The Deportation Continuum: Convergences between state-agents and NGO-workers in the Dutch deportation field

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Abstract: The social field in which deportations of illegalized migrants are operationalized is often perceived to be comprised of two opposing sides that together form a deportation regime: on the one side, street-level state-agents, on the other side, civil-society actors. Focusing ethnographically on deportation case-managers and NGO-workers in the Netherlands, a country known for its consensus politics, our study reveals significant convergences in the manners that illegalized migrants are treated by both sides in usage of terminology, handling of face-to-face interactions and worldviews on issues like belonging and justice. Given these convergences, we argue that the field in which deportation is being negotiated and practiced amounts to a *continuum* formed by state-agents and NGO actors. We argue that a deportation continuum is underlined by shared political subjectivities and creates a sealed-off political realm that restricts the initiatives of activist citizens, imaginaries of citizenship, and alternatives for deportation policies.

Keywords: Deportation; State-agents; Civil society; NGOs; Consensual politics; The Netherlands

Introduction

The deportation of illegalized migrants[1] in liberal democratic states is a heatedly disputed and highly contested political matter in recent years. A prevalent image of this contested political and moral terrain depicts a staunch opposition between two main sides, which together constitute deportation regimes. The one side consists of state institutions, engineered by policy-makers and staffed with bureaucrats and agents, whose explicit goal is to enforce the law and to ensure the repatriation of illegalized migrants from the sovereign territory of the state. The other side is comprised by civil-society organizations in which volunteers and salaried workers aim to contest state deportation policies and to assist illegalized migrants on the ground of human-, fundamental- or universal-rights.

This article contends that an image of a marked divide between these two sides is too simplistic to capture the complexities of actors involved in the highly charged deportation field, where inflaming rhetoric often disguises actual practices. Focusing on the Netherlands, the article moves beyond rhetoric and on to an ethnographic inspection of the practices of key actors in these two putative sides. Keeping in mind that each of these sides comprises heterogeneous views (Ellerman 2006), our study moreover reveals significant convergences between state-agents and civil-society actors in: the usage of terminology and categories, the handling of face-to-face interactions with illegalized migrants, and the worldviews on issues like borders, rights, and citizenship that couches actors' discourses and practices. Given these convergences among state-agents and civil-society actors, we argue that the social field in which deportation is being negotiated and practiced in the Netherlands is better conceptualized as a *continuum* that is underlined by a dominant logic, common categories, shared political subjectivities, and pre-agreed lines of political actions.

Conceptualizing the deportation field as a continuum contributes to an understanding of the political room that exists for negotiating and challenging ideas about citizenship. We follow here on a major critique of civil-society as a political space for

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[1] We choose the term 'illegalized migrants' to underscore the process by which states move to categorize and treat certain people as being 'illegal'. These people can be failed asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, visa over-stayers, and migrants with a criminal record. They all face the threat of deportation whenever apprehended by state authorities.

operations that supposedly 'are steeped in struggles to impact the ways that power in society is acquired, distributed and exercised' (Scholte 2007, 311). A broad consensus on deportation results from actors' political subjectivities that dispose and induce them to agree on a wide range of practical and moral issues, such as: categories of non-belongingness, notions of deservedness, showing empathy to the 'victims' of the system, prizing human-rights, etc. As Wiktorowics (2000: 46) alerts us, 'Rather than assume that civil society enables democracy or serves as a mechanism of empowerment, it is important to understand the political context that shapes and limits its potential as an engine of political change'.

In the Dutch political context, conceptualizing the deportation field as a continuum draws attention to the contours and limpid limits of a political realm that is sealed off from real alternatives to existing deportation policies. A continuum, comprising of convergences between state-agents and civil-society actors, excludes from the dominant political arena those activist citizens (Isin 2009) who attempt to transform the notion of the political, for example, by acting and enunciating illegalized migrants as de facto active political subjects. Such activist citizens - anarchists, squatters, no-border movements, non-citizen migrant groups - are then conceived by those within the continuum as 'radicals' or 'naive romanticists', who should not be invited to 'join the table' of political negotiations. The major consequence of the continuum, thus, is a restricted spectrum of imaginaries and alternative practices of citizenship as well as of non-citizenship. If, as Nyers and Rygiel (2012, 2) assert, 'migrant activism is a key site for reconceptualising citizenship', then the continuum is its counterpoint.

A deportation continuum is produced, we argue, through a collapse to a middle ground from above and from below, as state-agents as well as civil-society actors move between positions that are within a broad consensus. This consensus is rooted in a shared binary conception of citizenship and an a-priori acceptance of the right of states to deport people; migrants labelled as deportable are simultaneously conceived as non-citizens (Bosworth 2011) and their forced removal is thus legitimized. These shared notions are produced in important ways by the many interactions and collaborations between civil-society actors and state-agents in managing illegalized migrants.

Our study in the Dutch field goes against the idea that 'deportation is liable to generate conflicts amongst citizens and between citizens and the state over the question of

who is part of the normative community of members' (Anderson et. al 2011). Rather, as Balibar (2009, 192) contends, 'the figure of the citizen (with its statutory conditions of birth and place, its different subcategories, spheres of activity, processes of formation) is exactly a way of categorizing individuals. Such a process is possible only if other figures of the "subject" are violently or peacefully removed, coercively, or voluntarily destroyed'. A deportation continuum thus highlights societal configurations where the figure of the deportable subjects serves more to reinforce internal cohesion among citizens than instigate conflict around competing imaginaries of citizenship and non-citizenship.

The article proceeds with a theoretical discussion of the deportation field, with a special attention paid to the role of NGOs taking a dominant position in civil-society. This is then followed by a methodological note and two ethnographic sections, respectively depicting the work and views of state-agents and of civil-society actors. A subsequent section pulls together the convergences and fleshes out the consequences of the hegemonic logic that unifies the deportation continuum for the imaginaries of citizenship.

Deportation: regimes and continuum

The burgeoning academic literature on deportation has consolidated the concept of a 'deportation regime' to describe the working of states towards the forced removal of undocumented migrants and 'bogus' asylum-seekers (De Genova and Peutz 2010). This concept is centred on the exercise of state sovereign power to secure national borders and to regulate the entry/exit of people in 'an increasingly unified, effectively *global* response' against free movement. Deportation regimes thus usefully capture how sovereign power works on state and intra-state levels. Deportation continuum can be seen as a complementary lens for looking inwards at how state power works in specific national contexts to mold not only the work of state-agents but also that of civil-society actors, producing consensus with respect to the illegality/deportation nexus.

The notion of regimes might suggest a field that is being well under control and that functions according to neatly implemented regulations and orders. In reality, however, the deportation field is precisely notorious for its implementation deficits, high level of discretionary power among street-level bureaucrats, ad-hoc resolutions, and changing interpretations of formal policies (Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014). Moreover, a reference to regimes might direct our attention primarily to the role of the authorities in charge of the

process, whereas, in practice, civil-society actors are often at least as important to the actual shape that deportation rules and regulations acquire on the ground.

The legitimacy of deportation emanates from what is perceived to be an indisputable right of states to protect the integrity of their national population and sovereign territory from non-belonging Others. In line with much critical thinking on state sovereignty (Arendt 1958; Anderson 2010; Walters 2002), we believe that it is precisely this taken-for-granted right of states to deport Others that should be problematized. The widespread acceptance of deportation as a legitimate instrument in the hands of states should be seen as an important achievement by states: an achievement resulting from 'law-creating violence' (Benjamin 1978), which constitutes the very existence of the state as the most important political unit in our current world order (Agamben 1998). To accomplish this achievement, states go to great lengths in applying their sovereign and symbolic power to categorically define those who legally belong to the governed population and those who are to be kept outside the boundaries, if not borders, of the nation-and-state.

One of the crucial means in producing widespread legitimacy for deportation, a biopolitical instrument used by states to control, manage and govern populations within their sovereign territory, is the ability of states to fashion the formation of particular modes of subjectification that lead citizens to internalise certain visions of divisions between insiders and outsiders (Foucault 1979; AUTHOR 2012; Nicholls 2013). States use an array of techniques - public educational system, national symbols, popular culture, etc. - to saturate the national space with hegemonic ideas about insider/outsider as well as the legitimacy of the state to rule over this matter. When successful, individuals' political subjectivities are shaped in ways that are conducive to the rendering of territorial and national borders as taken-for-granted. From this point, it is only a small step towards accepting the right of states to defend themselves from alleged intruders and invaders who disrupt what is then seen as the 'natural' and 'national order of things' (Malkki 1995).

A deportation continuum, with its convergences and crosscutting positionalities of actors, thus highlights the intricate ways in which state power shapes the subjectivities of those who operate within and without its formal apparatus. While we do not treat civil-society as consisting of the sum total of NGOs, we do argue that in the Netherlands it is mostly NGOs that are involved in shaping the deportation continuum. Being famous for coming close to 'the ideal type of consensus government' (Andeweg 2000, 697), Dutch

politics encompasses the field of civil-society, forming a 'cozy consensus' (ibid.) among many NGOs and state agencies. Dutch NGOs that are involved in negotiating deportation are not simply co-opted by the state-system, as has been widely documented and criticized in civil-society studies elsewhere since the 1990s (Ferguson 1994; Fischer 1997). What we observe is a concomitant move on the side of state-agents towards progressive political positions (adopting human rights discourse), compassionate attitudes (showing empathy for the 'victims' of the system), and a critical view of the state-system that is nonetheless accompanied by an overall acceptance that 'we work in a democratic country where the rules should be respected'.

A deportation continuum thus alludes to Foucault's notion of the *dispositif*, and should be seen as a constitutive element in what Feldman (2012, 17) calls the 'migration apparatus' that 'rather than conquering individual initiative, makes it utterly reasonable to accept the choices it presents and offers few discernible targets of resistance. Conformity and agency combine to create hegemony'. Attempts to upset and expand 'traditional' notions of citizenship (McNevin 2006; Mezzadra 2011; Nyers 2011) are contingent on the potential of alternative politics – that defy existing notions of membership as articulated in citizenship – to resonate with those who hold or (appear to) contest current power positions. In the Netherlands, illegalized migrants' disruptive acts of 'politics of presence' (McNevin 2012) and 'taking space' (Nyers 2003) indeed led to visibility of their migration limbo. However, they amounted to mere incidents that, despite their challenging and promising character, failed, in practice, to put in motion substantial change. This marginalization, we argue, is produced by the converging ideas and practices of both civil-society actors and state-agents. To expectantly focus on the agency of illegalized migrants as a transformative power thus runs the risk of overburdening them with a problem that lies in the politico-juridical framework of which they only are part by exclusion (Agamben 1998; De Genova 2002). In this article we therefore turn our gaze to those who manage the deportation field but shy away from 'interrupt[ing] the temporality of consensus' (Rancière 2009, 9).

Putting aside scenarios of an abrupt overhaul of migration regimes, the ability of alternative imaginaries and practices of citizenship to gain a foothold in society is contingent on their adoption by actors involved in the 'migration apparatus'. We thus posits that there is a direct link between the room for imaginaries of citizenship to filter

into the political realm, and the degree of continuity that exists between the ideas and practices of state-agents and civil-society actors. As we demonstrate, in the Netherlands, the degree of the continuum is pronounced to an extent that offsets alternatives and precludes the participation of new actors in what is considered to be a legitimate debate about non-citizens' belongingness to the nation-state.

Methodological note

In the Netherlands, deportation has been practiced as a 'migration management'[2] tool since the late 1990s. Different guesstimates put the number of illegalized migrants between 70.000 and 150.000. Around 10.000 people are repatriated each year, either via 'voluntary return' programs or by means of forceful removal. The Dutch state has put together an extensive deportation infrastructure that includes four detention centers, 44 limited-free-movement-location centers, a special deportation unit and a substantial allocation of police force (*Vreemdelingenpolitie*, *Marechaussee*). At the same time, a plethora of civil-society organizations are active in the Netherlands; from intergovernmental organizations like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to international NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to numerous local NGOs and grassroots movements.

The article is based on fieldwork from January 2012 to October 2014 conducted among actors who work in various settings of the Dutch deportation field. On the side of the state, we have conducted our research among state-agents who work in the following institutions: Immigration & Naturalisation Service (IND), Departure & Repatriation Service (DT&V), Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), Military Police (*Marechaussee*), detention centres, the Ministry for Security and Justice, and the local government in Amsterdam. On the side of civil-society, the actors who took part in our research included high-ranked managers at the IOM, heads of departments at Amnesty International, and volunteers and salaried workers at various NGOs. Other actors we

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[2] The commonly used term 'migration management', introduced in 1993 by the Commission of the United Nations to improve governmental cooperation in the regulation of migration, only further depoliticizes the political project behind the extreme measures taken by states to secure their borders (Geiger and Pécoud 2010).

consulted in our study included lawyers, counselors and medical practitioners. We we also followed the efforts of the We Are Here (WAH) group, a self-organized platform of illegalized migrants concentrated in Amsterdam and The Hague since the autumn of 2012.

To elicit our data, we used a range of methods that included participant- and direct-observations, formal and semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Whenever possible, we recorded our interviews and transcribed them. While our claims in this article are informed by the entire body of data we collected, we have focused specifically on actors in two key settings. We selected two specific sides to be able to invest a serious amount of time that is necessary for such an ethnographically rich research. On the side of the state we visited four different locations of the Departure and Repatriation Service (DT&V) where we conducted a dozen in-depth and follow-up interviews and joined regular working day activities such as interviews with migrants, canteen lunches, and consultation meetings. On the side of civil-society, we participated for around hundred full working days in the main office of the Support Group Refugees (SGR)[3]. Informal conversations and meetings with SGR colleagues and migrants were part of the daily routine, while in-depth interviews were conducted with a number of respondents with whom rapport was established.

In the Dutch deportation field, as in Dutch society more broadly, the DT&V has gained a reputation for being 'tough' and unequivocal in its treatment of illegalized migrants. Among civil-society organizations, SGR is widely considered a bastion of 'good old-fashioned' Dutch radicals and anarchists resisting state policies and helping marginalized victims of the state-system. Our idea has been that if we were to find convergences between actors across these two settings that represent the right edge of state institutions and the left edge of civil-society organizations, then we could more safely generalize our claims regarding the prevalence of convergences throughout the deportation field. Indeed, our entire body of data supports this idea, as we found convergences across the continuum among all the other actors whom we interviewed and observed in this study.

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[3] SGR (Support Group Refugees) is a fictitious name. We use pseudonyms for all mentioned informants.

State-agents

'My goal is to help these people'. This was one of the first sentences I heard from Marloes, a veteran case-manager at the Departure and Repatriation Service (DT&V). The DT&V is responsible for controlled voluntary repatriations and forced removals of illegalized migrants in the Netherlands. In a glossy corporate-brochure, the DT&V mission is concisely stated: 'Together with other government agencies and social organizations, our goal is to have foreign nationals repatriated permanently and voluntarily in as many cases as possible'. It is further proclaimed that 'the DT&V stands for a transparent and humane way of working, with respect for the dignity of the foreign national concerned'.

'What do you come to do here? Deport people?' Marloes rhetorically poses these questions to the air before she exclaims, 'then you have to look for another job! I am here not to deport people but to solve problems.' Marloes is one of the approximately 500 officials working at the DT&V since its establishment in 2007 as an independent unit, organizationally separated from the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND). Case-managers like Marloes are each responsible for a batch of 'clients' whose deportation they must facilitate, either by convincing 'clients' to return voluntarily or by arranging for their forced removal. In the DT&V formal terminology, as in official reports and statistics, deportable subjects are mostly referred to as 'foreigners' or 'illegal foreigners'. In the jargon of case-managers, the preferred term is 'clients', while in informal conversations many civil servants use the common shorthand 'illegals'.

Case-managers meet their 'clients' on a regular basis, usually once every three weeks. These meetings take place in DT&V offices, detention centres, or limited-free-movement locations where mostly to-be-deported families with children are housed. In these meetings, case-managers provide 'clients' with updates on their deportation process and/or receive from 'clients' new information about actions that they were required to undertake, for example, obtaining a passport or a laisser-passer document from their embassy. The duration of meetings, depending on the complexity of the case and which stage the deportation process is at, can last anywhere from 20 minutes to one or even two hours.

Marloes tells me about the challenges in her job in her office on the 8th floor of the DT&V headquarters in Hoofddorp, a town just outside Amsterdam and next to the

international airport of Schiphol, where the biggest and newest detention centre in the Netherlands is located. It is late afternoon and Marloes just concluded her third meeting of the day:

> When a client sits in front of me, I see a person, not a document. I'm not an IND agent. I deal with people. And there are rules and facts but there is also always space [for manoeuvre] and I use this space. I try to come up with the best solution for each case. For example, there was this case with a man from Burundi who was clearly so anxious [about his intended deportation]. I saw and talked with him and I told my colleagues at the asylum-receiving centre that they should bring him physically to the IND. Not the dossier, not a number, but the face! They eventually did it and he got a status. That gives me energy to do my job here.

A similar view was shared by Yanic who dealt with a 'client' from India who had been living in the Netherlands for eight years. Throughout the interview, Yanic maintained a friendly tone, although at times his voice turned more authoritarian, especially when he reiterated questions that the 'client' answered in a manner dissatisfying to Yanic. The interview concluded with Yanic asking the 'client' whether he had any questions, setting up a subsequent meeting, and warmly shaking hands. Yanic then reflected on the meeting:

> For me it is always a challenge to find the links through which…like also in the case of this person, I hope that I can accept his story, in a positive sense…that I will discover things through which I can say: 'Aha! I see!' That is actually what you always hope for. I will, as a matter of speaking, be happy if in the case of each foreigner the result will be a positive one [not to deport]. But it must be true [client's' story]. And this is, alas, not the case.

Many DT&V agents experience a tension between the desire to believe the stories of 'clients' and the strong belief that many of them in fact lie. Marloes easily relativized this prevalent tension, 'It's normal that they try everything. I would have done the same.' However, some DT&V agents seemed more agitated about the matter. Yanic joined the DT&V after having worked for years as a social worker in a reception centre for asylum-seekers. He used to have a lot of empathy for the 'sad stories' of asylum-seekers,

> But then you also start to hear the side of the IND agents, that the stories of asylum-seekers are full of contradictions, unreliable… [Asylum-seekers] are all unfortunate and have a reason why they came to the Netherlands. But with time, I became increasingly aware that a serious number of them, and here I mean 80%, well 90%, simply come here for a better life.

Balancing their commitment to 'get the job done' with the empathy they often have for the person sitting in front of them is a serious challenge for many DT&V agents. Case-managers underscore the face-to-face, human contact with 'clients' as the most intriguing element in their job. Yet this also appeared to be the source for frustrations. As Marloes put it,

> It is not easy, especially when you get to know someone, cause then it's no longer a dossier or a number, but Jan or Muhammad. Then I find it difficult, for example, when I know that in their own country they will not have medical assistance after three months.[4] […] You remain as nice as you can, but you are telling them horrible things.

Ruben, who worked for the Military Police before joining the DT&V, was more straightforward about his handling of taxing face-to-face interactions,

> People too quickly take over the role of the victim, become very emotional and only see problems. It is indeed emotional and vexing and gloomy and whatever, and you can understand it all but you can only go along with it that far. After that, you have to say: 'I understand your situation, we can work and talk about it, but these are the facts and we must now look for a solution for your return'.

Case-managers acknowledge that face-to-face interactions can significantly influence their approach towards 'clients' and the use of their discretionary power. Ruben admitted to have little patience for 'clients' who try to 'buy some time' by sabotaging or refusing to work on their return. Marloes confessed she had 'an allergy to foreigners who walk into my office and say: "I have the right to this and that". Then I'm immediately done with this sort of person'. Another case-manager, Rachel, acknowledged that,

> If I sit for a talk with a client and immediately feel strong resistance, then I begin the process of a forced removal faster. But if it is, let's say, a nice family in a difficult situation, I will do my best to let the process go via IOM and not have any forced measures involved.

Case-managers often give their business card to favourable 'clients', instructing them to show it in case of a police search. Case-managers will then talk to the police, explaining that the 'client' is in the midst of a deportation process, is collaborating with

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[4] The Netherlands often takes care for the continuation of medical care only in the first months after repatriation.

DT&V, and should thus not be arrested. The selective approach of case-managers towards their 'clients' seemed to be shaped not only by the individual attitude of the latter but also by stereotypical ideas of the former about the 'attributes' and 'deservedness' of certain categories of illegalized migrants. Some case-managers engage in what can be considered ethnic profiling, which becomes apparent in Roberts' experience: 'North Africans, yeah, I always say about them, or always…with them the lying is ingrained in their genes. Huh, they don't know, they just get that from childhood on…Eastern Europeans, yes they are also… the difference between what is mine and what is theirs isn't in their genes'. Another obvious bias was in the compassionate approach of case-managers towards families with children.

Adnan, a 4-year-old boy born in the Netherlands and suffering from postnatal brain damage is cuddling a teddy-bear while Esther, an experienced DT&V case-manager interviews his mother, Jamila, a failed asylum seeker from Somalia. Esther explains that the doctors have diagnosed Adnan's condition to be stable and that he can enjoy the same medical care in Somalia with the right medicine. 'We will make sure that you will be provided with the medicine for the coming years, but apart from this there is no legal reason that allows you to remain in the Netherlands because your asylum application was not approved'. Jamila's eyes instantly fill with tears, she sobs and mumbles, 'but how can you send us there, don't you watch the news? They kill people, it is terrible'. Esther insists that there are safe places in Somalia, but she then changes her tone and tells Jamila: 'I understand your fear. The doctors' report is clear but I can imagine that this is difficult for you to hear. Why don't we stop for now and you go back to your room to rest. Shall we talk again in two weeks?' After Jamila leaves, Esther looks desperate. 'What can I do?' she asks rhetorically, 'I don't envy her. They let her stay here for six years and now they decide that she should return. I don't know' she sights. 'But yes, the case is now quite clear. There is not much she can do. She has to go back. Is that fair? I don't know. I'm happy it's not my decision'.

Allocating the responsibility for deportation elsewhere – in the hands of the IND, medical staff or federal courts – partially relieves case-managers from the (emotional) consequences of their direct actions. Yet the deference of responsibility to other authorities within the state-system is effective only when the system itself is perceived to be righteous. Most case-managers indeed unequivocally view the Dutch state as being well

functioning, just and tolerant towards foreigners. Contemplating the core aspect in his work, Yanic concluded that 'Well…it's a kind of…maybe it's very strange but it has to do with justice. We need an immigration system that is just but which also ensures that not everyone can enter and stay because then in ten years it will become unlivable here'. The majority of DT&V agents consider their job to be strictly professional and strongly unrelated to political convictions. Case-managers see their professionalism as part of an overall just and orderly Dutch migration regime, as outlined by Fatima, a case-manager in her mid-20s who joined the DT&V three years ago,

> The Netherlands has a very liberal policy towards foreigners and I think that it should be like that. If you come here, we guarantee that your case will be looked into carefully and if you deserve to get a status, you can be sure this will be done for you. But if we process your case and the result is that you should leave the country, then we must make sure that this happens. For the real refugees to have a place here, we must make sure that the non-refugees are removed. Otherwise, they take the place of those who deserve to and should stay here. For the system to be fair, we must make sure the decisions are all followed by actions. Many people think that if you do this job, you are against human rights, but it is the opposite. I do this work because I strongly believe in human rights and in the rule of law.

Countering state policies?

'In fact, I am an unpaid functionary', says Guus, a volunteer at SGR. With the intense juridical assistance of the SGR, some initially failed asylum-seekers eventually received a refugee status. 'We are cleaning up the mess of the government', says SGR worker Brenda. Where state institutions are believed to fail, NGOs take up the task of improving the execution of the policy. Tobias, a veteran member of SGR, explains:

> We are not against the policy. Well, it's like…you see, we are against…we realized that...I don't know how to explain this...some people who have been working here a long time, they came to the understanding that a small group of people cannot change the policy. But you can work on other ways to support people, to make sure our work leads to good results, which would be a status or a medical indication [for migrants] or something.

NGOs find themselves in the paradoxical position of actively using the state's legal framework in their attempt to support migrants, while they simultaneously reject these state policies. It is a 'secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight' (Agamben 1998, 133), that runs the risk of having the institutionalized Dutch civil-society

undermining structural changes that are suggested by activists and migrants who attempt to subvert state regulations.

We distinguish three types of NGOs working on migration/deportation issues: organizations that can be regarded as subcontractors of the state, organizations that operate more or less in agreement with state policies, and organizations that openly oppose state policies.

The subcontractor type of NGOs exclusively focuses on the departure of illegalized migrants from the Netherlands. Their finances come almost entirely from DT&V and/or the European Return Fund. Recent years show a significant rise in these relatively small-scale NGOs operating 'voluntary return' programs with emblematic names like Bridge to Better, Solid Road or Tailored Return. These NGOs often attempt to distance themselves from an image of strictly serving as implementers of state policies. Gert-Jan, a co-founder of one such NGO, explains: 'We only work with people who approached us themselves, asking us to help them with their return.' However, he later negatively comments on attempts of other NGOs to help 'illegal migrants': 'Well, there are these local projects that offer migrants basic facilities. Yeah, that de-motivates people to return. Then we don't get them back [to their countries of origin] anymore'.

An example of the second type of NGOs is the Dutch Refugee Council (*Vluchtelingenwerk*). With branches all across the country, the Refugee Council is one of the largest NGOs in the field. For the last 35 years, it supports migrants in their legal procedures, in the integration of migrants who received a status, and in facilitating the return of illegalized migrants via a program called 'Looking at the Future'. Approximately half of the finances of their local and national branches are directly covered by the national and local government (Annual Report 2013).[5] Tellingly, the gross annual salary of the general director is almost €100.000.[6]

An NGO openly opposing the state policy, our third type, is for example Stichting LOS (Nationwide Support for the Undocumented), an umbrella for relatively small-scale NGOs that are each selecting their own specific target group. Categories that are used for selection include: sexuality, mental- or physical illness, religion, age, geographic location,

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[5] For more on the co-option of the Dutch Refugee Council through financial means, see Habraken et al. 2013

[6] See www.vfi.nl/website/branche-informatie/brancheonderzoek/feiten-en-cijfers/salarissen-directeuren-

goede-doelenorganisaties [viewed 09.01.2015]

vulnerability, gender, but also juridical status as assigned to migrants in a legal procedure by the state, for example, 'failed asylum-seekers'. Relying on the efforts of volunteers and/or low paid employees, these organizations often receive governmental small funds from local or national sources. SGR is one such small-scale NGO, receiving half of its budget from subsidies of the local government.

Positioned on the critical end of the NGO spectrum, SGR originates from the squatters movement in the 1980s and nowadays offers social and juridical support to migrants whose asylum request got rejected. The organization is run by a handful of modestly paid employees, most of whom had initially diligently volunteered for years, and around twenty volunteers, who commit to at least two full workdays a week. Several migrants find their way to SGR hoping to find some support on a daily basis. Based in central Amsterdam, new migrants are received at the SGR office on weekdays for an intake. After ringing the outer doorbell, a buzz indicates that the slightly heavy door can be pushed open. Walking through a dim corridor, the visitor finds a narrow staircase in the end leading to the first floor. After some cardboard boxes and a collection of give-away clothes piled in the small hallway, a few chairs that are often occupied by new coming, mostly African migrants, serve as the waiting room.

For migrants, the challenge of receiving support from SGR starts when they go through the formal intake. After being called in from the waiting room, migrants are asked by volunteers to answer standardized questions concerning identity, juridical situation, country of origin, family situation, and medical condition following a list of checkboxes. If migrants fit SGRs designated target group, their legal file consisting of the asylum application procedures is evaluated to estimate the juridical perspective. If this perspective is regarded to be too weak, the migrant does not meet the conditions to receive formal support. Migrants who are considered eligible for support are then referred to as 'clients'. All 'clients' are assigned a personal contact at SGR who meets with them on an individual basis in order to devise the preferred juridical and social strategy. A file is created with information about the migrant that is considered useful in the juridical procedure and further information is tracked in the migrants' database account, which is accessible to all SGR workers. Employees and volunteers are each given responsibility of a caseload of 'clients'. To protect them from police arrest or other undesirable situations related to identity checks, SGR provides 'clients' with identity cards. Besides a passport photo, these

cards contain information about the SGR contact person so the police can reach them and arrest of the 'client' might be prevented.

'We are not able to help everyone', Carla explains after sending someone away who was hoping to get support from SGR. Her colleague Jasmijn elaborates: 'It is not feasible to achieve more. We simply do not have the capacity...But I think that given the possibilities, we do the utmost now.' Given the scarcity of possibilities, assistance is preferably directed at those who 'need', or in other words 'deserve' it most, even within the designated target group. This categorical selection by SGR results in tense situations in daily practice where a line is continuously being drawn between the deserving and undeserving migrants. The dichotomy is hard to understand for migrants in precarious situations. 'But what should I do now? Where should I sleep tonight, tomorrow? I have no place to go!' replies Aalif to the limited capacities of SGR and the impossibility to assist him. In another case, a migrant accusingly cried: 'You should try your best! You are a support organization but what support are you offering at all?'

The migrants who do receive support are expected to be grateful with whatever they receive or else run the risk of becoming 'ungrateful subjects' (Moulin 2012). The image of the ungrateful subject becomes patently visible when migrants who are not considered to be 'real refugees' solicit support from SGR. Thom explains: 'When it is possible to go back, it is your own choice to stay here. But then we are not going to help you'. In practice, given their dependency on subsidies from the local or national state, it is financially difficult for SGR to support migrants who, according to the state, are able to leave the Netherlands or have denied state facilities. Tobias explains: 'When you start to count [as an organization] then you come in contact with people on an administrative level. And then you have to negotiate! Yeah, you can say like "euhm no", but then you get nothing. So you have to give up something… your independency and your privacy. And we get money from the municipality for supporting a specific group of refugees'. What Tobias highlights is the fact that NGOs receive state funding in return for acceptance of the 'rules of the game', namely, that they should not extend their help to those migrants who already receive direct state provisions.

Such exchange is only possibly due to the intensified conjoined terms of state and civil-society. The efforts of SGR to counter the state policy have undergone a significant

change according to veteran members. 'Over the past few years, I have seriously experienced how this organization has changed', Mona admits. 'It used to be different.'

Sealing off imaginaries of citizenship: working within a deportation continuum

'We used to protest more, go to demonstrations and such. But actually we reached the goals we had back then, you know, now we are sitting around the table with the municipality who is supporting our work. So yeah, what is there to demonstrate against now?' explains Tobias at SGR. A converging dynamic between civil-society actors and state-agents has been highlighted in different modern states (Scholte 2002) and in the Dutch political context in particular (Andeweg 2000, Habraken et. al 2013). In the Dutch deportation field, this dynamic has produced a continuum with an underlying yet visible logic. Driven by the desire to sit at the table with state agencies, and the prospect of becoming influential within this political field, civil-society actors have achieved a foot in ministerial committees, parliamentary debates, and other political decision-making fora. Consequently, there seems to be no clear idea, but mere confusion, on what the actual protest against the state consists of nowadays, as illustrated by Jasmijn's interpretation of the daily work:

> Of course it is my, the organization's ideal to change the policy of the government. Of course, you are confronted with it constantly because you are constantly working with it and trying to think of how things should be different and…but there is also, indeed, so much to do, to take care that...that the policy as it is now is carefully executed…and therefore I execute, out of protest, namely out of protest, what the IND should have done, in my opinion. Because they simply don't do it.

Although Jasmijn gives priority to supplementing the tasks of the IND, she also believes that this prevents her from protesting these very policies. Tobias explains that the reason for a decline in protesting state policies lies in recently changed circumstances:

> We have become an institute that is taken seriously by other groups, by the municipality too, even on a national level…on a governmental level. Well, and that is not because we constantly say like "you are crazy, and you are no good, and you are crooks or partly imbecile", or even worse, no, we always worked with a positive attitude. And of course it is terrible when you get people and you are thinking "well, how is it even possible that they have to go back, it is highly dangerous there in Eritrea" but yeah, it is also, we didn't bring the guy over here, or you have to let that go. But we cannot help it, but this can eat you up, but ok, of course you have

to, just like a doctor with a patient or a lawyer with a case, you need a certain degree of professionalism.

In the current constellation, some repressive state policies can only be implemented with the accommodating work of NGOs. For example, setting 'failed' asylum-seekers out on the street without being concerned for their subsistence and potential ramifications for public order is only possible because NGOs arrive to pick these people up and offer them shelter, food and health care. Civil-society actors at the same time recognize that this informally agreed upon division of labour in treating illegalized migrants means that 'cleaning up the mess of the government' demands all their time at the expense of former practices of protest.

Whereas NGOs welcome their role as interlocutor in meetings initiated by the government, state-agents also applaud this cooperation. In the words of Judith from the DT&V:

> In the old days NGOs used to think of us as the 'bad guys'. Every time they'd see us they'd go like 'oh, here are the guys that are busy with forced return'. But more recently I see that, like also with the Dutch refugee Council with whom we first had a difficult relation, that now there is much more contact. This is because we talk with each other about our work and they get to know us better and we get to know them. Then they understand us and we become less of 'bad guys'.

Another veteran DT&V case manager, Silvia, noted that: 'Some NGOs have this idea that the land is for everyone and that we should only help those people who themselves decide to leave. But lately I noticed a cultural shift in their attitude. They are now saying that they want to collaborate'. For NGOs, being occupied with immediate concerns impedes them from reflecting on whether deportation is an (un)acceptable immigration tool. Instead, they debate and dispute the *extent* to and the *manner* in which deportation is used. Although we recognize the plurality of ideas on the use of deportation, this plurality is neatly reduced to a delimited range. The idea that deportation 'may serve to highlight just how divided and confused modern societies are in how they conceptualise membership and in who has the right to determine membership' (Anderson et al. 2011, 548), is in the Dutch case at best a limited confusion which does not lead to a divide that stands in the way of a consensus. In other words, differences among and between state-agents and NGOs workers are not rooted in the principal question 'Why we do what we

do?', but rather in the practical question of 'How we do what we do?' In this sense, the difference between actors in the continuum amounts to a semantic one; that of attempting to claim the moral high ground and appearing to be more humane and (politically) correct.

Highlighting these conjoined terms one cannot discount the financial dependency on state funding of Dutch civil-society organizations. It has been argued that in the Netherlands 'the difference between government and civil-society in many fields had disappeared' (Habraken et. al. 2013, 752). NGOs compete in applying to funds, like the European Return Fund, for projects that reinforce the government's policies. This financial reliance produces a compromising effect in the extent that NGOs can agitate state institutions and policymakers, criticize state actions freely, and promote radical alternatives. This compromising tendency has been noted by DT&V case managers who interact with many NGOs that, as Judith put it, 'get their funding from the European return Fund and also from the DT&V, so this is a clear motivation for them to collaborate with us'. In applying for budgets and presenting their performance, NGOs adopt state categories and jargon to justify their expenses to funding agencies. This 'terminological isomorphism' transforms the juridical and political categories of state policies into an accepted currency for discussing issues relating to citizenship and rights.

Consequently, at stake in most exchanges between the pros and cons of deportation are the technicalities of these regimes, not their ethical, political and biopolitical foundations. The fact that most civil-society actors have been working in recent years within the official categories and 'rules of the game', as set out by state policies, has led to the circumscription of resistance to pre-agreed lines of what is regarded to be legitimate actions. Concurrently, the fact that many state-agents show empathy towards illegalized migrants, and conceive of their work in terms of upholding human-rights, diffuses criticism of 'doing evil' in the name of formal procedures. In this sense, the current field of deportation is better seen as a continuum on which state-agents and civil-society actors are interchangeably placed in endorsing, operating and criticizing – yet always accepting – the deportation of illegalized migrants as an inherent practice of states.

The highlighted convergences have had two interrelated important consequences for the space to think and negotiate imaginaries of citizenship and alternative modes of belonging in the Netherlands: first, real alternatives to existing deportation policies and practices are hardly ever voiced by actors who participate in the current political debate;

second, and related, actors who do articulate real alternatives are banned from the dominant political framework and dismissed as radical or utopian. The deportation continuum thus highlight the ability of the political field to suffocate the potential of 'radical' actors, among them illegalized migrants, to transform hegemonic ideas on rights, belongingness, and justice.

By lieu of conclusion

On a Saturday morning in March 2014, the WAH non-citizen migrant group and some Dutch activists protested outside the official residence of the mayor of Amsterdam. The mayor, who publicly positioned himself as being compassionate towards the WAH group, engaged in a discussion with the protesters at his doorstep. At a certain point, a Dutch activist asked the mayor about the presumed efforts to deport illegalized migrants who reside in a municipality shelter. The mayor, viscerally agitated, insisted that it was unacceptable for activists to discuss such matters with him. With an accusing finger he reproached the activist:

> What you are saying is political!...I am the mayor of the city, and I am part of Dutch legislation…you are looking in the eyes of a mayor who tries to do everything to help the refugees, get what they can get within the borders of Dutch legislation. But your goal is to fight Dutch legislation. And that's the difference between you and me!...I stand for the refugees. But I withstand, I withstand, Dutch political activists!

Whereas the non-citizen migrants are positioned as passive subjects for whom the mayor fights, the non-migrant activists are excluded as political actors because they appear to be operating outside the recognized political framework. The Dutch deportation continuum, nestled in a greater political 'cozy consensus' context, is based on a wide, albeit often unacknowledged, consensus regarding migration management. This is a consensus not because everyone openly agrees on everything, but in the sense that Ranciére (2007, 567) indicated when he argues that 'what is entailed in the notion of consensus [is]: the infinite reversibility of interpretation, a reversibility that is based on the fact that the police order and the critical dispositive share the same regime of visibility and intelligibility of things'.

What a deportation continuum thus highlights is the formation of a field where NGOs do not simply get co-opted into the state-system, nor is it that their work just depoliticizes the subject of matter. Instead, a deportation continuum foregrounds the

generation of a consensus among state and a dominant majority of non-state actors around the very notion of contemporary deportations. Substantial alternatives and critical inquiries of the current system are thus entertained increasingly only by actors who consciously choose to be a-political and are often indeed opposing not only state agencies but also the work of NGOs. These actors - anarchists, squatters, no-border movements, non-citizen migrant groups - attempt to transform the notion of the political by acting and enunciating illegalized migrants as de facto active political subjects. Although illegalized migrants are often presented and treated by recognized political actors as 'passive' and 'in need of a voice', there is plenty of evidence to the contrary in the Netherlands and elsewhere (Coutin 1998; Isin 2009; Nyers and Rygiel 2012). Illegalized migrants repeatedly prove to be articulated and savvy when it comes to understanding the political context, putting forward demands, and collaborating with different parties locally and internationally. The predicament of activist citizens (Isin 2009) thus appears to be the fact that actors within a hegemonic continuum agree that deportation is a controversial political issue, yet they also agree with and actively produce the narrowly demarcated space for deportation to be discussed and for alternatives to be imagined.

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