# “We are not documents but human beings”

*The presentation of a counter-narrative on undocumented migration through the art practices of We Sell Reality*


Master Thesis Urban Geography
Faculty of Geoscience Msc Urban Geography
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Words: 31.093 (*including references*)
1st of July 2021

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# Acknowledgements

I want to thank my thesis supervisor Ilse van Liempt for her enthusiasm, involvement, support and critical feedback during my research process. Besides, I thank the second reader Mieke Kox for her critical opinion. Furthermore, I want to thank FramerFramed for allowing me to study the concept of belonging within such an inspirational and social innovative environment. Throughout the internship, they have given me the trust and freedom to go on my own journey of exploring. Last but not least, I want to state a special thank you to all the members of We Sell Reality including the artists, for welcoming me into the group and making me feel at home and included. I developed a strong connection and a relationship of trust. Never before have people so open-hearted and honest shared their personal stories. Through this, they made my thesis possible.

I am grateful to have spent this time with you.

# Abstract

This study provides insights on the construction of place- and political belongingness of undocumented migrants by presenting a counter-narrative on undocumented migration through their art practices. A literature study first of all sheds light on the existence of dominant exclusionary discourses in the Netherlands as the host society. Thereafter it focuses on the flipside, by discussing the impact on the construction of one's identity and sense of belonging within an exclusionary society. Lastly, it investigates how art practices can support the construction of belonging among marginalized and contested groups in society. This study contained participatory research of three months with the members of the art collective We Sell Reality. Participatory art-based methods, focus-groups and an in-depth semi-structured questionnaire were applied to construct the research. Results revealed that although exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration in the Netherlands make undocumented migrants feel unwelcomed and not belonging in the Dutch society, their everyday life art practices contribute to constructing a sense of place- and political belongingness in the city. Through making art and socializing within the collective, the members feel like they belong to each other and in the city. Thereby, emotional and informal notions of citizenship and belonging unfold on a local level. In addition, it can be stated that their resistance and awareness creation of their situation by fighting for their rights as human beings through their practices, contribute to constructing a sense of political belonging within an exclusionary society. This study thereby contributes to new and alternative academic knowledge on the construction of belonging of a specific marginalized and rather invisible group in society.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Introduction

*"It's been just over five years since the European Union and Turkey agreed a deal, or in the EU's preferred language, a "statement" to restrict migration from Turkey to the EU" (Lindsay, Forbes Jun, 22, 2021).*

The migration deal between the European Union and the Turkish government that is agreed upon in 2016 presents a clear example of how the EU is limiting the flow of migration into its states by strengthening their border control. Through a statement of cooperation, the crossing of refugees and migrants without official permission to travel from Turkey to the Greek islands is controlled and limited. Migrants are stopped at the border and must return to Turkey, which is not counted as a safe country for the refugees. For every refugee that has returned, the EU would take a refugee from Turkey (Long, 5th April 2018). This migration deal sheds light on the increasing border surveillance of the European Union in order to exclude *'undesirable foreigners'* from European countries (Castles, et, al., 2014, p. 16).

But what is meant with *'undesirable foreigners'?* Over the last decades, the western society speaks of a *'refugee crisis'* consisting of a form of forced migration of refugees towards Europe in hope of seeking a safe place to continue their lives (De Genova & Peutz, 2010, p.3). Forced migrants can be defined as "*people that were forced into decisions to leave their homes and continue their lives elsewhere, irrespectively of the legal label they may carry"* (Korac, 2009, p. 1). They include people that emigrate because of unsafe situations of war, conflicts, or climate challenges. Besides, they could be prosecuted in their home country based on their race, religion, nationality, political belief or being part of a social group (Europees Migratienetwerk Nederland, 2020). The forced migrants are traveling from different countries around the globe to European countries, including The Netherlands. Data on migrating towards the Netherlands demonstrates 29.435 asylum seekers in 2019. The varying countries where the asylum seekers are traveling from in 2019 are Syrians (16%), followed by Nigerians (9%) and Iranians (7%) (Europees Migratienetwerk Nederland, 2020).

However, it must be acknowledged that some migrants are denied citizenship status in the host country and therefore do not have a valid document to seek asylum. Consequently, there exists a respective group of so-called *'undocumented migrants'* which relates to their non-citizen status according to the legal system of the nation-state. They are not allowed to stay in the host country and forced to leave. Responses from nation-states towards forced migrants as the '*undesirable foreigners'* presents how few visas are offered, they are being arrested, sent to detention and eventually deported (De Genova & Peutz, 2010; De Genova, 2002; Europees Migratienetwerk Nederland, 2020). Not every undocumented migrant leaves the country immediately in the hope to find other routes to seek asylum in the host country. As a consequence, they live with a daily risk of deportability. It must thereby be acknowledged that not all undocumented migrants are forced migrants. In doing migration research, the different categories of migrants must be recognized, and their specific context must be investigated to

understand the impact of migration on the everyday life of specific groups (Delanty, Wodak & Jones, 2008; Lenette, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Within this thesis, the contested position of forced and undocumented migrants in the host society as the so-called '*undesirable foreigners'* is stressed. Through dominant exclusionary discourses, undocumented migrants are represented in a negative light without considering their vulnerability and struggles in everyday life. Through geopolitics, media, and public discourses they are often represented as '*illegals'*. Scholars and humanitarian organizations stress that a person cannot be illegal, and this label denies their humanity: "*'Illegality' as a form of status has been deliberately assigned to undocumented migrants to justify a category of people who are undeserving of rights"* (De Genova, 2002; Picum, 2021). This label presents just one of the many examples of exclusionary practices towards undocumented migrants communicated through dominant discourses in the host society. The labels are used in order to justify their exclusion from citizenship rights and thereby determine their right of movement. Undocumented migrants are living with uncertainties by constantly being on the move and endless waiting during the asylum procedure (De Genova, 2002; De Cleen, Zienkowski, Smets, Dekie & Vandevoordt, 2017; Korac, 2009; O'Neill, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Furthermore, this thesis remarks that the impact of exclusionary practices of the host society on the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants remains understudied. One's sense of belonging plays a significant role in shaping one's life and has a great impact on how to understand the self and the world around that is influenced by how one is perceived and treated by others (Nunn, 2020). According to Hall (March 24, 2014) *"a sense of belonging is a human need, just like the need for food and shelter. Feeling that you belong is most important in seeing value in life and in coping with intensely painful emotions."* The construction of belonging of undocumented migrants is a complex process (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). On the one hand, their political sense of feeling included in the host society is contested because they are excluded through an ascribed identity that is forced upon them through dominant discourses. This ascribed identity raises fundamental questions of who they are and where they belong (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). On the other hand, it is understudied how a personal and emotional sense of feeling at home in a particular place is constructed among undocumented migrants (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Mensink, 2020; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). Although studies on belonging have previously focussed on forced migrants, more research on the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants is especially relevant because they hold a contested relationship with citizenship and the state. Alternative approaches towards citizenship must be explored that could provide opportunities to construct a sense of place- and political belongingness in the host society without legal status.

Therefore, more insights are needed on the perspectives of undocumented migrants that form a marginalized and a rather invisible group in society instead of elaborating on dominant exclusionary perspectives of the host society. Within this thesis, it will be demonstrated that performative art practices provide possibilities for marginalized groups in society to politically express themselves (Lenette,

2019). By representing themselves through art practices and shedding light on their personal experiences in their everyday life, alternative and scientifically relevant knowledge on their complex stories can be realised that encourages a critical reflection. Experiences of the powerful forces that shape their everyday life communicated through their own narratives could humanize the inevitable flow of migration and strengthen national and local hospitality towards them. Furthermore, it could contribute to shaping refugee policies with a positive impact on their everyday lives. Art practices thereby provide a powerful and creative tool for political action to resist the dominant exclusionary discourses (Lenette, 2019). By presenting this counter-narrative, a sense of political belonging among marginalized groups in society can be constructed (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Besides, while representing themselves through art practices as a political strategy of belonging, the everyday life practices in itself can also contribute to constructing a feeling of being at home in place, as a sense of *'place-belongingness'* within an exclusionary host society (Antonsich, 2010; Damery & Mescoli, 2019; Lenette, 2019; Nunn, 2020; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Stickley, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Through participatory research, this thesis investigates the presentation of a counter-narrative of undocumented migrants involved in the Amsterdam-based art collective We Sell Reality. Analysing their specific everyday life practices of making art can add to the scientific knowledge on the construction of place- and political belongingness of this marginalized group within an exclusionary host society. The research question of this thesis is as follows:

*How do the art practices of undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality play a role in their construction of a sense of place- and political belongingness within an exclusionary society?*

# 2. Theoretical framework

When researching the construction of a sense of place- and political belongingness of undocumented migrants through their art practices, the subject must be first and foremost placed within the societal context that shapes their everyday life. By analysing dominant exclusionary discourses within the geopolitical landscape of forced and undocumented migration in the host society, the role of institutional structures is acknowledged in determining the right of forced and undocumented migrants to construct a sense of belonging in the place they currently live. This context assists to understand how undocumented migrants become excluded from the host country.

The first paragraph therefore discusses *(2.1.1) The geopolitical discourse on forced migration, (2.1.2) Dominant perspectives on citizenship, (2.1.3) Societal exclusionary discourses on forced migration,* and *(2.1.4) The deportation regime*.

The second paragraph thereafter discusses the 'flipside' which sheds light on the consequences of this exclusionary landscape on the construction of identity and sense of belonging of undocumented migrants within an exclusionary host society. It analyses theoretical perspectives on *(2.2.1) Constructing a sense of belonging, (2.2.2) Place-belongingness, (2.2.3) The politics of belonging,* and *(2.2.4) Alternative approaches towards citizenship and belonging*.

The third paragraph investigates how the identity of undocumented migrants can be represented through art practices as a counter-narrative that challenges dominant exclusionary discourses. It is thereby explored how a sense of belonging is constructed through these art practices both on a place and political dimension. The paragraph discusses *(2.3.1) Representation and the politics of belonging through art practices, (2.3.2) Contested visibility and vulnerability,* and *(2.3.3) Art practices and place-belongingness*.

In the last paragraph *(2.4) a conceptual model* can be found that provides a summary of the theoretical framework.

## 2.1 Dominant discourses on forced and undocumented migration

### 2.1.1 The geopolitical discourse on forced migration

Migration towards Europe is not a new phenomenon of the last decade. Humans have always migrated in search of better opportunities, to escape war, conflicts, poverty, or climate challenges (Castles, De Haas and Miller, 2014, p. 5). However, through the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century and technological and societal developments of the last decades, people have become increasingly mobile. According to the sociologist Bauman (2000), modern society can be characterized as the *Liquid Modernity* wherein people are no longer bound to places and can easily transcend boundaries and borders. As a consequence, migration patterns have become globalized and massive migration flows from rural to urban areas occur within and across national borders (Castles, et, al., 2014, p. 5).

At the same time, Bauman (1996) stresses that the amount of freedom of choosing life paths is not equal around the globe. He writes that the opposition of the '*tourists'* and the '*vagabonds'* demonstrates the social division that defines the postmodern globalized world. On the one hand, '*tourists'* are characterised by their mobility. They hold the freedom to move to other places and return to their home when they wish so. In this way, they experience the world as a welcoming place without borders. On the other hand, '*vagabonds'* experience the world as a rather inhospitable place because at no place of arrival, they are welcomed by the host country. While they wish to stay at home, they lack the freedom to choose their life path and are pushed by a powerful force to stay on the move.

In line with Bauman's (1996) social division of one's freedom to move within the modern society, Castles and colleagues (2014) describe a trend of '*politicization of migration'* whereby the European nation-states increasingly strengthen their territorial borders and regulate the freedom of movement of particular people across their borders (Castles, et, al., 2014, p. 16). This trend is especially remarkable in the reactions of European states towards the so-called 'refugee-crises' (De Genova & Peutz, 2010, p. 3). Stemming from the European Union (EU) principle that nobody should be sent back to their country when they are endangered, the EU offers protection to those that are seeking refugee across the borders of their own country (Europees Migratienetwerk Nederland, 2021). However, the trend of '*politicization of migration*' presents how in reaction to an increase of irregular flow of migrants towards Europe, migration policies between states are made to manage the 'crisis' and control their national borders. Through this management of migration, *'undesirable foreigners'* become excluded from the EU nation-states, while *'desirable foreigners'* are encouraged to migrate (Castles, et, al., 2014; De Genova & Peutz, 2010, p. 2-3). In reaction to this trend, scholars are speaking of a humanitarian crisis wherein people's life and mobility patterns are constrained by a geopolitical play of migration deals shaped by nations' self-interests and national politics (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Lenette, 2019).

Within this geopolitical context, scholars stress that migration has become to be approached as a '*migration industry'* (Castles, et, al., 2014, p. 235) through which their concern is expressed that

individuals and institutions profit economically by the continuous exclusion and movement of *'undesirable'* migrants. The economic interests in the continuation of forced migration can partly explain why migration flows have become increasingly managed. Within this critical school of thought on the management and continuation of forced migration, the commodification of transnational migration is stressed (Kyle, 2000 in Vogt, 2013). Sharp (2000, p. 293 in Vogt 2013) describes that: "*…commodification insists upon objectification in some form, transforming persons and their bodies from a human category into objects of economic desire*". In this line of reasoning, the process of commodification of migration translates into migrants' bodies being exchanged and sold based on their used value of potential labour within local economies which leads to the dehumanization of forced migrants (Vogt, 2013).

Taking a closer look at the Netherlands, the Dutch government is making it clear that the flow of migration must connect to the capacity and needs of the Dutch society. Simultaneously, it is acknowledged that migration towards the country could also offer opportunities because highly educated migrants and foreign companies could stimulate the Dutch economy. In this line of reasoning, it becomes apparent that more highly skilled migrants are encouraged to come to the Netherlands. This group is given access to shorter, simpler admission procedures and better (electronic) services (Europees Migratienetwerk Nederland, 2021). Contrarily, for forced migrants, getting a residence permit in the Netherlands and the EU states in general, is strongly depending on their country of origin, specific area they travel from, the specific safety situation in that area, and their individual circumstances of rights and freedom in this country (Europees Migratienetwerk Nederland, 2021). The struggles and difficulties forced migrants face to seek refuge and citizenship in Europe against the easy procedure to enter the country for desirable foreigners illustrate how forced and undocumented migrants could be classified as the *'vagabonds'* of society (Bauman, 1996).

### 2.1.2 Dominant perspectives on citizenship

Within the geopolitical landscape of forced migration there is an ongoing debate about the concept of citizenship and its relation to the state (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This debate is linked to the question about who deserves to be a citizen and who does not. The different perspectives on citizenship can partly explain the hospitable practices (or lack of) towards forced and undocumented migrants in the European society that form the context in which these migrants shape their everyday lives. To understand the contemporary debate on defining citizenship in our modern, globalized society, this section will focus on briefly describing classical theories about citizenship and the critique upon them. In the following paragraph (see 2.2.4) alternative approaches of citizenship will be explored in relation to a sense of belonging of undocumented migrants.

The relation between citizenship and the state is reflected in the *liberal theory* that defines the concept as a reciprocal relationship, or social contract, between individuals and the state based on ideas

of liberty and equal rights. In this relationship, citizens hold responsibilities towards the state in order to receive rights. The responsibilities could relate to paying taxes and live up to the states' law (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Secondly, in the *republican* approach, the relationship between citizens and the state is mediated by the political community and political participation. The primary duties of citizens are their loyalty to the political community, the nation, and its preservation and promotion. Within this conceptualization, the politics of the community must be realised together in public. A 'true' citizen thinks about what is best for the community as a whole, the common good, and is an active participant in the political community while individual needs are put aside (Dagger, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thirdly, *communitarian theories* emphasise the relationship between an individual and the community and understand citizenship as a moral duty of being loyal to '*the products of the political community'* (Etzioni, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In other words, a person's individual identity is understood within the context of the community and other members of the nation. Within this theory, the importance of sharing a common interest and history is emphasised while individual norms and behaviour are reinforcing those of the community. Simultaneously, ideas of extreme individualism are undermined (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

While these classical theories demonstrate an understanding of citizenship in relation to responsibilities and rights acquired by the state, contemporary theorists acknowledge that the nation-state is historically constructed and constitutes only one of several layers of citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that the relation between citizenship and the state continues to be up to debate. Throughout the last years, sociological scholars have questioned the extent to which citizenship should be understood primarily, or even at all, in relation to the nation-state (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Within this debate, Korac (2009, p. 3-4) remarks that social in- and exclusion of citizens is analysed and understood by scholars and policymakers from the classical perspectives of citizenship. It is thereby stressed that through this understanding, inclusion becomes conceptualized within a frame of set rights that outsiders must gain access to.

This debate on conceptualizations of citizenship demonstrates a close link to migration discourses on assimilation and integration (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Though dominant exclusionary discourses on migration, the national community with a unified culture and undivided identification with, and political loyalty to the nation-state are emphasized as something that must be protected against other cultures. Thereby do scholars stress that many public and political debates on migration display a strong host-society bias (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Visser, 2017). Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006) draw attention to a continuous trend of migration policies being developed concerning the interests of the national security of the host country. Whereas their intention is to maintain their national culture, it is simultaneously expected that forced migrants fail to integrate and assimilate to the set rules of the country. Through this host-society bias on conceptualizations of citizenship, little attention is paid to migrants' experiences and struggles as non-citizen within their nation.

### 2.1.3 Societal exclusionary discourses on forced migration

Rising anxiety can be signalized among European states about the persistence of boundaries of their so-called '*Fortress Europe' (*O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). Consequently, a growing hostility towards forced migrants is reflected in the rise of populist, extreme right-wing, anti-immigration and anti-Islam political parties around Europe. A trend that is also visible in The Netherlands. Although the country has a long history of tolerance towards difference and supporting multiculturalism, the current political and societal landscape demonstrates how a part of its society is moving towards the tendency to exclude non-natives and forced migrants in particular (De Voogd, 2017). In order to construct a deeper understanding of the exclusionary geopolitical discourse on forced and undocumented migration, one must look at the societal discourses represented through the media and in the everyday life of the host society. The hostility towards forced and undocumented migrants in western society can be explained by stigmatizing logics of *securitarian, economic*, *cultural,* and *victimizing* societal exclusionary discourses (De Cleen, Zienkowski, Smets, Dekie & Vandevoordt, 2017; Korac, 2009; O'Neill, 2008).

Firstly, the *securitarian discourse* illustrates the anxiety among nation's citizens towards forced and undocumented migrants because of fear and belief that they pose a threat to the national security of the state. The media such as newspapers, journals, tv-shows, and radio programs play a significant role in influencing this public discourse through which refugees and asylum seekers are often criminalized and linked with terrorist attacks (Gabrielatos 2006; O'Neill & Harindranath, 2006; Saeed 2007 in O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Tyler 2006). Especially the term *'illegal migrants'* is often criminalized while it must be acknowledged that irregular flows of migration are an administrative violation and not a criminal act (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). These criminalizing public discourses of undocumented migrants are often used to exclude forced migrants and justify their exploitation and dehumanization (Anzaldúa [1987]1999 in Cahill, 2009; De Cleen, et, al., 2017; Flores, 2003; O'Neill, 2008; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Torre & Ayala, 2009 in Cahill, 2009).

Secondly, the *economic discourse* explains anxiety among nation's citizens about access to the benefits of the welfare state. The discourse sheds light on how forced and undocumented migrants are often accused of falsely claiming to need protection in order to take advantage of housing and employment opportunities. These accusations relate to the national discussion of who deserves asylum rights and thus, the right to national state protection. Thereby the distinction is made between '*bogus'* and '*genuine'* refugees. While the first is just striving for a better life, the latter is actually fleeing for her live (De Genova & Peutz, 2010, p. 1; Korac, 2009, p. 7). Undocumented migrants are often categorized as '*bogus'* and accused of stealing the work of the nation's citizens (De Cleen, et, al., 2017; De Genova & Peutz, 2010, p. 1; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010).

Thirdly, the *cultural discourse* does not only reflect anxiety on the resistance of the national and cultural identity against the non-western cultures of forced migrants, but it also demonstrates that hostile and exclusionary practices are strongly built around concepts of race. Delanty and colleagues (2008, p. 243) stress that hostility towards forced migrants in Europe is increasing and a new kind of European

racism has originated. Through the cultural discourse, forced migrants have become positioned in an exclusionary frame of the 'others' that endanger the cohesion of European homogeneous national cultures. The foundation of prejudiced and racist behaviour is built upon the distinction of 'us' and 'them'. Through this distinction, there is an increasing focus on the differences between various social groups in society. The cultural differences of forced migrants are emphasised and exaggerated on while it is presumed that refugees are unwilling to assimilate to the culture of the host society (De Cleen, et, al., 2017, Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006).

Thereby, Delanty and colleagues (2008, p. 4) emphasise that "*it is not the fact of differences or the fact of inequalities that produces discrimination or racism, but the generalization of such differences into negative categories and their attribution to whole groups"*. In other words, this exclusionary discourse is constructed through adding negative labels to particular others which as a consequence leads to generalization and negative stereotypes applied to 'those alike'. This in turn is used to justify the exclusion of the whole group. Exemplifying, Muslims, and more generally ethnic minorities in Europe, are often portrayed as being violent, ill-educated, lazy, against women, and against values of democracy. These stereotypical characteristics are contrasted with the European identity and used to justify their exclusion from European society. This phenomenon presents how a new kind of European racist behaviour is legitimated through arguments based on 'culture' (Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 126-128).

Besides these stereotypical frames as classified by De Cleen and colleagues (2017), Korac (2009, p. 6-8) points out to the discourse of *victimization* through which refugees are often presented as being victims, traumatized, passive, and helpless. However, although they do experience grave loss and can be traumatized by the way their life has been disrupted, they also want to overcome their struggles and build up their new lives. This societal discourse of victimization lacks attention to the existence of agency and decision-making processes which disempowers undocumented migrants' position in their new country of residence (Korac, 2009).

Concluding from these societal discourses, it can be stated that the identity of undocumented migrants becomes ascribed upon them through labels that the host society assumes to hold for them based on stereotypical associations. In the media, asylum seekers and refugees are represented by others instead of being given the space to represent themselves (O'Neill, 2008 in O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). The next paragraph (see 2.2) will explore the consequences of this process of identity being forced upon them while it is been stressed that it makes it harder to feel like they belong within the host country.

### 2.1.4 The deportation regime

It must be acknowledged that undocumented migrants are considered a stateless 'non-citizens' group within the exclusionary host country (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). The process of applying for a residence permit for undocumented migrants can be drawn out over a number of years while they have no citizenship rights and are being excluded from financial aids and the labour market (Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 238). Moreover, it must be acknowledged that besides being deprived of securities, protection

from the law, and opportunities to construct their everyday life, undocumented migrants live with the daily fear and risks of deportability. In attempt to understand how this fact is constructed by the regime of nation-states, the conceptualizations of '*illegality*' and '*deportability*' will briefly be discussed. Thereby, attention is paid to the Dutch society as a '*deportation regime*' (De Genova & Peutz, 2010).

Like the dominant conceptualization of citizenship, De Genova (2002) remarks that the concept of '*illegality'* is often understood as a juridical status in relation to the state. Within this conceptualization, '*illegal'* movements become defined by laws of migration that determine people's rights to move. De Genova (2002) thereby stresses that the term '*illegality'* of movement is especially problematic as it is argued that '*illegal migrants'* are unsuitable for citizenship. This criminalization of forced and undocumented migrants is used in migration politics to exclude undocumented migrants from citizenship rights. Consequently, it becomes even more difficult for them to be given citizenship rights within the host country. Responses from nation-states towards undocumented migrants present how few visas are offered, they are being arrested, sent to detention, and eventually deported (De Genova, 2002).

The stigmatization of undocumented migrants within nation-states holds a strong relation to the analyses of deportability. De Genova and Peutz (2010) explore the relationship between sovereignty, space, and freedom of movement through a critical analysis of the deportation regime. 'Deportation' is defined as: "*the compulsory removal of "aliens" from the physical, juridical, and social space of the state*" (De Genova & Peutz, 2010, p. 1). Within their analysis, it is stressed that the power of the state is used to deport *'undesirable'* migrants as a problem that must be solved while they make it appear like the only reaction to immigration of undocumented migrants. This deportation regime sheds light on the normative division by nation-states to decide who is a rightful citizen against those regarded as rightless non-citizens. De Genova and Peutz, 2010, p. 7) argue that: *"this regime of nation-state sovereignty and citizenship has become the conventional determinant of an individual's liberty to move into, out of, or across various national, international, and sometimes even subnational spaces"*.

The deportation regime can be signalised in The Netherlands. When asylum seekers are rejected asylum, they are expected to leave the country immediately and voluntarily and are otherwise forced to leave. The government believes that migrants who stay can cause nuisance and municipalities are experiencing negative consequences from this. Therefore, refused asylum seekers are offered assistance by application for a travel document. This policy aims to avoid an illegal stay in The Netherlands. When their home country refuses to take back the migrants, the Dutch government is even willing to reward the country to take them back. Exemplifying, states are cooperating in the field of legal aid, police, and border security and sometimes offering study grants in their home country. On the other hand, it also occurs that countries that do not cooperate in the return of migrants are punished (Rijksoverheid.nl, 2021).

The deportation regime sheds light on how undocumented migrants live with a daily threat of detention and deportation. This risk of deportability can lead to extreme fear that people find out they are undocumented. Scholars stress that*: "The experience of seeking asylum in a new nation is often one*

*that is bewildering, frustrating, alienating and ultimately damaging to both mental and physical health"* (Martin 2006; JRCT 2007 in O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010, p. 46). As a consequence of their risk of deportability, undocumented migrants remain a rather invisible and understudied group. Therefore, more qualitative research needs to be done to understand how geopolitics and dominant exclusionary discourses shape the everyday lives of undocumented migrants and the impact on their construction of belonging within an exclusionary society (Lenette, 2019; Mensink, 2020).

## 2.2 A sense of belonging

### 2.2.1 Constructing a sense of belonging

To explore the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants within an exclusionary host-society, a conceptual understanding of belonging is required. One's sense of belonging plays a significant role in shaping one's life. It has a great impact on how to understand the self and the world around that is influenced by how one is perceived and treated by others (Nunn, 2020). Belonging is intuitive and common sensic (Buonfino & Thomson, 2007, p. 6 in Antonsich 2010, p. 2). However, it is also subjective, and the feelings attached to it depend specifically for each individual (Antonsich, 2010). It must therefore be acknowledged that a sense of belonging is multidimensional and different understandings exist simultaneously. Antonsich (2010) argues that the concept is often too vaguely defined by scholars and theoretical analyses remain limited. Consequently, scholars propose a critical analytical framework of belonging through which the concept becomes analysed on two dimensions (Fenster, 2005 in Antonsich, 2010; Visser, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The first dimension is '*place-belongingness'* which can be defined as: "*a personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place"*. The second dimension describes the '*politics of belonging': "a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion / exclusion"* (Antonsich, 2010, p. 1). Through this conceptual framework, the distinction between belonging as a personal feeling of place attachment, and a political and formal structure of membership to a collective comes to light (Visser, 2017).

Scholars argue that investigating both dimensions is crucial for a deeper understanding on the construction of belonging of specific groups and individuals in society (Antonsich, 2010, p. 644, Visser, 2017). It is argued that:

*"To focus only on the personal dimension risks treating belonging as an individualist matter, independent from the social context within which it is immersed. To focus only on the social dimension risks essentializing belonging as the exclusive product of social(izing) discourses and practices*" (Conradson, 2005 in Antonsich, 2010, p. 19-20).

Visser (2017) argues that studies on immigrants and belonging focus mainly on citizenship *or* personal feelings of belonging while the *interplay* between their experiences and feelings, and the politics of

belonging must be taken into account. Thereby do Antonsich (2010, p. 19) and Visser (2017, p.323) state that the personal feeling to belong reflected in '*place-belongingness'* is unavoidably influenced by the working of power relations reflected in *'the politics of belonging'*. Therefore, within this thesis, the analytical framework of belonging divided in these two dimensions will be taken as a starting point to study a sense of belonging of undocumented migrants (Antonsich, 2010; Visser, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

### 2.2.2 Place-belongingness

The first dimension that will be discussed is the sense of '*place-belongingness'*. Scholars describe this dimension as a personal and emotional state or attachment of feeling safe and at home in place (Antonsich, 2010; Duyvendak, 2011; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Visser, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006). *'Home'* can thereby be defined as: "*a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment*" (Hooks, 2009, p. 213 in Antonsich, 2010, p. 6) In line with this conceptualization, Duyvendak (2011, in Visser, 2017, p. 323) defines '*home'* through characteristics of "*familiarity, security, safety and place for self-expression"*. Within this thesis, the conceptualization of a sense of '*place-belongingness'* by Antonsich (2010) will be used. According to his analysis, the symbolic sense of feeling 'at home' in a particular place is not explicitly linked to territorial dimensions of belonging. It is thereby acknowledged that *'place-belongingness'* can constitute on multiple geographical scales where an individual can feel 'at home' attached to, and rooted in a place (Antonsich, 2010, p. 6-8). Antonsich (2010, p. 8) highlights five different factors that can contribute to generating this personal feeling of belonging through everyday practices and emotional attachments.

Firstly, (1) *auto-biographical factors* refer to factors that are related to individuals' personal experiences and emotions that are embedded in their history and memories. These experiences influence in which specific places one feels at home. Often one's place of birth and the place where one grows up remains a central place of feeling at home. The (2) *relational factors* describe one's personal relationships and include both dense social ties of relations with friends and family as well as weak ties that make their life meaningful within a particular place. While some scholars argue that social relationships are what constitute the self, others note that the extent to which social ties influence an individual's feeling of belonging differs. Van Liempt and Staring (2021) expect that interactions with social ties are more difficult for refugees because they are separated from relatives and other migrant communities. This makes it harder to feel belonging. Thereby, it is noticed that not all relations matter in the same way. Relationships must be long-lasting, positive, stable, and significant and should frequently 'take place' through physical interaction in order to construct a sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010, p. 9).

Within the (3) *cultural factors*, feelings of belonging can be generated through *language, cultural expressions, traditions, habits, religion, cultural practices, food production,* and *consumption*

that include semiotic codes, signs, and gestures. Through these factors, situations are interpreted and defined that can create a common sense of belonging to a community. Thereby, the process of homemaking of refugees is complex and costs emotional and physical energy because they do often not speak the language and have distinct cultural backgrounds (Van Liempt & Staring, 2021). Fourthly, (4) *economic factors* relate to economic embeddedness that can rise a feeling of belonging through providing safe and stable material economic conditions. Being fully integrated in a given economy is not sufficient but yet necessary to construct a sense of *place-belongingness*. Lastly (5) *legal factors* refer to components that produce security related to someone's legal status such as citizenship and a resident permit. The legal factor relates to a sense of belonging in relation to securities generated by the welfare state and forms a factor that is especially relevant in researching the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants. It is thereby argued that where you belong, you feel safe (Antonsich, 2010).

Besides, the length of residence is an important factor that generates a sense of *'place-belongingness'*, a factor that relates also to forced and undocumented migrants that move to a place where they were not born and did not grow up (Antonsich, 2010).

### 2.2.3 The politics of belonging

The second dimension that will be discussed is *'the politics of belonging'*. Researchers argue that the construction of belonging in a particular place is part of the same process of constructing self-identity (Antonsich, 2010). According to Loader (2006, p. 25 in Antonsich, 2010). questioning '*Who am I*?' cannot be isolated from the other question '*Where do I belong?*'. With this in mind, the concept of belonging is often referred to as a synonym of (national) identity and the notion of citizenship that is narrated by the self (Antonsich, 2010, p. 2). Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 197) describes this political dimension of belonging as "*…an emotional attachment in relation to recognition of someone's identity to become part of society and 'belong' in this society"*. Hereby Antonsich (2010) emphasises forms of socio-spatial in- and exclusion of individuals or groups in society. Yuval-Davis (2006) explains that the representation of one's identity within society can be understood as a personal and subjective narrative through which they not only understand self-identity but also communicate to others how the self is positioned and represented within society. In this contextual understanding of the relationship between the self-identity and belonging, the construction and representation of one's identity within a particular social context relate to constructing a sense of belonging within that context (Anthias, 2006 in Visser, 2017, p. 323).

An analytical understanding on the construction of identity starts with acknowledging that different social divisions shape someone's position in society (Lenette, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The construction of the identity of undocumented migrants is therefore placed in the geopolitical context of forced migration that sheds light on the powerful institutional forces that shape their everyday life. It is thereby emphasized how dominant exclusionary discourses are often based on negative stereotypical

and stigmatizing labels. This process of labelling presents how their identity becomes ascribed and forced upon them by society. Not only do their bodies become objectified as a commodity, but they are also often criminalized and labelled as '*illegals'* (Castles, et, al., 2014; Kyle, 2000 in Vogt, 2013; De Genova, 2002). In this context, forced and undocumented migrants are becoming aware of their own position and ascribed identity as a marginalized and rather invisible group in society (Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 251).

However, this ascribed identity can be in conflict with how the undocumented migrants construct their own identity and want to represent themselves within society. Flam and Beauzamy (2008, in Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 221) state that migrants are daily and routinely confronted with different forms of rejection that can be intimidating, humiliating, and incapacitating. They stress that repeated experience of such rejections causes feelings of fear, inferiority, and reserve. Yuval-Davis (2006) and Lenette (2019) analyse the effect of labels of identities being forced upon people on how they themselves construct and represent their identity. To illustrate, an undocumented migrant living in America stresses how the ascribed identity can cause struggles on how one identifies the self within a specific context of society: *"my very exitance, being here, your whole being is controversial*" (Nancy sec.15:00, 19th Oct 2018). Consequently, undocumented migrants go through a process of humanizing the self against the dominant stigmas. Simultaneously, they must acknowledge themselves that they exist although they are not legally recognized by the state (Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 250; Lenette, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

While analysing the construction of belonging of a specific classified group in society, scholars argue that the intersectionality of identity and its effects on one's position in society must be considered (Lenette, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Being a forced and undocumented migrant forms an important dimension of someone's identity that shapes their everyday life. However, it must be acknowledged that undocumented migrants cannot solely be defined as such. People are who they are because of the different dimensions of their identity that constitute each other such as their gender, class, race, ethnicity, stage in their life path, sexuality and abilities. There are thus multiple dimensions of someone's identity that together construct the identity of a whole human being. In addition, it must be recognized that migrants are not a homogeneous group. Delanty and colleagues (2008, p. 242) argue that *"the extent to which the overarching – some may say objectifying – status of 'migrant' provides the basis of an individual's personal identity, or of their allegiance to a collective identity, can be highly contested"*. While researching the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants, insights on how they construct and represent their own identity must therefore not be taken for granted or filled in by the researcher.

Although acknowledging that different dimensions of someone's identity constitute each other, a particular dimension can appear to be more important and central in the positioning and representation of the self than others depending on the specific social and historical context that shapes the everyday life (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006) states that when a particular dimension of the identity is threatened, this dimension might become a significant element in the construction and representation of

the self. Within this analytical framework, '*the politics of belonging'* sheds light on how being an undocumented migrant forms a part of one's identity that is threatening the construction of belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006) hereby suggests that undocumented migrants might focus specifically on presenting a counter-narrative of this dimension of their identity that goes against the dominant discourses. This presentation demonstrates their contested place in society through which their sense of belonging becomes politicized in a call for justice.

### 2.2.4 Alternative approaches towards citizenship and belonging

This paragraph explores the possibilities of undocumented migrants to construct a sense of belonging through alternative forms of citizenship. Through conceptualizations of citizenship in relation to the state, questioning who deserves the right of access to the benefits of the welfare state is related to determining who has the right to belong and who is excluded from the nation's society. Undocumented migrants are not legally recognized to belong in the country they reside in and hold a stateless 'non-citizen' position within the host society. Analyses on the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants thereby shed light on the need for alternative and expanded conceptualizations of citizenship. It remains understudied how the construction of belonging in a particular place could be constrained by a stateless position in society Mensink (2020). Additionally, studies on the relationship between migrants and citizenship often do not consider how migrants themselves construct citizenship identities while their relationship between citizenship and belonging is not straightforward and can change over time (Van Liempt, 2011). Besides, it has only slightly been studied how forced and undocumented migrants construct a sense of being *"home away from home*. Therefore, more research is needed on the one hand on the construction of belonging within the *"here and now"* of the particular place they are situated and on the other hand, on how they locate themselves *"far away"* from where they currently live" (O''Neill & Hubbard, 2010, p. 47).

One possibility to explore an alternative sense of belonging is through loosening the boundaries of the nation-state. For the last decades, migration studies have increasingly focused on the concept of '*transnationalism'* in relation to citizenship and the construction of identity and belonging (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006). Ehrkamp and Leitner (2006, p. 1591) describe migrant transnationalism as: *"migrants' increasing ability to maintain ties and create new social spaces that are multilocal and span national borders*". While migrants build *familial, economic, cultural,* and *political ties* and *identities* in the host country, they also build ties across national borders and sustain existing ties in their home country. This perspective of transnationalism can be analysed in relation to alternative understandings of citizenship. Scholars argue for the phenomenon of '*deterritorialization'* of citizenship identities while claiming that belonging is no longer bound to specific localities and constitutes on multiple geographical scales. Within this perspective on identity and belonging, it is stressed that migrant's sense of belonging cannot be described within the territorial borders of the host country while the importance of national identities

is decreasing. It thereby sheds light on the possibilities of '*dual'* or '*multiple citizenship'* that go against the classical relationship between citizenship and the nation-state (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006).

Through dominant exclusionary discourses on migration, the proposition of these *multiple citizenships* is often instrumented as conflicting with migrant's loyalty towards the national identity of the host country. Anti-immigration supporters stress that '*multiple citizenship'* leads to denationalization which holds migrants from identifying and assimilating to the national identity of the host country. They therefore argue that '*multiple citizenship'* is limiting their sense of belonging within the place they currently live (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006, p. 1592). On the other hand, it is stressed that the deterritorialization approach undermines the importance of belonging within particular places and through lived experiences (Antonsich, 2010). Scholars state that in the modern globalized society, people continue to build an emotional relationship with the people, places, and organisations they encounter in their everyday lives. Especially within the context of transnational migration, researchers stress that attention must be paid to how such processes are lived and produced locally (Van Liempt & Staring, 2021, p.310). In this line of reasoning, Erkamp and Leitner (2006) discuss empirical researches in which it is stressed that despite the increasing transnational character of ties and identifications of migrants, they still continue to be nationally and territorially constructed.

In accordance with alternative approaches towards citizenship and belonging, scholars note that the urban landscape forms a specific place of living and belonging. It is thereby argued that the concept of citizenship originally constituted in the city instead of the nation-state level (Cohen, 1999 in Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 206). This approach of *'urban citizenship'* sheds light on the local, city level of integration. Studies thereupon focus on the construction of a sense of citizenship and belonging through the daily practices of individuals through which they build an emotional relationship with the places and people they encounter in their everyday life (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Rosbrook-Thompson, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Schiller & Çağla 2015). This understanding of citizenship relates to conceptualizations of emotional and informal notions of citizenship (Askins, 2016). It highlights the everyday spaces to demonstrate active participation and integration of irregular immigrants through local environments in which they take part in institutions such as schools, churches, ethnic community groups, and political organizations.

Within this analytical framework, both through '*place- belongingness'* and '*the politics of belonging'*, undocumented migrants construct their identity against the dominant exclusionary discourses. Pallares (In Schreiber, 2018, p. 5) argues that scholars "*…must focus on the specific agency of the undocumented—that is, on the relationship between the exclusion from citizenship and the forms of political representation, strategies, and identities that undocumented people can potentially deploy.*" Thereby it must be questioned how they can present a counter-narrative and construct a sense of belonging in their everyday life.

## 2.3 Art practices and sense of belonging

### 2.3.1 Representation and the politics of belonging through art practices

In the previous chapter, *'The politics of belonging'* shed light on how a sense of belonging among marginalized groups in society can be constructed by sharing personal experiences and stating needs and rights through a counter-narrative against dominant exclusionary discourses (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, because undocumented migrants are excluded from formal means of political participation and political decision-making processes, they must search for alternative and creative strategies of political action (Salzbrunn, 2014 in Damery & Mescoli, 2019, p. 2). This section will explore how a counter-narrative can be constructed through performative art practices that serve as a political strategy to create awareness, recognition and inclusion.

First of all, it must be acknowledged that to understand the experiences of forced and undocumented migrants through dialogue, faces barriers of language, culture and nationality. Moreover, some aspects of their lived experience are hard to put into words (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). Therefore, performative, visual and qualitative art-based methods are preferred to come to a deeper understanding of their experiences (Lenette, 2019, p. viii; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). By constructing a counter-narrative through art methods, emotional structures and inner experiences are exposed which create a tension with reasonable, rational and objective forms of knowledge. This form of ethno-mimesis, wherein ethnography and sensuous knowing are combined, can be described as '*the politics of feeling'* that can be realized by the collaborating of artists and participants through storytelling and making art O'Neill, Giddens, Breatnach, Bagley, Bourne, & Judge, 2002 in O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010).

The intention of such art methods is to encourage a moment of cognition through which we can develop a critical perspective that includes 'empathy' as sensuous knowing (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010, p.48). By the implementation of art practices, people are able to get in touch with their own and the lived experiences of others in ways that demand critical reflection (O'Neill, 2018 in Lenette, 2019, p. vii). Through these methods, richer and scientifically relevant insights in their complex stories can be realised that provide a powerful and creative tool to *"speak back to regressive and at times cruel policy measures"* (Lenette, 2019, p. xi; Nunn, 2020). Likewise, Cahill (2009, p. 153-154) articulates that art practices create an opportunity for the development of new theory that challenges the privileges of the *'ivory tower'*. Thus, by undocumented migrants making their contested position within society visible through art practices, their insights could raise awareness that challenges dominant perspectives on forced and undocumented migrants.

Thereby, it must be acknowledged that through creative art practices, the marginalized voices of undocumented migrants can be recognized, privileged and amplified (Nunn, 2020; O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). By representing themselves and their lived experiences, they are given the opportunity to seek recognition while acting in a 'socially significant way' regardless of their legal status. Through

this power of art, political action is encouraged which forms a key element of *'the politics of belonging'* (May, 2013 in Damery & Mescoli 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus, by shedding light on their personal experiences contributes to understanding the construction of belonging from their personal point of view (Lenette, 2019; Delanty, et. al., 2008).

Furthermore, by being part of an art collective, a sense of individual identity can be developed that counters stigmatizing labels being attached to one's identity (Damery & Mescoli, 2019; Lenette, 2019; Stickley, 2010). While one is being labelled for example as a *"writer,"* an *"artist,"* a *"poet,"* or a *"musician,"* the person is not labelled anything more negative such as *"mentally ill"* (Stickley, 2010). Identifying the self as an artist implies that one can make a contribution to society, while being identified according to discriminatory or stigmatizing labels shapes ones identity more negatively (Stickley, 2010). Thus, by choosing to identify themselves with the art group, undocumented migrants hold agency to claim belonging that goes against their status as an undocumented migrant or '*the other'* (Damery & Mescoli, 2019). This confirms the importance of intersectionality in constructing one's identity and sense of belonging within society (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

### 2.3.2 Contested visibility and vulnerability

While doing research on the presentation of a counter-narrative on undocumented migrants, the dynamic between their vulnerability and visibility must be considered. The visibility of undocumented migrants through activist practices could be perceived as a creative form of '*the politics of belonging'* (Mensink, 2020; Schreiber, 2018). Within the work of Delanty, and colleagues (2008, p. 243-244) multiple forms of resistance of migrants in relation to spaces and discourses are discussed. Besides, a study of Damery and Mescoli (2019) on art practices of undocumented migrants in Belgium demonstrate how their presence and performative practices in the public space become legitimized while the boundaries between illegality and legality become blurred. Consequently, they state that:

*"In spite of structural constraints, art is a means (and a product) through which migrants, independent from their legal status, participate in the local socio-cultural life and elaborate concrete claims concerning their own situation as well as global concerns that are related to it—such as migration governance and politics*" (Damery and Mescoli, 2019, p. 14).

This demonstrates that art can be a powerful tool to construct a sense of political belonging. Nevertheless, scholars stress that claiming a space to represent the self in urge for recognition and inclusion is contested when holding a marginalized and stateless non-citizen position within society. Sawyer and Jones state that:

*"Explicit challenges to existing power inequalities have, at specific historical periods and contexts, meant significant risk for subordinate individuals, such as exposing them to the threat of*

*symbolic or physical violence from power holders and the institutions and structures that legitimate these actors and their power"* (Sawyer & Jones in Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 243-244).

Accordingly, De Genova and Peutz (2010) stress the contested relationship between the urge for recognition and the risks of becoming visible which sheds light on a constant play between empowerment and vulnerability. Migrants are constrained in their attempts to portray themselves in both legal and political contexts while their visibility can produce heightened conditions of vulnerability and exposure (Schreiber, 2018, p. 11). The terms of visibility and the prevalence of self-representation as a form of visibility have yet to be adequately addressed and analysed (Schreiber, 2018, p. xi).

### 2.3.3 Art practices and place-belongingness

The previous section has presented how performative art practices provide possibilities for marginalized groups in society to politically express themselves. While the political dimension of belonging through art practices is significant, scholars argue that other dimensions of belonging through art practices must not be overlooked (Damery & Mescoli, 2019). It must thereby be noticed again how one dimensions of belonging can and must not be analysed without considering the other one (Antonsich, 2010; Damery & Mescoli, 2019). In this line of reasoning, this section will demonstrate that while representing the self through art practices as a political strategy of belonging, the practices in itself must not be taken for granted in constructing a sense of *'place-belongingness'* (Antonsich, 2010).

Through membership of an art collective, connections with others alike are encouraged (Beauregard, Tremblay, Pomerleau, Simard, Bourgeois-Guerin, Lyke & Rousseau, 2020, p. 439; Nunn, 2020). Therefore, a sense of *'community belonging'* can be constructed. This social dimension of belonging could be established as an alternative way to claim local membership among undocumented migrants even when holding a non-citizenship status on a nation level (Damery & Mescoli, 2019). Thereby, community arts can create bonds that go beyond social norms, the social containment of institutions, and imposed collective identities (Youkhana, 2015). Damery and Mescoli (2019) demonstrate with their empirical study how undocumented migrants besides constructing a sense of political belongingness by making themselves visible through art practices, also construct a sense of '*unofficial'* belonging within their art group by coming together and building a community with others that share the same struggles. This approach towards belonging in place through membership of a community can be linked with the *relational factors* described by Antonsich (2010).

Besides, scholars promote community engagement through art practices because it can have therapeutic benefits. Research presents positive impact on the mental, social and physical wellbeing and quality of life of vulnerable groups in society dealing with loneliness, isolation and exclusion (Beauregard, et. al., 2020; Lenette, 2019, p. 61; Stickley, 2010). Although the art practices might not completely resolve people's individual mental health problems, they might help by providing a safe

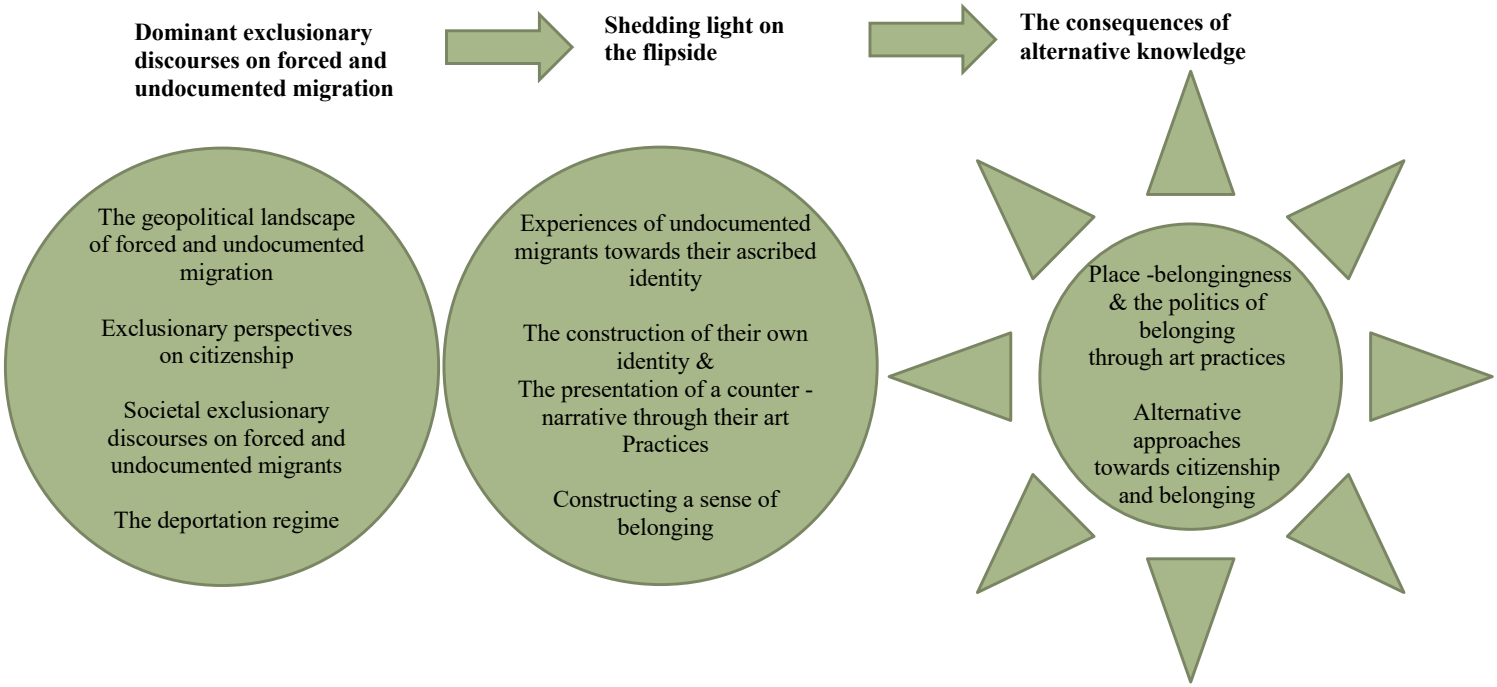
space among marginalized individuals dealing with similar struggles. Within this safe space, mutual support is encouraged through which new relationship are created. The social activities generated through collective involvement in art practices can stimulate changes in one's identity and sense of social belonging (Stickley, 2010).

Furthermore, the study from Nunn (2020) presents that arts-based projects for migrants can provide a supportive environment in which recourses are developed that can support a sense of *'place-belongingness'* beyond the project itself. The recourses were (1) *practical*: materials and expertise to engage in artistic and research practices. (2) *local*: increasing familiarity with people, places and institutions. And (3) *personal*: confidence, teamwork and leadership. In line with this place-based approach towards art practices and belonging, the study by Damery and Mescoli (2019) presents how undocumented migrants in Brussels focus on creating ties to the city through their art practices while national belongingness is rarely longed for. It is argued that a sense of place-based (Bruxellois) identity is constructed through their city-based art practices. This analysis can be linked to conceptualizations of alternative notions towards citizenship and belonging on a local, informal level *'urban citizenship'* (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Rosbrook-Thompson, 2014; Schiller & Çağla 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

## 2.4 Conceptual model

The following theoretical concepts hold a central position in this study: *dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration, the construction and presentation of a counter-narrative against dominant exclusionary discourses* and *the construction of belonging through involvement in performative art practices*. Figure. 1 illustrates the conceptual model including its dimensions.

Figure. 1 Conceptual model



# 3. The case-study: We Sell Reality

This research used a *case-study* design with a focus on the Amsterdam-based art collective We Sell Reality. We Sell Reality describes itself as a social collective or 'label' of social designers. The collective is developed in 2018 by two professional artists and undocumented migrants that used to be involved in the collective 'We Are Here' through which they were fighting for refugee rights. As this collective was put down by the municipality of Amsterdam, smaller subgroup initiatives arise and attracted old and new members to become involved. The collective has a growing network and a fluid group formation as new members are continuously joining and leaving. It can therefore be described as an open-source platform. Nowadays, they weekly gather in the museum Framer Framed in Amsterdam East to work on their art practices together.

We Sell Reality makes products, installations, and does performative interventions in the public space. With their practices, they focus on making the everyday life of undocumented migrants visible and reflect on the paradox of closed borders for one and open borders for others. They make the independent position of migrants visible and sheds light on the reality of their lives and vulnerable position within society. Besides, attention is paid to the European migration system that is lacking in its asylum policy. However, they do not only stress the vulnerable position of the migrants but also demonstrate the empowerment of the migrants to survive and their love, proudness, and power that is translated through their art practices (Translated version, FramerFramed, 2021).


*Photo by We Sell Reality (2021)*

# 4. Research questions

## 4.1 Research question

This thesis researched the construction of a sense of belonging of forced and undocumented migrants living in Amsterdam through their involvement in the art collective We Sell Reality within the geopolitical landscape and dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration. More specifically, it is investigated how they construct a sense of personal '*place-belongingness'* through their art practices and how, simultaneously, the representation of themselves through these practices can operate as a counter-narrative that contributes to their sense of *'politics of belonging'* in the host society.

The following research question is formulated:
*How do the art practices of undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality play a role in their construction of a sense of place- and political belongingness within an exclusionary society?*

## 4.2 Research sub-questions

To provide an answer on the research question, four sub-questions were formulated. In this paragraph, a brief explanation of their purpose in relation to the research question will be stated.

*1. What is, according to the undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality, the dominant narrative on their status as an undocumented migrant in The Netherlands?*
This sub-question placed the members of We Sell Reality in the context of their everyday life that is shaped by the geopolitical landscape and dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migrants in the Dutch society. This question attempted to reflect on their awareness of such exclusionary discourses, and it provided the opportunity to shed light on their experiences and perspectives on how they are positioned within society through the media, migration policies and how they are approached in their everyday life. Insights on their experiences thereby attribute to existing knowledge on both the content and effect of dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration on the everyday life of undocumented migrants in The Netherlands.

This sub-question could be answered by firstly participating in weekly art workshops and having informal conversations with the members about dominant discourses on undocumented migrants. During these workshops, both positive and negative experiences were shared with the group. Besides, during a brainstorm session, topic questions provided the opportunity to elaborate on their awareness of the dominant discourses and it was possible to ask specific questions about their personal experiences. Lastly, within an in-depth interview the understanding of the members' individual perspectives could be deepened and opened up to emotions and more concrete examples that illustrate the discourses.

*2. What counter-narrative do the undocumented migrants want to represent through their art practices of We Sell Reality?*

This sub-question investigated the consequences of experiences of dominant exclusionary discourses on undocumented migrants. It aimed to seek an understanding of how the members of We Sell Reality want to react towards and present themselves against these dominant discourses by constructing a counter-narrative through their art practices. It investigated their resistance towards their contested position within society through which they could feel more like they belong. This question thereby shed light on their construction of a sense of *'politics of belonging'*.

This question could be answered by participating in art workshops and having informal conversations about how the members react towards the dominant discourses. Thereby, both by making the art pieces and talking about what it represents, the counter-narrative they want to construct came to light. Besides, a brainstorm session was organized to have an in-depth conversation on how they want to represent themselves as a collective and react towards the dominant discourses. Lastly, through an in-depth interview, the members individually elaborated on how they construct their own identity and wish to represent themselves through We Sell Reality.

*3. How do the undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality describe their sense of belonging?*

This sub-question was asked to get a deeper understanding of the personal, emotional and subjective understandings of the construction of belonging of the undocumented migrants. Therefore, explorative questions were formulated to provide insights into what belonging means to the members themselves and how they construct this feeling. This understanding made it possible to subsequently investigate how they construct a sense of belonging in relation to their involvement in We Sell Reality. This question shed light on undiscovered and understudied forms of belonging that can supplement existing literature on the construction of belonging.

This question could be answered through an individual in-dept interview. While creating the possibility for the members to share thoughts and experiences on belonging and non-belonging and elaborate on their thoughts during the brainstorm session, their personal understanding and construction of a sense of belonging could be discovered in-depth. In attempt to get a deeper understanding of the personal, emotional dimension of belonging, the members could express and illustrate their feelings by giving examples.

*4. What is the motivation of the undocumented migrants to be involved in We Sell Reality and how is this related to constructing a sense of place- and political belongingness?*

This sub-question was asked to outline the motivations of the members to be involved in We Sell Reality. It aimed to explore what the collective contains, and besides, to get an impression of the reason behind their art practices. Furthermore, this question was asked to explore the different elements of belonging

that play a role in their motivation to be involved in We Sell Reality. It was necessary to be open to the possibility that the two different dimensions of belonging of *'the politics of belonging'* and the constructing of a sense of personal *'place-belongingness'* unfold through their art practices. It was thereby acknowledged that besides political motivations, emotional attachments to the art practices and membership of We Sell Reality could also be an important motivation to be involved.

This question could be answered by participating in their workshops to understand their practices and participate in informal conversations. Besides, questions were asked during the brainstorm session to get a deeper understanding of their motivations. The brainstorm session focused on what it means to be involved and what their general goal is with their art practices. During the in-depth interview, follow up questions were asked to further investigate individual differences and similarities. Their motivation could be linked to different elements of belonging both on a place and political dimension. This question shed light on how their feeling of belonging can be expressed both through and by the practices of making art with We Sell Reality.

# 5. Research methods

## 5.1 Examples of art practices and belonging

Before describing the research methods that are implemented in this thesis, some projects will be demonstrated that present a great example of studying art and belonging and inspired the methods of this research. O'Neill and Hubbard, (2010) shed light on how a sense of belonging of migrants can be analysed through the process of *mapping, walking and making art* through which they can express experiences of belonging in a place that becomes '*home away from home'*. Through claiming this creative space, the migrants have a personal and political voice within the unwelcoming geopolitical context through which they are often presented as threatening strangers. Damery and Mescoli (2019) demonstrate how undocumented migrants in Brussel, Belgium, make themselves visible through artistic workshops such as writing and theatre presentations and exhibitions. These actions contribute to their construction of home making and sense of belonging in the city.

Besides, Schreiber (2018) investigates how documentary forms as *photography, film, and video* can be used by undocumented Mexican and Central American migrants as a political strategy of counter-knowledge and counter-representation. Within the art works, they include their own point of view that challenges how they are represented in the mainstream media. Through this creative counter strategy of employing documentary media, migrants visualize their belonging and inclusion within the nation-state (Schreiber, 2018). Although the projects were in some cases initiated by non-profit organizations, social services, filmmakers and artist, through this creative visualization and performative act of belonging, the migrants themselves have agency in the mode of production through which they become part of the artistic process.

Another example is presented by the study of Cahill (2009) on creative ways to present a counter-narrative through The Mestizo Arts & Activism Collective. The collective describes itself as a social justice think tank which involves around young people as so called '*catalysts of change'*. Within the program, the focus lies on leadership and active civic engagement through which the people are participating in varying artistic collective practices of *action research, arts and activism, spoken word, photography, song, visual artmaking, movement and performance*. The aim of their practices is to process and make sense of social issues such as the xenophobic racism of anti-immigrant politics. Through these practices, they can express themselves and engage in ways of knowing that they might otherwise not have a language to articulate through. The aim of their projects is for the young people to investigate and understand their everyday lives while offering a critical lens that could reframe immigration politics Cahill (2009).

## 5.2 Research strategy

In order to answer the sub- and research questions of this thesis, the research contained a qualitative research strategy. Following the theoretical assumption that the construction of belonging is subjective, and the feelings attached to it depend specifically for each individual (Antonisch, 2010), this research contained an ontological framework of meaning making from experiences that can be characterized as *constructivism* (Bryman, 2012). It was thereby acknowledged that the construction of belonging takes place within a specific societal context and the actors within this context could experience it differently. Through this strategy, the knowledge-holders were given the opportunity to elaborate on their answers and share their personal experiences and meaning making which made it possible to grasp the construction of a sense of belonging from their personal perspective.

## 5.3 Research design

This thesis focused on the *case-study* of We Sell Reality. This research design can be characterized as an *interpretative epistemology*. This approach made it possible to gain an in-depth understanding of the personal perception of struggles and experiences of belonging in the everyday life of a selected group of undocumented migrants. The art collective creates methods beyond language to communicate and present a counter-narrative. To gain a deeper understanding on the consequences of exclusionary discourses, it is especially important to pay attention to their stories and personal experiences instead of elaborating on perspectives of the host country and dominant discourses. Attention to their counter-narrative contributes to recognition and empowering of their position in society. Therefore, this research design formed a suitable method to study their emotions, practices and meaning given to belonging (Lenette, 2019).

## 5.4 Research methods

### 5.4.1 Participatory art-based research

Collaborative art-based methods were applied through which the epistemological perspectives of art and social science research were brought together. It opened the possibility to make sense of the world by creativity and imagination (Lenette, 2019, p. 32-33). Lenette (2019, p. 40) argues that this forms a suitable method in refugee studies because it provides possibilities to better understand the impacts of political debates and public opinion on the everyday life of refugees. Art-based methods can be implemented beyond the academic sphere and can be instrumented to counter stigmatizing labels communicated through dominants discourses.

Through attending twelve art workshops that lasted an average of five hours (see appendix 10.6 for elaborative outline of the attended workshops), unstructured and informal conversations with the members of We Sell Reality took place. My role varied from hosting the collective at the museum,

assisting the members and the artist by their art practices, and making art myself. This formed a suitable method to get to know the members and their practices in a comfortable setting before asking the right, but also personal research questions. Through observing how the members are working together as a collective, it allowed to construct an understanding of the group dynamics and it was possible to observe how they communicate and act around each other in the house of the artist and to what extent they act like they are at home. Besides, the conversations opened the possibility to learn more about the geo-political context that shapes their everyday life and gave the opportunity to ask follow-up questions about specific topics that the members brought up (Lenette, 2019).

Besides, participating in the workshops allowed to express genuine interest in their practices and build trust among the members. Through genuine engagement and by respecting the agency of the members during this process, it was possible to inclusively work together. A safe space was created for creative, alternative storytelling and knowledge creation that challenges dominant discourses. It was possible to come to a unique and deeper understanding of what the art pieces of We Sell Reality represent and the reason behind their practices. As their counter-narrative raises awareness and encourages critical thinking on the everyday life of undocumented migrants, it adds to new and alternative knowledge through which people can connect with others across place and time (Lenette, 2019). Being involved thereby added to an understanding of their sense of place- and political belonging (Bryman, 2012).

Eventually, photos of the art pieces and practices were made to enrich interpretations of the data (see appendix 10.9). Lenette (2019, p. 143) argues that: *"photographs have a unique ability to evoke emotional responses among viewers who consider another's point of view"*. Through this visual art-based method, the process and results of their practices and the story it represents could be visualized and analysed in forms that are more difficult to translate and communicate through language. The scientific research methods of communicating by language could be expanded and thereby provided the opportunity to not only listen, but also sense the counter-narrative they want to present and how their sense of belonging is constructed through their art.

### 5.4.2 Focus-group

In addition, three *focus-groups* in the form of brainstorm sessions were organized to interactively discuss specific research topics in-depth. The sessions lasted around three hours (see appendix 10.3 - 10.5 for elaborative descriptions of the brainstorm format). They were organized besides the workshops in order to create a safe space for the members to talk about sensitive topics and feel supported by the others that share similar experiences. Within these sessions, my role shifted from being a participant in their art practices, to being a moderator. The artist stayed in the background a bit more and only assisted when necessary. Through these sessions it became clear for all the members that besides being involved in the art practices of We Sell Reality, I was also holding a position of a researcher. It was important that they

were aware of this role in order to give permission and feel comfortable in contributing to the research by answering specific questions.

A critical note to the structure of the sessions has to be made because of specific group dynamics that occurred which sometimes led to unclarities in their answers. It must be acknowledged that some members felt more comfortable to express themselves vocally in the group while others were more silent and listening. Besides, because of a language barrier, some reactions within the group were given in their own language and translated by a group member. Furthermore, sometimes smaller one-on-one conversations during the discussion took place which caused some distractions, and some information might have missed. Overall, the members were focused, enthusiastic and willing to actively participate during the sessions.

### 5.4.3 In-depth interview

Furthermore, a *semi-structured questionnaire* was developed (see appendix 10.2). Seven in-depth interviews took place in order to get a deeper understanding on their personal and emotional storytelling of constructing a sense of belonging in relation to their art practices and contested position within society. The questionnaire included different topics to discuss with each member in order to reveal complexities of experiences of belonging. Through the conversation, an attempt was made to create a safe space where they felt comfortable to elaborate on specific topics. Those who felt less comfortable to talk during the focus-groups, were given the opportunity to share their experiences more privately. Besides, it was possible to ask follow-up questions to better understand what was observed and discussed through the workshops and brainstorm sessions. This one-on-one interview furthermore shed light on individual differences from the collective construction of belonging. Their subjectivity was embraced in order to gain a deeper understanding of what belonging constitutes. In this way, a more profound understanding of their construction of a sense of belonging on both place and political dimensions could be established (Bryman, 2012).

## 5.5 Operationalization

In this section, the theoretical concepts and how it is applied within the research will briefly be discussed. In the appendix (see 10.1) a schematic overview of all concepts can be found that were operationalized in order to ask concrete questions during the research.

Within the theoretical framework, *dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration* were discussed according to the dimensions of the geopolitical discourse which demonstrated the increasing regulations of migration flows through the trend of '*politicization of migration'* and the commodification and dehumanization of continuous forced migration flows (Castles, et, al., 2014; Kyle, 2000 in Vogt, 2013; Sharp, 2000, p. 293 in Vogt 2013; Vogt, 2013). Thereby, dominant perspectives on citizenship in relation to the state were discussed which furthermore

demonstrated how forced migrants become (legally) excluded from the host country (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Visser, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Besides, societal discourses demonstrated how forced and undocumented migrants become excluded from society based on anxiety expressed through stigmatization frames of *securitarian, economic, cultural* and *victimizing* discourses (De Cleen, et, al., 2017). Lastly, '*the deportation regime'* illustrated how nations react towards undocumented migrants by deportation which increases risks, anxiety and (mental) health problems among undocumented migrants in the host country (De Genova & Peutz, 2010).

This study first of all investigated the reflections and experiences of the members of We Sell Reality towards these dominant exclusionary discourses in their everyday life. Questions were asked about their awareness and perspectives on these discourses without immediately and directly referring to the dominant discourses as outlined in the theoretical framework. Exemplifying, open and nonsuggestive questions were asked about how they are presented in the media such as television and newspapers. Open discussions took place in order to outline their perspective on the world and contribute to existing knowledge on dominant exclusionary discourses and its effects on undocumented migrants.

The research furthermore explored on how the members experience the consequences of these dominant discourses on their position as a contested and marginalized group in society as a non-citizen. The research therefore aimed to describe how they construct their own identity by asking questions to describe themselves. These questions included the intersectionality of their identity and did not take their identity as an undocumented migrant for granted. This was for instance realized by also questioning their identifications as an artist. Besides, it was asked how they want to represent themselves as a counter-narrative within an exclusionary society. Thereby, by being involved in their art workshops, and asking questions about their practices, an in-depth understanding is constructed on how they represent themselves within the host society through their art.

Thereby, personal experiences of the construction of belonging were explored. Therefore, questions were asked about their understanding of belonging and their feelings attached to it. Questions such as "*how is belonging translated in your language, what does it mean, how might it be different?"* were asked in order to get a deeper understanding on what belonging means to them. It must thereby be noted that in my position as a researcher, I realised that one must move beyond existing theoretical knowledge and conceptualizations while doing research on the personal and subjective construction of belonging and by focusing on the very human element on how it feels to belong and how this feeling can be constructed within an exclusionary society.

Furthermore, during this analysis, attention was paid to the possibility of alternative approaches towards citizenship and belonging. The conceptual approaches towards citizenship and the non-citizen status of the members were thereby taken into account. Through researching different elements of belonging in the dimensions of both '*place-belongingness'* as a personal and emotional attachment to particular places and '*the politics of belonging'* in relation to citizenship as is outlined in the theoretical framework, it could be investigated which elements unfold within this specific group. Informal

conversations on perspectives on citizenship took place. Exemplifying, questions like "*do you feel you belong in The Netherlands, and in Amsterdam?"* "*What is needed to feel belonging in the host society?"* And "*Do you feel you will belong in the host society in the future?"*. These questions allowed to discover alternative forms of citizenship.

Lastly, the research focused on seeking a deeper understanding of how the undocumented migrants construct a sense of belonging in relation to the two dimensions of '*place-belongingness'* and *'the politics of belonging'* through their art practices within We Sell Reality. It was thereby investigated how they can construct a sense of *'place-belongingness'* through different factors discussed by Antonisch (2010). Besides, the research focussed on how the representation of themselves through their art practices contributed to a political sense of belonging within the host society.

## 5.6 Knowledge-holders

Through the case-study of We Sell Reality, attention is paid to the art practices of undocumented migrants in Amsterdam through which they construct a sense of belonging by presenting a counter-narrative. In doing so, the members are producing alternative knowledge of looking at the world. Therefore, they were approached as 'knowledge-holders' instead of participants while their agency in constructing a counter-narrative through their art-practices was highly respected. A schematic overview of the knowledge-holders can be found in the appendix (9.7).

Through my internship at the art and cultural institution FramerFramed in Amsterdam-East, I got in contact with one of the artists who is connected to FramerFramed and the founder of We Sell Reality. She served as the gatekeeper to get in contact with the undocumented migrants by inviting me to their workshops. The artist therefore played a crucial role in getting access to the undocumented migrants and provided the possibility to become part of the community. Although the artist is not an undocumented migrant, she is an important member of the collective. Throughout the research, we had informal conversations over the phone that contributed to my deeper understanding of the collective. Her perspective is therefore also included in this study. The second artist was not always present and is therefore not mentioned explicitly within this thesis.

It must be noted that the collective is welcoming those who are interested to be involved and therefore has a fluid group structure. Besides, the members are changing over time because of their asylum procedure and the constant possibility they are deported. Furthermore, on a weekly basis new people joined the workshops as the members invited other friends through their expanding network connected to the AZC. During the study, the collective existed of twelve members (including two artists). Most of them were living in Amsterdam in different neighbourhoods and housing situations. Some lived in a camp outside of the city. While some lived together with roommates, others lived alone or were not allowed to visit their roommates. Nine of the members were man, only three of them were woman. Their age differed from 22 to 54 years old. Over the last two years they migrated to the

Netherlands from different home countries in Afrika such as Gambia, Soudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. One of the members just recently got accepted to receive a citizenship status while most of the members were still waiting for a varying amount of time. Some of them for more than three years.

Being a non-citizen within an exclusionary society formed a significant corresponding element that shaped the everyday life of the members. Because of their circumstances and everyday life experiences as a non-citizen in the Netherlands and by being part of We Sell Reality wherein the members collectively fight for justice through art practices, they were all able to reflect on their contested construction of belonging.

## 5.7 Ethical considerations and reflection on research process

Throughout the research, specific ethical considerations were taken into account in relation to the applied research methods within the context of refugee studies (Lenette, 2019). Most importantly, the protection of the undocumented migrants and the challenges they face because of power dynamics within an exclusionary society were considered and respected. The confidentiality and protection of all knowledge-holders was considered including their safety, privacy, anonymity and respect.

It must be mentioned that the vulnerability of their visibility was expected to be an important element within the research. However, in their reflections on their visibility, some of the knowledge-holders expressed that they do not want to be approached as a vulnerable group. Their visibility remains an important aspect to be considered while representing themselves at the risk of being deported. Yet, they prefer to focus on their possibilities instead of limitations of visibility. By presenting a counter-narrative, they see their visibility as a political strategy of empowerment of undocumented migrants. The extent to which they want to make themselves visible differs per person. Some do not want to present their face, while others do not mind, and would also not mind sharing their name. Because the extent to which they wish to be visible differs, it has been decided within this thesis to ensure the privacy of all members to the same extent. Thereby, the privacy of the information they shared was considered. In consultation with the members, pseudonyms have been used to protect their identity and very personal stories are not discussed explicitly. Also, the audio of the interview was only used for analysing the data with approval of the members. Moreover, as discussed with the knowledge-holders, some sections of the analyses will be discussed more generally speaking than on an individual level to respect the privacy of the members. Out of respect, some names will not be explicitly mentioned in the results. As the members represent themselves of a collective, the core of their story is not coming short.

Secondly, it was taken into account that the knowledge-holders could suffer from trauma and experienced major struggles throughout their life. It was therefore a suitable method to first get to know the members and earn their trust before diving into sensitive topics and questions. Especially during the brainstorm sessions and the interviews, their vulnerability was kept in mind. Some members did not want to do an interview for personal reasons. This can be explained by the fact that many members

associated an interview with negative and sometimes traumatic experiences with the IND (Dutch governmental institution that judges whether migrants get asylum). To put them at ease it was emphasized that the interview could be approached more like a conversation and no questions about their migration process would be asked. Nevertheless, no one was forced to do the interview. They are however represented in the research through their participation in the brainstorm sessions and workshops. During the interviews, it was important to not only focus on the research questions and listen to their personal stories. Besides, it was encouraging to calm them down by making explicit that everything they say was okay, since it was their personal experience that counted, no false answers could be given (Lenette, 2019).

During the in-depth interviews, a language barrier had to be considered. Most of the members are Sudanese and although they do understand and speak English, some conceptual understandings of the research topic were not understood immediately. Therefore, one of the members that best masters the English language, was interviewed first. Afterwards, she was sometimes present at parts of interviews with other members to translate some questions in Arabic. This method was successful. Yet, some members appeared to face difficulties in reflecting on their situation and describing their own identity. Some state that it is not in their culture to do this. This is important to take into account especially when discussing how their identity is constructed. However, although language sometimes formed a barrier, they could communicate themselves through their art practices.

It must also be noted that throughout the research my position and role within the group continuously transformed from being an observer, a teacher and a researcher to being accepted and included as a member of the group. In the last weeks I was even considered a friend to some of the members. While I attempted to make it clear that I was doing research, I developed a strong connection with the members and gained their trust. Some members asked if I would stay part of the group after my research. It was therefore crucial to consider their vulnerability and sometimes longing for friendship. I sometimes considered difficulties to manage between these different roles, but always attempted to be honest about it.

Lastly, it must be reflected that when starting with the research in March, the members had not been able to work together as a group for a long time because of the Covid-19 measurements. The workshops took place within smaller groups at the house of the artist. Therefore, I met the members not all at once. During the lockdown, they became even more isolated. Starting from April, the workshops could be hosted at the Framer Framed museum where the members were able to work together as a group. As the workshops could start again, the members expressed how happy they were to be able to all work together at the same time and have a reason to get out of the house. These contextual circumstances must be taken into account because the Corona measures have had such an impact on the members mental health and expresses their current situation and vulnerability.

## 5.8 Data-analysis

The relevant information that resulted from attending the weekly workshops have been written down in a fieldwork notebook afterwards. During the workshops, pictures were made of the art pieces and the knowledge-holders (without facial recognition) working on the dolls to visualize their practices. The written materials that were created during the brainstorm sessions were collected and photographed (see appendix 10.9). Furthermore, during the first brainstorm sessions and the individual interviews, it was approved by all the knowledge-holders to record the session. The recordings are thereafter transcribed in a document. Thereafter these transcripts could be analysed following the sub-questions of this thesis. By using the qualitative analyses program NVivo similarities and interesting contrasts between the answers could be discovered. Within this program, it was possible to code the recognized patterns and outstanding findings in different themes (see appendix 10.8 for coding schemes). These themes helped to structure the analysis and support to answer the sub- and research question to formulate the conclusion of the research (Bryman, 2012). At the end of the research, the findings will be discussed with the knowledge-holders to reflect on the results and conclusion. Duo to limited time, this reflection is not concluded in this thesis.

# 6. Results

## 6.1 Experiences of dominant discourses on undocumented migrants in The Netherlands

### 6.1.1 Discouraging anti-migration policies

Policy deals and labels

During the first brainstorm session, the knowledge-holders were asked to describe the dominant discourses of the Dutch migration system and reflect on how migration policies narrate and treat undocumented migrants. All describe the migration policies in the Netherlands in a negative way because they make them feel unwanted and excluded from society. They believe that because European countries want to exclude forced and undocumented migrants, policy deals are created between states to stop forced migration. To illustrate, Aamria (33) states that when she and the artists did research on the European migration deals, they found out that agreements between Turkey, Sudan and Nigeria are made to tackle refugees and stop migration into Europe. She uses this as an example to present how programmes are created to make migration harder. Their description of the geopolitical discourse thereby confirms to the theoretical analyzation of '*politization of migration'* that stresses how European nation-states strengthen their territorial borders and regulate the freedom of movement of particular people across their borders to exclude *'undesirable foreigners'* (Castles, et, al., 2014; De Genova & Peutz, 2010).

Furthermore, this study sheds light on the awareness of the knowledge-holders that several labels are used by the government to put them in boxes as an excuse to exclude them such as: *'criminals', 'illegals', 'refugees', 'less'* and *'liars'*. It is thereby stressed that the label *'refugee'* is often used to categorize forced migrants and contributes to their exclusion from society. Aamria (33) explicitly states that she does not like the word because it is determining or giving a position that is an indicator to a certain category of people. Ras (54) mentions that the far-right politicians frame forced migrants like a threat for the European society and he stresses that they do not want to welcome refugees. Therefore, he feels like they discriminate and underestimate their value. Aamria (33) believes that because The Netherlands is a small country, they want to protect their economy and therefore do not want more foreigners to integrate. Although especially Aamria (33) and Ras (54) think that the left political parties like 'Bij1' are better, they believe they have no power to change the system. The other knowledge-holders present in the brainstorm session do agree with these statements.

Exclusion, discouragement and deportation

In their reflection on the dominant discourses, the knowledge-holders argue that they are treated badly by the Dutch migration system in order to exclude them from the Dutch society. Exemplifying, Bob (29) states that his lawyer was not on his side during his procedure and was telling him that he is not allowed to stay in The Netherlands. Omar (23) believes that when they wanted to give them asylum, they could do it, but they simply chose not to. Furthermore, Aamria (33) thinks that the government has a hidden agenda to make the life of undocumented people difficult so that they would leave the country. She states that the procedures of Sudanese migrants are taking years and they are being treated as *'stupid'* and *'less'*. As a consequence, they hope migrants will return voluntarily or would choose to go to another country. To argue that the Dutch migration system attempts to treat them badly in order to make them feel excluded and encouraged to leave the country, she states the following:

*"…Yeah, and then like they are being kicked out to live in the shelter and this shelter is like they kick out people at 9 am and then you have to go be in the streets. Otherwise, if you have friends like * artist * she was like opening her house to people. If you don't, you just be there, out in the cold you know… But this is also one on the agenda. Is like a hidden agenda. Because they want you to go back to your country." (Aamira, 31, brainstorm session)*

What has become clear for the knowledge-holders is that whenever their asylum application is denied, they do not have the right to stay, and must immediately leave the country. This is very stressful because they risk being killed or refused to enter when they return to their country of origin. Therefore, some of the knowledge-holders try to go into a new asylum procedure or decide to stay in The Netherlands without documents. Throughout the process of deportation, Bob (29) feels like he is not assisted and completely abandoned by the system. On the other hand, as he is out of procedure, he no longer feels like a prisoner of the system and experiences a certain freedom. He thereby states the following:

*"Not to send you back, just only that you have to leave the camp and we don't give a fuck where you go. You know. So that one. It was for me a good change you know, because I have met people, I start new life you know. Better than you stay in Ter Apel. Every day you see new people coming, new people going. So, it was terrible you know." (Bob, 29, interview)*

Waiting, frustration and dehumanization

During the brainstorm session and the workshops, the consequences of these dominant narratives on the everyday life experiences of the undocumented migrants were investigated. According to the knowledge-holders, these exclusionary policy discourses and deals are extremely frustrating and dehumanizing. To exemplify, Jamal (27) and Hafez (25) mention the Dublin deal through which they were no longer allowed to stay in the night shelter because it was closed. Other examples of dehumanization are strongly reflected in the way they are treated during their asylum procedure. Within the workshop it is mentioned that they are treated like children because they have to get a stamp at the

camp every week to prove their presence. This limits their feeling of freedom. Besides, some stress that they are constantly waiting because the asylum procedure is taking a long time. To exemplify, Dukz (28) is in procedure for four years and Jamal (27) already for six years. During this procedure of waiting, they are not allowed to work. The knowledge-holders also stress that their interviews with the IND can take around three days of questioning. The IND interviewee is looking for hard proof and sometimes indicates that the undocumented migrants are lying because they cannot proof their country from origin, or they believe they are safe to go back. For some it is difficult to proof their country of origin because they have no documents, the country is corrupt, and some do not have family that could help them with evidence during their asylum process. The disbelieve and lack of empathy for their situation is devastating for the knowledge-holders. They find this process very exhausting and sometimes even traumatic. Besides, they stress that the IND is looking at their case and files without paying attention to their individual, personal stories and their vulnerability. They are treated like a number as one of the many. Omar (23) therefore feels that there are no human rights. Dukz (28) mentions during both the brainstorm session and the interview that she feels like a document and not a human being. To further illustrate this dehumanizing experience:

*"She writes, the IND, in front of me, they write the document full of like this… 'hey you have the document, attach it, and close'. Then they do whatever they like. But if she would really be like the human thing about it; 'okay let me look, let me give this that'. But they put me in a document. All of us we are documents, we are not humans. Sorry if I … but yeah…" (Dukz, 28, interview)*

The narratives of the knowledge-holders on everyday life experiences of the excluding migration system thereby confirm and add to existing knowledge on dehumanizing migration policies. The study demonstrates that they have an immense impact on how undocumented migrants structure their everyday life without themselves holding any agency in controlling their migration process. Throughout this reflection of exclusion, the knowledge-holders construct a sense of non-belonging in the Dutch society.

Lack of integration

Within the in-depth interviews, the knowledge-holders furthermore reflected on the consequences of the dominant exclusionary discourses on their position within the host society. Although they are neglected by the system and form a rather invisible group in society, their continuing presence in the host country cannot be denied. Bob (29) stresses that because of their exclusion, lack of possibilities and not being allowed to work, a problem of homelessness is created. Many people he knows live out in the street and face difficulties, stress and issues regarding their mental health. He notes that their difficult situation could consequence in them taking part in criminal activities. The knowledge-holders thereby articulate that the criminal behaviour of forced and undocumented migrants as presented in the media and politics is not completely fictitiously, but however fragmented. They stress that because they are not given the opportunity to integrate, they are not been given a change to proof this image wrong. To illustrate:

*"Because of the system fucked up, yeah. If you give them possibility like one year document, so they can start their life. After one year if they don't do anything so okay take it from here and tell him bro, I will take it to the airplane, go back to your country, it is going to be okay." (Bob, 29, interview)*

This quote accentuates that the non-citizen status of undocumented migrants contributes to the persistence of stigmatization and justification of exclusion which increases their feeling of non-belonging. This process of exclusion contributes to knowledge on the construction of (non-)belonging as a non-citizen.

Remarkably, while dominant discourses accentuate how undocumented migrants end up on the wrong path, the knowledge-holders also demonstrate a different picture. Because of their risk of deportation, they share experiences of attempting to follow the rules very strictly and behave like a respectful citizen to avoid being deported. Thereby, they state that other rules apply to undocumented migrants than to nations citizens. To illustrate:

*"I have to be careful somehow. Like, if you are doing something, for example when you past traffic light, if I cross traffic light, when they catch me, they fine me and for me it's different. It is difficult. Yeah exactly. The rules you have, and I have is different. It's all the same rules, but what you are gonna face I am not gonna face. I face different." (Momodou, 22, interview)*

Also, Ras (54) states that he once had to go to a detention centre because he crossed a red traffic light and was treated like a criminal in a prison. Momodou (22) states that because the consequences for undocumented migrants are different, he feels less like he belongs in the host society. Within this reflection on lack of integration and the consequences on risks in the everyday life, it becomes clear that the deportation regime has remarkable consequences on the behaviour of the knowledge-holders that in some cases counters the dominant exclusionary discourses.

Furthermore, Aamira (31) feels like even when forced migrants are given asylum, they will never fully be able to integrate in the Dutch society. The artist thereby mentions that in the newspaper, they would state that a second or third generation migrate does a criminal act, even when a person was born in the Netherlands. Aamira (31) believes that this situation increases the discouragement of migrants to seek asylum in the Netherlands. To illustrate:

*"I see surnames people… how long they have been in Nederland? Very long. But when you see the jobs that most of them are having, it is really second-class jobs. And you see like why they are like less intelligent like Dutch people for example? No but it is the system… even if you have a Dutch passport but you are not Dutch. You have to be in the second. And you will always be the next generation, next generation. It is the system. You cannot really hack it." (Aamira, 31, brainstorm session)*

The lack of integration possibilities presents awareness that even when obtaining a residence permit, this does not guarantee their integration in the host society. Some knowledge-holders have become to

believe that they will never be fully included in the host society. Their awareness of the exclusionary system that goes beyond the legal recognition of citizenship increases their feelings of non-belonging within the host society.

### 6.1.2 Absence and fragmentation in the media

Negativity

During the brainstorm sessions and interviews, the knowledge-holders reflected on how they are projected through the media such as television, newspapers and online sources. All of them feel like the everyday situation of undocumented migrants is nowadays rarely represented in the media. While the Dutch media should help to make their situation visible to the public, it is not working and bad. Momodou (22) and Jamal (27) say that they are not fighting for the rights of refugees. Some knowledge-holders do give examples of when the media focuses on the topic of refugees, however most often this information is fragmented. Exemplifying, Ras (54) mentions that it could be about boat people crossing the Mediterranean, but there is no specific news about asylum seekers or failing asylum seekers in the Netherlands. Bob (29) states that when undocumented migrants are mentioned in the news, they are focussing on negative incidents. To illustrate:

*"…the tv was recording and they were asking the people out from the camp because someone committed big crime I believe. So, they came I think is undocumented person in the camp and he says that the migrants are here, they are stealing, selling drugs. And he was telling the government that you should close this place, like the prison. So, everybody cannot go out. Just only the people who have document can be integrated to the social life. But the others who don't have, they are supposed to stay inside the prison and don't go out. So, this is explaining how the tv is so fucked up, how can you show something like this you know? So, I believe that they don't like the people who stay here illegal. But there is no other way for those people you know, most of them they get problems after you know, thinking too much so they end up doing some bad things you know." (Bob, 29, interview)*

Bob (29) hereby stresses that this projection of undocumented migrants through the media reinforces fear towards welcoming refugees. Similar to the political discourse, the knowledge-holders state they are projected in the media as *'liars', 'a threat', 'aggressive'* or as *'criminals'*. Besides, Dukz (28) says that the media projects refugees like thieves that steal jobs and are manipulating the culture of the host society. Asim 26) says that they simply wonder: *Why are you here when you did not receive asylum?* Remarkably, it is mentioned only explicitly by the artist iftu (44) that whenever forced migrants are not projected as a threat, they often are victimized. This societal discourse confirms with the analyses of Korac (2009) who states that by victimizing refugees, attention to the existence of agency and decision-making processes is lacking which disempowers undocumented migrants' position in their new country of residence. The knowledge-holders do agree with the artist, but do not share examples themselves.

Only Jamal (27) mentions that he does not want to be helped and wants to fix his problems himself. During the brainstorm session, the artist Iftu (44) mentions the following:

*"I feel this is problem what I see in the media if there is any attention than its either negative like refugees being put at like liars, criminals or illegals. This kind of like right-wing rhetoric strongly, but then you have the nice media, and they like they put after refugees as like highly traumatized, very like you have to feel pity for them bladibla…" (Iftu, 44, brainstorm session 1)*

This discourse once again presents how undocumented migrants are bound to a certain category to legitimize their specific treatment and exclusion. These accusations confirm to societal exclusionary discourses based on stigmatizing logics as presented in the theoretical framework (De Cleen, et, al., 2017). This study further accentuates how the negative fragmentation through the media makes undocumented feel not represented and recognised which endorses their feelings of exclusion and non-belonging in the Dutch society.

### 6.1.3 Positive and negative discourses in the everyday life

Labels and lack of knowledge

During the brainstorm sessions, interviews and workshops, the knowledge-holders described how they experience the dominant discourses on forced migration are reflected in their everyday life for example when they are going to the supermarket, take public transport or walk around in their neighborhood. They share several negative experiences of labels being forced upon them as being '*illegal'*, '*a thief', 'poor', 'aggressive'*, *'criminal'* and having a negative influence on the culture of the Netherlands. Exemplifying, Omar (23) says that many people in his surroundings believe he migrated for economic reasons while this is a huge misperception of the situation of forced migrants. Dukz (28) thinks that this is because of lack of knowledge of the Dutch citizens on their situation. Omar (23), Jamal (27) and Momodou (22) also explicitly mention that people in society, and in the city more specifically, do not realize the situation that undocumented migrants are in. Momodou (22) says that people think everybody is just having a good life without knowing any better. Besides, Ras (54) says:

*"Because I meet so many Dutch people, the first time they meet you they all ask you that they don't know that out of procedure asylum seekers are living in their cities. They have no idea at all. People living without bank account, without shelter, without insurance." (Ras, 54, brainstorm session)*

In addition, they share experiences of people telling them that when they are rejected asylum in the Netherlands, they are *'illegal'* and must leave the country. Exemplifying, Ras (54) tells in the interview that when he went looking for a job, people rejected him because he had no documents. Occasionally employees told him that he must go back to his country. He thinks that these people are not aware of his

situation. He thereby stresses that it is misleading to suggest that undocumented migrants migrated without a valid reason just because they are out of procedure.

The labels, accusations and lack of knowledge reflected in the everyday life of the undocumented migrants contribute to their feeling of not being heard and understood by the people in the host society. This lack of recognition of their situation makes them feel invisible and wanting to raise their voice to be heard and included in society.

Experiences of racism in everyday life

During the workshops, the knowledge-holders occasionally share stories with the group of racist incidents they have experienced in their everyday life. Exemplifying, Omar (23) stresses that he feels frustrated as he encountered many unpleasant incidents and Asim (26) says:

*"…Sometime people like you meet in areas there are racist people. Some time you feel you are not welcome… For example, if you want to sit like around close, they are change the place when you sit. Yeah… you feel badly… you feel like you are not welcome." (Asim, 26, workshop)*

The knowledge-holders stress how such incidents makes them feel unwelcome and like an outsider in The Netherlands. The experiences of racism in their everyday life confirm to the *cultural discourse* that stresses how hostile and exclusionary practices are strongly built around concepts of race and othering through which ethnic minorities construct a sense of non-belonging within the host society (Delanty, et, al., 2008, p. 243; De Cleen, et, al., 2017; Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006).

A positive social bubble

Although most of the knowledge-holders experience racism in the Netherlands, overall speaking, they are positive about the people they encounter in their everyday life. Some of the knowledge-holders that live in the Netherlands for a longer period of time, have a more nuanced opinion about how people approach them in their everyday life. For example, Dukz (28), Aamira (31) and Momodou (22) say that they got used to some people being racist and do no longer pay attention to it. Besides, both Ras (54) and Asim (26) say that there is only a handful of bad people and a lot of good people. Bob (29) says that the Dutch are easy people to hang out with.

Furthermore, the knowledge-holders are each to a varying extent living in their own social bubble, surrounded by their roommates and friends they made in the camp which increases their sense of feeling included. Some of the knowledge-holders, like Ras (54), Aamira (31) and Dukz (28) live in the Netherlands already for a couple of years and also know Dutch people. This social bubble makes them feel more comfortable, surrounded by people that respect them. Aamira (31) says that she does not remember many negative experiences because she has a bubble around her. These people would not even use the word 'refugee' and see them for whom they are. Besides, Momodou (22) says if people know about their situation, they will never categorize them like 'black people'. The comfortable feeling

of having friends around that respect and appreciate the undocumented migrants presents how *relational factors* as described by (Antonsich, 2010), are an important element to construct a sense of belongingness for the undocumented migrants within the exclusionary host society.

The city versus the village

It has become remarkable throughout the study that the knowledge-holders experience a great difference between stigmatization disapproval of their presence in Dutch villages and tolerance and acceptance in Amsterdam. On the one hand, they share negative stories about people they encounter in Dutch villages. For example, Bob (29) tells he encountered a man in a village that told him a major part of migrants want to do nothing, take money from the government and stay at home. He said that people in the city would never talk like that. Besides, in small towns, for example around Zwolle, people hold more stereotypical thoughts and immediately expect them to be refugees. Another example given by Dukz (28) is that in places around Groningen, people would never approach her to ask her the time.

On the other hand, in Amsterdam people are less likely to label and exclude them and they are more positive towards refugees. All knowledge-holders are positive about the people living in Amsterdam and prefer to live in the city. Aamira (31) says that people are just minding their own business and do not care about their presence. Dukz (28) feels that she can be more relaxed in Amsterdam. People do not look at her with judgement and do not immediately assume that she is a refugee. This comparison between the city, and small towns and villages in The Netherlands presents how dominant discourses are experienced differently in particular places and have a strong influence on feeling included within that place. The diversity, tolerance and acceptance of differences in the city counter the dominant cultural discourse based on othering and allow undocumented migrants to feel more like they belong.

### 6.1.4 Ascribed identity

Transformation of the self

Within the interviews, the knowledge-holders reflect on the consequences of the dominant discourses on how they describe their own identity. It has thereby become clear that they all to a varying extent went through a transformation of their identity through the asylum procedure within the exclusionary Dutch society. It must thereby be noted that the transformation of their identity is a complex process that cannot solely be ascribed through the dominant exclusionary discourses on forced migration. The knowledge-holders' individual circumstances and experiences go beyond what is included in this research.

However, it can still be concluded that the personality of many of the knowledge-holders has changed as a consequence of the excluding dominant discourses. They express that they are facing difficulties to deal with the negative labels being forced upon them and it makes them feel sad. Omar

(23) says that when he came to the Netherlands, he reached his worst moment and is facing a lot of stress. He feels like he cannot do what he wants to do because of how he is treated during the asylum procedure. Therefore, he feels like he is not human. Asim (26) also says his personality completely changed when he moved to the Netherlands. He was asked in what perspective, and he said '*everything'*; the way that he looked to the world and his mentality has changed completely. Back in Sudan he used to be more ambitious than now. This is also explicitly mentioned by Aamira (31), Jamal (27) and Dukz (28). Besides, Dukz (28) recognizes that she has less motivation because of the stress she faces, and she has many things on her mind. To further illustrate how their identity is transformed:

*"Because like everything is blocked and my identity took from me by someone. So, when you lose your identity, you… your self-confidence is also gone. So, in that way I am… yeah losing. Just like pretending I am fighting, yeah. I don't want to lose; I don't want to lose. But sometimes yeah… It's hard you know." (Dukz, 28, interview)*

It could thereby be noted that the exclusionary discourses have an inevitable impact on how undocumented migrants construct their own identity and become aware of their contested position within the host society. Consequently, they acknowledge themselves that they have changed through the system and dominant discourses, and to some extend lose proudness and confidence in their own personality. The knowledge-holders express that to cope with the stigmatization and labels attached to their identity is difficult. As explained through '*the politics of belonging'* (Lenette, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006), the daily and routinely confrontation with different forms of rejection can be intimidating, humiliating and incapacitating and causes feelings of fear, inferiority and reserve with a negative impact on the formation on one's identity. As the system quite explicitly states that they do not belong, the undocumented migrants feel like they must fight and be strong in order to, maybe someday, be respected, recognized and included in society for who they are.

## 6.2. The counter-narrative of We Sell Reality

### 6.2.1 Constructing a counter-narrative

Construction of the own Identity: strength and positivity

Despite from acknowledging that their identity is contested and transformed through experiences of living as an undocumented migrant in an exclusionary host society, most of the knowledge-holders hold the strength to focus on the positive sight of their identity in the construction of their identity. Within the interviews, specific questions were asked about their personality, hobbies, ambitions and hopes. When talking about this topic, they start smiling more and appear to be very strong, confident and positive people. In extreme contrast with the dominant discourses, the knowledge-holders state that

people who know them personally like their family and friends, both in their home country and in the Netherlands, describe them as being strong, positive, funny, open minded and having many qualities and ambitions in life. They themselves agree to this description of their personality. This intersectionality of their identity confirms with the analyses of Yuval-Davis (2006) on '*the politics of belonging'* in which it is described how people are who they are because of the different dimensions of their identity that constitute each other such as their gender, class, race, ethnicity, stage in their life path, sexuality and abilities. It is thereby noticeable that while dominant discourses dehumanize undocumented migrants, in the construction of their self-identity, the knowledge-holders start to humanize themselves and acknowledge their different characteristics, qualities and their ability to stay strong. To further exemplify this process:

*"My personality I think is, I cannot judge myself. But I think it is okay. Because it helped me to stay healthy this long without income, without bank, without driving licence, house, everything. If you can stay healthy, there must be something good inside you." (Ras, 54, interview)*

Another example:

*"For me how do I describe myself. I am like, what people can do, I can do. I am like other people. Just like I don't have change to do it. If you have change, I can do what they do. I can take care of myself also. I am a person like them but just the situation make me different." (Momodou, 22, interview)*

Humanization of undocumented migrants

During the first brainstorm session and the interviews, the knowledge-holders were asked how they want to react towards the dominant exclusionary discourses and what counter-narrative they want to represent that reflects their construction of '*the politics of belonging'* (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Anotnisch, 2010). They especially stress that they want to be respected and recognized as human beings and counter negative labels being attached to their identity. Thereby, Aamira (31) stresses that the label of refugee limits their value and potential and makes her feel less like she is equal and included in society:

*"They actually limit refugees because a lot of people they are not aware that refugees within themselves they are different. I mean they are so different. Different race, different skills different educational backgrounds and yeah…so if someone's says that I don't get angry because I know he does not know. But if he knows then they will just treat people more equally." (Aamira, 31, interview)*

Besides, their basic human rights to migrate must be stated and protected. Aamira (31) explicitly states that it is in the human nature to migrate and a process that must be normalized. However, she stresses that as a part of the process of mobilization, some experience the world as a free space to explore and settle down wherever they like while others are forced to move:

*"But of course, within the world that we live in there are some people that are forcibly been pushed to migrate. I mean they did not choose to migrate, but they have to because it is like a survival mechanism and yeah so, they came to a new country with a lot of challenges and also a lot of learning. Because migration for me, personally I don't see it as a Dutch person see refugees, I mean I see myself as okay I moved from my country and I left behind family friends and your like sense of belongness. But also, I came here and I also able, I was able to build up a life you know. Even if it's not sure, but I succeeded to adapt to acclimatize to you know." (Aamira, 31, interview)*

According to her, people in the host society must become aware of this process of forced migration and the rights of undocumented migrants as human beings to migrate and integrate must be stated. She and other knowledge-holders repeatedly state that they are just human beings. They wish that when people in the Dutch society get to know them and their situation, they would no longer be negatively labelled and excluded. They want to be seen and treated like equals. Some knowledge-holders, like Asim (26) and Ras (54) say that they are respectful people. To further illustrate this:

*"Actually, I don't hurt anybody. I don't want to do on another person what I don't like to be done on me. So, this is the good formula that makes me stand here today." (Ras, 54, interview)*

Also, the artist Iftu (44) has a strong influence on this humanization process to recognize their existence and make undocumented migrants feel more included in society. To illustrate:

*"... when I see the people around me, yeah, a lot deal with drama but they are much more than that and they are not only refugees. They are just like human beings with like some are funny, some are highly intelligent, some are very handy, you know they are just like people. With like lots of layers and I feel like always when there is being talked about refugees it is very one dimensional. I am like a victim or a criminal. And it is never the reality, the real deal, package." (Iftu, 44, brainstorm session)*

<u>Raising awareness: making own media</u>

Throughout the brainstorm sessions, it has become clear that, according to the knowledge-holders, the media and migration policies are dehumanizing undocumented migrants and attention to their situation is lacking. Therefore, the knowledge-holders find it crucial to raise awareness of their existence and believe that the media must do something. They want to become more visible in the media. Many of the knowledge-holders like Ras (54), Aamira (31), Jamal (27), Bob (29), Momodou (22) and both artists state that We Sell Reality therefore should create their own media. They want to create awareness and share their experiences of their everyday life as an undocumented migrant. Aamira (31) states that they must make a campaign to create raise awareness on the topic of equality and people must start to think about a society without boxes. Ras (54) especially wants to focus on the positive things he faces in his everyday life. He wants to state that people migrate for different reasons and tell the people to keep on loving. To further illustrate their aim to create awareness in society:

*"Yeah, that I am against this media and I have to show you my problem and how I should I live my life here. Not that I will say okay they did this to me, no I have the right to say no, they did this to me but I don't want it in the future, that's it. But for the people who don't have document they should talk their problem. Because maybe it can change something. In Italy there is many people who start to do protesting so they, the Italian government start to give the people documents." (Bob, 29, interview)*

This study presents how the knowledge-holders on the one hand, in the construction of their identity against the dominant discourses, focus on the intersectionality of their identity in order to humanize themselves. On the other hand, in their construction of a counter-narrative and representation of themselves, they focus on a particular dimension of their identity that is threatened to demonstrate their contested place in the host society. This dimension has become a significant element in the construction and representation of the self through which their sense of belonging becomes politicized (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

### 6.2.3 The projects

How the knowledge-holders construct a counter-narrative against the dominant discourses on forced and undocumented migration can best be demonstrated by briefly demonstrating their art projects (see appendix 10.9 for more photos of the projects). During one of the workshops, the artist Iftu (44) explicitly states that We Sell Reality makes unapologetic and strong work. It does not excuse itself while undocumented migrants are constantly forced into a position to say; *'sorry that I am here'*. Nevertheless, their work can be characterized by colours and lightness against a deeper layer of heavy, touching and confronting political messages. We Sell Reality thereby illustrates how creative alternative strategies for political action can be created that transcend barriers of language, culture and nationality to state their needs within an exclusionary society (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010; Salzbrunn, 2014 in Damery & Mescoli 2019, p. 2).

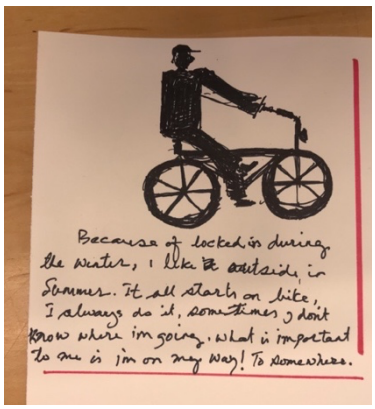
<u>Making dolls: awareness on migration deals</u>

During the workshops, the main project that the knowledge-holders are working on is making dolls. Around fifty dolls with different faces, clothes and colours represent how refugees are 'played around with' by the migration system in Europe while stressing that all they have is their bodies. They are stating that they are no puppets. This project thereby contributes to humanization of undocumented migrants. Furthermore, the knowledge-holders wants to raise awareness on the migration deals that shape their everyday life. They want to pay attention to deals between the EU and internal and external countries to stop refugees to come to Europe or try to discourage them to stay in Europe. Once the project is finished, the dolls will be presented in a pop-up store in Amsterdam to raise awareness among its ordinary residents.

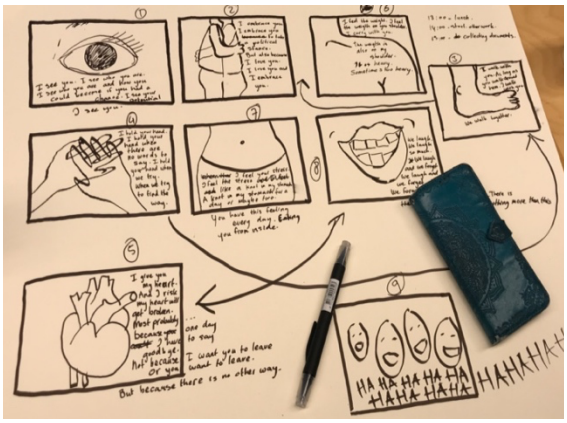
*During the workshop, making dolls*

Agency and visibility through videos

During several brainstorm sessions, the possibility of another project is explored. The knowledge-holders discussed how they can make themselves visible in the media and shed light on their situation. The importance of taking agency in what they want to represent is stressed while their visibility stays protected. The knowledge-holders themselves will be the director of their own short documentary. Each person will have a camera for a couple of days to realise their video. They individually thought about their story, sketched a script and shared their ideas with the group. The stories included different topics such as their everyday life activities of cycling through the city and its parks without a home, enjoying everything that is free, living with an empty fridge and a critical reflection on the situation in the AZC camp. After the videos are made, they will be shared on a website of We Sell Reality that has yet to be developed.

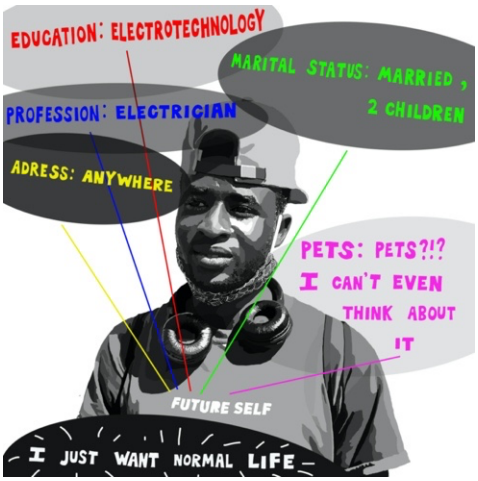



*Script Drawing Ras (45):*
*"Because of locked in during the winter,*
*I like outside, in summer.*
*It all starts on bike. I always do it.*
*Sometimes I don't know where I am going.*
*What is important to me is I'm on my way!*
*To somewhere."*




*Script Drawing Iftu (44): "all they have is their bodies."*

Collaborative project: “Corona in de stad”




Amsterdam Museum asked We Sell Reality to share drawings to present on their digital museum called “Drawing Stories: Corona in de Stad”. Through their drawing series called “The Homeless Quarantine”, the collective demonstrates how their everyday life in Amsterdam as an undocumented migrant is under pressure. Their situation worsened because of the Covid-19 pandemic. They demonstrate how they deal with fear of the virus, how they experience having no home, how they relate to the care they receive, how they deal with the lack of future prospects and how contact with the family in the home country continues. “*These intimate, personal visual stories are confrontational, rich in contrast, painful, funny and real. They provide insight into a world that usually remains hidden*” (Amsterdam Museum, Coronaindestad.nl, 2020). Out of a group of projects from different museums, We Sell Reality is selected to present some of their drawings in a public space in Amsterdam. The Amsterdam Museum thereby acknowledged the relevance of their story and contributed to raising awareness among Amsterdam residents by making their problem visible in the public space.

Minimal music festival

For the Minimal Music Festival in Amsterdam, We Sell Reality works on making a truck from wood and paper. They tell the story of refugees sneaking into a truck to cross the border by using visuals, audio and performances. The chauffeur of the truck will be in the truck listening to music while the people in the truck uncomfortably sit still. They must be quiet, because they risk being arrested. They wear a little bag with water and some food to exchange. On the bag the text “bag of chance” is written. At the border, an infra camera is used to scan the warmth of human bodies to prevent people from illegally crossing the border. Through this performance art, they raise awareness on how refugees attempt to enter a country of hope while they risk their safety.

*Screenshot of video made to project on the truck with infrared camera*

Amsterdam Roots festival

The Amsterdam Roots Festival invited We Sell Reality to host a stand at their festival. On this festival, they will sell their dolls and other items that they made. Examples are as carpets and a children's book that represents EU migration deals and tents that raises awareness on the situation of forced migrants living in small tents in refugee camps. During the festival, they can elaborate on their projects and share their stories with an audience. Furthermore, the festival gives them an opportunity to raise awareness on the right to work for undocumented migrants. The makers of the festival also came to do an interview with some of the members of We Sell Reality and their story will be published in their magazine.

*Tents in progress*

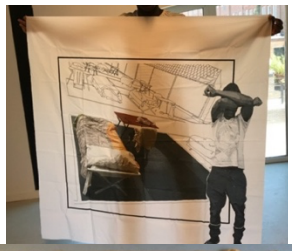
*Carpet EU*




*Migration Deals*

*Children's book on Migration Deals*

Banners




For several projects, We Sell Reality makes banners with and without text. These banners send strong messages to raise awareness on their situation and relate to different specific topics. One example is a project called *'No space to breath'* in collaboration with the New art institute in Rotterdam. This project focuses on their living situation in camps in which they share a large space. Their private space is marked with stripes on the floor and blankets that serves as walls.

Making a difference

During discussions on the counter-narrative that We Sell Reality wants to represent, the knowledge-holders reflect on the effect their projects have on their situation and to what extent it can actually make a difference. They feel like they are trying and might be able to make steps towards more awareness and inclusion, however they are realistic and understand it will take time and effort. Dukz (28) states that the art practices might not change their situation very soon, but when they continue to work hard, nothing is impossible. Momodou (22) says that is depends what they talk about. People can listen to their words and come to an understanding of the point of view of refugees by paying attention to the story behind their practices. Once they understand, they will get their support. Especially Bob (29) feels like some projects are too small and are not going to have value. To make a difference, they must reach a bigger audience. It has become apparent that the artist Iftu (44) plays a significant role in making them believe that the work they are doing is helpful. Sometimes they need some motivation and believe that their work can be powerful. Overall, they find it relevant enough to continue working on the projects.

## 6.3 Constructing a sense of belonging

### 6.3.1 An overall understanding of belonging

*During the in-depth interviews, the knowledge-holders attempted to define their meaning of belonging. Most of them did not immediately understand the concept. Different questions were asked to explore their sense of belonging together.*

Words for belonging

To get an impression of how the knowledge-holders define belonging, they were first asked to give another word to describe it. Aamira (31) says they have one word for it in Arabic: '*intima'*. She describes this feeling of belonging in relation to whatever the connection is. Most of the knowledge-holders like Asim (26) and Jamal (27) describe belonging in relation to feeling at home. This emotional state or attachment of feeling safe and at home in place confirms with Antonsich (2010) conceptual framework of '*place-belongingness'*. Nevertheless, the knowledge-holders find it hard to concretely define its meaning. Most of the knowledge-holders describe belonging as something that is an emotional, unconscious feeling. Aamira (31) says that it is something that exist but is not practical. It is something that you feel part of something, or people, or places which also connect to different factors related to a sense of *'place-belongingness'*. To illustrate:

*"You feel so much connected to this or that even, so you are so far. It's a feel of like, I belong to those people, I belong to that place, you know, I belong to this culture, I belong to this religion. I belong its not something that in* your *body but in your spirit, something emotional. Something that you just feel*

*it so much. And it also has an effect on you. You feel but at the same time its, it has an influence on you. I mean me sometimes when I see pictures of my city, I really cry, you know. Not because only I miss being, because I feel connected. This is the sense of belonging you know…" (Aamira, 31, interview)*

Remarkably, only Ras (54) immediately links belonging to the word '*inclusion'* related to the political dimension of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Antonsich, 2010). Ras (54) states that since you are not neglected, you are included. When he things of not being included or feeling like not being important, he does not feel good. But when he feels included, he feels like a human being, like he can be himself and important to other people. To further illustrate:

*"Yeah, belonging is… it is difficult to translate it. But when you think of a society of us and them, it is a bit difficult to explain it, but inclusiveness. And you know I believe that like you are free the moment you want to be free. Otherwise, if you think I am not free, you are not free. And I think it that way. I am included. Then, yeah, I feel like I am included." (Ras, 54, interview)*

Belonging to family and friends

According to the knowledge-holders, belonging is strongly related to family and friends which can be linked to the *relational factors* as part of the dimension of *place-belongingness* to make individuals feel like home in place (Antonsich, 2010). Bob (29) and Momodou (22) explicitly link it to being around people that they trust and share feelings and memories with. They can feel like home and like they belong through living and eating together with their friends and family. Most knowledge-holders thereby make the distinction between friends back home and friends in the Netherlands, which they feel a less strong connection with. For Dukz (28), family and friends form the only understanding of belonging. She states belonging is always connected to belonging to someone and feeling like someone belongs to you, like your family, friends, husband and children. In Ethiopia, she belongs to her family and friends and this is absent in the Netherlands. Therefore, she has no belongingness in the Netherlands and Amsterdam. She links this non-belonging to stress and loneliness.

Belonging in the home country

Most of the knowledge-holders describe belonging as an emotional feeling of belonging to their home country which connects to a sense of *'place-belongingness'* that can be linked both to emotional connections to particular places, and to *auto-biographical factors* referring to experiences and emotions that are imbedded in their history and memories connected to that place. Bob (29) and Aamira (31) mostly emphasise how they belong to their birth country Sudan even though they are critical on the current situation in the country. Aamira (31) states it is the place where she was born, her childhood and '*everything'*. Bob says the following:

*"Me I belong to Sudan you know. That is what I understand when you come to belonging…No, this is all what I have you know. Belong to Sudan. Emotional feeling. That even if I have the citizenship*

*here, I will have my own Sudanese spirit you know. Belonging to Sudan. I am feeling proud you know. It makes you feel proud." (Bob, 29, interview)*

This proud feeling is also reflected by Aamira (31) who states that she would get angry when people talk negative about Sudan. Most knowledge-holders appear to be closely connected to their home country. Until this day, Aamira (31) is connected to the country on a daily basis by calling her friends and family, by following the news, economics, politics, art, music and food. Also, Omar (23) is following the news of his home country on a daily basis. This understanding of belonging can also be explained by the concept of '*transnationalism'* that remarks how migrants build *familial, economic, cultural,* and *political ties* and *identities* in the host country, but also build ties across national borders and sustain existing ties in their home country through which they construct a sense of belonging on multiple geographical scales (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006).

Remarkably, Ras (54), who lives in Amsterdam for around twenty years without documents, immediately refers to Amsterdam when talking about belonging in comparison to Ethiopia. He states: "*I belong to Amsterdam; I can call this my home"*. This is the place where he lived the longest all his life. He knows the culture and has a social network. Besides, *cultural* and *relational factors*, this can also be linked to the length of residence that forms an important factor to generate a sense of place belongness (Antonsich, 2010).

### 6.3.2 Belonging in The Netherlands

Non-belonging through an excluding system

When exploring the feeling of belonging related to the Netherlands, all knowledge-holders express that they feel like they do not belong. They link this feeling to the Dutch migration system that excludes them. This dimension of belonging can be explained by *'the politics of belonging'* related to a feeling of being part of society (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Antonsich, 2006). All state that they are feeling excluded from opportunities by the system. Jamal (27) says even after six years he still cannot feel like home because he does not feel free to do whatever he wants. Bob (29) states it is needed to be welcomed by the state and allowed to stay to actually construct a sense of belonging. However, it could grow once he gets to know the Dutch people. To further exemplify feelings of non-belonging in the Netherlands:

*"Shortly, when I explain, I am not welcomed. Since I came here, I am knocking the door, and they don't give you welcome. So, I am not belonging to Nederland." (Dukz, 28, interview)*

Another example:

*"Sometimes it makes me really feel like why? Why don't want me here? Do they hate me? I am bad person? Why? Too much things to just stay here, yeah it does not feel belong." (Momodou, 22, interview)*

For some of the knowledge-holders like Asim (26) and Bob (29), the consequences of the excluding system make them want to leave the country because they feel they will never belong:

*"And in my things like Nederland is in the last years for me it's clear, I don't want to live there more. Because I try and yeah like people don't want to give asylum, and I don't know nothing in my case, I don't have problem anything. I feel I want to leave." (Asim, 26, interview)*

Adaptation

Despite from the Dutch migration system that is excluding undocumented migrants and makes the knowledge-holders feel like they do not belong in The Netherlands, they do to some extend describe a sense of belonging that is related to adaptation that can be linked to a sense of '*place-belongingness'* related to *cultural factors*. (Antonsich, 2010). Aamira (31) thinks these concepts are very much related. She states that she is adapting to the Dutch society by learning the language, having friends with different backgrounds, following the rules and being a good citizen. Other knowledge-holders like Momodou (22) and Hafez (25) follow a Dutch language course a couple of days a week which makes them feel like they are integrating more into the Dutch society.

Besides, topics related to the Dutch culture for example about LGBTQ, marriage and feminism start the conversation among the knowledge-holders which stimulate culture exchange and integration. These discussions do to some extend change the mindset of the knowledge-holders and makes them fit into the Dutch society. However, Aamira (31) states that even though she loves The Netherlands, she does not need to belong and makes the distinction between belonging and adaptation. In her opinion, understanding the culture and being able to live in the society and fitting in, is not deeply connected to emotional feelings of belonging that she related to Sudan. This understanding shed light on the difference between adaptation and belonging which is related to a deeply rooted emotional feeling (Antonsich, 2010).

Temporality, uncertainty and priorities

When exploring a sense of belonging in relation to the Netherlands, Bob (29) and Aamira (31) say it is a question for the future as they currently have different priorities. Besides, Asim (26) is certain that he is going to leave the Netherlands because he sees no future. Their situation makes it difficult to plan a future in the place they currently live. The knowledge-holders, except for Ras (54), Asim (26) and Bob (29) are focused on their asylum case and residence permit in The Netherlands. Consequently, the way they structure their life is focused on living from day to day and on activities that are possible within their rights. To exemplify, Bob (29) focuses on a self-study of developing websites while this is not something he wants to do in the future. He feels like he must go back to Africa to start a business. Dukz (28) is doing a study without knowing what she will do with it in the future, it is something to keep her busy. Also, Aamira (31) is following a study. She has a master's degree in Sudan but is not able to practice it in The Netherlands without a residence permit. Because of their temporality, uncertainty and

priorities in the Netherlands, it is difficult to construct a sense of belonging in the Dutch society. As stated by Antonsich (2010) the *legal factors* referring to components that produce security related to someone's legal status such as citizenship and a resident permit, form a factor that is especially relevant in the construction of belonging of undocumented migrants (Antonsich, 2010).

### 6.3.3 Belonging in the city

Tolerance and inclusion

When talking about the feeling of belonging in Amsterdam, the reactions of the knowledge-holders are different in comparison to feelings of belonging in The Netherlands. Especially Ras (54) argues that Amsterdam is his home and that he belongs in the city. This is because he has been her most of his life which presents that length of residency is an important factor to construct a sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010). Thereby, Ras (54) states that he knows every part of Amsterdam and sometimes even guide Dutch people around to show the city. The knowledge-holders enjoy the parks and different spaces around the city to hang out and work out. They express to feel safe both in the city and their neighbourhood. Besides, they especially like the De Bijlmer. Dukz (28) and Aamira (31) say it feels like little Africa because many residents originate from African countries, they find this nice and it makes them feel included. Most of them express that they find Amsterdam a beautiful city and they would like to stay.

Moreover, most of the knowledge-holders state that Amsterdam is open minded and more tolerant towards refugees, as discussed in section (5.1.3). Aamira (31) does not feel weird or strange in the city because she meets people all over the world and Amsterdam is very diverse. To further illustrate:

*"When I come to Amsterdam, I immediately feel safe. It's really, I immediately breath like ah this is my city. And if I go to Assen, I mean I can't breathe because of the people around you that gives you this toxic look or toxic energy, you know. Here people are different, you see black, Chinese, Asian, you see America, Dutch. People are just you know; they don't even look to each other. Everybody is so busy you know. So, you feel more relaxed you feel more comfortable." (Aamira, 31, interview)*

Other knowledge-holders like Momodou (22), Dukz (28) and Ras (54) agree to this and state that Amsterdam is multicultural. The possibilities of communicating through international languages is also an important reason for Jamal (27) to stay in Amsterdam. Ras (54) also says that people approach you like their own. Dukz (28) says Amsterdam is different than the Netherlands because she feels at home and socialized. Asim (26) also says he feels like Amsterdam is his home and Bob (29) says he has a good feeling about the city. To Further illustrate his sense of inclusion in the city:

*"I am neglected excluded by the system, but not by the public. The public is still friendly with me. The politics don't like me, I know that. And I don't care about it to." (Ras, 54, interview)*

Remarkably, while the feeling of belonging of the knowledge-holders related to the Netherlands can be linked to the political dimension of being excluded through the system, their perspective on belonging in the city demonstrates that because of its tolerance and acceptance, they feel less like 'the other' and more included in society on a city level. Therefore, they can construct a sense of belonging. This result confirms with alternative theoretical approaches towards constructions of citizenship. By paying attention to the local, city level integration and everyday life experiences, a sense of *'urban citizenship'* could arise through which a sense of belonging on a local level can be constructed against their exclusion on a state level (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Rosbrook-Thompson, 2014; Schiller & Çağla 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

## 6.4 We Sell Reality and belonging

### 6.4.1 Place-belongingness

An activity to stay busy

Often a reason to join We Sell Reality is that the knowledge-holders are able to do something while they are waiting during their asylum procedure. All state that being outside of the house is good for their mental health. Ras (54) argues that otherwise, they would be scattered all over the city doing nothing. He states that some people sleep for ten to twenty hours a day. Omar (23) states that for two months he did not move around in the city. He was very enthusiastic when the artist Iftu (44) asked him to join We Sell Reality. Furthermore, Jamal (27) states that he stayed to long alone in his life and does not like that. Therefore, the knowledge-holders really like to be in the group. To further illustrate:

*"We have nothing to do. And which makes people you know… our mental health is in question. We are sensitive people. And if you add something on this sensitiveness, people live without income, without house without insurance, without everything. And sitting and thinking all the time about it… you can image how terrible it is. I like whether I am paid or not, I like to keep myself busy. Because you forget your headaches. That is the best medicine you know. You do something and you forget your problems. Whether you are paid or not. Even if I get not paid, I can continue coming here. I tell you." (Ras, 54, interview)*

A safe space, like home

Another reason for the knowledge-holders to be involved in We Sell Reality, that becomes clear mostly from participating in the workshops, is the possibility to share general and very personal stories with the others that support their mental health. The group provides a safe space to share personal situations, experiences, memories, worries but also funny stories. Aamira (31) says that they talk about all kinds of different topics. To exemplify, they share experiences of being in the AZC. Omar (23) stresses that he

feels sad he cannot cook himself in the camp and Hafez (25) shares his worries of the night shelter being closed. In their everyday life, the knowledge-holders share very similar experiences, and totally different ones.

Thereby, the art practices in itself play a significant role in supporting mental health for the knowledge-holders by providing the opportunity to share their experiences. Exemplifying, during the infrared camera project, the knowledge-holders were laughing and having fun while acting in front of the camera and directing others what to do. Their ideas were based on their own experiences of hiding in a truck on their way to the UK. This illustrates that they share lightness and joy together despite the deeper layer of carrying heavy stories with them that sometimes come to the surface. Besides, the knowledge-holders actually enjoy working on the art pieces. Exemplifying, Momodou (22) states that while he is doing it, he can be himself and forget about all his problems. He thinks about nothing else and is just busy and focused. Ras (54) says that every piece of art makes him happy.

Furthermore, during the workshops and brainstorm sessions it has become clear that the house of the artist Iftu (44) feels like home for the knowledge-holders. An important example that comes up multiple times is the kitchen table of the artist where they feel very comfortable. It has thereby also become clear that the artist forms an important part of the group. Momodou (22) says that the artist is part of the collective, that she cares a lot about the knowledge-holders. He can go to her house whenever he wants. Especially because Momodou (22) experiences that some people in his surroundings would not invite him into their house, he feels very welcomed by the artist. During the brainstorm session, the artist clearly describes how this safe space if related to creating a sense of belonging:

*"… What I try to do is I try to create a safe space for people to come and feel at home. Feel that they are welcome, you know. And where they can express themselves. Yes, and like I think We Sell Reality is there to fight the unjust asylum system. Yeah. And so, it is like it has this double function of activism like art activism and at the same time like also to just like create kind of a more therapeutic level where you find a place. You say also like I feel healthier. This is what I think. It is coming together, making things, talking, this endless kitchen conversations. I think it helps you to feel healthier, to feel more human. And I enjoy very much. Because these kitchen conversations are fantastic!" (Iftu, 44, brainstorm session)*

The creation of a safe space for the undocumented migrants through We Sell Reality relates to Stickley's (2010) analyses that community engagement through art practices should be promoted as it creates a safe space that might not completely resolve people's problems but helps to recover.

Socialization

Another important motivation is to socialize, get to know people, become friends and to work together as a collective. This social dimension can be linked to the construction of an art community as part of the dimension of '*place-belongingness'* (Antonsich, 2010; Beauregard, et, al. 2020; Damery & Mescoli,

2019). The importance of socialization through We Sell Reality becomes clear as the knowledge-holders are not only meeting to make art, but also meet outside working hours. They were doing Ramadan and iftar together and celebrated Eid Mubarak (the end of the Ramadan). Besides, the knowledge-holders organized a barbeque in the park.

Following these examples, the knowledge-holders say that they feel like they belong to the group. Ras (54) states that by gathering and working together, We Sell Reality provides a good opportunity to create belongingness. He feels like he belongs because of his participation in it. Bob (29) also says that he belongs to the group because most of them need help and together with those people something good can happen. He also mentions that as he meets other Sudanese, it makes him feel more confident. Aamira (31) says that as she sees the guys from the group almost every day, it gives her the feeling it are 'her' people. Remarkably, Asim (26) says that he is planning to leave the Netherlands, but the only thing that keeps him here is We Sell Reality. He can be himself and does not have to be different. He says We Sell Reality is his home. To further exemplify:

*"Before I was not having this bubble around me, but now I do. I mean, I know people but not that much. So, I was kind of isolating myself. But now within the group, we are more integrating with each other and more socializing. Yeah, so it also gives you… access more to the community." (Aamira, 31, interview).*

Only Jamal (27) mentions that he does not feel very relaxed in the group and would not state that he belongs. Also, Dukz (28) does not feels she belongs to the group, but she feels it is because she just joined recently, and she expects the feeling to grow as she will spend more time together with the group.

Flexibility

An interesting finding is that all knowledge-holders express how much they like the flexibility when working with We Sell Reality. Exemplifying, Bob (29) says he likes it that they do not have work hard while working on the dolls. Aamira (31) says the artist is very flexible, not pushy and she feels all the work is voluntarily. Momodou (22) also experiences agency in deciding what work he wants to do. To further illustrate:

*"Yeah, I can be myself. From there, it is not somebody is going to tell me okay, you have to do this, you need to do this. I can also decide, okay I do this." (Momodou, 22, interview)*

This flexibility makes the knowledge-holders like they can be themselves and not feel pressure through which they feel comfortable and welcomed.

### 6.4.2 Political belonging

Fighting for human rights

Another motivation is the political purpose of their art practices to create a counter-narrative and feel more included in the Dutch Society that can be related to '*the politics of belonging'* through creative art practices as discussed by Lenette (2019). Asim (26) says that an important reason for him to join, is not necessarily that they are learning how to make creative things, but he is mostly interested in the meaning behind it. Thereby, Bob (29) and Jamal (27) agree that they enjoy making something for the public. Through their practices, they can send a message to people in the Dutch society which reflects how they are fighting for their human rights. Ras (54) states that the projects reflect his own refugee problems and therefore he feels like he is represented in society through his involvement in the group. Momodou (22) also says that all members of the collective are fighting for the same thing which makes him want to be a part of the group. Besides, Aamira (31) states that she is encouraged through We Sell Reality to change the wrong image people in the Dutch society have of undocumented migrants. She appreciates that the collective makes an effort to change their situation.

Furthermore, Dukz (28) explicitly says that through their art practices, the audience could really feel their stories and emotionally connect. Momodou (22) mentions that he some's get touched by his own work as it really taps into deep-rooted emotions and experiences. They thereby provide a great opportunity for their audience to better understand their marginalized position in society. This confirms to the analyses of Lenette (2019) and O'Neill and Hubbard, (2010) who remark that a critical reflection through creative art methods contribute to new forms of knowledge and a deeper understanding of the everyday life experiences of migrants.

It has become clear from this study that We Sell Reality offers a platform of opportunities for undocumented migrants to represent themselves as a collective and speak back to exclusionary discourses. As already recognized by (May, 2013 in Damery & Mescoli 2019), they are given the opportunity to seek recognition through their art practices while acting in a "socially significant way" regardless of their legal status, which appears to form a key element of belonging. It must thereby be stressed that the political message that is communicated through We Sell Reality is a source of hope of inclusion for the undocumented migrants. Jamal (27) states that before he was part of We Sell Reality he felt like he had no opportunity because of the system, but now he feels like some doors are opening and things are changing. Also, Asim (26) states that without We Sell Reality there would be no chance anymore and he would just leave.

Gaining knowledge

Another motivation that appeared to be relevant, is to gain knowledge on migration deals and thereby becoming more politically involved. Dukz (28) states that picking up knowledge on migration deals is really important. It helps her to be aware of her own situation in the Dutch society and how she can fight

for her rights. Aamira (31) and Ras (54) also mention that the access to knowledge is very important for her. Besides, during the workshops the artist is often giving information to the members on how to deal with their asylum case. Although this is not often legal knowledge, the knowledge-holders find a great support by the group to learn about the migration system and where to go for specific information or recourses.

Students of the arts

During conversations about motivations to join We Sell Reality, questions were asked about their interests in the art practices in itself. Interestingly, it can be concluded that most knowledge-holders had no interest in art before they joined the collective. Yet, because their conditions now are different, they do find it an interesting field to explore and find it great fun. However, most knowledge-holders do not consider themselves creative. Only Ras (54) states he is creative by nature. Besides, the extent to which they describe themselves as artist is varying. Aamira (31) and Dukz (28) refer to themselves more like a student of arts. They realise art is not an easy field and they are learning step by step. Aamira (31) appreciates that through We Sell Reality, she gained knowledge on practical methods like suing. Both Ras (54) and Bob (29) argue that art is something inside people that everybody has. Asim (26) states that as he is making art now, he feels like he is an artist.

Even though not all knowledge-holders consider themselves to be an artist and good in what they are doing, they all share an interest in exploring different art practices. Some want to explore the conceptual thinking of the projects while others are trying out practical tools like drawing, suing and screen-printing techniques. Remarkably, within the current formation of the group, only Momodou (22) wants to work on an artistic career and wishes to one day become a professional artist:

*"An example like something I want to do for now I am like yeah. I want to do art. So, I am working on it with We Sell Reality. I want to apply in Rietveld Academy. Maybe in December we will see." (Momodou, 22, interview)*

By exploring the personality and abilities of the knowledge-holders beyond their identity as an undocumented migrant by tapping into their identification as a student of the arts, a positive value to their identity is acknowledged. This identity counters the dominant exclusionary discourses and empowers the undocumented migrants. The importance of a sense of identity and feeling valuable in relation to the construction of belonging relate to the analyses of Stickly (2010) on creative identities and the intersectionality of once's identity in '*the politics of belonging'* by Yuval-Davis (2006).

Encouraging personal development

Another interesting finding of this study came to light during the workshops. It has become apparent that the artist Iftu (44) pays attention to discovering the potentials and strengths of the knowledge-holders and encourages them to further develop their skills. All knowledge-holders hold specific

qualities. Some are better at doing research and interested in political topics while others are really interest in exploring different art techniques. What they have in common is that they are all keen to learn new skills and work collaboratively on the projects. The artist asks the knowledge-holders to do specific tasks and in doing so, they all take their part in the project while further developing what they are good at. Exemplifying, Bob (29) learned himself computer programming skills through videos. He presented his ideas voluntarily in the group and it was proposed by the artist to make a website for We Sell Reality. Another example is that the artist saw Momodou's (22) great potential in doing art. Momodou (22) says that she mentioned he is very good with his hands. Currently, she is connecting him with artists to learn different skills and build on a professional portfolio to apply for an art academy. Additionally, he can apply for a study visa in The Netherlands. Ras (54) says that the artist often says he is quite philosophical and Dukz (28) states that the artist provides the opportunity to practice her intelligence. To further exemplify:

*"For me in Nederland it is for the first time to feel like oh I am a person that people can see. That I am able to do something and therefore I could do it. Because I have the skills or potential that I can use it. Because we are all like different people from different backgrounds and also skills… * artist 1 and 2* also, they know how like different things we are good at and they give us the change to like to bring it out to do it." (Aamira, 31, brainstorm session)*

This finding present how the artist sees the potential of the undocumented migrants and encourages to bring out the best in themselves whereby attention is paid to the intersectionality of their identity (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This demonstrate again that through We Sell Reality, the identity of the knowledge-holders become described according to their potential and ambitions instead of negative labels communicated through dominant exclusionary discourses. Thereby, within the collective, they are being seen as human beings with potential to grow and become included in the host society.

Access and opportunities

A remarkable finding through this study is that being part of We Sell Reality gives the knowledge-holders access to organisations and institutions in Amsterdam and provides a network to connect with that could help to further develop their skills. Through their involvement in We Sell Reality and the collaboration with several museums in The Netherlands, they get invited to powerful institutions in the city through which the knowledge-holders feel like they are being seen, recognized and important. They are invited to a museum not as a visitor but as an artist and being asked to work on projects together with big names in the art world. The access through We Sell Reality gives them the opportunity to do something and feel like they belong and included in the Dutch society. Aamira (31) says she has never been to Amsterdam museum before. She states that she would not have this access to the community if We Sell Reality did not exist. To further illustrate this feeling of inclusion:

*"Yeah, I feel like I belong to them. Even because last time we went museum, Amsterdam museum. Walk and things. Then I have some pictures, I show some other friends. They are like; wow you go to Amsterdam museum?! Yeah like, wow, I don't go there, you go there how? Then this is a big thing also. They put me part the, part of Dutch society. Like I am belonging to here, they are trying to. If I am with them, I feel like they try to put me like I belong to Nederland. To take me wherever people are." (Momodou, 22, interview)*

It could also be stated that through their access to institutions in the city, the undocumented migrants develop social relations and a professional network in the city through which they could feel more at home in the city. A professional network could thereby also contribute to a sense of '*place-belongingness'*.

# 7. Conclusion

To formulate an answer on the research question of this thesis, the study was supported by four sub-questions. In this chapter, the research questions will be answered, and the conclusions of this study will be stated.

*Firstly, this research provides insights on experiences of dominant exclusionary discourses from the perspective of undocumented migrants.*
It can be concluded that they feel excluded from the host society based on a hidden political agenda of discouragement of migration. This reflection confirms the theoretical analyses on '*the politicization of migration'* (Castles and colleagues, 2014). The exclusion of '*undesirable foreigners* sheds light on the duality of freedom of movement in our modern society (Bauman, 1996). Undocumented migrants can be characterized as the '*vagabonds'* of society who are pushed to migrate by a powerful force while at no place of arrival, they feel welcomed. Thereby, stigmatizing labels must be stressed as they are used by politicians to justify and reinforce their exclusion. Furthermore, insights are provided on the dehumanizing effects of the geopolitical discourse on the everyday life of undocumented migrants that can be characterized by frustration and sometimes even traumatic experiences. Through exclusionary institutions and regulations reflected in the geopolitical discourse, they lose hope to one day integrate into the host society. It thereby increases their feelings of non-belonging that operates even beyond their legal recognition of citizenship within the state.

Thereby, through reflections of undocumented migrants on Dutch media discourses such as television, newspapers, and online sources on forced and undocumented migration, the fragmented presentation of their situation in the host society comes to light. The study presents insides on how the lack of recognition of their situation and humanized representation of undocumented migrants in the news leads to the persistence of their exclusion. When undocumented migrants do however get

mentioned in the news, they are focussing on negative and fragmented incidents. This negative image strengthens the rhetoric of right-wing politicians and reinforces stigmatizing labels that furthermore justify their exclusion (O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010). The study thereby shows how the absence and fragmentation of undocumented migrants in media contribute to feelings of non-existence and non-belonging within the host society.

Additionally, reflections of undocumented migrants on experiences of dominant discourses in their everyday life demonstrate how exclusionary discourses of the geopolitics and media are reinforced. They experience stigmatizing labels being forced upon them that reflect the lack of knowledge among Dutch citizens of their existence and situation. Besides, it must be stressed that they experience racist incidents in their everyday life. This is in line with the study by Delanty and colleagues (2008, p.243) that demonstrates how hostile and exclusionary practices are strongly built around concepts of race. These experiences, through which they are treated as the *'other',* contribute to their construction of a sense of non-belonging in the host society. Nevertheless, the social network of undocumented migrants could to some extend diminish experiences of exclusion in everyday life. Besides, experiences of dominant discourses can differ between cities in comparison to smaller towns and villages. Experiences of tolerance and diversity in the city go along with fewer experiences of being stigmatized and excluded which makes it more accessible to construct a sense of belonging in cities.

By shedding light on the narratives of undocumented migrants, this study provides insights into the remarkable impact of exclusionary discourses on the construction of one's own identity. Through the discourses, the undocumented migrants become aware of their contested and excluded position within the host society. They face difficulties in coping with the dehumanizing and stigmatizing labels being ascribed to and forced upon their identity. It must thereby be stressed that through continuously being treated as *'less'* and *'the other'*, the identity of undocumented migrants transforms. This study presents the impact on their confidence, ambitions, and hopes for the future that are reflected in the way they become to describe themselves. It is thereby illustrated how the theoretical analyses of Yuval-Davis (2006) on '*the politics of belonging'* unfold in the dynamic of identifying the self and being identified by others that is shaped by relations of power within an exclusionary society.

*Secondly, this research shed light on the construction of a counter-narrative of undocumented migrants against dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migrations through art practices.*

Despite the transformation of the self-identity and decrease in self-esteem through dominant exclusionary discourses, a focus on the intersectionality of one's identity could strengthen a positive perception of the self and operate as a form of resistance towards the ascribed identity. By focusing on the strengths, qualities, and ambitions of undocumented migrants as a whole human being contributes to their humanization and empowerment that counters stigmatizing and exclusionary labels. This

construction of the self-identity by attributing positive qualities accentuates the relevance to avoid concentrating on one dimension in narrating the self (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

While intersectionality plays a significant role in the construction of the self-identity, the study illustrates how in the representation of undocumented migrants as a counter-narrative, their identity as an undocumented migrant plays a significant role. In order to counter dominant discourses and feel more recognized in terms of rights and freedom within the host society, the undocumented migrants aim to humanize and equalize their contested position in society. Besides, they focus on raising awareness among Dutch citizens on their situation as an undocumented migrant. This study thereby elucidates the political strategy to identify themselves specifically as an undocumented migrant in order to state specific needs through which their identity becomes politicized in a call for justice (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Moreover, marginalized groups in society can implement creative art practices as a strategy to legitimize their visibility within the host society without citizenship rights. Through this, the boundaries between illegality and legality become blurred. A continuous play between visibility and vulnerability must thereby be taken into account. Confirming with previous studies on visibility through performative art practices, this study demonstrates how undocumented migrants can raise their voices and avail themselves through alternative strategies to become politically involved (Damery & Mescoli, 2019; Mensink, 2020; Schreiber, 2018). Furthermore, their creative counter-narrative becomes strongly communicated in forms that transcend language and emotionally speaks to the audience. This study illustrates how art practices communicate new and alternative forms of knowledge that contributes to awareness, understanding, and humanization of their contested position within society (Lenette, 2019; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

*Thirdly, empirical insights on the construction of a sense of belonging of undocumented migrants are provided that contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the theoretical concept of belonging.*
The results are in line with the analyses of Antonsich (2010) in stating that a sense of belonging constitutes in diverse forms and shapes and is influenced by several factors. Within this study, both dimensions on a place and political dimension unfold depending on the individual's specific situational context and emotional attachment to specific factors. Thereby the study accentuates the relevance to research a sense of belonging on both dimensions that constitute each other as outlined by Antonsich (2010).

In their reflections on a personal sense of '*place-belongingness'*, undocumented migrants describe an abstract, emotional sense of belongingness related to feeling at home, and safe in place. The home country forms a significant place of belonging. They emotionally stay closely connected to their country of origin. Thereby, relational factors regarding family and friends are important indicators for a sense of belonging of undocumented migrants. Their personal relationships are not bound to specific places and can transcend borders of nations through which a sense of home away from their current place of residency can be constructed. Another result from the study confirms that the extent to which

undocumented migrants feel connected to their current living place also strongly depends on their length of residency (Antonsich, 2010). This indicates that a sense of belonging in the host country can develop over time. These results provide interesting insights to the academic debate on '*transnationalism'* in relation to migrants constructing a sense of belonging in the home or the host country (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006).

The political sense of belonging of undocumented migrants can be understood through the duality of inclusion against non-belonging in society while being aware of their own position within that society (Antonsich, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Excluding dominant discourses and migration systems can lead to the construction of a sense of non-belonging in The Netherlands. Nevertheless, cultural factors related to adaptation and integration into the Dutch culture and society can increase a sense of '*place-belongingness',* despite being neglected and legally excluded by the state. However, a sense of belonging as a feeling of adaptation cannot entirely be compared to emotional attachments of 'home' towards the country of origin. Besides, the uncertainty and temporality of undocumented migrants limit the extent to which they construct a sense of belonging in place and withhold themselves from building strong relationships. The study thereby provides insights on the academic debate on citizenship in relation to the state by presenting the effect of the legal system on the possibilities to construct a sense of belonging in the host society. It shows that citizenship status continues to be of relevance (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Remarkably, the study provides interesting insights into the construction of belonging on a city level. The results demonstrate how undocumented migrants experience The Netherlands as an excluding system while Amsterdam as a city is experienced as a place of inclusion. The multiculturality, tolerance, and everyday life practices of undocumented migrants shed light on how city can be a place of belonging. The study thereby provides empirical insides on an emotional and informal sense of *'urban citizenship'* of undocumented migrants holding no legal status through which a sense of belonging can be constructed (Askins, 2016; Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006; Rosbrook-Thompson, 2014; Schiller & Çağla 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

*Fourthly, by illustrating the motivations of undocumented migrants to be involved in an art collective, this study sheds light on the relevance of art practices to construct a sense of place- and political belongingness in an exclusionary society.*

First of all, results on the construction of '*place-belongingness'* through involvement in an art collective sheds light on the possibility to create work. The economical factor reflects the basic needs of human beings to take care of themselves and afford to participate in everyday life activities to construct a sense of belonging (Antonsich, 2010). Besides, the relevance of having an activity to feel productive is presented. This is especially relevant for undocumented migrants as they are constantly waiting during their asylum procedure. Having something to do in the place they currently live present the importance of everyday life activities to construct a sense of belonging in place. Furthermore, the relevance of

providing support for mental health and a safe space is demonstrated through participation in the group and therapeutic art practices that make vulnerable individuals feel comfortable and supported. Moreover, the importance of relational factors within a collective through socialization must be emphasized in constructing a sense of home and belonging. Providing a social network could contribute to feeling a sense of belonging in place. Lastly, the importance of flexibility during the art practices is demonstrated that makes vulnerable groups feel comfortable and themselves through which a sense of home can be constructed.

The construction of a sense of political belonging through making art sheds light on how art practices can operate as a platform through which vulnerable and contested groups in society can represent themselves as a collective and state their rights. By creating the opportunity to send a political message through art and connecting with others, a sense of being visible and recognized in society is realised. The hope this generates for undocumented migrants to become included in society must not be underestimated. Besides, gaining knowledge in order to become more politically involved motivates to be involved in an art collective. Furthermore, the artist has an important role in empowering the position of marginalized groups in society. Focusing on their personal development within the collective empowers vulnerable groups. Moreover, an art collective creates opportunities for invisible and marginalized groups in society to become more involved in the city. The study presents the relevance of being invited and involved in creative institutions and museums within the exclusionary host society because it consequences in feeling recognized and included in the city while being excluded on a state level. Through their involvement in the art collective, undocumented migrants are invited to share their story with an audience through which they become aware that others are interested in hearing their story. This opens up possibilities for inclusion in the future.

*To summarize, this case thesis represents how the interplay between the dimensions of 'place-belongingness' and 'the politics of belonging' unfold among undocumented migrants within an exclusionary host society.*

By investigating the reflections and experiences of undocumented migrants on dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration, this study sheds light on an institutionalized geopolitical system of The Netherlands that functions to exclude '*undesirable foreigners'*. On this macro-level analyses of society, regulations, and restrictions by the state are presented that serve to exclude non-citizens. It is thereby stressed that the relationship between citizenship and the state continues to be of importance to construct a sense of being recognized and included in a nation. Consequently, undocumented migrants internalize that a sense of political inclusion in The Netherlands without a citizenship status is hard to construct. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that dominant exclusionary discourses communicated through politics and the media are reinforced in the everyday life of undocumented migrants. The geopolitical migration system of The Netherlands thereby communicates through different levels of society that legal status of citizenship does not guarantee

inclusion into the host society. Undocumented migrants experience exclusion through stigmatizing labels and practices that emphasize their differences and subordinate position within society. It must therefore be stressed that they are confronted with being the outsider on a daily basis. Concluding from this research, it can be stated that a political sense of non-belonging of undocumented migrants can be signalized through the analyses of exclusionary discourses on a system level of the host society.

On the other hand, by focusing on a micro, city-level of analyses where the everyday life activities and experiences of undocumented migrants come to light, a sense of inclusion and '*place-belongingness'* within the exclusionary host society can be signalized. Firstly, the tolerance, diversity, and acceptance of the city residents towards foreigners, decreases feelings among undocumented migrants of being '*the other'*. This opens opportunities to feel more included in the city. Secondly, through a social network in place, undocumented migrants are recognized and appreciated as human beings against the dehumanizing dominant discourses. Consequently, a comfortable feeling of being home and belonging in the city can be constructed. Thus, even though undocumented migrants feel excluded in the host society on a system level and the nation as a whole, the interactions and practices in their everyday life present a sense of being home and included in the city. This study thereby suggests that a sense of emotional, informal, urban citizenship can be realized without a legal citizenship status and while being legally and institutionally excluded by the state.

Moreover, this study demonstrates the relevance of the art collective in constructing a sense of place- and political belongingness among undocumented migrants within an exclusionary host society. Firstly, within the collective, the situation of undocumented migrants is recognized, and their personality is appreciated. Through these inclusionary practices, they feel humanized and like themselves. The established social and supportive community makes undocumented migrants more comfortable and like home in place. Through their emotional attachments to the collective, a sense of *'place-belongingness'* within the collective can be constructed. Secondly, the collective contributes to the empowerment of undocumented migrants within the exclusionary society by stimulating their ambitions and personal development. Besides, they are provided access to city-based cultural institutions and museums to share their story and seek recognition. Through their involvement in these institutions, undocumented migrants are not only recognized by the institutions in itself but also become more visible in the city. Through their creative art practices represented by inclusive city-based institutions, possibilities arise to create awareness in society from a bottom-up approach. From this platform, undocumented migrants can influence the exclusionary system level of the host society. It can therefore be concluded that the art collective opens possibilities for undocumented migrants to implement creative art practices of presenting a counter-narrative as a political strategy of belonging within an exclusionary host society.

# 8. Discussion and recommendations

This research demonstrated how forced and undocumented migrants involved in the art collective We Sell Reality construct a sense of place- and political belongingness within an exclusionary society through making art as a political strategy of constructing a counter-narrative. These narratives raise awareness of the powerful forces that shape their everyday life. Thereby, new and alternative critical knowledge is provided on experiences of undocumented migrants as a contested and rather invisible group in society. This knowledge could contribute to recognizing and understanding their world view and increasing national hospitality towards forced and undocumented migrants. Furthermore, it is suggested that nations' geopolitical institutions explore alternative methods to regulate the inevitable flow of migration and humanize the asylum procedure of undocumented migrants. Policymakers working with refugees could implement regulations with a positive impact on the everyday lives of undocumented migrants. Recognizing and improving their circumstances of living in a nation without citizenship rights, could contribute to their construction of a sense of belonging in the host society.

Furthermore, the empirical knowledge on the construction of *'place-belongingness'* of undocumented migrants in the city, provides interesting insights that could be implemented on a city level of policy making. By demonstrating the importance of everyday life practices and being part of a collective to construct a sense of belonging and feeling at home in the city, it could encourage to implement policies with a focus on community building on a local level. Thereby, by demonstrating the importance of creative institutions and museums, it is recommended that cities invest in its city-based cultural institutions and support social innovations that constitute through social platforms in the city. Through these platforms, contested and invisible groups in the city can be united and empowered to collectively state their rights. The city plays a key role in promoting their visibility and inclusion. This bottom-up approach has the potential to be a powerful method for making structural changes on a system level to make societies more inclusive.

Nevertheless, there are shortcomings of this study that must be considered. Firstly, although it can be argued that the art collective We Sell Reality aims to represent a larger community of undocumented migrants in society, the extent to which the research findings can be generalized and applied for a wider population of forced and undocumented migrants should be taken into consideration. Therefore, more empirical research should focus on the flipside, by investigating the personal reflections and experiences of undocumented within exclusionary societies. This could attribute to a deeper understanding of, on the one hand, the impact of dominant exclusionary discourses on the everyday life of undocumented migrants as a contested and marginalized group in society, and on the other hand, on their agency in presenting a counter-narrative to construct a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the concept of belonging remains a subjective, and rather abstract feeling that is understudied. How the concept of belonging unfolds depend on individual

and contextual circumstances. Besides, as it is emotionally constructed, it continues to be a difficult concept to theorize. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies further investigate the concept of belonging in depth and dive into the different dimensions and factors that unfold in different contexts, and among different individuals and groups in society.

Additionally, more research on the construction of belonging is especially necessary among contested and invisible groups in society. This research presents that undocumented migrants simultaneously construct a sense of inclusion and exclusion on different dimensions and societal levels. Regarding undocumented migrants, more research is needed on the construction of belonging without a legal status. The impact of their specific situational context of non-citizenship, temporality and uncertainties in developing relationships with others and places through which a sense of '*place-belongingness'* can be constructed should be further investigated.

Lastly, it is stated that creative art practices constitute a powerful method to construct a sense of political belonging by creating awareness and inducing the audience to critically reflect on their perception on the world. However, the actual impact remains unknown. It is therefore crucial that future studies investigate the impact of creative art practices on the mindset of the audience of the host society and how the dominant discourses in society can be transformed by the representation of a creative counter-narrative.

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# 10. Appendix

## 10.1 Operationalization scheme

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Research Question<br>How do the art practices of undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality play a role in their construction of a sense of place- and political belongingness within an exclusionary society?</td></tr>
<tr><td>CONCEPTS</td><td>DIMENSIONS</td><td>INDICATORS</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration<br><br>Undocumented migrants' reflections and experiences of dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration in the host society</td><td>The geopolitical discourse</td><td>Political discourse<br>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on Dutch dominant political perspectives and attitudes towards forced and undocumented migration.<br><br>Migration policies<br>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on perspectives of Dutch migration policies and their political agenda. Including their perspectives on Politicization of migration.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dehumanization of forced migration</td><td>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how they are being treated by individuals and institutions throughout the migration process</td></tr>
<tr><td>Societal exclusionary discourses reflected in the media and in their everyday life<br><br>Focus on reflections and experiences of these discourses without immediately and directly refer to the discourses as outlined in the theoretical framework</td><td>Securitarian discourse<br>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how they are being portrayed through the Dutch media such as tv and newspapers from a securitarian discourse.<br>Besides, how this discourse is reflected and experienced in their everyday life in the host society.<br><br>Economic discourse<br>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how they are being portrayed through the Dutch media such as tv and newspapers from an economic discourse.<br>Besides, how this discourse is reflected and experienced in their everyday life in the host society.<br><br>Cultural discourse<br>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how they are being portrayed through the Dutch media such as tv and newspapers from a cultural discourse.<br>Besides, how this discourse is reflected and experienced in their everyday life in the host society.<br><br>Victimization discourse<br>Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how they are being portrayed through the Dutch media such as tv and newspapers from a victimization discourse.</td></tr>
</table>

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Besides, how this discourse is reflected and experienced in their everyday life in the host society.<br><br>*Being open to the possibility of experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on other media and societal exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migrants* |
| | Dominant perspectives on citizenship | Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how the Dutch society approaches the concept of citizenship.<br>*What is citizenship according to the host society?* |
| | The deportation regime | Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on how the Dutch system reacts towards undocumented migrants being denied citizenship in the country.<br>*What happens when you are denied citizenship?* |
| **Construction of identity and belonging** | Identity formation | Experiences and perspectives of undocumented migrants on their ascribed identity<br><br>Construction of their own identity while considering the intersectionality of one's identity |
| | *'Place-belongingness'* | *Auto-biographical factors*<br>Personal experiences and emotions that are imbedded in their history and memories. These experiences influence in which specific places one feels at home.<br><br>*Relational factors*<br>Personal relationships. These include both dense social ties of relations with friends and family as well as weak ties.<br><br>*Cultural factors*<br>Language, cultural expressions, traditions, habits, religion, cultural practices, food production and consumption that include semiotic codes, signs and gestures.<br><br>*Economic Factors*<br>Economic embeddedness that can rise a feeling of belonging through providing safe and stable material economic conditions.<br><br>*Legal Factors*<br>Security related to someone's legal status such as citizenship status and a resident permit.<br><br>*Length of Residency*<br>How long do they live in The Netherlands, Amsterdam? |
| | *'The politics of belonging'* | *Awareness of the ascribed identity forced upon them and their position within society*<br><br>*Construction of a counter-narrative,*<br>*The political representation of the self-identity* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | *Stating their rights* |
| | Alternative approaches towards citizenship and belonging | Their personal understanding of citizenship through everyday life practices<br><br>*Dual or Multiple Citizenship*<br>Feel belonging in multiple places (home country, host country) and around different social groups<br><br>*Urban Citizenship*<br>Feel belonging in the city<br><br>*Emotional and informal notions of citizenship*<br>Feel belonging through actions, and everyday life practices |
| **Art practices and sense of belonging** | Representation and the politics of belonging through art practices | - Political goal of their art practices of We Sell Reality<br>- Relevance of *self-expression* and *alternative identity*<br>- Counter-narrative they want to represent<br>- Personal goal of presenting this narrative<br>- Feelings and emotions attached to presenting this narrative<br>- Forms of art-based methods that are applied and why |
| | Contested visibility | *- How to be visible?*<br>*- What are the risks they face in representing themselves?*<br>*- Where should they be careful about and what are they afraid for or not afraid of?* |
| | Art practices and place-belongingness | *The politics of belonging*<br>How to represent the self through art, claiming their rights in the host country<br><br>*Place belongingness*<br>What role do the factors play described by Antonsich (2010) (see '*place-belongingness'* section) in their art practices?<br><br>*'Community belonging'*<br>Social element belonging of coming together and building community with others that share the same struggles.<br>*Do they experience a sense of 'Community belonging' through their practices?* |

## 10.2 Semi-structured questionnaire

*Firstly, I will introduce myself. You have of course already met me and got to know me a little bit because I am attending the weekly workshops and I organized two brainstorm sessions. I am doing this because I am interested in getting to know the members of We Sell Reality, and I am personally motivated to contribute to your practices. But besides that, I am doing research for the University of Utrecht and I am writing my master thesis for the study programme Urban Geography. From a research perspective, I am interested in how you as an art community are working together to be more visible in the city, but also in how you personally experience working on the art practices and why you like to be involved. I am exploring how you can create a sense of belonging through We Sell reality, and I am hoping that you want to share your thoughts and feelings about it with me through this interview.*

*In this interview, we will together explore your personal understanding and feelings of belonging. I will first ask you to introduce yourself, then we will elaborate a bit more on the dominant discourses as we discussed during the brainstorm session and your thoughts about this. Then we will talk about how you would like to describe yourself and lastly, we will explore together what belonging means to you and how this is related to the art practices of We Sell Reality.*

*Before we start, I want to say that there are no wrong answers, and I am interested in your personal opinion and experiences. I also want to make sure that you feel free to say when you do not feel comfortable answering the question or if on the other hand, you would like to tell me more on a specific topic. I want to record the interview, but only for the purpose of analyzing it for my thesis. I hope this is no problem for you. I will make sure that your answers will stay anonymous, and they will not be shared with anyone for other purposes then the thesis. If you are ready, I would like to start the recording and then we continue the conversation.*

**Introduction**

1. How would you like to introduce yourself?
2. How long are you involved in We Sell Reality and how were you introduced?
3. What was your personal motivation to join We Sell Reality?
4. What do you like the most about We Sell Reality?
5. Is there anything you don't like about We Sell Reality?
6. What project do you like the most and why?

*In the brainstorm sessions we talked together with the group about why you are involved in We Sell Reality and about your opinion about the dominant exclusionary discourses on forced and undocumented migration. Within this interview, I would like to talk a bit more about this with you.*

**Elaborate on Ascribed Identity through dominant discourses**

7. Can you describe *again* how undocumented migrants are represented through the Dutch media? Do you have an example?
8. Can you describe *again* how undocumented migrants are represented through the Dutch migration policies? Do you have an example?
9. How do people in your everyday life approach you, for example on the street or in the supermarket?
10. Do you have an example of a negative experience of labels being forced upon you in your everyday life?
11. How do you react when people talk negative about undocumented migrants?
12. When you think about how The Dutch society describes and treats undocumented migrants, how does that make you feel?
13. Do you also have a positive experience regarding labels, someone that surprised you and talked positive about undocumented migrants?

**Construction of the Self-identity**

*I would now like to talk more about you as an individual person despite from the labels that the Dutch society forces upon you.*

14. How do your friends and family describe your personality?
15. What do you think about this description?
16. How would you describe your own personality? What are your qualities and strengths?
17. Could you give an example of something that you are good at?
18. Do you think your personality has changed when you moved to the Netherlands?
19. How do you introduce yourself to others? Do you describe yourself to others as an undocumented migrate? To whom yes/no?
20. What would you like to do for work? Is this different from your ambitions five years ago?
21. The artist mentioned that she always analyses what your strengths are within We Sell Reality, what did she say about you, and do you agree?
22. Do you consider yourself creative?
23. Would you describe yourself as an artist? And why? Were you doing similar art practices in your home country?
24. Do you see a future for yourself in the arts world?
25. How would you like to present yourself through We Sell Reality?
26. What do you think that We Sell Reality can do to react toward the negative representation of undocumented migrants in society?

*I would like to explore the concept of belonging together with you and see how you experience this and feel about it.*

**Construction of Belonging**

27. Can you translate belonging in your own language? What does it mean? Is this different from the English word?
28. How would you describe belonging yourself?
29. If you would have to give another word to describe this feeling of belonging, what would it be?
30. What colour would you give the feeling of belonging? Why?
31. What are important elements that need to be there to feel like you belong?
32. Can you describe how important belonging is to you?
33. Can you give an example of when you most feel like you do belong? *Does this relate to feeling you can be yourself?*
34. Are there specific actions, things you can do to feel like you belong?
35. Around whom do you most feel like you belong? *(Relational factors)*
36. If you think about places you are during the week, what specific time of place do you most feel like you belong? *Why?*
37. Can you give an example of a place or time where you feel like you do not belong at all?
38. How would you describe the feeling when you do not feel like you belong?
39. What can you do yourself to feel more like you belong?
40. How much do you feel like you belong within the Netherlands in comparison to your home country?
41. How would you describe the feeling of belonging in the Netherlands in comparison from your feeling of belonging in your home country? What makes if different or the same?
42. Do you feel like you belong within Amsterdam, and your neighbourhood?
43. Are there other places that remind you of feeling belonging? *(Auto biographical)*

**Art Practices and Sense of belonging Through We Sell Reality**

44. Can you describe how much you feel like you belong within We Sell Reality?
45. What are the elements within We Sell Reality that make you feel like you belong?
46. What does We Sell Reality give you that you would not have without it?
47. How would your life in Amsterdam look like without We Sell Reality?
48. Do you feel like you can be yourself in We Sell Reality?
49. Which art piece of We Sell Reality does best demonstrate your understanding of belonging? Why?

50. Do you feel like you belong when you are working on the art pieces with, We Sell Reality? How would you describe this feeling?
51. To what extend do the art practices make you feel like you belong in the community, the city, in the Netherlands?
52. Does We Sell Reality give you hope to feel a sense of belonging in The Netherlands?
53. What would you suggest to strengthen or foster the sense of belonging and connection more within the community of We Sell Reality?

*Summarize interview*

*Is there any other thing you would like to share?*

## 10.3 Brainstorm session 1 format

Brainstorm Session 1
Date: 5.04.2021
Time: 10:30 – 14:00
Place: FramerFramed
Present: Two artist, 8 members

Cause for the Brainstorm Session
During the art workshops, we (the artist, members and me) had a conversation about the contested relationship between visibility and vulnerability of the members of We Sell Reality. We discussed the possibilities of making a documentary film about the process of their art practices to shed light on their marginalized position in society and presenting a counter-narrative of resistance and empowerment. However, we discovered that this medium does not fit to share their story with the public.
First of all, filming would shed light on their everyday life practices and informal conversations while working on their art practices which is perceived as a too personal medium. The house in which the members come together feels like their home where they want to be themselves without a camera watching. Therefore, the members communicated that they feel uncomfortable with presenting themselves within this personal and private setting to the outside world.
Secondly and maybe most importantly, the vulnerability of their identity as an undocumented migrant through being visible and physically represented through film is stressed. Their privacy has to be considered in making their identity visible because of their risks of deportability through visibility. We must therefore explore ways that make them visible while being protected and without being too vulnerable in public.
A possibility would be to make a video where people are unrecognizable. However, this method could be inconvenient because it could contribute to criminalizing connotations of undocumented migrants. In choosing an art medium to present themselves, we must be creative and explore ways that the members feel comfortable with.

The Goal of the Brainstorm Session
*Research Focus*
This brainstorm session contributes to an analytical understanding of '*the politics of belonging'* of the members of We Sell Reality. The topic questions are chosen in attempt to understand first of all why they are motivated to be involved in We Sell Reality. Besides, through having a dialogue about how they are represented through dominant exclusionary discourses, they can reflect on their marginalized and vulnerable position in society. They are thereby given the opportunity to express how they construct their own identity and react towards the ascribed identity that is forced upon them by society. This

conversation contributes to understanding what counter-narrative they want to represent. Besides, by reflecting on their involvement in We Sell Reality, insights are gained in why they are motivated to make art and what it could contribute to their contested position within society and construction of belonging.

Because this is my first session with all the members, it is relevant to first understand (1) *why they are motivated to be involved in We Sell Reality*? (2) *what are their ideas of dominant exclusionary discourses of undocumented migrants? (politics, media, everyday life experiences)* and (3) *what story (counter-narrative) do they want to represent through their practices?* Besides, it could be relevant for the members themselves to be aware of each other's personal experiences and motivations in order to work together solidary as a collective.

The brainstorm session gives the possibility to open the dialogue about the topic of *vulnerability vs visibility*. Together with the members we can explore what creative ways would give the opportunity to represent themselves (*visibility while not so much vulnerability*).

*Personal goal of the brainstorm session*

- All the members know that I am doing research and they feel comfortable with me being involved.
- Get an understanding of their personal and collective motivation to be involved in We Sell Reality and more concretely grasp the counter-narrative they want to represent.
- Gain insights from the group on how they think about the nexus *visibility – vulnerability*
- All the members are being inspired and enthusiastic in exploring ways to creatively represent themselves as a collective.

Topic Theme List

*First, write for yourself, then discuss with each other:*

*1. Understanding We Sell Reality*

Why are you involved in We Sell Reality?

What is your personal motivation?

What does We Sell Reality mean?

What is the goal of We Sell Reality?

*2. Representation*

1. How are undocumented migrants represented in the media, through dominant discourses, in political discourses?
2. What do you think about this?

*3. Counter-narrative*

1. What story do you absolutely want to counter?

2. What story do you want to represent?
3. Do you know of a good example of an art project that managed to present a counter-narrative?

*4. Art Practices*

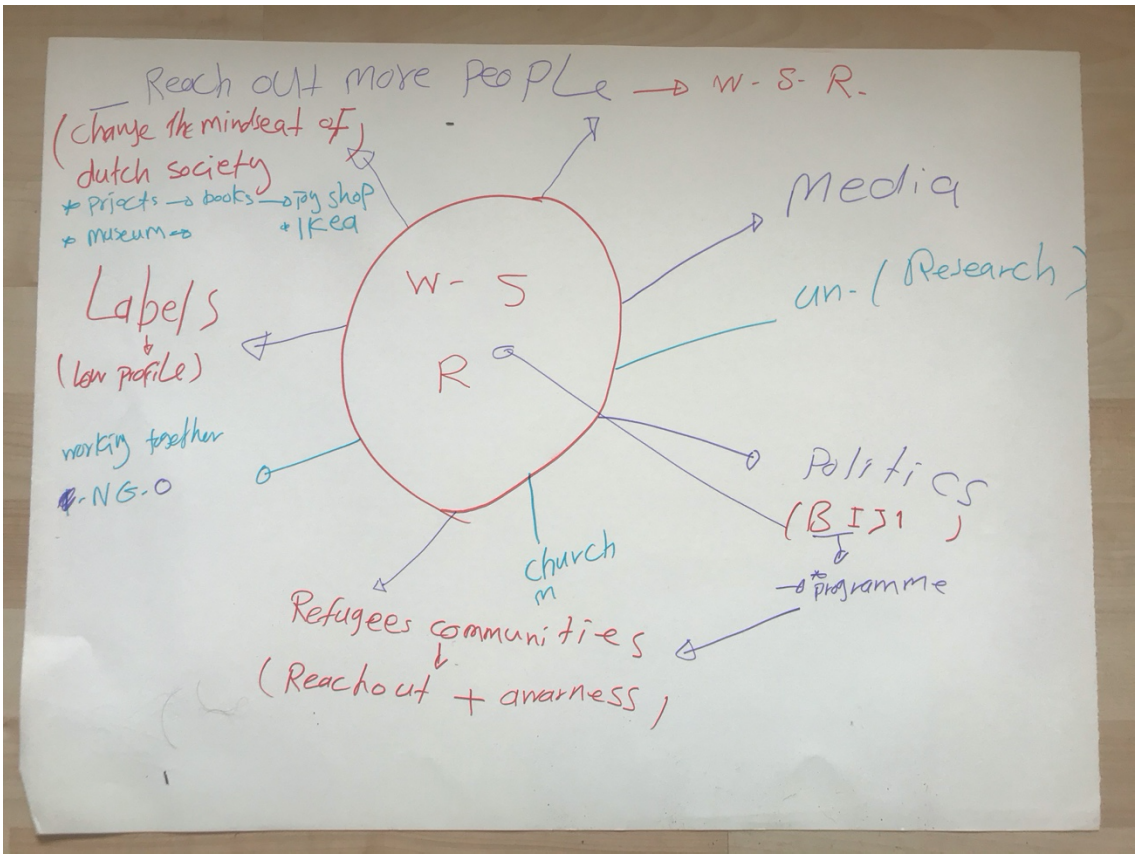
*Theme: Play of Visibility vs Vulnerability*

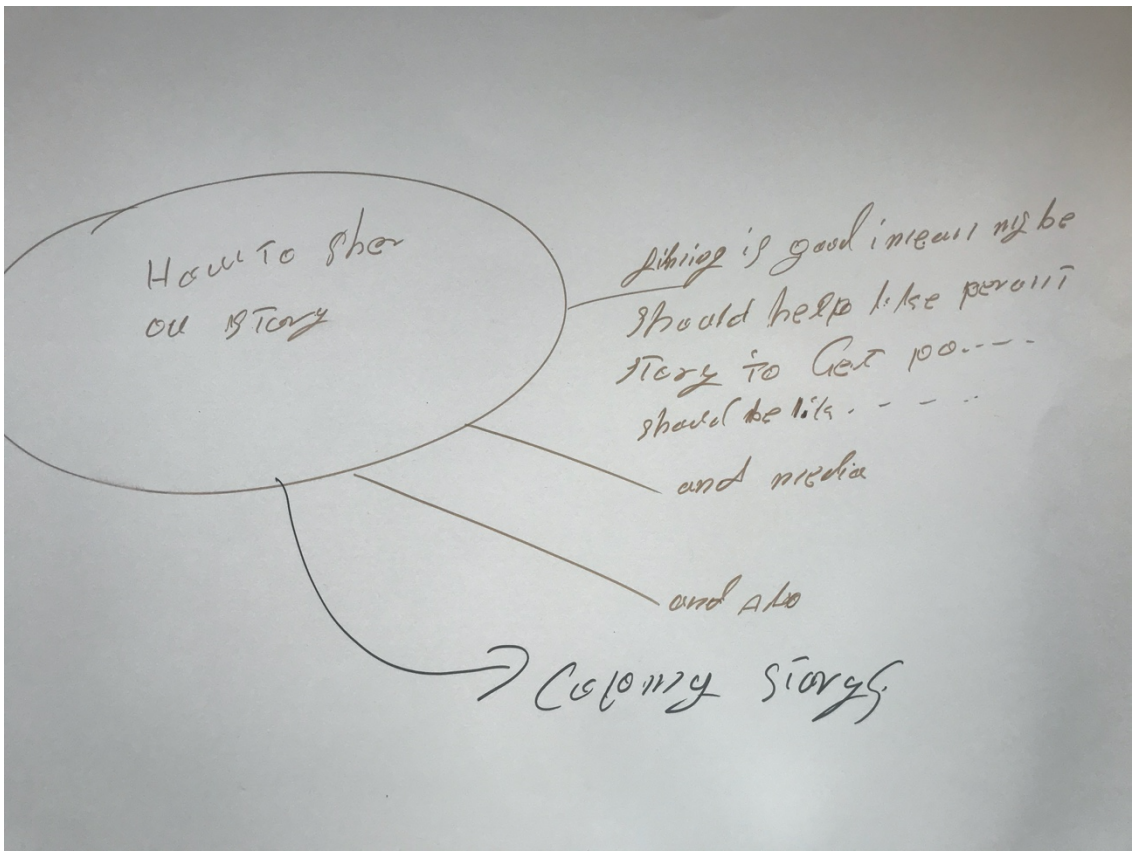
Think of creative ways to make We Sell Reality visible while not being too vulnerable.

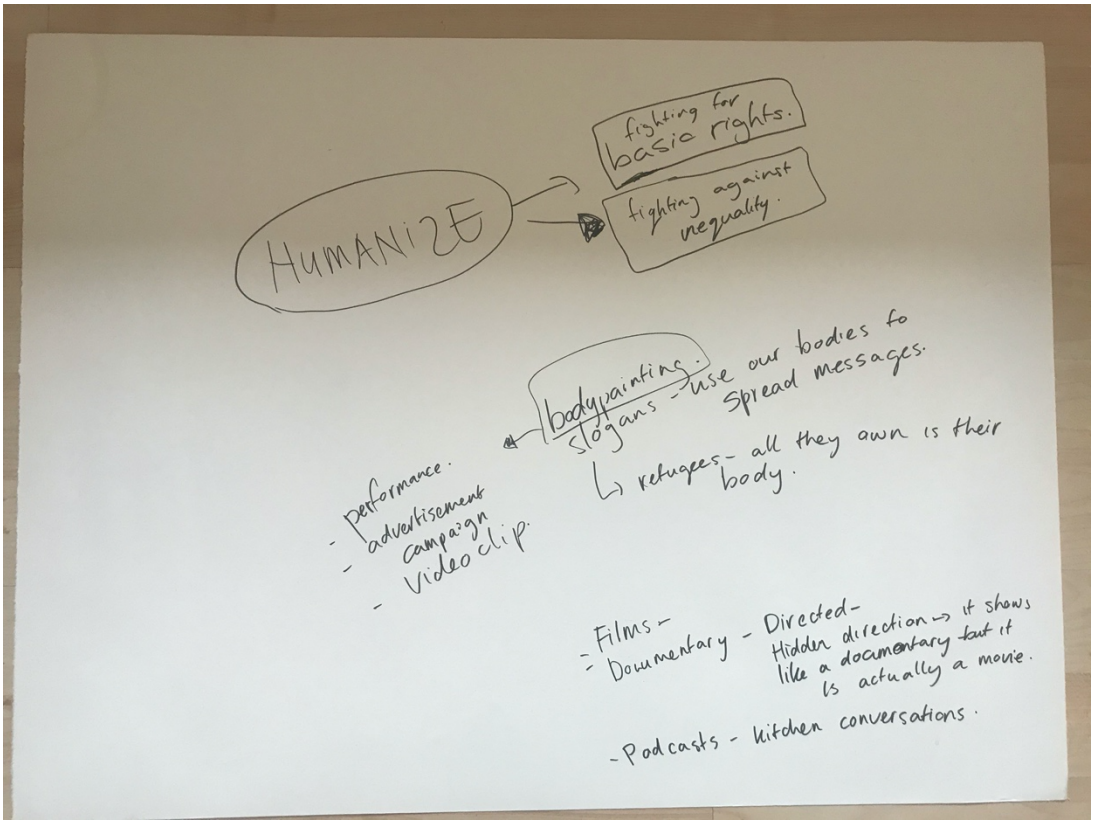
1. *What are your concerns, what do we need to consider, be careful about, what are no issues at all?*
2. *What are objections against filming?*
3. *What are good alternative methods?*
4. *What art forms are we interested in? For example, through photography, voice, video*

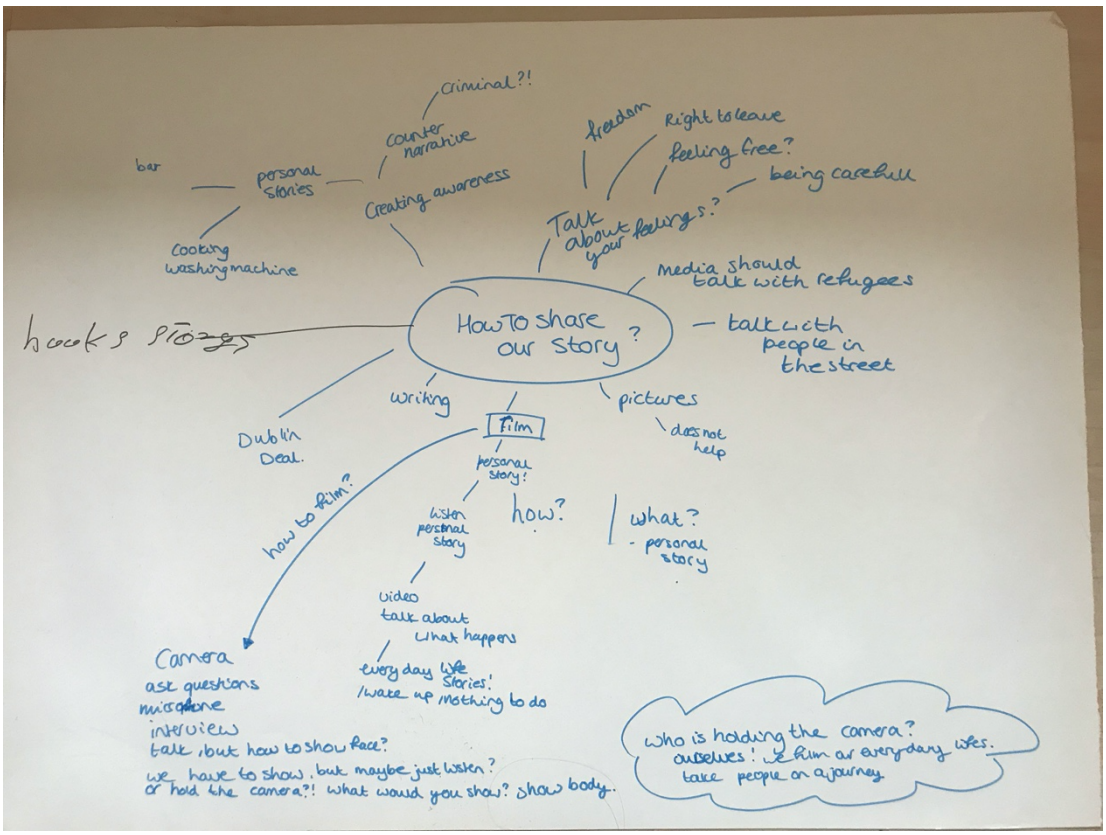
The first brainstorm session served as a suitable method to explore how the members think about certain topics and it made it able to explore in more depth what We Sell Reality stands for. Therefore, the session added to getting a deeper understanding of the collective thoughts and individual motivations of the group members to be involved in We Sell reality and attributed to answering the sub-questions of the research. Within the first brainstorm session, a general group discussion of two hours took place. The topics that were discussed during the session were realized beforehand by operationalizing the concepts that were outlined in the theoretical framework (see 5.5 Operationalization). Firstly, the members individually formulated the answers to the topic question by writing it down. Thereafter, we reflected on their answers in the group. After this two-hour session, we continued the brainstorm session in smaller groups around the specific topic of *visibility versus vulnerability* and thought about ideas to represent themselves through creative art forms. Finally, each group pitched their idea through presenting a drawing or word-web. This session gave a clear overview of how the members worked as a collective and what they found important in their representation of a counter-narrative (Bryman, 2012).

Pictures pitches brainstorm session 1




HUMANIZE
fighting for basic rights.
fighting against inequality.
bodypainting.
slogans - use our bodies to spread messages.
↳ refugees - all they own is their body.
- performance.
- advertisement campaign
- video clip.
- Films -
- Documentary - Directed - Hidden direction → it shows like a documentary but it is actually a movie.
- Podcasts - kitchen conversations.


How TO share our story ?
criminal?!
counter narrative
bar
personal stories
Creating awareness
cooking
washing machine
freedom
Right to leave
feeling free?
being careful
Talk about your feelings?
Media should talk with refugees
talk with people in the street
hooks
writing
Film
pictures
does not help
Dublin Deal.
personal story!
how to film?
listen personal story
how?
what?
- personal story
video
talk about what happens
every day life stories!
/wake up nothing to do
Camera
ask questions
interview
talk, but how to show face?
we have to show, but maybe just listen?
or hold the camera?! what would you show? show body.
Who is holding the camera?
ourselves! We film our everyday lifes.
take people on a journey

## 10.4 Brainstorm session 2 format

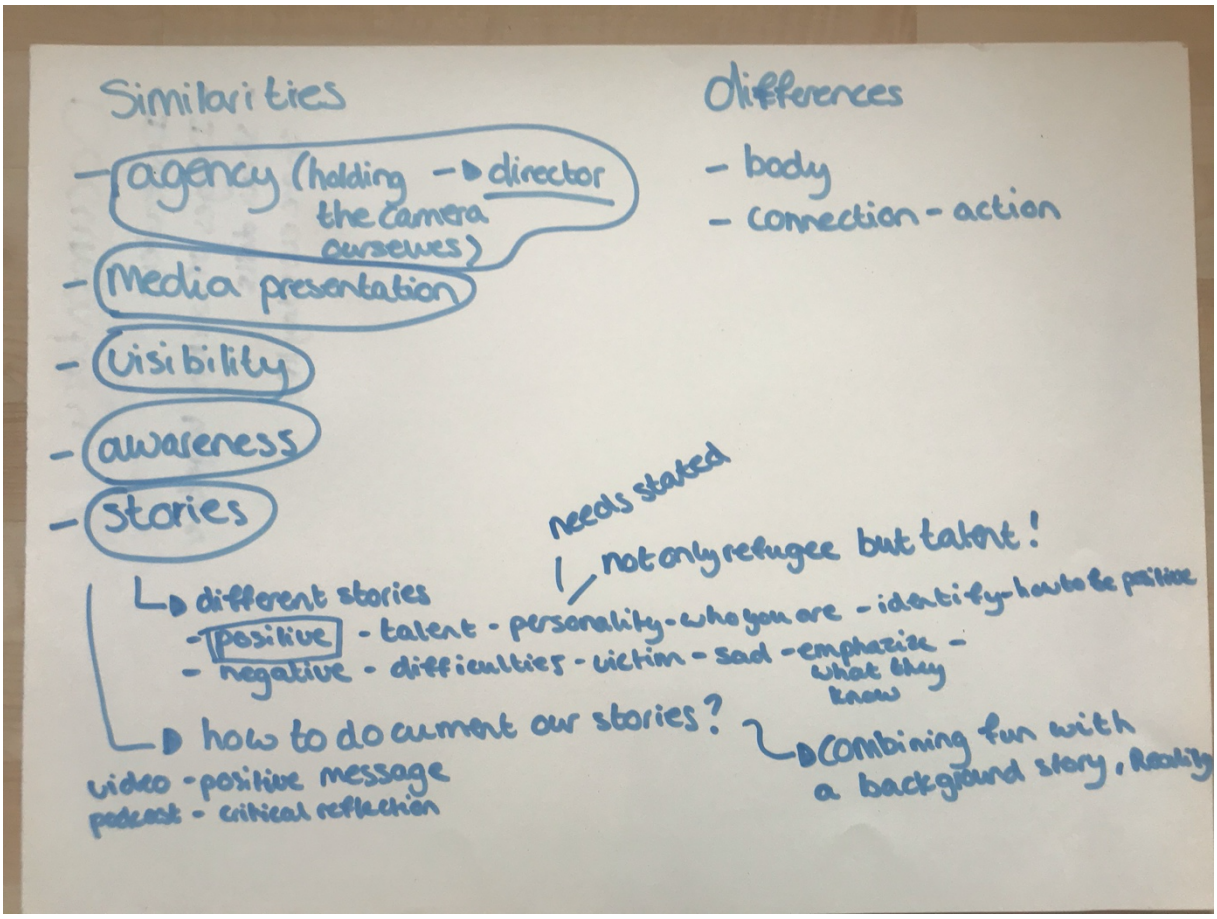
Date: 16.04.2021

Time: 14:00 – 18:00

Present: Artist, 10 members

The second brainstorm session continued where the first session stopped and elaborated on the ideas that were pitched at the end of the first session. This session focused on how art forms can be applied to represent themselves while not making their identity too visible and recognizable in society because of their risks of deportability. We collaboratively looked at the drawings from the first session and looked at similarities and differences between the ideas. The session contributed to a deeper understanding of how the members want to represent themselves and why this presentation is important for them.

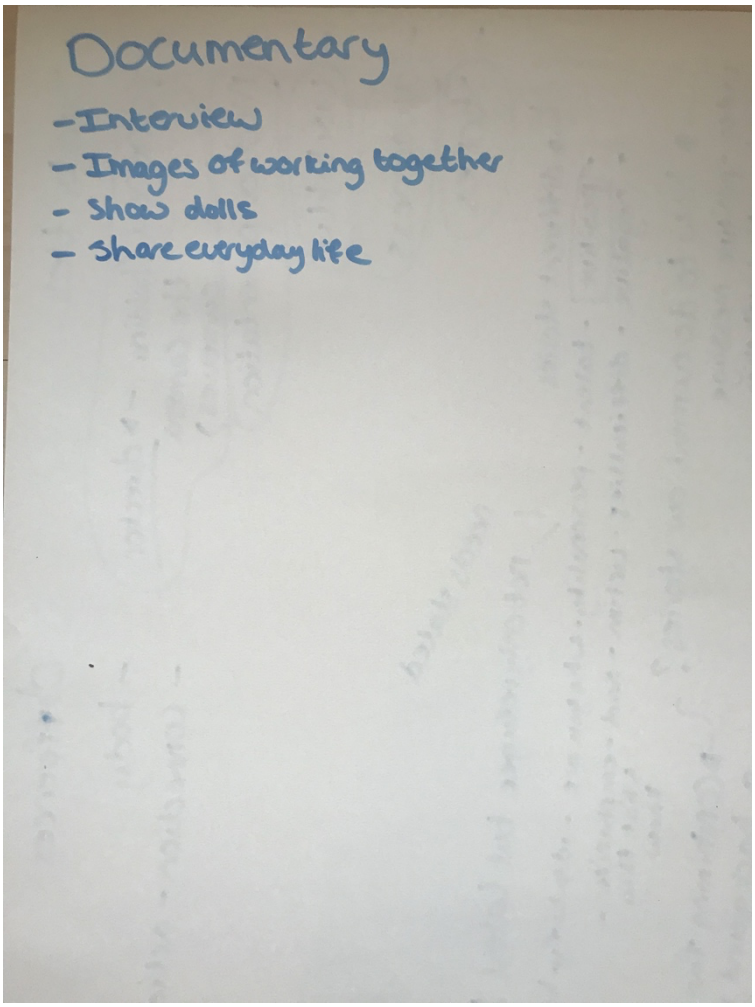
Similarities and differences between the pitches from brainstorm session 1




Within this picture, it can be signalized what the members find most important in presenting themselves and where they want to focus on in a next project.

It sheds light on their importance of holding agency in their practices and being presented in the media. This clearly shows how to want to be visible to share awareness of their situation in the host society. They want to tell their personal stories that not only reflect their difficulties, but also their personality.

The idea of making a documentary




We further discussed how we can document this story by discussing different art forms. We concluded that a video could still be a suitable method to share this message with a wider audience. Yet, they must hold agency themselves in what they want to represent and to what extent they make themselves visible. Throughout this discussion it became clear that I, as a researcher, should support them in their process, but should not take the lead and decide what should be filmed. We planned to focus on this plan in the next session.

## 10.5 Brainstorm session 3 format

Date: 7.05. 2021

Time: 14:00 – 16:00

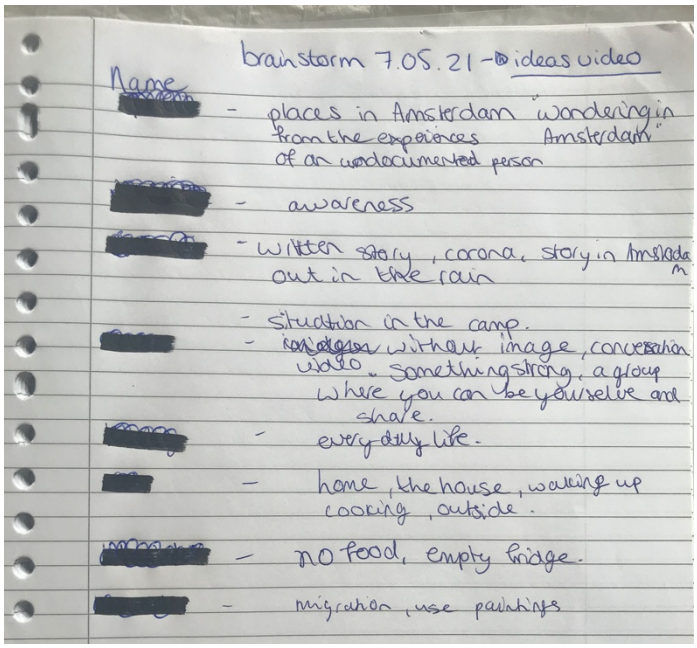
Present: Artist, 9 members

The third brainstorm session is divided into two smaller sessions that took place on different moments. Within the first session, we discussed specifically how we could make a video to create awareness. Because making a documentary is a complex and long-lasting process, we decided that each member would make an individual video and thereby shedding light on different specific topics related to their situation as an undocumented migrant in the host society. We discussed the different topics they found interesting and what story they would like to focus on. We also brainstormed on how they would like to present this. Within this discussion, it was emphasised again that they will hold agency in making their video and being the director of their own movie. Through this agency, they decide how they want to be (in)visible and deal with their vulnerability.

Questions that we attempted to answer:

- What is your topic?
- What would you like to stress (the counter-narrative that comes to light)?
- Where would they like to film?
- What is needed to film?
- Who will be in the film?
- Who is filming?
- How do you make the people in the video (in)visible?

The members shared ideas about filming their everyday life in the camp, living with little money leading to an empty fridge at the end of the week. Another member wanted to focus on cycling through the city and enjoying the public spaces. Two members preferred not to film themselves and would like to make use of excysting materials and drawings to make video.



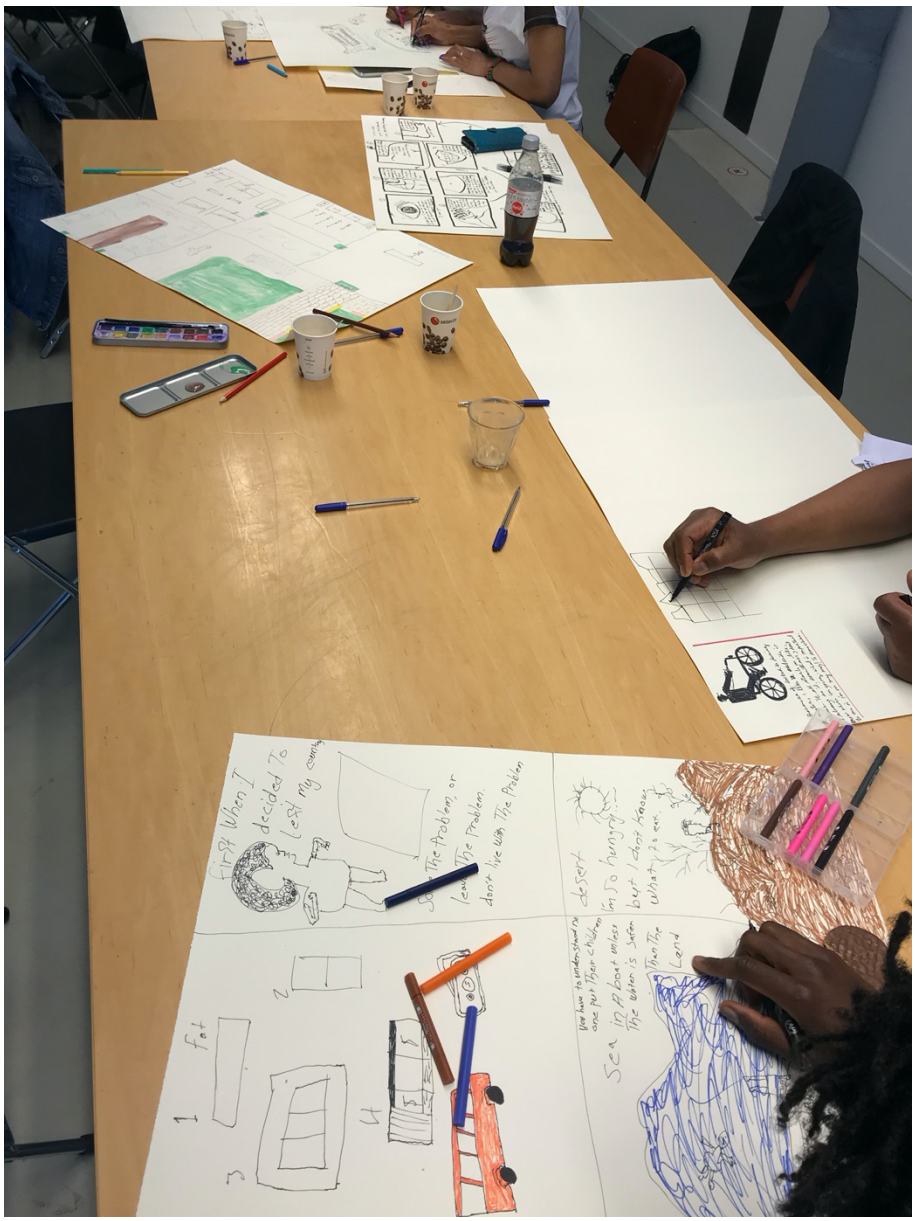
Date: 28.05.2021

Time: 11:00 – 13:00

Present: Artist, 11 members

Some weeks later, each member had more time to think about their video project. They made a story board to outline the script for their short documentary including the different scenes. My role during this session was to guide the members by their drawings and help them to structure their story. It again was questioned what was most important to present and what specific situation should be filmed.

*Currently, (July 2021) We Sell Reality is busy with multiple projects for the Roots festival, Minimal Music festival and the new institute in Rotterdam. Therefore, we decided to continue with the video project after these projects are finished.*



## 10.6 Workshop attendance overview

| Workshop | Date | Time | Place | Members present | Art Practices |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 19.03. 2021 | 13:00 – 17:00 | Artist House | Artist, two members | Dolls |
| 2 | 22.03. 2021 | 10:00 – 13:00 | Artist House | Present: Artist, | Dolls |
| 3 | 26.03.2021 | 13:00 – 17:00 | Artist House | Artist, three members | Dolls |
| 4 | 1.04.2021 | 13:00 – 16:00 | Artist House | Artist, two members | Dolls |
| 5 | 5.04.2021 | 14:00 – 16:00 | FramerFramed | Two artist, eight members | Taking pictures with members and art pieces |
| 6 | 16.04.2021 | 10:30 – 14:00 | FramerFramed | Artist, nine members | Dolls |
| 7 | 23.04.2021 | 10:30 – 17:00 | FramerFramed | Artist, eleven members | Dolls, infrared camera |
| 8 | 30.04.2021 | 10:30 – 17:00 | FramerFramed | Artist, eleven members | Dolls |
| 9 | 7.05.2021 | 10:30 – 17:00 | FramerFramed | Artist, eleven members | Dolls, **discussion video script** |
| 10 | 14.05.2021 | 10:30 – 17:00 | FramerFramed | Two artist, eleven members | Dolls, banners, |
| 11 | 28.05.2021 | 10:30 – 16:00 | FramerFramed | Artist, thirteen members | Banners, boat, **video script** |
| 12 | 4.06.2021 | 10:30 – 16:00 | FramerFramed | Artist, nine members | Banners |

## 10.7 List of knowledge-holders

| No. | Name (Pseudonym) | M/F | Age | Home country | Asylum Situation | Individual interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Aamira | F | 31 | Soudan | Waiting in the Netherlands for almost three years | Yes |
| 2 | Dukz | F | 28 | Ethiopia | Waiting in the Netherlands for four years | Yes |
| 3 | Momodou | M | 22 | Gambia | Waiting in the Netherlands for one year | Yes |
| 4 | Ras | M | 54 | Ethiopia | Out of procedure, in Amsterdam for twenty years | Yes |
| 5 | Asim | M | 26 | Sudan | Out of procedure, in the Netherlands for six years | Yes |
| 6 | Jamal | M | 27 | Sudan | Waiting in the Netherlands for six years | Yes |
| 7 | Hafez | M | 25 | Sudan | Recently received residence permit | No |
| 8 | Bob | M | 29 | Sudan | Temporarily in the Netherlands for maximum of six months | Yes |
| 9 | Omar | M | 23 | Eritrea | Waiting in the Netherlands for around two years | No |
| 10 | Eddy | M | 24 | Sudan | Out of procedure in the Netherlands for a year | No |
| 11 | Rhidhaa | F | 25 | Ethiopia | Waiting in the Netherlands for five years | No |
| 12 | Mustafa | M | 40 | Sudan | Recently received residence permit | No |
| 13 | Artist Iftu | F | 44 | The Netherlands | Dutch citizenship | Unstructured private conversations |
| 14 | Artist Hasifa | F | 40 | The Netherlands | Dutch citizenship | No |

## 10.8 Code-schemes

| Name nodes | Description | Files | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| **General information knowledge-holders** | Age, country of origin, length of residency, time waiting | 7 | 19 |

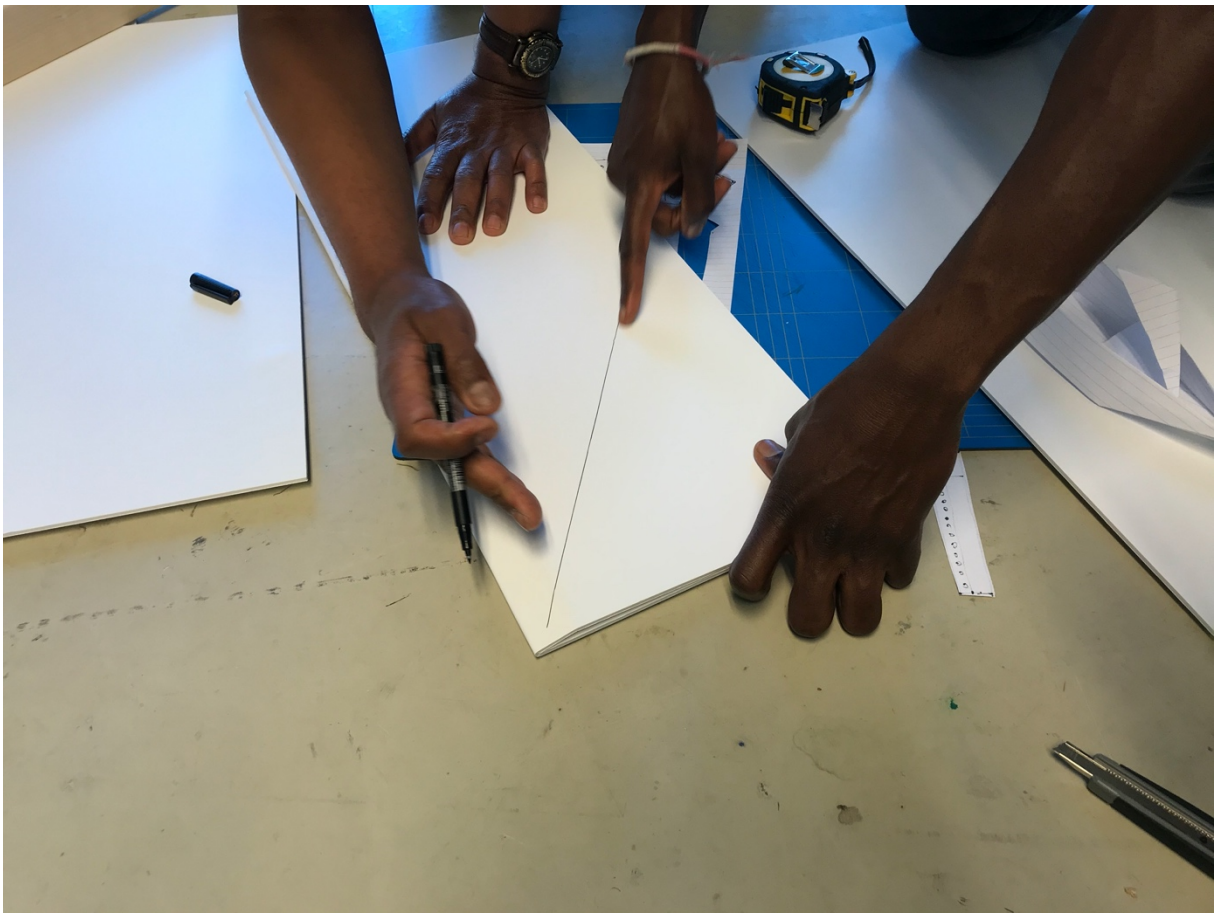
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dominant discourses** | What is, according to the undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality, the dominant narrative on their status as an undocumented migrant in The Netherlands? | | |
| Fragmentation in the media | How undocumented migrants are represented in the media according to the undocumented migrants themselves | 6 | 12 |
| Migration policies | How undocumented migrants are represented and treated through geopolitics according to the undocumented migrants themselves | 6 | 16 |
| Societal discourses in everyday life | Experiences societal discourses in everyday life | 2 | 2 |
| Negative experiences | Negative experiences in their everyday life | 4 | 12 |
| Positive experiences | Positive experiences in their everyday life | 4 | 5 |
| Racism | Experiences of racism in their everyday life | 3 | 6 |
| The village | Experiences of exclusion in smaller towns and villages | 2 | 4 |
| Tolerance in the city | Experiences of inclusion in the city | 3 | 8 |

| **Counter-narrative** | What counter-narrative do the undocumented migrants want to represent through their art practices of We Sell Reality? | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Creating awareness in society | The importance to create awareness among Dutch citizens | 5 | 12 |
| Humanization | The importance to humanize undocumented migrants in the host society | 3 | 3 |
| Self-identification | How do the undocumented migrants describe and identify themselves | 0 | 0 |
| Consequences dominant narrative and changing of the self | The transformation of the self-identity through the host society | 5 | 16 |
| Humanization Undocumented migrants | The humanization of undocumented migrants through how friends, family, the collective and they themselves describe their personality | 6 | 10 |

| **Sense of Belonging** | How do the undocumented migrants involved in We Sell Reality describe their sense of belonging? | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Dimension | Describing a sense of belonging related to a personal feeling of being at home in place: 'place-belongingness' | | |
| Adaptation to Dutch society | | 2 | 10 |
| City | Feeling at home in place in the city, feel tolerated and accepted | 7 | 22 |
| Emotional Feeling | Describing belonging as an emotional feeling | 3 | 4 |
| Friends and family | The relevance of friends and family to feel at home and belong | 6 | 20 |
| Place-belongingness | Connecting belonging to feeling at home in place | 5 | 17 |
| Political Dimension | | | |
| Feeling Included | Feeling included, part of a group | 6 | 19 |
| Temporality and Uncertainty | The uncertainty of non-citizenships makes it harder to construct a sense of belonging in the Netherlands | 2 | 3 |

| **Motivation We Sell Reality - Belonging** | What is the motivation of the undocumented migrants to be involved in We Sell Reality and how is this related to constructing a sense of place- and political belongingness? | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Access | Getting access to the institutions and organisations within the city through We Sell Reality | 3 | 5 |
| Art | Enjoy making art | 4 | 7 |
| Relationship with art | Interest in art, practical or conceptual | 7 | 19 |
| Artist | The relevance of liking the artist and becoming friends | 1 | 1 |
| Flexibility | Experiencing flexibility in the work that they are doing and feeling agency while working on the art practices | 3 | 4 |
| Knowledge | The importance of gaining (political and societal) knowledge through the collective | 3 | 7 |
| Making a difference | To what extent do the knowledge-holders feel like they can make a difference with their art practices | 5 | 16 |
| Mental Health | Being able to share thought, experiences and feelings with the group | 6 | 19 |
| Personal development | Being able to grow artistically and personally | 3 | 3 |
| Politics | Creating awareness in society, politics of belonging | 6 | 18 |
| Social relationships | A social network, becoming friends with the knowledge-holders of the collective | 7 | 31 |

## 10.9 Photo’s during the research process

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