively realise these rights for undocumented migrants present in the country. In other words, the group claimed that the Dutch government should fulfil social rights and make sure undocumented migrants can enjoy them too. Moreover, the more international legal orientation of the battle of the 'We Are Here' group turned out to be a rather successful strategy. Because international law trumps national law, when they did not succeed in making a winning case on a national level, they could force the Dutch government to reconsider by fighting on a European level. The Christian supporters of the group arranged for the Conference of European Churches to bring the issue of undocumented migrants to the European Court.[2] It was the ruling of the European Committee for social rights,[3] and the introduction of a minimum of social rights connected to the term 'Bed, bath, bread' that, together with the coinciding eviction of the group from an abandoned parking garage they were living in, spiked the national attention to the situation of undocumented migrants and the 'We Are Here' group in particular.

At the local level, they had battles over the new Dutch Social Support Act, *Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning* (WMO). In multiple court cases, they argued that undocumented migrants had a right to shelter based on the European Convention on Human Rights. Additionally, they argued that when someone is vulnerable, they are entitled to support under the WMO. The emphasis in these cases is on vulnerability, and not whether the plaintiffs are legal citizens or not. Interestingly, they used the fact that they are 'not' citizens (their illegality) as a reason to get a 'bit' of recognition as citizens, by arguing that their 'illegality' was proof of their vulnerability. These appeals to social rights can be seen as a claim to

citizenship, as they argued that shelter and social rights are therefore something migrants are entitled to.

The above can also be seen as a way of making a claim to citizenship using the rights that are granted to undocumented migrants, such as the right to of going to court. This is a distinctive feature of the struggle of the 'We Are Here' group: they used all the rights migrants do have extensively.

Use of civic political rights

A second strand in the claim-making of the 'We Are Here' group is their extensive use of acquired rights. Over time, and with fits and starts, the group explored what (political) activities were possible for them as undocumented migrants, and what was not possible. For example, they had the right to demonstration and the right to speak with, and to, the municipality and city council. However, it was not possible to participate in an open (national) parliamentary meeting. This strategy entailed that even though they did not have full political possibilities, they extensively used the possibilities they did have. At the city council, for example, the migrants could talk directly with the (city) government about their claims. However, at the same time, this was an opportunity for the migrants to show the municipality they were very much capable to participate in the political system. The municipality is the one that could actually have helped them a lot, by creating adequate shelter. Consequently, many claims of the group were focused on the issue of shelter and directed towards the municipality. In the example below, one of the spokespersons of the group addressed the Mayor of Amsterdam, Eberhard van der Laan, directly, claiming their right to shelter:

> Please, Mister Van der Laan, we come for you. We are human beings too and we need a place to concentrate on our asylum things and procedure. It is stressful and twelve hours [of shelter] is not enough. It is not our fault we are in this situation. ('Ali',[1] speaking in a meeting of the City Council)

Next to this, public demonstrations were an important way to gain exposure and visibility for the 'We Are Here' group itself, and their struggle for citizenship. During demonstrations, the group made claims towards the government directly. Moreover, these demonstrations were also a way for the migrants to show their frustration with their situation to a larger audience. During demonstrations, the migrants and supporters acted more directly on the current situation of the migrants and claim that

this situation is a direct result of faulty government policy. The example below shows the speech of 'Isra', who, during a demonstration, said in Dutch:

> Thanks to the judge we now get bed, bath, bread, we are happy with this step forward. However, where do we go after breakfast? We don't have money to go to the bathroom. We can be arrested, put in prison. We cannot work, we cannot go to school, we can also not stay inside, we can only go to the streets. Roaming all day long until we are allowed inside again. ('Isra', at the demonstration at Museumplein)

Her speech was immediately followed by the crowd of migrants and supporters scanting '*geen man, geen vrouw, geen mens is illegaal*' ('No man, no women, no human is illegal') and '*We need normal life, we need normal life*', meanwhile showing their hands with '*I am here*' written on them. Additionally, those who attended the demonstration were handed flyers, explaining the situation of the 'We Are Here' group:

> From the summer 2012 an action group of refugees manifested itself in Amsterdam under the name of We Are Here. They take action against the Dutch asylum policy, which sends thousands of refugees on the streets yearly, not allowed to stay in the country, but not able to return to their country either. (Flyer handed out at the Museumplein demonstration)

By using civic rights they claimed both that there is something wrong with the policy and that, contrary to what was sometimes stated by the government, and the then Secretary of State Fred Teeven in particular, their situation was not their fault.

Additionally, as they became visible to the general public, the 'We Are Here' group also made a more indirect claim to citizenship. By being visible on the streets and squares of the city and/or via media reports of the demonstrations, and visibly using the rights they have, they could establish themselves as right-bearing beings. Demonstrating and being visible can be a way to become less 'illegal' in public opinion: Chauvin and Garcés Mascareñas (2014) state that invisibility is linked with illegality, therefore being more visible is a way to become more legal. Besides gaining visibility in the city, demonstrating was also a way in which undocumented migrants could act in a legitimate way in public space. As showing they had the right to demonstrate could make them appear less 'illegal', it could be that this legitimate form of participating in the public debate was a way to let claims gain in legitimacy. That would mean that, following Nicholls (2013a) in his notion that migrants can establish deservingness by showing assimilation with the society, by

being visible in public space and acting in legitimate ways, the migrants can assert themselves as legitimate political actors in the Netherlands.

Identity claims

Throughout their struggles, the 'We Are Here' group actively aimed at reframing the image of undocumented migrants. It could be said that there was a discourse of undocumented migrants that follows a frame of undocumented migrants as 'illegals', who had no respect for the law because they were not allowed to stay and yet would not leave. Or, they were portrayed as 'opportunists' in search of happiness('Gelukszoekers': 'happiness seekers') in the Dutch debate, who were threatening a precious welfare system. As an attempt to reframe the shared identity of the 'We Are Here' group, they employed 'identity claims', through which they claimed aspects of citizenship by trying to change this prevailing image of undocumented migrants. To be considered as 'deserving of rights', they had to turn the negative image around, which is exactly what the 'We Are Here' group did. A group that was kept out of the picture, put away as 'illegals' that were not supposed to be here, and demonstrated deservingness by, for example, performing a theatre play in the heart of the Amsterdam cultural scene, in Theatre Frascati. With this, the group not just claimed the popular image of them was wrong, but they also claimed certain interestingness and attractiveness. It is this turning around of categories, or the 'refusing, diminishing or displacing [of] identities others wish to recognise in individuals' (Calhoun, 1994, p. 21) which is a very important aspect of the concept of identity claims. Identity claims are what some scholars have referred to as 'identity politics':

> Interpretations and reinterpretations of typical experiences and activities of group members in response to deprecating stereotypes can rightly be called 'identity politics'. They are often expressed in cultural products such as novels, songs, plays, or paintings. (Young, 2000, p. 103)

In this way, the group demonstrated or claimed deservingness to have rights in the Netherlands. They tried to change their image from 'illegal' or 'gelukszoeker', towards 'undocumented migrant', but especially to 'refugee', through constantly stating 'we are refugees' and referring to themselves as refugees. Moreover, they organised a range of different cultural activities that did not fit the dominant image of them as illegals and 'gelukzoekers' that could, therefore, qualify as an identity claim. For instance, the group organised a theatre play, an International Women's

Day celebration, and days in which they invited people to come to their squatted building with the purpose of creating a home, by repairing and decorating the squat, together. Organising cultural activities is a claim to citizenship through participation. Moreover, the group participated in cultural activities organised by others. For example, during the 'Maagdenhuis occupation' (whereby the administrative headquarter of the University of Amsterdam was occupied by protesting students), they not only showed their support to the protesting students, but also gave lectures about their situation as undocumented migrants in Amsterdam. Most of the places in which these activities took place were somewhat closed settings with an audience that was, at least, not heavily opposed to migrants. Hence, they acted in a semi-safe space where they as undocumented migrants could be visible and speak their minds, without having to fear for the consequences. Seemingly acting from the Dutch saying 'onbekend maakt onbemind' ('unknown makes unloved'), the 'We Are Here' group sought to reverse this common wisdom, with the idea that 'if unknown makes unloved, we must make sure others get to know us so that we will be recognised in our claim to citizenship'.

Moreover, their participation in, and active development of, the cultural acts played a key role in constructing their image as those 'lost' in the non-functioning Dutch asylum procedure, with difficult pasts and unknown futures. Ganz stated that these acts of 'storytelling' are central to social movements, in that the acts construct agency, shape identity and motivate action (2001, p. 3). Moreover, the fact that the group were able to give lectures, or write and stage plays, added weight to the fact that they had something to contribute, that they were creative and able individuals. Next to this, in anticipation of the right to study, two supporters helped to organise an academy of their own. The academy provided various courses of multiple weeks, on a range of topics, and at the end the migrants received a certificate. This certificate could be seen as a semi-official proof of good and legal conduct, which can be seen as a way of becoming less illegal (Chauvin & Garcés Mascareñas, 2012). The academy paints a picture of the migrants of the 'We Are Here' group as smart, creative, and potentially well educated. Moreover, in anticipation of the right to education, the migrants acting to exercise this right made it appear even stranger that they did not have it. Thus, this sort of makeshift education could be seen as a first step in achieving recognition as potential students by higher education teachers first, with a view to eventually gaining recognition for their cognitive capabilities by the government.

Besides, throughout their actions, the 'We Are Here' group often experimented with language, not only to turn around frames about the group itself, but to constantly reframe the issues around them. For example, 'bed, bath, bread shelter' quickly became 'night shelter', which always went together with the question 'so what do we do the rest of the day?'. Moreover, the 'Bed, Bath, Bread' (BBB) agreement of the Dutch government quickly became the 'Big Big Bullshit' agreement. Or, as one of the migrants who said during the Museumplein demonstration, the Dutch government did not allow her to live, which would almost be the same as killing her. In the media, on the contrary, the group were well-spoken, concise, and, not unimportantly, speaking Dutch. Media performances focused more on policy critique, and this is where they introduce a new word: the 'asielgat', or 'policy gap', to express the ways in which the policy was failing them, stating the policy was not balanced, and indicating there was a crack that people can fall through. This different use of language, of course, also had to do with the kind of 'audience' they had. The group were wholly aware of how to incorporate appropriate modes of behaviour in various settings, because they actively trained themselves in this, with the help of their supporters. It was this sense of the specificity of situations that allowed people to see how they acted in legitimate ways, creating some sense of normalcy, which made them legitimate political actors.

Claim-placing

Amsterdam as a city played an important role in citizenship struggle of the 'We Are Here' group. The city provided politically meaningful places, organisational infrastructure, and open spaces for migrants to carve out a life (which was a political act in itself), and to make visible their political demands. We now point to the infrastructure of support groups first, then analysing the strategic use of politically meaningful places and occupation of vacant places.

In Amsterdam, the 'We Are Here' group found a large supporting network, made up of small local non-government organisations (NGOs), some churches, the Amsterdam squatters' movement, and Amsterdam-based artists. Especially in Dutch bureaucratic hassles, the supporters provided a crucial understanding of society, functioning as the 'bureaucratic capital' of the migrants. This supporter network made sure the migrants had a place to live, food to eat, and clothes to wear. Moreover, they arranged the services of, and transportation to, lawyers,

embassies, and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). They also helped to prepare actions, such as making banners, promoting demonstrations, and arranging demonstration permits. Additionally, they helped with communication with the government,and when it came to it, they physically kept the migrants from fighting with the police. Supporters, then, can be seen as 'native support organisations' (Nicholls, 2011). The different forms of capital offered by the supporters also helped the migrants to act in legitimate ways during their actions. The migrants to some extent need this 'insider knowledge' to make claims on their own, as claims to citizenship must resonate to normative ideas of citizenship and political participation in a specific context (Bloemraad, 2018, p. 6). This type of analysis points to the discursive and performative nature of claim-making. At the same time, existing organisations provide a politically meaningful infrastructure in the city.

Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans (2012) state that the city is constitutive of social movements because it provides for the basic elements of contention, because 'contention emerges from the micro interactions between large numbers of diverse people in close proximity' (Uitermark et al., 2012, p. 2546). Amsterdam is a political place where migrants found possible 'publics' to direct their actions towards, like the proximity of key policy institutes, such as the IND office, or a place for the creation of possible support networks, like the connection to the art scene. The city itself can be seen as the negotiating table on which citizenship is weighted and defined. As Isin argues:

> The city is neither a background to these struggles 'against which' groups wager, nor is it a foreground 'for which' groups struggle for hegemony. Rather, the city is the battleground 'through which' groups define their identity, stake their claims, wage their battles, and articulate citizenship rights, obligations, and principles. (2002, pp. 283–284)

Amsterdam can become an asset in claim-making by latching on to the historical and political meaning of places in the city. The use of places is important for social movements and/or contentious politics because the meaning, as well as the power these places contain, allows them to create places for alternative imaginaries (Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008). Migrant (protest) movements can use specific locations in the city to enhance their political visibility, as has been described in the case of Vienna (Ataç, 2016) or Berlin (Bhimji, 2016). The city can be used to create visibility for the 'We Are Here' group, as a group or as a 'social problem'. This visibility was important to gain people's attention, for

instance by organising events in the public domain of the city. Moreover, visibility and presence in the public domain are important to establish oneself as a legitimate (rights-bearing) person, through acting in legitimate ways in this public domain: they underlined the normalcy and assimilation of undocumented migrants. Amsterdam hosted the stages they used in their struggle, which were the courts, the squares, the offices of important political parties, and immigration services, to involve in demonstrations and a large art scene for their cultural activities. Marches are a strong example of how the 'We Are Here' group used space in Amsterdam in their struggle. By marching through the city, walking significant distances, making as many people as possible see them, the group optimised their visibility. Marching can be seen as highly political, as an act of citizenship, and as a way to formulate claims in public space (Ataç, 2016; Monforte & Dufour, 2011). The visibility of political acts was something that was actively taken into account during protest matches though the city, as demonstrated in the following fragment:

> We walk into the Vondelpark, there is disagreement. Do we walk through the park or do we take the Overtoom [a busy street next to the Vondelpark]? 'No one sees us in the park', 'Amahle' shouts. (from field notes: protest march from 'Vluchtgebouw' (squatted building) to the IND)

In addition to walking through the city and using this space for visibility, the 'We Are Here' group occupied the city. During the marches, the group would make several stops, for example at the immigration office and at the city hall, sitting down on the front steps, blocking the entrance, and covering the windows with their banners, thus making it impossible to be ignored. Occupying space is a powerful and highly visible strategy, which can be performed by people with virtually no power. It forces people to recognise one's existence, or at the very least, one's physical presence. These acts in public spaces often became media events, thus enhancing their visibility. Occupying space enables protesters to 'challenge the dominant symbolic order, to mobilise and concentrate their own symbolic, social and material power' (Miller & Nicholls, 2013, p. 453). The locations chosen, in particular, are interesting because the group claimed to have fallen through the cracks of the asylum system. Literally standing directly in front of the agency that had 'forgotten about them' was a way to state 'we are (still) here, you cannot forget about us'. This is claim-placing by using the meaning of a place in your claim, the location of the claim adds weight to the claim itself.

However, there was more going on when the undocumented migrants and their supporters occupied parts of the city. In other instances, the 'We Are Here' group used non-political spaces (a road) or empty spaces (a vacant building)—the interstices of the city—to literally place or locate their claims. One example is squatting within buildings. This could be seen as a rather practical solution to the migrants' housing problem, but we suggest it is more than that. When migrants occupied a building, brought in beds and cupboards, and started cooking and gathering, they literally brought to life their core claim: the right to live in Amsterdam. Instead of using the existing meaning of a political place, they used the interstitial space, for example a vacant office building, to create new meanings and place their claim-making. The squat became a claim by living in these spaces, creating 'a home' and an existence. Gradually, they invited other citizens to the squats, and through this, to some degree, integrated into the social and political life of Amsterdam.

Again, this strategy profited from existing infrastructures. Amsterdam has a long history with legal and non-violent squatting (Gemert, van Siegel, Visser, Dadusc, & Brouwers, 2009, p. 76), therefore squatting in Amsterdam could be seen as less deviant, or even more normal, than squatting in other cities might be. The influence of the squatters' movement on the group was also visible, as the existing squatters' movement knew the 'rules' of squatting, and understood how far one can go without it becoming a serious problem. Additionally, the fact that the group often had to move to new locations, in the process creating new 'neighbours', also influenced their visibility, and therefore opportunities to create legitimacy, in new areas in the city. Some of these neighbours became involved with the group, providing an extended support network, which was incredibly valuable for the group.

Citizenship struggles through claims and places

Undocumented migrants are confronted with exclusion and bordering practices, yet at the same time struggle to achieve some form of citizenship (Isin, 2008, p. 17). While lacking full formal citizenship, our case shows how undocumented migrants strive for substantive citizenship. Building on the 'acts of citizenship' literature (see Isin, 2009; Isin & Nielsen, 2008), we argue that undocumented migrants construct various types of relations that allow them to gain substantive citizenship incrementally. We describe four ways in which migrants claimed citizenship. Firstly, they used the judicial system to pursue (human) rights, for example,

based on (European) human rights courts. Secondly, they made use of the limited rights they did have, for example, the right to demonstrate or to speak in the municipal council. Thirdly, they made claims about their identity and created an image of benevolent, creative, and deserving humans worthy of citizenship (Nicholls, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). Lastly, they literally localised claims for inclusion in specific spaces and places in the city (Miller & Martin, 2000; Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

Looking at the mechanisms that make claims to citizenship powerful (Bloemraad, 2018), our case study shows how undocumented migrants strike a balance between acting as if they are already citizens, latching onto existing norms and practice, and criticising these at the same time. We document their differential (Mezzadra & Nielson, 2013, pp. 157–159) and thus limited inclusion. The case of the 'We Are Here' group in Amsterdam shows how excluded migrants build relations with each other (the actual formation of a political group), with established citizens and organisations, with the state (through legal claims), with international organisations, and with other political entities depending on opportunities.

As much as the undocumented migrants challenged the status quo, they also explicitly demonstrated support for Dutch norms and culture, to establish sameness as the basis of citizenship rights. Identity claims strengthened their claims of belonging: the group created an image of themselves as lost in legal limbo beyond their fault, and at the same time as creative, smart, strong and sane, politically aware, and full of good intentions, ready to contribute to Dutch society. It gave their existence a sense of normalcy, through which they gradually approached a legitimate political subjecthood (Anderson, 2010; Nicholls, 2013b). Through these practices of citizenship, the undocumented migrants of the 'We Are Here' group constituted inclusion. By organising and participating in a variety of activities, undocumented migrants showed they were capable of participation, and it granted them the opportunity to build relations with citizens: these citizens can, in turn, recognise the undocumented migrants as 'those to whom the right to have rights is due' (Isin, 2008); in this relation, forms of citizenship can be created.

This process could be interpreted within a wider process of resisting diffuse borders. When the border is placed in the everyday lives of undocumented migrants, even small acts of citizenship, or instances of inclusion, can be seen as the micro-politics of border struggles. While we recognise the national community as a crucial focus for citizenship struggles, this article adds to this discussion the importance of the local level. Our case study shows how undocumented migrants actively use local specificities

to construct their relations. Undocumented migrants and their supporters significantly strove for inclusion through 'claim-placing': they instantiated claims physically in the city, turning *the* city into *their* city–'We Are Here'. Claim-placing refers to the way undocumented migrants use (public) places to locate, make visible and substantiate their demands (Borren, 2008; Chauvin & Garcés Mascareñas, 2014). Amsterdam as a city, with its historic concentration of politically charged places, its legal possibilities for squatting, and rich opportunities for network formation, offered multiple opportunities for the 'We Are Here' group to emerge and act as a movement. When undocumented migrants placed their claims at meaningful locations in the city, or collaborated with local organisations such as the squatters' movement, they latched onto the existing political meanings and infrastructure of the city. In other cases, they turned vacant spaces into politically meaningful places. The concept of claim-placing points to the fact that local and spatial specificities, next to national norms and values, are important for effective claim-making to citizenship. Our analysis thus shows how the 'We Are Here' group, literally places their claims in the city. In fact, this dimension is in the group's name: 'We Are Here' is a discursive claim and way of using the cities political places and interstitial spaces. It is a claim to presence and place: 'we are here' in the Netherlands or at the city hall. Moreover, it is the literal act of being, living and rallying in the city, expressing territorial presence and local belonging, even without formal rights. Through the use of claims to rights and the use of place and space, and procedures, undocumented migrants have stated: we already live here, we already participate here, and we should not be deported, because we belong here.

Notes

1. Of all migrants who are denied a residence permit the biggest group leaves government shelters 'without supervision'; meaning that they are registered as having left the country but of this group many actually remain in the Netherlands irregularly. Moreover, in the period of this study the number of forced returns (deportations) decreased as opposed to previous years (Ministerie van veiligheid en justitie, 2014, 2015, 2016).
2. (CEC v. the Netherlands, 90/2013).
3. (CEC v. the Netherlands, 90/2013: Decision on the merits).

Disclosure statement

ORCID

Minke Hajer http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7054-137X

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