

# **The Power of Innocence**

Examining the performance of “child innocence” in the documentaries ‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’ and ‘The Dream is Now’ in the claiming of immigrant rights in the Netherlands and the United States

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# Abstract

While previously known as a mainly American phenomenon, in recent years (and especially months), the influence of children on immigrant rights debate in the Netherlands has been disruptive. In the United States, undocumented youth advocates referred to as the “DREAMers” successfully embark on a broad range of themes regarding immigrant rights, whereas in the Netherlands, undocumented immigrant children like Mauro, Lili, Howick and Nemr cause great upheaval in the political debate. Now I wondered whether there is a relation between these advocating youths, and whether they have learned from each other in the past or might learn from each other in the future. In order to research this comparison, I analyze the performance of “child innocence” in the Dutch documentary ‘Terug Naar Je Eigen Land’ and the American documentary “The Dream is Now’. This is done at the hand of the “politics of deservingness” by Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita, a theoretical framework which describes the cleansing of polluting stigma’s that are attributed to the undocumented status of certain immigrants and make them “deserving” of exceptional considerations regarding their rights. The analysis of the documentaries about immigrant *youths* turns out to confirm this “politics of deservingness”. In addition, building on Benford and Snow their representation of social realities, the “politics of deservingness” is broadened by a formulation of three problematizing frames that make up the documentaries. Lastly, in this research opens up the possibility for researching the relation *between* the documentaries (or undocumented immigrant youths that are portrayed within it) according to Charles Tilly his contentious performance framework. The conclusion is straightforward: the children are *always* deemed innocent and thus deserving of a safe home in their residing country. They are in power of innocence.

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**Screenshots ‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’**

**Screenshots ‘The Dream is Now’**

# Introduction

‘We’re already home’, is what thirteen-year-old Armenian Howick said in *Het Jeugdjournaal*<sup>1</sup> while wiping away his tears. His sister Lili and he grew up in the Netherlands but had to leave because their mother had not completely followed their asylum procedures, which left the children unable to appeal to the *Children’s Pardon* law, an arrangement that grants citizenship to undocumented immigrant children who reside in the Netherlands for more than five years (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, 2018). Many people were moved by their story and stood up for them in the public debate or on the streets. The media extensively paid attention to these responses. As a consequence, the children were allowed to stay. On the other side of the Atlantic, a similar force influences the immigrant rights debate. A group of undocumented immigrant youth has created a strong political voice that penetrates the public discourse and governing policies of the United States. The group initially focused on passing the DREAM Act (acronym for Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors Act), a legislation act that has been introduced several times but has failed to pass and would grant permanent residency to alien minors in the United States (Library of Congress, 2017), but soon embarked on broader themes regarding immigrant rights.

Children are often considered to be vulnerable, but in the discussion on immigrant rights in the United States and the Netherlands, it is exactly this vulnerability that gives them power. In their article ‘The Politics of Deservingness: Comparing Youth-Centered Immigrant Mobilizations in the Netherlands and the United States’, Walter Nicholls, Marcel Maussen and Laura Caldas de Mesquita (2016:1591) distinguish the economic, humanitarian and cultural arguments that make undocumented immigrant minors in the Netherlands and the United States uniquely deserving of exceptional considerations regarding their resident status. In this research I aim to further explore this comparison by an analysis of the documentaries ‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’ and the American ‘The Dream is Now’ according to the understanding of this “politics of deservingness”. As such, I will answer the following research question: *How is the notion of “child innocence” performed in the documentaries ‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’ and ‘The Dream is Now’ in the claiming of immigrant rights in the Netherlands and the United States in spring 2013 and fall 2018?*

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<sup>1</sup> Dutch television news show for children produced by the public service broadcaster NOS (<https://jeugdjournaal.nl>)

Nicholls, Maussen and Mesquita (2016) explicitly state that there is *no communication* between the advocacy organizations and point to the similar contexts - increasingly restrictive citizenship regimes - to explain the resemblances. How, then, can we understand the relation between these groups? In this thesis, the possibility for formulating cross-connections will be opened up according to the contentious performance framework of Charles Tilly (2008).

Methodologically, I analyze the documentaries at the hand of Robert Benford and David Snow (2000) their understanding of collective action frames. There will be elaborated on their framework before I turn to the analysis of the documentaries. As a result of this analysis, three *new* collective action frames are being proposed: the *culturally rooted frame*, the *emotional disturbance frame* and the *economic utility frame*.

This research is academically significant as it broadens the theoretical understanding of the “politics of deservingness”. Hopefully, a better understanding of the performance of innocence on an academic level contributes to a more adequate way of its use on a societal level. Especially the media, a world that is often carried away by the issues of the day, is provided with grounded insights on a currently ‘hot topic’. Besides, this thesis has opened up possibilities for further research on comparing undocumented youth advocates in the Netherlands and the United States. As the groups might learn much from one another, this research is politically valuable as well.

In the first chapter, I will analyze upon what fundamental notions the politics of deservingness is built. Undocumented immigrants have been portrayed as an existential threat to the nation-state. The economic, security and cultural grounds for *exclusion* (Nicholls, 2013) come with an equivalent that can be the basis for *inclusion*, also explained as the “politics of deservingness” (Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita, 2016). In the second chapter I will open up the possibility to formulate cross-connections between the documentaries at the hand of Charles Tilly (2008), who argues that acts of claim-making are like the performance of a jazz-trio; clustered, learned, yet improvisational, and part of an overarching episode on contention. If we follow this line of thinking, the two documentaries can be identified as contentious performances of innocence that are part of the same episode of contention and diffuse across space and time - even *without* direct communication. In the third chapter I will elaborate on the methodological framework that is built upon Benford and Snow (2000) their understanding of collective action frames. Then I will describe the documentaries ‘Terug Naar Je Eigen Land’ and ‘The Dream is Now’. Then, the similarities and differences of the

performance of “child innocence” in the documentaries will be discussed. The Dutch documentary mainly makes a humanitarian claim and appeals to the moral responsibility of the viewer, whereas the American documentary stresses the economic utility of the undocumented immigrant minors to the country. As a result of this analysis, three frames will be distinguished that cleanse the undocumented immigrant youth in the documentaries of the polluting stigmas attributed to them: the *culturally rooted frame*, the *emotional disturbance frame* and the *economic utility frame*. As such, the conclusion of this research consists of three main statements. First, the politics of deservingness as described by Nicholls, Maussen and Mesquita (2016) is confirmed by the documentary analysis. Second, by adding Charles Tilly (2008) his analytical perspective, possibilities for the formulation of cross-connections are opened up. Third, this research broadens the theoretical understanding of the “politics of deservingness” with three new collective action frames.



## Chapter One: the fundamental notions of deservingness

Anti-immigrant discourses, parties and movements are sweeping through the global North, as there increasingly develops a more narrowed definition of ‘those worthy of attention, care and recognition’ (Lamont & Duoux, 2014: 60). In many countries, the stigma attached to undocumented immigrants has led to the question whether undocumented immigrants are right-bearing human beings within national borders (Arendt, 1973). Especially undocumented immigrants have been portrayed as an existential threat to the nation-state because they are said to ‘degrade its economic, social, and cultural foundations’ (Nicholls, 2013: 83).

In Europe, and especially in the context of the economic crisis after 2008, newcomers are being excluded based on their economic inutility (Sankari & Frerichs 2016, Lafleur & Mescoli 2018). As soon as immigrants pose a threat to a country’s economy, they become ‘undeserving’ of certain rights such as a resident status. The same accounts for the United States, a country that has ‘a long history of justifying immigrants on the basis of their economic value’ (Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita, 2016: 1607). Solidarity with strangers in these countries is justified in terms of economic advantage to the nation. A second ground of exclusion is (increasingly) being determined by culture. Many authors argue that the global North is moving towards a culturalization of politics, which uses the perceived lack of appropriate culture as a basis to exclude a group from deserving entry and solidarity by the national community’ (Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita, 2016: 1593). Aristide Zolberg and Long Woon (1999) apply this culturalist perspective to the Netherlands and the United States and state that Islam and Spanish are metonyms for the loss of cultural identity and unity that those most opposed to immigration perceive as an increasing danger (Zolberg & Woon, 1999: 5). A final ground for exclusion is determined by people’s desire to feel safe. Especially in the United States, the notion that people with an immigration background are a fundamental threat to national security became prominent after the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11 (De Genova, 2007), as ‘the growth of large populations of undocumented immigrants has occurred at a time of heightened xenophobia and deepening anxiety over the abilities of the nation-state to assert its sovereignty and protect its borders’ (Nicholls, 2013: 87).

These economic, security and cultural grounds for *exclusion* come with an equivalent that can be the basis of *inclusion*. As Nicholls (2013: 90) says, ‘if, for example, I demonstrate that I am like you, it becomes difficult for you to justify the denial of rights to me on the

grounds that I represent a threat to your community'. It is upon this fundamental notion that the "politics of deservingness" is built. According to Nicholls (2013: 90), 'the road to recognition as people deserving rights depends on the ability of undocumented immigrants to publicly demonstrate identification with the national community'... and 'cleans themselves of the polluting stigmas attributed to them' (Nicholls, 2013: 90). So now it gets interesting to look at the pool of undocumented immigrant *children* in the Netherlands and the United States. Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita (2016) argue that these children are in possession of certain attributes that seclude them of the above described cultural, security and economic threats to the nation, and make them uniquely deserving of exceptional considerations regarding their illegal residency status. They can 'tap into the moral ambiguity of the public and governing authorities' in order to legalize their resident status by adjusting their advocacy strategies to this (Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita, 2016: 1608). This thesis will examine the way in which immigrant minors show their identification with the national community and are cleansed of polluting stigmas in the 'Terug Naar Je Eige Land' and 'The Dream is Now'. Nicholls, Maussen and Mesquita (2016) explicitly add to their study there is *no communication* between the advocacy organizations in the Netherlands and the United States and point to the convergence of increasingly restrictive citizenship regimes to explain similarities. How, then, can we understand the relation between the documentaries? In the next section I will open up the possibility of formulating cross-connections between the documentaries by adding the analytical lens of Charles Tilly (2008), a widely built upon scholar in the field of collective action.

## Chapter Two: striking the sails

Undocumented children's action is an example of contentious politics. The academic field of collective action is fundamentally shaped by Charles Tilly. From the 1960's onwards, he raised questions on *how* this joint action occurs (Demmers, 2012: 85). The sub field of *contentious* collective action specifically looks at those who challenge the existing 'political and social structures and practices' (Demmers, 2012: 85). The powers that be, so to say. Tilly (2008) his ideas can be illustrated with the first documented strike, that took place in London in the year 1768. As many people opposed the British crown's repressive policies, sailors repeatedly made demands on their masters by striking their sails (Tilly, 2008). Today, faced with discontent over working conditions, people still figuratively strike their sails to make claims on their holders of power. According to Tilly (2008), this is a perfect example of a *contentious performance*; 'the relatively familiar and standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes collective claims on some other set of political actors' (Tarrow & Tilly, 2009: 441). In local struggles and uprisings, participants often follow available scripts, adapt them to local circumstances, and only change them bit by bit, if at all (Tilly, 2008). Tilly makes the dramaturgical comparison with a jazz trio:

'People who participate in contentious politics normally have several pieces they can play, but not an infinity... Within that limited array, the players choose which pieces they will perform here and now, and in what order. (2008:14)'

Just like a jazz trio, the contentious performance is merely a tone that resonates, and clustered into *episodes*, defined by Tilly as 'bounded sequences of continuous interaction, usually produced by an investigator's chopping up longer streams of contention into segments for purposes of systematic observation, comparison, and explanation' (2008: 10). By taking the contentious episode as a unit of analysis, one is allowed to see 'to what extent the same combination of performances – for example, the march ending in a public meeting; the peaceful demonstration leading to police repression, in turn leading to violent ripostes – appear repeatedly in the same episodes' (Tarrow, 2008: 236). Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht (1993) conceptualize the spread of a contentious performance from one site to another as *diffusion*. Without this mechanism of contention, local episodes of contention would remain local and not spread to other countries. Because the internet has given an entire new

scope to the diffusion of contentious performances and the means by which it occurs (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2009: 274), further research on this mechanism could be of great value.

Thus, even though Nicholls, Maussen and Mesquita (2016) explicitly state that there is *no communication* between advocacy organizations in the United States and the Netherlands, there is now a perspective on how to formulate cross-connections between the two acts of claim-making. If we follow Charles Tilly (2008) his line of thinking, the way in which innocence is acted out can be identified as a contentious act of innocence that diffuses across space and time – even *without* direct communication. The documentaries can now be regarded as part of the same episode of contention, which adds value to researching the relation between them as they might benefit from insight in one another’s development. So now the question arises what claim-making performances in the documentaries can be identified as “acts of innocence”, and what similarities and differences can be discovered.

## Chapter Three: the performance of innocence in the Netherlands and the United States

### *About the method*

This research has been done as systematically as possible, but as is the case with any other research, the choices that have been made were to a certain extent based on the researcher's intuition. In order to be transparent about the selection process, a framework analysis model has been applied. The documentaries 'Terug Naar Je Eige Land' and 'The Dream is Now' are analyzed in the light of Robert Benford and David Snow's (2000) understanding of collective action frames. They build on Erving Goffman's (1974) work and define a collective action frame as 'simplified and condensed aspects of "the world out there" in ways that are 'intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists' (Benford & Snow, 2000, 1988: 198). They identify three fundamental tasks for social movements to further their goals: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). Through diagnostic framing, a problem is identified and linked to the negative impact on social life in a clear and easily understandable way. Prognostic framing offers a solution to the problem posed by diagnostic framing and explains how this can be implemented. The motivational frame formulates what people should *do* once they accepted the prognostic framework as a true representation of the state of affairs. As such, people move 'from the balcony to the barricades' (2000: 615). The documentaries and supporting media campaigns contain elements of both prognostic and motivational framing. However, because of the limited scope of this thesis, I chose to focus on the frame is most present in the documentaries: the diagnostic framing. The performance of innocence falls within these terms, as this act articulates the denial of undocumented immigrant children on certain rights. So now the question arises how innocence is performed in the documentaries 'Terug Naar Je Eige Land' and 'The Dream is Now'?

### *Terug Naar Je Eige Land*

In the documentary 'Terug Naar Je Eige Land', Tim Hofman interviews seven undocumented children who advocate for a more inclusive Children's Pardon. Nemr and Kingsley are residing the Netherlands, Maksim, Dennis and Arina are deported to Ukraine. Together with Marije de Roode, Tim interviews these children about their current living situation. The

documentary is part of #BOOS<sup>2</sup>, a YouTube channel with videos in which children and young adults make a claim on holders of power, for example their boss, landlord or energy supplier. ‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’ was released in November 2018, coupled with a petition and directly attacks the Children’s Pardon<sup>3</sup>. The documentary explicitly formulates two goals: a revision of the Children’s Pardon at the Parliament that eradicates any possible loophole (1) and the entitlement of a permanent resident status to the 400 children and their families to which the Children’s Pardon is not in effect at the time of the documentary release (2). Thus, the documentary makers aim for policy change and, regardless of the outcome, they want to relieve the children who are already *in* the Netherlands from uncertainty about their resident status. If the petition receives 40.000 signatures, these claims will be on the agenda of the Dutch House of Representatives. The media campaign turned out to be a great success. In a short period of time, the petition was signed by over 250.000 people.

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The documentary outline is as follows:

‘Hi. I am Nemr. I am nine years old and I live in a detention center. That is a place where people live who have fled their country. I did not flee, but my parents did. From Iraq. It is very dangerous, and many people die. Me and my brother were not born here. And we are angry because we might go back, and we don’t want that.’

‘Well’, says Tim. ‘It is clear that you are angry. But are you really nine years old?’ Nemr sighs. ‘That is what you are asking me all time.’ As joyful music continues, the boy is asked for his big dream. ‘I want to become a video blogger’, he says with a smile. The documentary moves to the asylum seekers center where Nemr and his family reside. The boy shows a box that is filled with Christmas balls. ‘I thought you were Muslim’, Tim says surprised. The boy seems unaware of the cultural value of the decoration. As he tells that he has moved nine times, the conversation gets more serious: ‘How is it to make new friends every time?’, Tim asks. ‘Not fun. It is useless to make new friends, because I leave after a year anyway’. The Dutch police sometimes lifts undocumented immigrants out of their beds in asylum seeker centers without a warning, so that the people don’t run off and can be deported. Therefore, one of Nemr’s parents is always awake to look out for the police. The sinister music gets more intense while Nemr shares his perspective on the current living situation in Iraq – a country that highly suffers from criminality and terrorist attacks by (mainly) Islamic extremists since 2013

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<sup>2</sup> Loose translation: #ANGRY

(Miniserie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2018). ‘Within a few moments I’ll be shot dead’, he says. Back to Ukraine. Maksim, Dennis and Arina live with their parents in one bedroom. The children seem confused. They do not go to school nor do they speak Ukrainian. According to their mother, when the children wake up, the first thing they ask is whether they can go home. ‘I understand very little of what is happening’, says Maksim, the oldest of the three children. ‘And do you feel depressed? Do you feel unhappy the entire time?’ With a resolute ‘yes’ he confirms Tim’s presumption. ‘And what went wrong?’, he asks their mother. She finds it difficult to say who is guilty – governing authorities or the parents - but in any case, the children are innocent. The documentary moves to sixteen-year-old Kingsley. His case is currently at the Dutch court, where the discrepancy between his physical vulnerability and the law is being considered. He was born in Italy and got cancer when he was seven years old. In order to provide him with proper medical care, his originally Nigerian parents took him to the Netherlands. During the treatment, Kingsley lost one of his eyes, so his orbit is covered with a plaster. Tim sees an opportunity to lighten up the subject. ‘What does your life look like in the Netherlands, seen through one eye?’, he asks. The boy laughs and tells him that he lives an everyday life at a Dutch school with Dutch friends. He even thinks that he has Dutch humor. ‘I think that is because you can only see with one eye’, Tim jokes. Once again, the boy bursts into laughter. Back in Ukraine, the music gets more sinister. Tim asks Maksim to respond with the first thing that pops up in his head when hearing ‘the Netherlands’. ‘Home’, Maksim answers. ‘Future?’ ‘Nothing, completely nothing’. It slowly becomes clear that Maksim is emotionally much more disturbed than it initially seemed. While crying, his mother says the only thing her son does is sleep. ‘And what do you like to do?’, Tim continues his interrogation, but Maksim no longer responds. ‘Maksim? Are you okay?’. His face expression is blank, and he remains silent. According to his mother, Maksim has autism, and has great difficulty adapting to their current living situation in Kiev. In the following scene, Tim takes Nemr to the Dutch House of Representatives. ‘In Iraq I will die’, the boy says to Klaas Dijkhoff, party chairman of the VVD<sup>4</sup>. ‘Yes, so?’, he answers baffled. ‘If I go to Iraq, I don’t have a future’. Dijkhoff stays in line with the position of his party and answers that Nemr needs to build a new life in Iraq. Nemr sighs. All of the politicians that he interviews rigidly stick to the statement of their party. The documentary ends with the call to sign a petition called #EIGELAND. If this is signed by 40.000 people, Tim and Marije are able to discuss their proposal – a permanent resident status to the 400 children that currently live with a threat of deportation and a more inclusive Children’s Pardon - with the Dutch House of Representatives.

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<sup>4</sup> Short for Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, loosely translated as ‘People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy’. It is a Dutch conservative liberal party.

## *The Dream is Now*

'The Dream is Now' tells the story of four undocumented immigrant children in the United States. They all cherish a dream: Alejandro wants to become a Marine, Jose wants to become a mechanical engineer, Ola wants to be an oncological surgeon and Erika is leader of the DREAMers and wants this movement to be a success. Their personal stories are placed in a larger context of American immigrant politics on the estimated two million undocumented DREAMers. This is a group of individuals who would have qualified under the DREAM Act. They are waiting for themselves or their family to be granted citizenship. The documentary was directed by Davis Guggenheim and released in the United States in April 2013. It aims to give voice to undocumented immigrant youth and bring the DREAM Act under attention of the American public. The documentary is part of a larger campaign with a petition and a storytelling platform on which "DREAMers" are invited tell their own story.

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The documentary outline is as follows:

'More and more strange men on strange corners.' Newsflashes that incriminate undocumented immigrants alternate with undocumented immigrant youth who show the medals and certificates that they have received at universities or sport clubs. The message is carried out that the stigma these youths carry is untrue, because they are very successful in American society. The voice-over continues: 'what happens now, right here, at this very moment, is not a context to follow or a race to be scored. It is something very real. It is their lives.' The documentary moves to the first persona: Ola. She first elaborates on her mother, who started a bakery that became so successful that she now employs Americans at her business. Since she was a little child, Ola carries this dream to become an oncological surgeon. The next persona of the documentary, Erica, came to the United States when she was eleven years old. At her high school she was secretary at the so-called 'achievers club' and graduated at the top of her class. She got a scholarship at Arizona State University and is the leader of the DREAMers movement. Thrilling music starts to play. 'You've got to be able to take it, because service means you've got to be ready for instant action' a voice over says. The third person that is subject of the documentary is Alejandro. He went to a military public school in Chicago and became city core staff commander. According to the director of the school, 'he is the kind of guy our military needs'. The final person is Jose. In high school he was a top math student and dreamed of becoming a mechanical engineer. 'When I went to high school I was fearless. I thought I could do anything', he says.



The four undocumented immigrant youths were taught at a young age to ‘believe’, which refers to the national ethos of the United States: the American Dream. However, reality seemed shockingly different from their imagination. As the voice over says,

‘there is a bargain you make with your family and your teachers, and you believe it.  
Work hard, do everything right, and it will pay off. But they all hit the same wall.  
Without citizenship or a social security number, they are stuck in limbo’.

Because of his undocumented status, Alejandro cannot apply for a job at the marine. The same accounts for Jose, who now works at a construction site. Erika and Ola live in great fear that their mothers or other family members will be deported. The scene becomes even more daunting with the story of Joaquin. He grew up in Texas and successfully graduated from high school, but when he applied for college, he realized that reality might be much different from his dreams. Therefore, he committed suicide and wrote a farewell letter in which he says: ‘Jesus, I’ve realized that I have no chance in becoming a civil engineer in the way that I’ve always dreamed of here so I’m planning on going to you and helping you construct the new temple in heaven.’ ‘American tune’ from Paul Simon plays, which is a song about the American Dream:

‘Many's the time I've been mistaken, and many times confused  
Yes and I've often felt forsaken, and certainly misused  
Ah but I'm alright, I'm alright, I'm just weary through my bones  
Still you don't expect to be bright and bon-vivant  
So far away from home, so far away from home’

After this dreadful intermezzo, the documentary takes a turn, as the undocumented youths are portrayed as empowered individuals. Ola and Erika successfully took initiative against the deportation of their mothers. Ola started a petition and collected 15.000 signatures, whereas Erika posted a video on YouTube that spread virally throughout the internet. The documentary was made during a time in which the DREAM Act was discussed at the American Congress, which would grant citizenship to some of the undocumented immigrants. A series of newsflashes in which DREAMers publicly declare their undocumented status are shown. ‘I’m undocumented and unafraid’, they shout. The documentary ends with the following advocating message:

‘In the days to come, a new law that could give citizenship to millions of undocumented immigrants will be introduced in Congress. And there is growing support from Republicans and Democrats. But will there be enough votes? There is a

story without an ending. And there are millions of others who are waiting. Join us.  
Let's write their ending. Together.'

## Discussion

In 'Terug Naar Je Eige Land' and 'The Dream is Now', immigrant minors are cleansed of polluting stigmas by claim-making performances that can be identified as "acts of innocence". There are both similarities and differences between the documentaries that can be discovered. In 'Terug Naar Je Eige Land', the disturbing impact of the (continuous threat of) deportation on the emotional condition of the children is clearly foregrounded. Nemr lives in an asylum-seekers' center where one of his parents is always on the lookout for the possible arrival of police men who might bring the family to a deportation center. The boy has already moved several times and needs to make new friends every time. Kingsley suffered from cancer, and lives under the uncertainty whether his medical supervision will continue because he might be deported to Nigeria, the birth country of his parents. Maksim, Dennis and Arina grew up in the Netherlands, but currently live with their parents on a small bedroom in Kiev. The three children do not speak Ukrainian, nor do they attend school. The language barrier and lack of contact with their peers seems to have a deeply disturbing impact on their development. This is specifically the case for Maksim, whose behavior gives the impression of an autistic spectrum disorder. Thus, even though the children are emotionally vulnerable and sometimes even suffer from mental or physical problems, they live with a continuous threat of deportation or have already been deported. The cultural incorporation of the children in the Netherlands is also prominently problematized in the documentary. Kinglsey describes his life as 'normal' - at a Dutch school with Dutch friends. According to his own saying, he even has Dutch humor. At the asylum seekers center where Nemr resides with his parents, a box that is filled with Christmas decoration stands in the corner of the room. The balls and swings function as a protest event to stress the cultural incorporation of the boy. Thus, despite the fact that the children feel like they belong in the Netherlands, and sometimes even suffer from mental or physical problems, they live with a continuing threat of deportation, or have already been deported.

In 'The Dream is Now', the economic argument comes across as most important. During high school, the youths were at the top of their class as a 'top math scholar', 'city core staff commander' or 'secretary at the achievers club'. After their successful high school career, they wanted to contribute to their residing country's economy with honorable jobs such as a doctor, mechanical- or civil engineer. But after graduation, their dreams were shattered. Without a resident status they are not allowed to utilize their capacities and

contribute to America's economy. Therefore, some of them now reside on the social margins of society. Jose has a degree in mechanical engineering but works at a construction site, Alejandro cannot work at the military. Joaquin dreamed of becoming a civil engineer but committed suicide because he thought he would not be accepted to college. The future plans of the undocumented youths are formulated within terms of 'dreaming', which gives the sense that they carry the same national ethos of the United States – the American Dream. They are as culturally integrated as any other true American citizen, the documentary seems to say. Thus, because the youth have the will and capacity to be of economic utility to the country and do not pose a threat to national culture, it is their legitimate right to advocate the DREAM Act, which enables them to realize their dreams. Their dream is *now*.

Thus, the claim-making performances in the two documentaries are not simply one and the same. In the Netherlands, the disturbing impact of the (continuous threat of) deportation on the emotional condition of the children is clearly foregrounded whereas in the United States, the economic utility determines the extent to which the undocumented immigrant youths deserve certain rights. This confirms the findings of Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita (2016). According to their saying, in the Netherlands, 'immigration issues have often been viewed and discussed through the window of asylum seekers and vulnerable minors', whereas in the United States, there is a 'long history of justifying immigrants on the basis of their economic value' (Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita, 2016: 1607). Similarities also apply to the two cases. Again in line with Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita (2016), both documentaries highlight the possession of specific cultural attributes which make the undocumented immigrant youth uniquely deserving of exceptional considerations regarding their rights. According to Benford and Snow (2000), the above mentioned problematization of certain attributes falls within the terms of diagnostic framing. Building on this conceptualization of social realities, this research distinguishes three diagnostic frames that are used in the documentaries and supporting media campaigns in the Netherlands and the United States, and which distinguish the "acts of innocence" that cleanse undocumented immigrant minors of polluting stigmas that are attributed to them: the *culturally rooted frame*, the *emotional disturbance frame* and the *economic utility frame*.

By drawing on Charles Tilly's contentious performance framework (2008), it becomes possible to regard the documentaries as part of the same episode of contention. The two cases which are represented in the documentaries - or the documentaries in itself - might have influence each other. Because 'The Dream is Now' was broadcasted five years prior to

‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’, the relation is probably one-sided: ‘Terug Naar Je Eige Land’ might implicitly or explicitly have taken lessons from ‘The Dream is Now’. This research recommends further research on this topic.

According to Maurice Crul (2015: 54), next to the increasing diversity of immigrant groups, there is a growing diversity *within* immigrant groups both within the same generation as well as between generations, as ‘children of immigrants nowadays no longer integrate into the majority group, but into a large amalgam of ethnic groups’. To not get lost in nuances, "in this research I focused on undocumented immigrant children. However, it should be remarked that deservingness concerns a large continuum of people. Moreover, it is subject to continuous change. Lafleur and Mescoli (2018: 494) critically add to the notion of deservingness that ‘undocumented EU migrants – who have objectively more legal avenues to regularize their status – actually feel more threatened by asylum seekers and third country migrants whom they perceive are more likely to be recognized as deserving immigrants’. Those with a relatively low deserving status might feel threatened by those with a higher deserving status, and the hostile tensions among undocumented immigrants might lead to a shift within hierarchies of deservingness. Thus, the “politics of deservingness” is build up in fluid, hierarchical structures. The performance of innocence in the two documentaries might lead to a chain reaction of shifts in the established hierarchies of deservingness, for example within age or ethnic groups, which might lead to a range of tensions and other unintended consequences. Therefore, I suggest more research should be done on this topic, and it is with this critical remark in mind that this thesis should be regarded.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I have compared the performance of “child innocence” in a Dutch and American documentary according to the “politics of deservingness” as described by Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita (2016). The undocumented immigrant youths are deemed harmless to national security because they are discarded of moral failure, harmless to the national economy because have the drive to become hard working citizens, and harmless to the national culture because they are rooted within it. Their “innocence” discards the undocumented immigrant children of the polluting stigmas that are attached to dangers that the public and governing policies perceive as looming ahead. The Dutch documentary mainly makes a humanitarian claim and appeals to the moral responsibility of the viewer, whereas the American documentary stresses the economic utility of the undocumented immigrants to the country. Adding the lens of Charles Tilly (2008) allows us to identify the way in which child innocence is acted out as a contentious performance that diffuses across space and time – even *without* direct communication. Building upon the representation of social realities by Benford and Snow (2000), the problematization of certain attributes can be identified as a diagnostic frame, as a result of which three frames that cleanse undocumented immigrant minors in the documentaries of polluting stigmas that are attributed to them can be formulated: the *culturally rooted frame*, the *emotional disturbance frame* and the *economic utility frame*.

Broadly speaking, the conclusion of this thesis is threefold. First, the documentary analysis that I have conducted confirms the “politics of deservingness” as outlined by Nicholls, Maussen & Mesquita (2016). Second, in this thesis I have opened up possibilities for researching the relation between the documentaries, or undocumented immigrant youths in the Netherlands and the United States that are portrayed within it. This might be of political value, as the undocumented advocating groups in these countries might learn much from one another. Lastly, I have formulated three diagnostic frames that broaden the theoretical understanding of the “politics of deservingness”.

The boundaries of “child innocence” are constantly being drawn and redrawn. The documentaries “Terug Naar Je Eige Land” and ‘The Dream is Now’ are merely silent tones that resonate with Tilly’s rhythms of change, and subject to continuous change. But whatever the strategy is, the children are deemed innocent and thus deserving of a safe home in their

residing country. Their struggles function as a protest event to make serious and provoking claims on the public discourse and governing authorities. They are in power of innocence.

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## Appendix: screenshots





