A site of power imbalance or political potential?

A comparative case study of the accommodation infrastructure for illegalized migrants in Brussels

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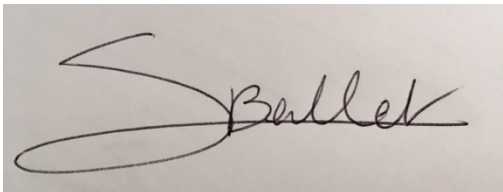
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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at exploring the humanitarian-political dynamics of diverse accommodation for illegalized migrants in Brussels. It builds on theories of recent civil support initiatives and literature on urban autonomous spaces. The research is a comparative case study of the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and of squats. Specifically, the paper examines which power dynamics and relations exist within those spaces and what humanitarian-political variation is at interplay. I operationalize four subdimensions based on the concept of *socially subversive humanitarianism*: the spatial-temporal organization of accommodation, the politicization of their members and volunteers, the social interactions between volunteers and migrants, and the reproduction, contention or reconstruction of migrants' social subject categories. The goal of the study was to contribute to and complement academic literature on civil initiatives, urban informal living spaces, and the supposed contradiction of their political potential. I used ethnographical methods of field work: participant observation in the Citizen Platform, squats and a squatting campaign, informal conversations with both volunteers as migrants, 16 semi-structured interviews, supplemented with a document analysis. I show that there are very diverse power dynamics at interplay over all the accommodation of the Citizen Platform, the differences of contention between the Citizen Platform and squats, but also the similar humanitarian and political dynamics. This thesis thus stimulates more research on civil initiatives after the *long summer of migration* and comparative studies on different forms of civil solidarity initiatives.

ABSTRACT

Deze thesis wil de humanitair-politieke dynamiek onderzoeken van diverse vormen van accommodatie voor *geïllegaliseerde migranten* in transit in Brussel. Het bouwt op theorieën over recente burgerhulpinitiatieven en literatuur over stedelijke autonome ruimtes. Het onderzoek is een vergelijkende casestudy van het Burgerplatform en van kraakpanden. Meer specifiek onderzoekt de paper welke machtsdynamieken en -relaties er bestaan binnen die ruimtes en welke humanitair-politieke variatie er speelt. Ik operationaliseer vier subdimensies op basis van het concept van *sociaal subversief humanitarisme*: de ruimtelijk-temporele organisatie van de accomodatie, de politisering van de vrijwilligers, de sociale interacties tussen vrijwilligers en migranten, en de reproductie, betwisting of reconstructie van de sociale subjectcategorieën van migranten. Het doel van de studie was een bijdrage te leveren aan en een aanvulling te vormen op de academische literatuur over burgerinitiatieven, stedelijke informele leefruimten, en de veronderstelde tegenstrijdigheid van hun politieke potentieel. Ik deed etnografische veldwerkm: participerende observatie in het Burgerplatform, kraakpanden en een kraakactie, informele gesprekken met zowel vrijwilligers als migranten, 16 semi-gestructureerde interviews, aangevuld met een documentanalyse. Ik laat zien dat er zeer diverse machtsdynamieken in het spel zijn in de vormen van accommodaties van het Burgerplatform, de verschillen tussen het Burgerplatform en de kraakpanden, maar ook de vergelijkbare humanitaire en politieke dynamieken. Deze thesis stimuleert dus meer onderzoek naar burgerinitiatieven en vergelijkende studies naar verschillende vormen van burgerlijke solidariteitsinitiatieven.

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INTRODUCTION

After the demolition of and the increasing hostile environment in border areas such as Calais and Dunkirk in 2016, Brussels has been a place of transit for migrants on their way to the UK. I conceptualize Brussels as an urban border zone constituted in the context of a violent EU border regime. Like in other border zones, people in mobility have been temporarily trapped in Brussels. Many of them do not want to apply for asylum in Belgium, or are afraid of being sent back to the first country of arrival in the EU - under the Dublin III procedure - or of being deported. I define these people as illegalized migrants as their condition is illegalized by the EUs and national migration regime, and they experience policing, surveillance and neglect. A majority of these migrants are de facto undocumented and do not have a protection status. However, some did already obtain a protection status in another EU country but leave for various reasons. The term *undocumented migrant* is most commonly used for migrants who stay in a country without a legal or documented status, and thus suffer for example from precarious housing and working conditions. However, most of the migrants in the context of my research are in transit towards the UK and do not necessarily wish to stay in Belgium. Besides this, the term *transit migrants* or *transmigrants* has emerged in Belgian public discourse. Nevertheless, being in transit is not an ontological condition, and has been a discursive tool for politicians (Neven, 2018) to delegitimize certain migratory trajectories.

In the case of Brussels, the Belgian state has denied illegalized migrants material help such as accommodation, food and other services as they do not claim asylum in Belgium. The Reception Act of 2007 which stipulates the criteria under which asylum-seekers get reception from the Belgian state, does not apply for people who do not officially register an asylum claim. When in 2017 more migrants in transit in came to Brussels, the Belgian state answered with a repressive approach. In and around the Maximilian park and the North train station, where these illegalized migrants were staying, a hostile environment was constituted aimed at policing and disciplining (see Vandevoordt, 2020b). Quickly, citizens mobilized to host these migrants in their homes. A civil initiative called the Citizen Platform started to operate, coordinating these joined efforts of citizens. They set up a structure of hosting families, cooperated with professional NGOs for medical and legal help, and worked together with Brussels' authorities to open up a collective shelter.

The Citizen Platform is one of the civil solidarity actors that have emerged in Europe throughout and in the aftermath of *the long summer of migration* in 2015. Numerous scholars have written on these civil initiatives (Della Porta, 2018b; M. Feischmidt, Pries, & Cantat, 2019; Sutter & Youkhana,

2017). I choose to study forms of civil refugee support as several authors (Feischmidt & Zakarias, 2018; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019) have already shown how this aid often finds itself in the grey zone between traditional humanitarian aid and political action. According to critical humanitarian studies, humanitarian help produces power imbalances between the aid providers and the aid recipients because the latter are often approached as apolitical and vulnerable bodies (Barnett, 2017; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). As a result, humanitarian action creates and enforces the category of vulnerable migrants instead of treating migrants as equals. Recent civil initiatives seem to act rather in solidarity with migrants and try to challenge the power imbalance between caregiver and the person in need of care by, for example, establishing personal relationships (Rozakou, 2017; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019). These initiatives are then placed between charity and solidarity (Rozakou, 2016). Furthermore, critical humanitarian studies address the assumed apolitical nature of humanitarian action and apolitical motives of humanitarian actors. This apolitical humanitarian action contrasts with more political repertoires or action of social movements such as protests and civil disobedience. Yet civil initiatives that provide shelter adopt a more politicized vision of their action, by taking for example a position against the EU and national migration policy, which according to Vandevoordt (2019) is a characteristic of a more *particularist solidarity*. More so, authors who study civil initiatives show that volunteers have both moral-humanitarian and political motives for their engagement (Artero, 2019; M. Feischmidt & Zakarias, 2018; Frykman & Mäkelä, 2018; Kende, Lantosa, Belinszky, Csaba, & Lukács, 2017).

Previous research of Vandevoordt (2019b) conceptualizes the ambivalent humanitarian-political tension in grassroots civil initiatives by the term *socially subversive humanitarianism.* With subversive humanitarianism Vandevoordt (2019) and Vandevoordt & Verschraegen (2019) mean: "a morally motivated series of actions which acquires a political character not through the form in which these actions manifest themselves, but through their implicit opposition to the ruling socio-political climate." (p.123). I opt to use this term in my research as this ideal-type needs empirical scrutinization. Such an ideal-type can serve as a tool to compare across cases by focusing on some of their key characteristics.

The Citizen Platform is not the only grassroots civil support group for illegalized migrants in Brussels. Squatters' movements have also mobilised to provide material support, but due to their rather informal and invisible character, they remain rather under studied. The literature on informal living spaces contrasts these with humanitarian camps (Dadusc, Grazioli, & Martínez, 2019).

Squats are assumed to encompass a politicising and political potential because, on the one hand, they are associated with urban social movements which use squatting as a *repertoire of action* (see Kotronaki, 2018; Tilly, 1986) The politicising effect of urban informal living spaces is also cited in critical citizenship studies (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Nyers & Rygiel, 2012): through squatting undocumented migrants constitute themselves as urban citizens and enact an alternative form of citizenship (Mezzadra, 2010). Scholars have written on how the relationships between activists and migrants also appear to be equal in this context (Karaliotas & Kapsali ,2020). The literature on these autonomous spaces appears to be rarely associated with ambivalent humanitarian and political dynamics. Nevertheless, volunteers with citizenship status support squats for illegalized migrants in Brussels. It is thus likely that a humanitarian-political tension can also arise. Hence, it could be particularly enriching to compare the accommodation in squats of and by illegalized migrants with the accommodation of the Citizen Platform, in order to re-explore the humanitarian-political tension.

There is thus an impetus to ethnographically investigate the humanitarian and political dynamics in grassroots civil initiatives. Citizen initiatives have been already associated with humanitarian-political variation, while squats are assumed to have a politicising potential. Therefore, it seems both theoretically and empirically relevant to compare these two forms of civil support. Because of the specific socio-spatial form of squats, it also seems particularly interesting to delineate to the spatial aspects of civil initiatives, namely the accommodation and shelter for illegalized migrants. I apply the concept of *social subversive humanitarianism* in combination with literature on squats to arrive at specific subdimensions to compare power dynamics and the humanitarian-political variation in these places of accommodation. A comparative case study between the Citizen Platform and squatters' movements in the same local context with a focus on the same practice – namely accommodation – can detect differences, but also similarities in political potential.

Thus, I pose the following research questions: *What are the power dynamics and relations at play in the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels? What is the humanitarian-political variation within and produced by the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels?* The different subdimensions, namely the temporal and spatial aspects of accommodation, the politicization of volunteers, the social interactions between volunteers and migrants and how the subject categories of migrants are reproduced or challenged, serve as tools to explore these power dynamics and humanitarian-political variation in the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats. By focusing on spaces of accommodation, I aim at the mechanisms that take place in the intimate space, such as the organisation and functioning, and the social

relations and degree of self-organisation. But these spaces are also created in cooperation or conflict with certain political actors such as the Brussels region and municipalities.

This research will explore these questions by conducting a comparative case study between the Citizen Platform and squatters' movements in the urban context of Brussels. I use ethnographic techniques such as participant observation to compare these four subdimensions. For my case study on the Citizen Platform I researched their big collective shelter (Porte d'Ulysse), the hotels they temporarily opened during the COVID-19 pandemic, hosting-at-home, small collective shelters managed by citizens, and the Sister House (a shelter for women). For my case study on squats for illegalized migrants, I followed two squats (Ultra and Tilt[1]) and a temporary campaign to occupy buildings in Brussels to house illegalized migrants. In total, I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews and numerous informal conversations with both volunteers and members of the Citizen Platform and squats, and residents. Based on these four subdimensions, I came to three categories of comparison: the temporal and spatial organization, politicization, and social interactions and subject formation, which I will present in my results.

I will briefly go over the following sections of my thesis. First, I present the theoretical framework, where I discuss the EU border regime, border zones, civil initiatives to assist and support illegalized migrants and informal autonomous spaces for accommodation in an urban context. Then I present my research design, my research questions and the methodology. Subsequently, I present the results of my analysis. Finally, I will outline my conclusion and discussion of the results.

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[1] Pseudonyms

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Border zones in transit

Before discussing the reception and accommodation of illegalized migrants, I outline the EU border regime, the creation of internal borders, and how the EU border regime illegalizes certain migration trajectories. Then I will elaborate on the concept of border zones.

<u>1.1. EU border regime</u>

I will briefly examine the EU border regime and how it constructs internal borders in order to highlight how it produces border zones such as Brussels. In this way, it gives us a context why civil initiatives have unfolded to support illegalized migrants.

The foundation of the EU border regime can be traced back to the Schengen Convention in 1990, which abolished internal EU borders, implemented the freedom of movement for EU-citizens and installed a common visa policy. Over the years the EU has created a stricter border regime, thus reducing the regular routes towards the EU. The EU has both externalized borders and created internal EU borders through certain policies and processes. The externalization of borders includes how the EU tries to make international and bilateral agreements with third (non-EU) countries, such as the EU-Turkey deal. The EU border regime also creates internal EU borders (Lendaro, 2016). The Dublin III Regulation stipulates the criteria that determine which EU member state is responsible for examining an asylum claim[2]. One of these criteria is that the member state where the asylum seeker first entered the EU is responsible for processing the asylum claim (see Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). The Dublin Regulation creates internal EU borders, as migrants are not allowed to move over borders in the Schengen area to claim asylum in a different country[3]. Migrants risk a Dublin transfer to the country of first entry (Kasparek, 2016; Tsianos & Kuster, 2012). The Dublin III Regulation tries to prevent secondary mobility inside the EU, but the practical implication of the Regulation is more mobility. Internal borders are also located on the national and local level. There is a focus on spatially managing illegalized migrants through detention, policing and deportation, which Kalir (2019) calls Departheid. Illegality is thus not an ontological condition but is produced by states' and EU's migration laws and migration control (De Genova, 2002).

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[2] It is a hierarchy of criteria for determining which Member State is responsible
[3] Unless in the case of family reunification

Hence, a combination of techniques produces a violent EU border regime. This is of theoretical relevance because these techniques on the one hand produce border zones such as Brussels, and on the other hand illegalize migrants in transit, who are for a large part neglected by states, and then depend on the support of civil initiatives.

1.2. Border zones

Brussels can be considered a border zone since – in general – 2017-2018, when more migrants in transit arrived. It is thus relevant to explain the concept of border zones before turning towards the accommodation and material help in border zones.

The multiplication of borders and migration management practices fracture migrants' movements inside Europe. The EU border regime produces socio-spatial *transit zones* (Hess, 2012): border regions which turn into zones of heightened circulation with people caught in mobility. These border zones are not necessarily located right at the border of nation states. Some spaces are only temporary spaces of passage for a few weeks or months, others persist despite efforts of disciplining migration through migration management and border policy practices. For example, the informal camps around Calais have become a semi-permanent space of transit, even though the French authorities try to disassemble the camp constantly (Hagan, 2018; Van Isacker, 2019). What is crucial, is that these border zones are marked by the mobility of migrants with a precarious legal status. Within border zones, increasingly coercive migration management practices operate, such as police violence, the destruction of living spaces and the denial of access to rights and care, which Ansems de Vries & Welander (2016a, 2016b) call a *politics of exhaustion*.

2. Accommodation in border zones

In these border zones, accommodation, shelter and assistance for illegalized migrants are usually not provided by state agencies or regulated by the state institutions. This support is operating in a field of tension between humanitarian help and politicized support. The socio-spatial form of humanitarian accommodation is a camp, whereas politicized support has been linked to for example urban informal encampments. I explore the seemingly opposing literature on camps and literature on squats. In the absence if state support, grassroots civil initiatives and informal camps have unfolded all around Europe (Feischmidt et al., 2019; Van Isacker, 2019).

2.1. The camp: site of humanitarian care and control

In the literature, camps have been traditionally linked to Agamben's *state of exception* (Diken, 2004; Perera, 2002). This makes the camp a place where the socio-juridical order is suspended (Agamben, 1998, 2005). In such a socio-spatial entity, migrants become apolitical beings. As Agier (2016) argues, a whole range of humanitarian actors are present in borderlands to provide humanitarian assistance to the "undesirables", taking the form of humanitarian government. These humanitarian actors can be international, national or local NGOs. For Agier (2011:4): "there is no care without control", border zones thus become humanitarian spaces, with an intimate link between humanitarian organizations and sovereign power (Agier, 2011). Other scholars have pointed at the humanitarian assistance in camps and how they often turn into spaces of control, producing migrant subjects as suffering victims (Diken & Lautsen, 2002, 2005; Hyndman, 2000; Ramadan, 2013). Nevertheless, geographers and anthropologists (Ek, 2006; Ramadan, 2013; Sigona, 2015), and also Agier (2011) have also showed that camps are social and political spaces with the potential for political activism (Rygiel, 2011).

2.1.1. Civil refugee support

Scholars studying the responses in the aftermath of *the long summer of migration* have illustrated how grassroots civil initiatives have supported migrants in border zones, or upon arrival (Fleischmann, 2020; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Milan, 2019). These civil humanitarians are new humanitarian actors, which seem to have (at least partially) replaced big humanitarian organizations. More so, they seem to operate in a grey zone between humanitarianism and politics.

Scholars from critical humanitarian studies have argued that humanitarian action puts an emphasis on human suffering (Agier, 2010; Bornstein & Redfield, 2011; Ticktin, 2011). The aim of humanitarians is the alleviation of immediate suffering through temporary provision of food, shelter or medical care (Ticktin, 2014). More so, authors have problematized how actions to alleviate suffering (re)produce unequal power relations (Barnett, 2017). They argue that humanitarian action addresses migrants as a humanitarian emergency, victimizing them as vulnerable objects while perpetuating inequalities (see Fassin, 2007). Humanitarianism mobilizes alleged apolitical ideals of universality and benevolence (Hyndman, 2000; Nyers, 2013; Vaughan-Williams, 2015). Scholars have addressed how humanitarian action is understood as an impartial and neutral practice (Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2012). These principles of apolitical engagement often lead humanitarian actors to effectively reproduce the causes of the suffering they seek to address (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019), and thus an apolitical vision can have deeply political effects. A belief in the

notion of a shared humanity lays at the basis of humanitarianism (Agier, 2010; Barnett, 2011; Feldman & Ticktin, 2010). Many works have foregrounded the essentializing effects of such a notion of a shared humanity (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010; Ticktin, 2016). Edkins (2000) for example outlines how such an approach depersonalizes and depoliticizes. Through technologies of care humanitarian action is strictly entangled with control over migrants' bodies and lives (Fassin, 2011; Ticktin, 2016).

Various authors have pointed at the politicizing potential of grassroots civil initiatives (Rozakou, 2017). Civil humanitarians usually adopt a more *particularistic* notion of solidarity (Vandevoordt, 2019b). This particularist solidarity involves citizens and civil actors taking sides, and supporting oppressed and victimized groups. Greek activists for example identify themselves as 'being in solidarity with migrants and refugees' (Rozakou, 2017), which refers to the social and political component of the support they give. Acts of solidarity include basic humanitarian aid such as shelter, food and physical care, but also legal, social, cultural and political support. In this way, authors suggest that the notion of solidarity could form a radical alternative to the core principles of humanitarianism. The ambivalent role of grassroots refugee support in politics is also central in Agustín & Jørgensen (2019) concept of civil solidarity in their book *Solidarity and the 'Refugee Crisis' in Europe.* Merikoski (2021) reveals how hosting in families entails contentious elements, and suggests the term *contentious hospitality* where the home is a powerful site of solidarity.

I will use the concept of *socially subversive humanitarianism* that Vandevoordt (2019) and Vandevoordt & Verschraegen (2019) theoretically foreground in their research in order to explore the dichotomy between humanitarian and political action in grassroots civil refugee initiatives, as it is an ideal-type which requires empirical and comparative scrutiny. In their research they explore the political potential in amongst others the Citizen Platform. They identify different aspects in the grey zone between humanitarianism and politics. Grassroots civil initiatives have often a dubious relationship towards politics. Their main focus is to provide immediate help, but they also adopt other *repertoires of action* of social movements such as letter writing, protests and online campaigns. Through the humanitarian support they provide, citizens' acts can be considered as a form of civil disobedience. Their actions are thus contentious in the wider political climate, and civil humanitarians take sides instead of remaining *neutral*. Specifically, spatial practices of contending public symbolic spaces attribute to their contentious actions (Leitner, H., Sheppard, E. & Sziarto, 2008), as there they render their solidarity with illegalized migrants visible.

As various scholars bring forward (and already highlighted above) (Barnett, 2011), humanitarian action creates certain subjects embedded in a power inequality, namely active subjects helping the other, and passive subjects or aid receivers. Humanitarian aid tends to produce hierarchical, power-infused and vertical relations, installing a form of dependency of the aid receiver, which is especially the case in camps managed by large NGOs (Fassin, 2011; Harrell-Bond, 1999; Vandevoordt, 2019b). Complementary, humanitarian action (re)produces categories used by the state and/or the global refugee regime. In contrast, recent civil initiatives are associated with more personal and horizontal relations between citizens and migrants. Places where solidarity between citizens and migrants are practiced, become social spaces (Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016; de Jong & Ataç, 2017; Hammam & Karakayali, 2016; Koca, 2016). Even though such relations would sometimes cause friction (Braun, 2017; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019), Braun (2017) argues that these tensions in the relationship between citizens and volunteers would also generate dissent. These spaces then offer opportunities of reconstituting illegalized migrants as *social* subjects.

In short, recent grassroots civil mobilization thus seems to emerge from a grey zone between morality and politics (Fassin, 2012; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019). Feischmidt & Zakarias (2018) describe this dialectic relationship between charity and politics in civil refugee initiatives as the *politicization of charity* and the *charitization of politics.* Rozakou (2017) shows this in Greek solidarity movements, using the term *solidarity humanitarianism.* Sutter (2020) postulates that these new forms of civil humanitarian assistance should be conceived as *vernacular humanitarianism* and that their activities are a certain form of prefigurative politics (Leach, 2013). Thus, civil initiatives and grassroots migrant support play a crucial role in border zones in the accommodation of and by illegalized migrants.

2.2. Urban autonomous spaces of accommodation

Camps, makeshift and informal settlements can also be sites where political action is possible, which is increasingly recognized in post-Agambian migration studies (Feldman, 2014; Rygiel, 2012; Sanyal, 2011; Turner, 2016; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, 2013, 2017). These border camps are not only created in national border zones, but also in cities (Katz, 2019; Lebuhn, 2013).

The city is the terrain of both institutional as makeshift camps, of multiple levels of institution and government, and of diverse forms of citizenship. Institutional and governmental inaction (Davies, Isakjee, & Dhesi, 2017) and the illegalisation of migrants foster the creation of makeshift camps (Martin, Minca, & Katz, 2020). Migrant squats present an example of such makeshift camps in the

urban space. Migrant squats are also an essential part of grassroots mobilisation of social movements before and in the aftermath of *the long summer of migration.* Occupations by migrants and the solidarities that are fostered are assumed to challenge the violent EU border regime and the humanitarian rationale (Dadusc et al., 2019).

The occupation of space is a well-established protest repertoire of urban movements. In this sense, migrant squatting and the creation of informal spaces in the city can be seen as contentious (Leitner, Sheppard & Sziarto, 2008). Squatting is a form of direct action that is inseparable from housing struggles and anti-eviction activism. Civil initiatives play an important role in defining the social inclusion of undocumented migrants at the local, urban level (de Graauw, 2016). Raimondi (2019) for example highlights how the contentious politics - implemented through collective action - define migrants' occupations, combined with egalitarian practices of solidarity. Civil society, activists and citizens can also be supported by local authorities. The city government can thus play a role in creating a sanctuary in their city as they pursue a policy of protecting undocumented migrants in opposition to federal laws (Bauder, 2017). However, as Lambert & Swerts (2019) show in their research around a *Villes Hospitalières* campaign in Belgium, cooperation, compromise, and dialogue with professionals and the local government can overtake the initiative from activists and lead towards depoliticization. Indeed, this process called *institutionalization* in social movement literature (Belda-Miquel, Peris Blanes, & Frediani, 2016; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2004) is understood to cause the decline of radical movements.

Critical citizenship scholars, see the practice as a means for irregular migrants to claim their *right to the city* (Lefebvre, 1968). Occupation by migrants can be understood as acts of citizenship: collective forms of political mobilization by illegalized migrants who claim *the right to have rights* (Butler, 2011). Citizenship is then conceptualized beyond the principle of national sovereignty and becomes a contested terrain that non-citizens enter through "the plethora of political practices through which (they) make claims to belonging, inclusion and recognition in their societies of residence" (Swerts; 2014, 297). Through squatting and creating autonomous space undocumented migrants constitute themselves as urban citizens and enact an alternative form of citizenship (Mezzadra, 2010). In this sense, squatting both transforms and rejects the notion of national citizenship, but generate *citizenship from below* (Nyers & Rygiel, 2012). Within the space of the squat, the migrant subject becomes an active one – a political subject capable of writing a different script: an activist citizen (Isin, 2009).

A third line of literature points at the function squats have in generating *mobile commons*. Mobile commons are understood to be "a world of knowledge, or information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of service exchange, of solidarity and sociability" (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). Inspired by the Autonomy of Migration literature (Mudu & Chattopadhyay, 2017), this radical approach sees mobility and illegalized border crossing as political movements that escape state institutions and delegitimize sovereign control. Migrant occupation in the urban environment is then a technique and tool to escape national migration regimes. When connected with critical citizenship studies, indeed, living in squats can be a way to remain de-identified for undocumented people whose aim is not to obtain a legal status (Dimitris Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2007).

Occupation of buildings for and by illegalized migrants puts contesting space right in the foreground of refugee support. In this sense, the place of the squat is considered 'antithetical' to the one of the camp (Raimondi, 2019). The dominant ordered space of the camp where relations of domination and subordination unfold (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2012) is disrupted by the squat (Raimondi, 2019). In a squat grassroots forms of self-management, autonomy, and solidarity are assumed to be constituted (Dadusc, 2019; Grazioli & Montagna, 2019; Raimondi, 2019). The migrants in these spaces live collectively, organize daily activities, workshops, discussions and build connections with supporters. Agustín & Jørgensen (2019) draw on City Plaza, an occupied hotel, as an empowering alternative based on autonomy and self-organization in contrast to other subjectivities the EU border regime creates. This, then, constitutes a form of *autonomous solidarity* (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019) on the local scale. Indeed, by communal practices and solidarity (Stavrides, 2015), migrants' squats contend the reproduction of humanitarian politics of dependency. Rather than migrants being passive receivers of help and the subject of care-control practices, Dadusc (2019) poses that, in migrant squats modes of organization based on solidarity between the documented and undocumented activists and squatters manifest. The rather non-hierarchical relationships in the Orfanotrofio housing squat are described by Karaliotas & Kapsali (2020) for example by the term *equals in solidarity.* By establishing relations based on *equality,* a political space is constituted where solidarity is a political praxis. Migrants' squats generate different social subjectivities: migrants are seen as equals, squatters are in solidarity with migrants and their struggles. According to Dadusc (2019) the solidarity networks established between documented and undocumented squatters and activist in inhabiting autonomous spaces also enable the formation of *political* subjectivities. Social movement scholars have then pointed at the decentralized and cooperative way to make decisions (de Jong & Ataç, 2017). Indeed, the

horizontal organization of squats and autonomous spaces tend to be associated with the elimination of certain hierarchies between citizens and migrants.

The explicit focus on the contentious character of occupying buildings for precarious housing in the urban context seems valuable to understand the situation in Brussels. Also, literature on occupation and squatting highlights the horizontal relationships between documented and undocumented people active in squats, the bottom-up decision-making and the different subjectivities for migrants in such grassroots civil initiatives.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research compares how the Citizen Platform's accommodation infrastructure and squats for illegalized migrants are operating in the current political context[4]. Concretely, I ask what the power dynamics and relations are in the infrastructure of the Citizen Platform and in squats and what the humanitarian-political variation is within and produced by the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels. I do this by building on the notion of *subversive humanitarianism*. As I foregrounded in my theoretical paradigm, subversive humanitarianism originates from the research of Vandevoordt (2019) and Vandevoordt & Verschraegen (2019), which they use to point at the political potential of grassroots civil refugee support. Vandevoordt (2019) proposes an ideal-type of subversive humanitarianism. This ideal-type is presented as a theoretical tool to think about the possible political nature of civil humanitarian action. The term does not aim to show the inherent political character of grassroots refugee support such as the Citizen Platform.

An ideal-type of *subversive humanitarianism* risks oversimplifying certain dynamics at interplay in grassroots civil refugee support. That is why I empirically scrutinize the term. I try to examine the humanitarian-political tension of grassroots civil refugee support by empirically investigating their socio-spatial practices. I connect literature on squatting and autonomous spaces to socially subversive humanitarianism. By zooming into socio-spatial practices, I try to tackle the humanitarian-political tension in forms of informal shelter for and by illegalized migrants. Thus, the research questions compare the various accommodation provided in the Citizen Platform, and housing in squats.

As highlighted by Vandevoordt (2019), an ideal-type of subversive humanitarianism can be useful to enable comparison across cases by focusing on some of their key characteristics. In fact, I shift the attention to accommodation for and by illegalized migrants, as this opens up the possibility to compare the Citizen Platform with another type of grassroots initiative, namely migrant squats. Both literature on civil initiatives as squats highlight the potential of equal relations between volunteers and migrants, in contrast with humanitarian power asymmetries between aid-giver and aid-receiver. Squatting has traditionally been studied within the literature on urban social movements and urban citizenship (Mezzadra, 2010; Raimondi, 2019). In other words, it is usually associated with

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[4] To actively unravel the dynamics of hosting and shelter by the Citizen Platform does not mean that we should deny the multiple facets of this solidarity movement – over the years also social help, a language school, legal counseling, a Humanitarian Hub with urgent medical help, has been established.

performing collective action and generating political subjectivities. Hence, it could be particularly enriching to compare the accommodation in squats of and by illegalized migrants with the accommodation of the Citizen Platform, in order to explore the humanitarian-political tension.

RQ1: What are the power dynamics and relations at play in the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels?
RQ2: What is the humanitarian-political variation within and produced by accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels?

To examine these research questions I use the dimensions of socially subversive humanitarianism inspired by Vandevoordt (2019) and Vandevoordt & Verschraegen (2019) and the literature on migrant squats (Dadusc et al., 2019; Raimondi, 2019). These dimensions were also relevant based on my empirical observations.

Firstly, I look into the spatial practices and organization of the accommodation infrastructure of the Citizen Platform (see Leitner, Sheppard & Sziarto, 2008; Zamponi, 2018) and squats. Especially literature on squatting highlights occupying buildings as contentious spatial practices. What are the spatial characteristics of the diverse accommodation for illegalized migrants? How are they organized? How are these spaces constituted in relation to the urban context or Brussels?

Secondly, I explore how politicization of members and volunteers of the Citizen Platform and of squatting collectives happens (see Braun, 2017). Literature on urban squatting movements assumes the politicized motivations and goals of their members. In which degree do volunteers act with a humanitarian imperative or have certain political goals?

Thirdly, I focus on the social interactions between volunteers of the Citizen Platform and illegalized migrants (Barnett, 2011; Harrell-Bond, 1999), while similarly focusing on social interactions between volunteers in the squats and illegalized migrants. Do such social interactions take the form of hierarchical relations of unequal power, or are such relations based on principles of equality, reciprocity and solidarity? What are the social interactions between volunteers from squatting collectives and the migrants living in the squats? At what extent can migrants self-manage their living space? How are decisions in the accommodation infrastructure made?

Lastly, I unfold the way in which social subject categories are reproduced or contended within and through spaces of accommodation (Bloemraad, I., Korteweg, A., & Yurdakul, 2008; Fassin, 2012) Humanitarian action tends to reproduce the subjectivities that are created by the nation state and for example the EU border and migration regime. Civil refugee support and migrant squats tend to

challenge these subjectivities. Which other social or political subjectivities do different forms of accommodation produce?

SQ1: What is the temporal and spatial organization of accommodation for people on the move?
SQ2: How does politicization manifest itself among volunteers and members in both the Platform's accommodation infrastructure as in squats?
SQ3: How do social interactions between volunteers/members and illegalized migrants unfold within the spaces of accommodation?
SQ4: In what way are migrants' social subject categories reproduced, constructed or contended in these spaces?

METHODS

In this section, I elaborate on the key methods I am using to conduct a comparative multiple case study on the humanitarian-political variation and power dynamics in grassroots civil initiatives for illegalized migrants. The comparative case study examines similarities and differences of two cases, namely the accommodation infrastructure of the Citizen Platform and the accommodation in squats in the same local context, Brussels. The central methods are qualitative in nature, on which I will elaborate in more detail below.   These methods emerged as the best way of approaching this complex field, and are also relevant for responding to my two research questions: *What are the power dynamics and relations at play in the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels? What is the humanitarian-political variation within and produced by the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels?*

Methodological process

This inductive multiple case study design uses a grounded theory approach. "Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed." (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 273). Theory evolves during a continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This research strategy seems particularly suitable when addressing understudied areas in social movements (Mattoni, 2014). Throughout my research there was a continuous interaction between theory, data collection and data analysis.

My first encounter with the field was from January until February 2019, and then again in March 2020 until May 2020. I volunteered in the Porte d'Ulysse, a collective shelter of the Citizen Platform, during both periods. The research topic and open coding were thus developed during this explorative preliminary research stage. The observations were then linked to theoretical reflections to identify relevant academic debates. The codes which emerged were for example *spatial dynamics* and *social interactions*. Engaging in field research did not start in a completely inductive way, as I already gained theoretical knowledge in the preliminary stage. Initial findings and theoretical exploration narrowed my focus, so I could tailor specific questions when I entered the field again in October 2020. From then on, I actively took on the role as a researcher. Also, during this phase there was a constant interplay between participant observation, data collection, and access to fields. While I was doing participant observation in a hotel of the Citizen Platform, I decided to access a new site for my field work, namely a squat called Tilt. Throughout both fieldworks I supported findings and observations with new theoretical literature, to reposition myself

in the academic field. In this stage, I linked the two case studies to sub notions of *socially subversive humanitarianism* and concepts emerging from the literature on urban autonomous spaces. Later on, I gained access to a squatting campaign through my engagement in Tilt, which again restructured and deconstructed previous findings. To analyse the data, I coded with MAXQDA instead of manually coding. Axial and selective codes which emerged out of the data were for example: *personal bond, individual help, understanding context, safety, autonomy, engagement, accommodation system, responsibility.*

Data collection and analysis

Participant observation and informal conversations

CASES	CASE 1: All accommodation types of the Citizen Platform	CASE 2: Urban migrant squats (Ultra, Tilt, campaign demand for solidarity)	
LOCATION participant observation	Temporary hotel	Tilt	Campaign: demand for solidarity
PERIOD	28/10/2020 – 13/12/2020	05/12/2020 – 11/02/2021	10/01/2021 – 28/03/2021

Table 1: participant observation

As noted above, I first volunteered in the Porte d'Ulysse (the collective shelter from the Citizen Platform) from January 2019 until the end of February 2019 and then from March 2020 until May 2020. This preliminary research stage helped me to gain initial access to the field and to comprehend the context. When I started participant observation as a researcher in October 2020, I immediately took an overt role and asked for (written) consent at the coordinator of the hotel (of the Citizen Platform). During the months of October, November and December I conducted field research in the hotel and was an active volunteer. I would usually distribute food or help out with registration and administration. I was in close contact with residents, volunteers and the coordination of the hotel. Because of the relatively short period of fieldwork, I was mainly doing basic tasks. This is definitely a limitation in terms of scope and deepness of data I could gather, however this also showed me the hierarchical structure in big collective shelters. Whenever I met a new volunteer, I brought up my role as a researcher, and asked verbally for consent. I did not mention my position as a researcher to all residents, though, due to practical and ethical reasons. To those residents I had informal conversations with which could possibly influence my understanding of the field (but which I would not explicitly use as data) I did specify my research goals in the hotel. Following methodological challenges of doing research on grassroots

mobilization in spaces of transit which Anghel & Grierson (2020) highlight, I reflected upon the possible harm it could bring to residents by sharing my role as a researcher. This might have had caused mistrust towards the actions in the hotel, endangering the role of such a safe space for illegalized migrants. After my engagement as a volunteer, I stayed in contact with several people (migrants) staying there. I had informal conversations on their experience of the accommodation of the Citizen Platform between December 2020 and January 2021. I chose to do this in a separate setting outside the accommodation without present volunteers and coordinators to be able discuss the topic openly.

Throughout my field work in the hotel of the Citizen Platform I established contact with members of a squat called Tilt. I presented my research and opened up about the interest of doing field research in the squatting environment. After, I was invited to a meeting in Tilt in the beginning of December where I asked for consent (using a consent form), I conducted field work in Tilt from the beginning of December until February. I was engaging in food collection, their activities such as cleaning, social activities such as cooking together, external communication, contact with the guys staying there, and so on. On several occasions I had informal conversations with migrants sleeping in the squat, and I conducted an informal focus group when a group discussion spontaneously developed. I explicitly told residents on what I was doing research, but soon realized that even verbal consent was difficult in a context where a lot of people have other things on their mind. Illegalized migrants are in mobility, so this also posed practical difficulties to being transparent about giving back research results (see also Jordan & Moser, 2020; Krause, 2017). Nevertheless, I made a moral assessment on how transparent I could be in relation to the respect of privacy of

residents. Through my engagement in Tilt, I came into contact with Ultra, where I conducted four semi-structured interviews with volunteers and one with a resident (see below). From the beginning of January, I got involved in a squatting campaign called 'campaign demand for solidarity' which squatted seven buildings in total all over Brussels to house illegalized migrants. I was present during the practice of squatting with four buildings. As squatting is a criminalized and heavily policed action, I won't elaborate on my role during these actions.

Semi-structured interviews

In the table below, an overview of the semi-structured interviews is presented. After I conducted the interviews with the hosts, I realized they were all women. This is not accidental, Merikoski, (2021) also sees more women invested in hosting in families. It also reflects a more general trend

Respondent[5]		Organisation	Function	Gender	Age range	Language	Date
1	Annick	Citizen Platform	Host	F	35-40	French	13/11/2020
2	Aurélie	Citizen Platform	Host	F	25-30	French	27/11/2020
3	Vanessa	Citizen Platform	Host	F	45-50	French	05/11/2020
4	Laetitia	Citizen Platform	Host	F	30-35	French	12/11/2020
5	Laura	Citizen Platform	Host	F	65-70	French	27/11/2020
6	Oscar	Citizen Platform	Employee Porte d'Ulysse	M	30-35	Dutch	16/11/2020
7	Arthur	Citizen Platform	Employee hotels	M	40-45	French	20/12/2020
8	Lou	Citizen Platform	Volunteer Sister House	F	25-30	French	03/12/2020
9	Céleste	Citizen Platform	Coordinator	F	25-30	French	27/01/2021
10	Barbara	Tilt	Volunteer	F	40-45	Dutch	08/01/2021
11	Sarah	Tilt	Volunteer	F	25-30	Dutch	09/11/2020
12	Emilie	Ultra	Volunteer	F	20-25	Dutch/French	02/01/2021
13	Robert	Ultra	Volunteer	M	40-45	Dutch	12/01/2021
14	Mohammed	Ultra	Volunteer/ resident	M	35-40	English	15/01/2021
15	Ahmad	Citizen Platform and squat	Resident	M	40-45	English	23/03/2021
16	Rashad	Ultra	Resident	M	20-25	English/Arabic	02/02/2021

where care work, also in social movements, is done by women (Herd & Meyer, 2002; Santos, 2020).

Table 2: list of respondents

My interview guide focused on daily activities in the accommodation infrastructure, their formation and organization, and the interaction between different actors. I adapted the guide to each respondent. My respondents would usually lead the discussions in directions which they felt were relevant, adding and adapting certain questions in the guide. My interviews with almost all the actors from the Citizen Platform would happen online or through the phone, except for two in real life. The interviews with squat members would usually happen in real life, in a quiet informal space. Interviews in general were quite difficult to organize, because of their highly busy schedules. Interview dates were constantly postponed, and cancelled. Most interviews lasted around 1.5 to 2 hours. Except for one interview with a resident in squat for which I had an English-Arabic translator, another resident in the squat, I did not use translators. The rest of my respondents were fluent in either English, Dutch or French.

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[5] These are all pseudonyms

Document analysis

I also drew my analysis based on Facebook posts and official statements available on the website of the Citizen Platform (for a similar approach, see Vandevoordt & Fleischmann, 2020). The Citizen Platform is highly present online, especially on Facebook. The movement has used online platforms to mobilize people or set up actions since the beginning (Vandevoordt & Fleischmann, 2020). Numerous private Facebook groups try to coordinate actions, and citizens share experiences. Drawing upon online data does risk breaching privacy and ignoring consent, when following the logic of 'but the data is already public' (Zimmer, 2010). Even though personal information is already made available online, it does not mean users of this space have given the consent for someone actively using it (Taylor & Pagliari, 2018). To overcome this, I asked consent from the online administrators of the Facebook groups. I also specified not to draw on individual posts of volunteers, nor personal information, but rather to use this data in a contextual way. This is done in order to triangulate data, ethnographic material based on field notes, informal conversations and interviews.

Sampling

My sampling at first was based on personal connections built up during voluntary work at the Citizen Platform and establishing myself in the scene of squatting practices in Brussels. In line with sampling strategies for the first stages of the grounded-theory process (Glaser 1978) it was at first random and purposeful. The researcher is supposed to sample where the phenomenon occurs, and the next stage of data collection is when theoretical sampling begins (Coyne, 1997). In the first stage I had a broad sample. I spoke – informally – to a variety of volunteers carrying out diverse roles. During a further phase of the research, I moved towards a theoretical sampling approach, determined by findings (Becker, 1993). The method is essential in an inductive-deductive process of grounded theory. This is for example the period when I reached out to Tilt, Ultra and the campaign demand for solidarity to introduce a new case, squats. Theoretical sampling is a strategy which tests, refines and expands on themes, as interview questions are also reframed and adapted (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). I thus adapted the interview guide and selected specific respondents in the squatting collectives, but also over different accommodation spaces in Citizen Platform.

Ethical reflections and limitations

Consent, confidentiality and privacy

For the period of January 2019 until February 2019 and March 2020 until May 2020 I did not have consent before, because I entered Porte d'Ulysse as a volunteer. As this threatens the confidentiality and privacy of the people I met during that time, I did not use informal conversations or gathered data, but used it as a preliminary research stage to gain access to the field context and to orientate my research topic. Preliminary access to the field is crucial in research on precarious population such as illegalized migrants (Aldridge, 2015). It made it easier to build relationships and move towards key sites of interest. This is in line with the approach that for example Sandri (2018) uses, as a long-term volunteer in Calais, based on traditions of activist anthropology (Goldstein, 2014). Similarly, Depraetere & Oosterlynck (2017), participated in voluntary actions in the Maximilian park in 2015 and conducted a focus group with initial participants after they left the field. I thus used initial observations as an explorative guide towards contextualization of further data, that I conducted through participant observation and interviews a couple of months afterwards, in October 2020. When in October 2020 I gained access to the Citizen Platform, I obtained written consent from the coordinator of the hotel and asked for consent (verbally) to all volunteers I came in contact with. When I had an interview with an employee from the Porte d'Ulysse I presented my observations (as contextual dynamics) from the preliminary exploration when I was a volunteer, and linked these to certain questions. In an interview with the coordinator with the hotel I discovered that he was also active in Porte d'Ulysse while I was volunteering there, so likewise I could present certain experiences and observations. I also discussed these observations with volunteers during participant observation in the hotel. Because the Porte d'Ulysse operates with a constant change of volunteers and migrants, tracing individuals back that were there at the time seemed practically impossible. I thus indeed obtained (written) consent before I entered the field in October 2020, and opted for verbal consent with volunteers. I thus did not distribute informed consent forms on a regular basis, because informal conversations emerged out of relationships I built in the consented field, following the approach of for example Nairn, Showden, Sligo, Matthews, & Kidman (2020). The semi-structured interviews I planned with volunteers and members of the Citizen Platform were all conducted after I wrote a short summary of my research, the goals, the data collection, ethics and their privacy. For the migrants (from the hotels) I had informal conversations with after the field research, I also obtained verbal consent.

Similarly, I distributed consent forms during the introduction meeting in the beginning of December 2020 with the squat Tilt. However, they made clear that the squat would be a consented field, where I could ask for consent informally. Indeed, I did that on several occasions with the migrants staying there. But as most illegalized migrants are in constant mobility, the question emerged of how to get

back to them with research results and the data (below). The interviews I had with two volunteers from Tilt, and the three volunteers of Ultra and one resident, were all done by summarizing my research, goals, the data, transparency and privacy. Also, I introduced myself to the various collectives from 'campaign demand for solidarity' as a researcher and got consent to follow their campaign.

Especially because I am doing research on illegalized migrants, and some criminalized forms of grassroots support, privacy and confidentiality were very important. During interviews and initial field access, this was discussed. Both with regards to the Citizen Platform as squats, I anonymised respondents and specific details on them, the location of accommodation, the municipality. I discussed privacy and anonymity of data individually with each respondent. For the Citizen Platform, I used the names which were publicly known, such as Porte d'Ulysse and the Sister House. However, names of small collective shelters, and all locations were held private, something which was brought up in all interviews. For squats, this was deemed as even more important because respondents were afraid for official repercussions, or criminalization if I would use the names of squats, their location or the link between the sociocultural organization Calligraph and Ultra. I later also anonymised names of municipalities as this would put certain squatting projects in danger. I agreed on sending for example the transcription of their interview, of the analysis before handing in my thesis, so they could verify their privacy. To all respondents and in both fields (the Citizen Platform and squats) we agreed on sending my thesis and their right on distributing it amongst their members and volunteers.

Positionality and reflexivity

I earned a place in the field before actively taking the role of researcher, which is quite usual for activist participatory research (see for example Depraetere & Oosterlynck, 2017; Sandri, 2018). This brought up ethical questions: by taking actively part in humanitarian activities, I obviously enforced a power imbalance which eased my access as a researcher. I never deliberately planned this research as "activist research" (Huschke, 2015) or "activist ethnography" (Frampton & Kinsman, 2006). However, I think research and activism are intimately connected when studying topics such as social movements mobilizing for illegalized migrants, especially when one is embedded in the research field. I have thus been socially engaged in not only the Citizen Platform, but also other initiatives in support of migrants and refugees in Athens over the past few years. I thus know this has strongly influenced not only my research topic, but also my position and

approach. My interest in grassroots initiatives coincides with standing in solidarity with migrants and refugees, and believing in their autonomous movements.

The challenge of 'do no harm'

In research with precarious groups it is very important to reflect on the aspect of not causing any harm towards participants or respondents (Ketefian, 2015). I chose my respondents carefully, not wanting to intervene in their field of action, in respect of their boundaries and their precarious work. Thanks to intense debates on how to present research results and access to certain respondents of migrants, I think I managed to do this.

Limitations

This research should be understood as a first overview of the humanitarian-political balance and power dynamics in the accommodation for illegalized migrants by the Citizen Platform and squat movements in Brussels. Due to the very mobile population, and a constant change of the situation on the ground, my data is somehow limited to a specific place, at a specific time. I tried to overcome this by situating the Citizen Platform in a broader political context. However, such a fast-changing context also enhances the value of the research, which tries to document part of the process of grassroots civil initiatives. This specific place, specific time also is clear in my research on squats, where the 'campaign demand for solidarity' unfolded temporarily just when I was conducting field work.

I briefly want to address the difficulty of research in the current global pandemic of COVID-19 and the sanitary condition. Luckily, the field remained open for engagement. However, the sanitary condition and lockdown also interfered with my research. I did not have full access to all the sub-fields I wanted to research (such as all accommodation spaces of the Citizen Platform). This was less of an obstacle in squats because of their informality. It was also difficult to meet respondents in real life. A lot of interviews I conducted happened online, which obviously also influenced the conversation and the data extracted from it. The emergency of getting people off the street, had an impact on participants' availability. I sometimes found myself in a situation where I was send around or not responded to in a time when direct action was prioritized.

Limits to the process of data gathering where for example the viewpoint of the municipalities in Brussels, the Brussels Regional government, and private property owners on those spaces or buildings they open up for the Citizen Platform to use. Similarly, the viewpoint of local government

on squatted buildings or squatting practices or for a squat movement to squat (see Aguilera, 2017) also is not explored in this research.

THE CONTEXT OF BRUSSELS

Brussels has been a border zone since 2017-2018, but is also an urban environment. There is thus a mix between grassroots civil initiatives which have used a variety of forms to accommodate illegalized migrants and other urban actors which have used squatting as a technique to create shelter for illegalized migrants.

Since 2017-2018, a civil initiative, the Citizen Platform, has mobilized to provide shelter, medical assistance and socio-legal aid to illegalized migrants on the way to the UK. The federal Belgian government did not only show violent inaction (Davies, Isakjee & Dhesi; 2017) but also actively created a hostile environment where migrants in transit were not provided shelter with but were policed instead. Two years earlier, the Citizen Platform emerged as a social movement in the northern area of Brussels (in the Maximilian park) as a citizens' initiative during the *long summer of migration* (see Della Porta, 2018) in order to organize the reception of newly arrived asylum-seekers. From 2017 onwards, the Platform remobilized again. The North train station and Maximilian park were key places, where a politics of exhaustion (Ansems de Vries & Welander, 2016a) was deployed by Belgian state actors, through continuous police raids (Vandevoordt, 2020b). Daher & D'Auria (2018) illustrate, that from mid-2017 the Maximilian park becomes the central place for embodied claims between policing actions, migrants staying in the park, and solidarity and aid workers. One of the immediate responses was the set-up of a hosting-at-home system, which made sure that from September to November 2017, 50,000 overnight stays were facilitated by citizen-families of the Citizen Platform[6].

There were a couple of moments where the policing-politics logic conjuncture (Vandevoordt, 2020b). In September 2017 the State Secretary of Asylum and Migration, Theo Francken, invited a Sudanese delegation to identify detained migrants. The Tahrir Institute for Middle-Eastern Policy gathered evidence that some of those deported had been subjected to intimidation and torture. The Citizen Platform responded by increasing their support for illegalized migrants and formed alliances

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[6] Which is about 350-400 people per night: Bruzz (2018). Burgerplatform verzekert 50.000 overnachtingen voor migranten. In Bruzz. (January 4). Retrieved from:
 https://www.bruzz.be/actua/burgerplatform-verzekert-50000-overnachtingen-voor-migranten-2018-01-04

with professional organizations[7]. In order to professionalize their services (in cooperation with the mentioned organizations) they opened up the Humanitarian Hub[8] around the Maximilian park. The Citizen Platform thus responded to the hostile environment, not only by organizing political actions[9], but by increasing their support in a politically contentious climate. At the same time, they lobbied successfully with the Brussels regional government to open up a collective shelter for illegalized migrants. From December 2017, 80 people per night stayed in the Porte d'Ulysse, which gradually increased to 350 per night. The costs and logistics of the building would be covered by the Brussels Region.

Continuous police raids in the Maximilian park increased the mobilization of citizens. When on 17 May 2018, Mawda Shawri, a 2-year old Kurdish-Syrian toddler was shot by the police during a police chase against human smuggling, the Citizen Platform responded towards this criminalization of migrants by supporting Mawda's parents, as a form of *grief activism* (Stierl, 2016). The criminalization and policing of illegalized migrants took different forms. A draft law submitted by the Federal Minister of Home Affairs, Jan Jambon, which would permit police forces to enter private homes in case of suspicions that undocumented migrants are staying there, caused strong counteractions of the Citizen Platform. By pressuring local mayors not to adopt the law, demonstrations and press releases, the law was abandoned. Moreover, citizens affiliated with the Citizen Platform were criminalized. Four of the Platform's volunteers together with seven migrants were taken to court in a trial against human smuggling and membership of a criminal organization. The Platform launched protests against 'the criminalization of solidarity'.

The changing context
In December 2018, Maggie de Block (Open VLD) succeeded Theo Francken (N-VA) as State Secretary for Asylum and Migration. From the beginning of January 2020, a specific group of asylum seekers would no longer be accommodated by Fedasil, the federal reception agency. Even though the Reception Act of 2007 guarantees the reception of all people who apply for asylum in Belgium, this measure of de Block deliberately excluded a specific group of asylum seekers. People with a protection status or their fingerprints in another EU country, would no longer be accommodated by Fedasil. From then on, a new group of people were illegalized. In addition,

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[7] Doctors of the World, Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, Médecins sans Frontières and Ciré
[8] The Humanitarian Hub is a building where the Citizen Platform works together with professional NGO's to give medical aid, socio-legal support. It's where clothes are distributed, medical appointments can be made…
[9] They thus did organize political actions, such as letter writing, petitions, protests, and lobbying, but this was/is not their main repertoire of action

Maggie de Block adapted a rather humanitarian-securitizing discourse in approaching migrants in transit in Brussels. At the end of May 2019, hundreds of illegalized migrants slept in the Brussels North train station in precarious conditions. De Block depoliticized the hostile environment by cooperating with civil society organizations and Brussels regional and municipal governments in order to find a solution for the humanitarian emergency in the station. However, in reality, the eviction of the station and humanitarian support would go hand in hand with disciplining these illegalized migrants into the EU and national migration regime, and increased policing and repression. Then in March 2020, Belgium went into a corona pandemic lockdown. As an emergency measure, the Immigration Office[10] closed its doors for a couple of weeks. New asylum seekers would find themselves unable to register and without accommodation. Only after an asylum registration the Belgian state is responsible to give material help and accommodation. A couple of weeks later, the asylum procedures were organized online. This meant that many people without access to internet would not have access to the asylum application. As a result, hundreds of asylum seekers were not accommodated at first instance.

The Citizen Platform has continued to mobilize and organize accommodation and reception for illegalized migrants. Even though the specific hostile environment of 2017-2018 has changed, thousands of citizens still host migrants in their homes. The Citizen Platform has expanded, changed, and professionalized their actions, in cooperation with medical NGOs such as *Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde*, and the Brussels region and municipalities[11]. The lockdown presented a challenge for the Citizen Platform to adapt and expand their accommodation infrastructure. Most of the collective shelters of the Citizen Platform – which were previously only to spend the night - stayed open 24/7. Throughout my field work in the Citizen Platform, I noticed that there have been numerous squatting collectives which opened up buildings all around Brussels in order to meet the housing and accommodation shortage for precarious groups. Through these collectives, I found out that there have been migrant squats in Brussels since 2018 which have been hosting illegalized migrants[12]. These squatted buildings have unfolded in an urban context, where there is – according to squatting movements – a shortage in affordable housing, in

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[10] The Immigration Office moved from across the Maximilian Park to the canal side at the end of 2018

[11] My focus is on the city of Brussels, where a complex entanglement of governments operates: the federal government, the Brussels regional government and city and municipal government. The Citizen Platform is also very active in Wallonia. Recently, a Hub Humanitaire opened in the province of Liège, where citizens, the CPAs and the Red cross operate. Various municipalities have opened temporary collective shelters in cooperation with the Citizen Platform

[12] Informal living spaces with illegalized and precarious population have obviously already existed before 2017-2018. However, the topic of my research demands to impose a time limitation

combination with a very high vacancy of buildings. The number of informal housing, squats for undocumented and illegalized migrants and other precarious groups in Brussels, is difficult to assess. Because of their informal, invisible form of living, the support groups behind the squatting projects and the migrants remain rather unexplored. Indeed, migrant squats for illegalized migrants on their way to the UK are in a bigger network of other migration support movements. *Sans papiers* movements have for example also used squatted buildings in order to make claims on collective regularization in the past and during the time of my research. I thus observed that there are both squats by and for illegalized migrants on the move (to the UK) and squats by and for *sans papiers.* Both types of squats have different goals and organization, but an informal link (through certain activist collectives) exists. In the context of my research I will concentrate on migrant squats which are housing illegalized migrants on the move and their volunteer support group (of mainly documented activist-volunteers). I concentrate on squats called Ultra and Tilt, and a squatting campaign in Brussels.

1. THE TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF ACCOMMODATION FOR PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

First, the different accommodation structures part of the Citizen Platform and by squats will be presented. The spatial practices of grassroots civil initiatives have been highlighted to be contentious (Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008). Also, the temporalities that grassroots civil refugee support use, have gained increasing attention (Vandevoordt & Fleischmann, 2020). I outline the organization and structure of the different types of accommodation of the Citizen Platform, and the two squats I followed. Then, I will examine a temporal dimension of the accommodation, namely how long migrants can stay. After that I look how these accommodation spaces are constructed in cooperation or conflict with public authorities, private owners, and citizens.

1.1. Different types of accommodation

The Citizen Platform represents both a combined effort of citizens to support migrants and refugees and a non-profit organization with about 70 payed employees. In the aftermath of the period 2017-2018, multiple spaces of and ways in which illegalized migrants are hosted, have developed. Then I will briefly introduce the two squats (Ultra and Tilt) and the squatting campaign I was involved in.

A) Citizen Platform

Most of the accommodation infrastructure of the Citizen Platform was set-up during 2017-2018, such as the Porte d'Ulysse, the practice of collective shelters, hosting-at-home and the Sister House. Initially, their accommodation was organized to respond to an emergency: a more hostile environment in the Maximilian park and illegalized migrants who are not hosted by the state, which corresponds with literature on other civil initiatives (Milan, 2019). Over time, all these different modes of hosting and shelter are maintained, adapted, transformed and expanded.

Hosting-at-home: Thousands of families have been hosting illegalized migrants at home since 2017-2018. In the beginning, a group of volunteers from the Citizen Platform called *white jackets* would go every evening to the Maximilian park to coordinate the *dispatching* of migrants to families. Facebook as a social platform would be used to launch calls. Gradually, the system put a lot of pressure on the teams of white jackets. The atmosphere in the park could be tense, as sometimes there would not be enough families for the number of migrants. The team suffered police intimidation, under capacity and exhaustion, a finding which is supported by authors working on grassroots humanitarian support in other border zones such as Calais (Ansems de Vries & Welander, 2016a). After intense consultation with families and the lived reality on the field, the Citizen Platform announced at the end of September 2019 to organize the accommodation within families differently. The changing reality partially entailed the fact that families would usually get the same people to their place for a longer period of time, or would find solutions with friends in case they could not host (see also Vandevoordt, 2020). In other words, the Citizen Platform had such a wide support group willing to engage independently (as to say without the guidance of for example the dispatching team) that coordinating hosting-at-home from the park was no longer efficient. From the end of September 2019, a new system was introduced. A team of marauds would go to the park *in order to meet, inform, guide and answer questions and requests from people in the park* (Facebook post, 27 September 2019) and register new people. Indeed, the hosts I met had been engaged for a long time, and built their own personal network. A couple of people told me also about how a regular guest would put them into contact with new migrants. Certain dynamics which are at interplay in this structure of accommodation- how long people can stay within families, how much citizens are invested in the life of migrants, and until which extent they support in basic needs - differ from family to family. The hosting-at-home was the first type of direct action the Citizen Platform engaged in, and carries the symbolic value of the civil movement, namely that citizens welcome migrants in their homes in contrast to the neglect of the Belgian state.

The Porte d'Ulysse: When the Citizen Platform started hosting-at-home during their intense mobilization of 2017-2018, some of its members negotiated with the Brussels Regional government to open up a shelter. During the Platform's early days, just like with hosting-at-home, a team went to the park every evening. From the beginning of 2019, this system of daily dispatching in the park was changed into a system of registration for similar reasons as the hosting-at-home. From June 2020, the contract with the building in Haren finished and the Citizen Platform had to find a new location. From the end of December 2020, the Porte d'Uysse opened again. The building of Porte d'Ulysse resembles the structure of for example asylum centres or other night shelters for homeless people. The architecture creates distance, for example big sleeping halls, a separate kitchen where volunteers cook, and includes security guards who manage the security in the building. An important feature of Porte d'Ulysse is that its activities – together with the HUB, the social-legal service of Citizen Platform (SISA) and also temporary solutions such as the hotels that opened during the pandemic – are subsidized by the Brussels Regional government. This gave the Citizen Platform the opportunity to professionalize their services. It is also the only accommodation infrastructure in Brussels of the Citizen Platform which continuously works with payed employees since its opening. The daily operation of the shelter, however, would not function without an ever-changing team of volunteers. Volunteers roles comprise cooking and distributing food, and managing the registration.

Hotels during COVID: Around March 2020, the Citizen Platform negotiated the temporary use of hotels with several hotel owners, the Brussels Regional government and municipalities, as the pandemic shut down the tourist sector. In total, three hotels opened in Brussels for about 400 people. I volunteered in the smallest one. The opening of the hotels shows on the one hand the flexible organization and professionalization of the Citizen Platform to respond to urgent situations. On the other hand, the accommodation infrastructure of hotels shows the willingness of both the Brussels region and private partners (hotel owners) to open up extra spaces in the city to host illegalized migrants with a precarious living situation (further discussed in 1.3.). The hotels compose a unique living space: hotel owners and employees kept their job and remain crucial in running the hotel. Also, the Citizen Platform organizes volunteer shifts. Hotel employees and Citizen Platform members thus work together in managing the hotel.

The Sister House: a shelter for women: From the beginning of the mobilization of the Citizen Platform in 2017-2018, Platform's members noticed that there was also a substantial number of women in the park. They realized these women on the move had *specific vulnerabilities* (Lou,

volunteer Sister House, 03/12/2020). From November 2018, the Platform opened a separate shelter for women, called the Sister House. Over the years, it has increased its capacity, and has moved to various locations. Right now, the Sister House hosts about 50 to 100 women with a volunteer team of about 100 women.

Small collective shelters: Besides accommodation within families, in Porte d'Ulysse, or in hotels, there are various small collective centres for about 15-20 people. They are set up and managed by citizens. Their origin can be traced back to the actions of the Citizen Platform in 2017-2018, when citizens opened up collective shelters spontaneously. *Places such as empty theatres, sport centres, etc. were repurposed by citizens to host migrants.* (interview Céleste, 27/01/2021)

Two specific actions influenced the development of collective shelters of the Citizen Platform. First of all, there was a campaign for *Villes Hospitalières* from CNCD 11.11.11 which urged citizens to pressure their municipality to host refugees, mostly around Brussels and Wallonia. Secondly, as mentioned previously, in 2018 the Citizen Platform reacted to the draft law from Minister of Interior Affairs at the time, Jan Jambon, and saw a lot of support from local mayors. The Citizen Platform then increased mobilization to open up shelters on a municipality level, as they felt there was an overall willingness of municipalities to *welcome* illegalized migrants. Hence, the idea is that citizens can appeal their municipality to transform empty buildings into temporary shelters managed by Platform's volunteers. Throughout 2018, the practice of collective shelters was modelized. In 2018 for example, around 20 collective shelters opened up around Brussels. Right now, there are about 5 collective shelters in Brussels. Negotiations usually happen between Platform's coordinators and the municipality. There are essentially two types: urgent, short-term collective shelters, and long-term. In reality – at least in Brussels – almost all collective shelters are for people who stay there middle to long-term, and plan to remain in Belgium.

B) Squats

Contrary to the literature of squats and squatting processes which link these to more organized forms of social movements (McAdam et al., 2004; Tarrow, 2011), political opportunity structure, and collective claim-making, squats in Brussels were also – partially - created in order to respond to crises, just like the Citizen Platform. Since 2017-2018 various squats have been opened in Brussels in order to host illegalized migrants on the move to England. Throughout the year 2020-2021– partially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic – there has been an intensification of opening squats as housing solutions for precarious groups diminished. I was connected to two squats in Brussels. One of the squats, Ultra, opened mid-2018. The other squat I was involved in, Tilt,

(re)opened up during the COVID-19 lockdown. Important is that only illegalized migrants live in these occupied buildings, and volunteer groups support the squats.

Ultra[13]

At the time, a group of Sudanese migrants were coming to our sociocultural organization during the day, and engaged in our activities. A couple of members of our organization were frustrated because at the end of the day we would close our doors, and the guys would need to go back to the Maximilian Park. So, then we decided to occupy a building. (Emilie, volunteer Ultra, 02/01/2021). Mid-2018, a group of volunteers from a sociocultural organization, Calligraph, thus occupied a building in the north of Brussels, next to the Maximilian park. The squat could host twenty people on the move. In the subsequent years, the migrant squatters and volunteers connected moved buildings because of evictions.

Tilt[14]**: COVID emergency squat**

Until the beginning of the pandemic, ROLF[15] was a big squatted building in the centre of Brussels where various collectives would be accommodated, varying from feminist collectives to ecologist ones. When the pandemic generated a lockdown, "the associative life in ROLF vanished" (Sarah, volunteer, 05/11/2020). A big police raid in the Maximilian park in March 2020 was intended to disperse homeless illegalized migrants hanging around in the park. As a result of the increasing hostile environment and the pandemic, some members of these collectives in ROLF opened the doors of the building for a group of 20 migrants in transit. Volunteers would help with food donations, mattresses and other materials. After they squatted a new apartment in a different municipality in Brussels, which they gave the name Tilt.

Campaign 'demand for solidarity'

The campaign 'demand for solidarity' was launched at the end of December 2020 until mid April 2021. It was a campaign of occupying several buildings in Brussels for illegalized migrants with the support of various squatting collectives. One of the incentives was increasing housing and accommodation needs for people on the move during the COVID-19 lockdown. Another incentive was the planned eviction of a squat in Jette which was housing around 170 illegalized migrants from March 2020. The owner of the building (a NGO) was urging to evict the squat because of the

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[13] A pseudonym
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

precarious living conditions, but the owner, the municipality and the Brussels region were unable to find a solution for the residents to relocate to. Various experienced squatting collectives with different activist backgrounds[16] worked together to occupy seven buildings in total.

1.2. Organization and structure

There are differences in spatial and temporal organization of accommodation within the case of the Citizen Platform, and between the Citizen Platform and squats.

1.2.1. How long people can stay

The Citizen Platform and squats mainly accommodate a very mobile group of people, which has implications for the organization and structure of reception. In the large structures of the Citizen Platform such as Porte d'Ulysse and the hotels, there is a temporal context that encompasses a humanitarian logic, namely: to reach as many people as possible. In the Sister House, which only accommodates women in transit, this temporal organization does not seem to apply. Squats host people in transit, but they form groups of their own, independent of the volunteer group.

A) Citizen Platform

In both Porte d'Ulysse and the hotels there is a system of rotation. There is a maximum time limit on staying. During my research this would be around six weeks. Exceptions are made depending on people's specific vulnerabilities. A group of marauds go around the park every morning to register people for the Platform's accommodation. There is also a system adapted to absence in the hotels and Porte d'Ulysse. Ahmad who I call a friend and know from when we were both in Greece stayed for a couple of months in Porte d'Ulysse, and explains me: *they gave me a card, with my number ****, that was my number. You can sleep two days outside, if you go to the UK. Three days and it is finished, then you need to find a new place* (23/03/2021). When migrants do 'a try' to the UK, they go at night to try and jump on a truck. Zaid, who I would host regularly, went back and forth to informal camps on changing irregular routes in Luxemburg, Tournai, Dunkirk or Calais. This is an aspect of the hyper and autonomous mobility of illegalized migrants in transit to the UK. In Porte d'Ulysse and the hotels, they would lose their place if they stay away for more than two nights. This temporal dimension is – according to my respondents of Porte d'Ulysse and the hotels - guided by a logic of helping as many people as possible.

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[16] There were collectives of artists, ecological activists, etc.

Small collective shelters which citizens opened and the Sister House do not use this strict system of rotation and absence. In practice, all five small collective centres are for the long-term: for people whose migration project is to stay in Belgium. People can stay in the centre usually around 3 to 6 months, but this is adapted to their personal situation. In the Sister House most women are in mobility to the UK, but there is no real limit on how long they can stay, it is adapted according to their individual situation too. In hosting-at-home hosts can decide how long their guests can stay, with a certain degree of discussion. There is a large variety in how long guests can stay in hosting families.

B) Squats

Both the squats of Ultra and Tilt accommodate people on the move to the UK. There is no system of rotation, limit on how long people can stay or rules for absence. Thus, they usually host the same group of people until someone reaches England. This can be explained by the fact that both squats accommodate a specific network of illegalized migrants. New residents in the squat usually get connected through other people in the squat. In this sense, they remain in their personal network. Usually people with the same ethnicity or/and nationality are cohabiting, as a result of their social network.

In the Citizen Platform the time of stay in their accommodation depends thus on the type and the rules of the space. Squats operate with less rules on how long migrants can stay, and in this way, migrants decide independently, according to their specific migration trajectory.

1.2.2. Professionalization, the function of volunteers and living conditions

Grassroots refugee support can professionalize their actions (see for example Boersma, Kraiukhina, Larruina, Lehota, & Nury, 2019) by for example standardizing aid and working together with professional civil society actors. In Porte d'Ulysse, standardized volunteer shifts depersonalize encounters between volunteers and migrants. This is less the case in the other accommodation structures of the Citizen Platform. One of the incentives to professionalize is to improve the quality and quantity of aid, which has a positive impact on the living conditions in the accommodation of the Citizen Platform. The lack of professionalism can create challenges for the living conditions in squats.

A) Citizen Platform

The Porte d'Ulysse and the hotels function with a certain degree of professionalization. The Porte d'Ulysse for example uses a system of registration in a self-made application. Volunteers and coordinators can then semi-automatically check who has been staying in their structures, and for how long. The hotels use a list of residents with specific numbers, in order to note their presence for food, something which I regularly did during my shifts. As highlighted in the quote of Ahmad above (1.2.1.), migrants often remember their respective numbers which could indicate a process of depersonification. Vandevoordt & Verschraegen (2019) notice the tendency of grassroots refugee support to professionalize by depersonalizing the encounters between volunteers and refugees and by standardizing the aid. Also Kreichauf & Mayer (2021) notice that grassroots initiatives consolidate their activities: they have more clearly defined responsibilities and goals and create registered associations. Such professionalization is connected to the integrated approach the Platform uses. In cooperation with civil society organizations such *as Médecins du Monde and Médecins Sans Frontières*, they provide not only accommodation and food, but also legal information (Castañeda, 2013; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019). This, I noticed, also has an empowering and politicizing effect on migrants, as for example the SISA (social-legal department of the Citizen Platform) is in close contact with accommodation spaces. Migrants then have relatively easy access to legal advice on their status and migration trajectory. The specialization and differentiation of tasks among volunteers, is another aspect of professionalization (Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019). This is most noticeable in the structures of Porte d'Ulysse and hotels. Payed employees fulfil the coordinating tasks, such as the registration of new guests, making appointments, and so on (see also Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021). Volunteers are important actors in the shelter, but do delineated tasks focused on fulfilling basic needs. There is a certain degree of professionalization in small collective shelters and the Sister House too. They also work together with the (above mentioned) professional civil society organizations. Volunteers have clear tasks, and there is a system of shifts. However, volunteers have more extensive and varied roles. Most of the tasks are done by citizens and volunteers, and only a handful of employees. In Facebook groups, volunteer coordinators post about shifts or ty to reach out for new volunteers to join. All new volunteers need to sign a charter in order to provide basic information and rules. Especially small collective shelters and the Sister House organize information sessions, and specific trainings for their volunteers. The Citizen Platform can guarantee decent living conditions by managing the number of people in the building, their semi-professional working with employees and volunteers, and their agreements with the Brussels Region and municipalities.

B) Squats

The public discourse on squats often presents squats as precarious living environments, a discourse that I found also in grassroots civil humanitarian initiatives. When a squat opened in Jette, the local newspaper reported on the overcrowding of the building and the precarious living conditions[17]. It is true that the informality of occupied buildings, the lack of professionalism of volunteer groups and the temporality of stay of people on the move are all factors for the possibility of precarious living in squats. Nevertheless, in the case of the squat in Jette the owner of the building (an NGO) used a humanitarian-securitizing discourse on the living situation in order to legitimize the eviction of the 170 people staying there at the time. Scholars have pointed how such framing delegitimizes, depoliticizes and criminalizes the occupation of urban space by focusing on the humanitarian situation caused by squatters (Dadusc & Dee, 2014). Thereby they conceal the social and political causes. Eventually, the eviction of the squat was cancelled because of the moratorium[18]. However, continuing negotiations between the owner, the municipality and the region provided no alternative housing for these people[19]. Because squats are thus less professionally organized then the Citizen Platform, the living conditions depend on the internal organization of the residents. In Tilt for example, the volunteers organized cleaning sessions when mould was forming in the rooms. In the previous building of Tilt, ROLF, a similar problem occurred: *ROLF was really not good, that was really a squat 'sauvage' (wild). The problem there was that it was a huge building and you had no overview… It ran really badly with fights and problems and clogged toilets but we couldn't make agreements because that group itself was not a coherent group.* (Barbara, volunteer in Tilt and ROLF, 08/01/2021) It is not only the lack of professionalism in relation to the installation of rules or a good-working system that can render the living conditions in squats precarious. Also, the fact squatting collectives sometimes do not find an agreement with the municipality or the private owner of the building to cover costs, can bring about living situations without electricity, warm water, or gas. When my friend Ahmad had to leave Porte d'Ulysse, he found accommodation in one of the squats of the 'campaign demand for solidarity'. He describes the living conditions as the following: *The building is very cold, and we sleep on the floor. The water is cold too and we don't have good blankets.* (23/03/2021)

A lot of the accommodation spaces of the Citizen Platform have a professionalized working, standardized services and volunteer shifts. In the small collective shelters and Sister House, these

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[17] Bruzz. (2020). Bijna 170 migranten in Jette, maar niemand weet wat te doen. In Bruzz. (October 18). Retrieved from: https://www.bruzz.be/samenleving/bijna-170-migranten-kraakpand-jette-maar-niemand-weet-wat-te-doen-2020-10-18

[18] The Brussels Region had installed a moratorium on evictions during the COVID crisis and the lockdown. The period ended on 31 August and was reinstalled 3 November. The owner of the building in Jette wanted to evict these people in this specific time.

[19] The campaign 'demand for solidarity' would be put in place in order to find a new building

volunteer shifts are more focused on establishing personal ties between volunteers and migrants. In squats, most of the operation is not professionalized. Their informality poses challenges sometimes to ensure good living conditions.

<u>1.3. How spaces of accommodation are created in cooperation or conflict with citizens, public authorities and private actors</u>

In both the literature on humanitarianism and on urban squatting, the relationship with public authorities gets a lot of attention (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019a; Vandevoordt, 2019a). For the Citizen Platform, these relationships are different depending on the scale of governance: there is cooperation on municipal/urban and regional level which may include co-optation, but conflict on the federal level (see Vandevoordt, 2019a). For squats, there is more conflict on the municipal and regional level even though a certain degree of cooperation is required in order to continue an occupation.

A) Citizen Platform

The (accommodation) actions of the Citizen Platform are conducted in opposition to the federal approach towards migration and asylum. On a regional and local level, multiple types of accommodation infrastructure of the Citizen Platform have been unfolded in cooperation and discussion with public authorities.

The Porte d'Ulysse is for example the collective shelter which members of the Citizen Platform initially negotiated with the Brussels regional government (see Vandevoordt, 2019a). They receive subsidies from the Brussels region, which they renew these subsidies every 6 months. The financial side of Porte d'Ulysse and the negotiations are thus mostly managed by the Platform's Board of Directors. The temporary hotels opened in negotiation with the Brussels regional government, municipalities and hotel owners. In social movement literature, institutionalization is linked with the decay of social movements (Belda-Miquel et al., 2016). Indeed, the institutionalization of a part of the Platform's accommodation has transformed the civil initiative. Initially as a temporary action of solidarity, institutionalization of the Platform allowed them to professionalize their actions (e.g. by employing members), and to continue in the future. Crucial is that cooperation with the Brussels region and municipalities fosters safety in accommodation shelters for migrants. In Arthur's - one of the employees in the hotels of the Citizen Platform - words: *There are arrangements with the*

district commissioners, with the mayors. So, a police team that would like to come in here, without any documents proving don't have the right to come in here, because it's a sanctuary. (20/12/2020)

The practice of hosting-at-home, as personal spaces of solidarity, lack institutionalization. Furthermore, the establishment of small collective shelters requires citizens to call upon their municipalities to open up buildings. Private owners are included in this process, by going into discussions with Platform's members and municipalities. *There are municipalities that have made proposals to private owners to reduce municipal taxes through the provision of a convention of temporary occupation. We have models of agreements for temporary occupancy for insurance and administrative documents to reassure owners and municipalities.* (Céleste, employee and coordinator Citizen Platform, 27/01/2021) The fact that the Platform is a non-profit association can thus be very beneficial for signing contracts and receiving the trust of owners and municipalities for such temporary occupation. By voicing explicit critique against the federal level, but working together with public authorities on a regional and local level, the Platform politicizes urban citizens. Volunteers living in Brussels play thus a crucial role in addressing their municipalities to open up spaces for illegalized migrants. On the one side, this creates increased participation in local urban politics, and reinforces urban citizenship. On the other side, opening up local shelters in cooperation and discussion with municipalities, the Platform paves the way for Brussels to become a *Solidarity City* (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019d; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021), and creates instances of *institutional solidarity* (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019c).

B) Squats:

Squats such as Ultra address urban vacancy and housing policies on the local level. Urban governments are – according to squatting collectives – unable to provide adequate housing for precarious population. These collectives and activists thus occupy buildings in conflict with public authorities. The anti-squatting law of 2017 criminalizes unauthorized entry and occupation of buildings. It has tightened the laws in order to protect the owner of the building and to make eviction easier[20]. This means that the act of occupying a building is contentious, and a form of civil disobedience (see Della Porta, 2018a), as it contests urban policies. In the beginning of the lockdown, the Brussels government installed a moratorium on evictions[21]. However, there were still evictions during the moratorium. ROLF was for example evicted in November 2020 by the owner. More so, during the 'campaign demand for solidarity' multiple buildings were occupied. During the

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[20] In the first eight days the owner can evict the squatters
[21] The rationale was that during the COVID crisis, no one could be put on the streets

occupation of the fifth building, the police arrested the group of squatters. During their seventh occupation, the police evicted the squat officially out of security reasons[22]. Similar to the squat in Jette, urban authorities would use a humanitarian-securitizing discourse in order to legitimize eviction (look at section 1.2.3). I thus noticed that the contentious character of occupying buildings in (partial) conflict with urban authorities never really guaranteed safety for migrants. There is always a possibility of eviction. Even when an agreement would be established, police have entered or even raided squats: *During the first two months of the lockdown, the police raided a squat. The guys (migrants) opened the door, the police pushed the door open and they were inside. "We're going to arrest everyone" they said.* (Robert, volunteer Ultra, 12/01/2021) A group of documented activist-citizens and collectives usually engage in the practice and process of squatting. In the code of conduct of squatting, the inhabitants of the squat usually enter at a later stage, when a sort of (informal) agreement is found with the municipality and the private owner. Some municipalities are more open and supportive towards occupying buildings, tells one volunteer from Tilt (09/11/2021). I notice this indeed during fieldwork and by engaging in occupations. Similarly, activists notice a difference in squatting buildings from private or public owners. The same activist (09/11/2020) told me that their squat, Tilt, belongs to a public housing service, which is a better actor to negotiate with then the private owner from their previous squat, ROLF. However, especially with regards to covering costs of electricity and gas, private owners can also entail advantages for squatters. *The second building of Ultra was owned by a big company from England which had thousands of office buildings everywhere. They paid the electricity and the water without even realizing that the building had been used for a year. (*Emilie, volunteer Ultra, 02/01/2021) Thus, not all creation of space to accommodate illegalized migrants happens in conflict with public authorities. There is also a certain degree of discussion and agreement needed with local governments in order to maintain an occupation for a period of time. Squatters plan meetings with municipal governments, the mayor, the private owner of the building and are sometimes in contact with the police too. Again, cooperation and discussion could lead according to new social movement theory to institutionalization, a process accompanied from disruptive to more conventional tactics (Belda-Miquel et al., 2016). However, scholars point at certain squats which have legalized while remaining antagonistic (see Cattaneo & Martínez, 2014; Martínez López, 2017; Pruijt, 2007). Squatting for and by illegalized migrants is thus often, *a balancing act. You are always juggling things: What is it that your group needs? What do you need for people who still don't have a place to live? What*

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[22] A clear example of the humanitarian-securitizing logic

do you need to keep the owner happy? What do you need to keep the police happy? What do you need to keep the city happy? (Robert, volunteer Ultra, 12/01/2021)

The accommodation of the Citizen Platform is thus constructed in cooperation with and support of the Brussels region and municipalities. There is thus institutionalization especially in the management of Porte d'Ulysse. Squats Ultra and Tilt and the campaign demand for solidarity occupy buildings in opposition to and conflict with urban governments and municipalities and owners. There is a certain degree of cooperation between squatters and municipalities and owners.

Temporal and spatial organization	Citizen Platform	Squats
Different types of accommodation	Hosting-at-home, Porte d'Ulysse, hotels, the Sister House, small collective shelters	Ultra, Tilt, squatting campaign demand for solidarity
How long can people stay	About six weeks and max. number of nights outside in the Porte d'Ulysse, depending on individual situation in Sister House, 3-6 months in small collective centres, depending on host in hosting-at-home	Depending on individual situation of migrants and their migration trajectory. No rules on how long people can stay
Professionalization, function of volunteers and living conditions	Porte d'Ulysse and hotels are professional environments, with standardized volunteer shifts, more varied roles for volunteers in Sister House and small collective shelters, good living conditions	Less professionalization, sometimes formalization in form of temporary contracts, no volunteer shifts, living conditions vary depending on internal organization of migrants
How spaces are created in cooperation/conflict	Conflict with federal level, cooperation on Brussels regional level with the Porte d'Ulysse, cooperation municipalities on small collective shelters and the Sister House	Initial conflict with municipalities, gradually cooperation in order to maintain occupation, possibility of conflict remains

Table 3: an overview of temporal and spatial organization

2. POLITICIZATION

Humanitarian action is associated with less political mobilization, as it is considered an apolitical and neutral practice. Recent grassroots civil initiatives have already shown that politicization in civil humanitarianism is in reality more complex (Fleischmann, 2020; Vandevoordt, 2019b). Urban squatting on the other hand, is often associated with political action (as social movement) or politicizing potential (as transforming citizenship). I explore politicization by focusing on the initial motives of direct action and gradual politicization of volunteers and members of the Citizen Platform

and squats. Moreover, I look at how using urban space in different ways has a politicizing potential on the actions of the Citizen Platform and squats.

2.1. Moral shock and social network: engaging in direct action

A) Citizen Platform

In general, volunteers and members of the Citizen Platform have little previous experience engaging in pro-migration movements or other social movements (or in the professional field) (see also Gill, 2018; Karakayali, 2018; Sandri, 2018). Out of conversations I had with both hosts (hosting-at-home) as volunteers and employees in the diverse accommodation infrastructure, I confirm what researchers such as Vandevoordt (2019) and Vandevoordt & Verschraegen (2019) and the literature of social movements (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995) indicate. Namely, citizens experience initially a moral shock (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995) and outrage on a situation of emergency and this works as a moral imperative to act (Fleischmann, 2020; Rosenberger, Stern, & Merhaut, 2018; Zamponi, 2018). Thus, compassion towards fellow humans guide initial direct action (Kleres, 2018). The direct and visible situation in the Maximilian park and the North station have encouraged a lot of citizens to act:

*I started two years ago. At that time, I was working in a space in the North Station. Every day, I walked around there and saw many people sleeping on the floor. I already knew the Citizen Platform through my sister and she had positive experiences being a host. It still took some time for me to get involved, but that image and idea of those people sleeping the train station, really had an effect on me. (*Annick, host, 13/11/2020)

Indeed, a moral shock inciting to direct action (see Zamponi, 2018) is shared over all accommodation spaces of the Citizen Platform. But Annick also highlights that she already knew the Citizen Platform from positive experiences in her personal network.   As the Citizen Platform has become an established civil initiative and civil society partner in Brussels (and all around Belgium), new volunteers are thus also drawn to their actions through for example social media (see Hwang & Kim, 2015).

B) Squats

There are different dynamics at interplay to volunteers' initial engagement in Tilt or Ultra. Tilt and Ultra volunteers don't voice a pre-political claim with their occupation of buildings, but their direct action is a concrete response to material needs (see Castelli Gattinara & Zamponi, 2020) of illegalized migrants. Sarah from Tilt (05/11/2020) explains me: *One of our fellow activists had two guys staying in his home. Then in the beginning of the lockdown there was a raid in the Maximilian*

park. And then we thought: we have such a big building, why won't we host some people? Nevertheless, most of the volunteers getting involved in squats like Tilt or Ultra have already been active in activist collectives. Therefore, they mobilize a specific subgroup of the population, namely those already involved in activist collectives or being politically engaged. New volunteers get usually drawn to Ultra's or Tilt's action because they find themselves in a social network. In this way, they mobilize less people to support squats than the broad citizen's engagement of the Citizen Platform. It is important to note though, that both volunteers from Ultra and Tilt see their volunteer support in migrant squats as an extra engagement besides their activism. Almost no volunteer from Ultra or Tilt talked about their actions as explicitly politically motivated. The 'campaign demand for solidarity' however, was erected voicing direct critique against the urban approach towards vacancy and the federal approach towards asylum and migration.

Members and volunteers engage in the Citizen Platform out of an initial moral shock of the current situation. However, now the Citizen Platform is an established actor for some years new volunteers are usually joining as they got to know the Platform through amongst others their online social network. Volunteers and squatters started squatting and supporting migrants' squats both as a response to an emergency, while being affiliated through pre-existing social networks of activists.

<u>2.2. Gradual understanding of political context</u>
I find that volunteers in the accommodation infrastructure of the Citizen Platform, but also in squats, gain a gradual understanding of the political context regarding migration, the EU border regime, asylum procedures. This is supported by several other authors (M. Feischmidt & Zakarias, 2018; Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Sandri, 2018; Vandevoordt, 2019b, 2020a; Vandevoordt & Verschraegen, 2019).

A) Citizen Platform
The goals of the Citizen Platform as a non-profit association (to raise awareness on issues of migration and to support and help illegalized migrants) are separate from the individual's political engagements and beliefs. Indeed, there is a great diversity in individual motivation and political beliefs of members of the Citizen Platform. Nevertheless, the Citizen Platform has also created a group identity *vnous,* pointing at citizens in solidarity, especially on their social media.

The gradual understanding of the political context is connected with citizens' and volunteers' experience in the movement. Besides that, a lot of payed employees and coordinators currently

working at the Citizen Platform started as volunteers in the period of 2017-2018, a specific hostile period. In accommodation structures such as the hotels or Porte d'Ulysse, there is big pool of constantly changing volunteers. In general, these volunteers mobilize for only a shorter period of time (in contrast to small collective shelters, the Sister House and hosting-at-home), and are not always aware of political factors contextualizing citizens' solidarity.

On closed Facebook groups, thousands of members of the Citizen Platform share stories and ask questions. There is a *hébergement* group which coordinates hosting in families. There are also other closed groups, for example with a focus on volunteer shifts. Through these closed groups, members are exposed to a big amount of posts, for example on the political context (see also Vandevoordt, 2020). Regularly, posts on the local political context, the Belgian asylum and migration system, the Dublin procedure, the EU border regime, the treatment of illegalized migrants and undocumented migrants, deportation and detention, appear. In the Facebook group, members, coordinators and volunteers share stories, post relevant news articles, and express their solidarity. In this sense, Facebook groups can create *social spaces* where volunteers are confronted with and share stories of the structural causes of migrants' lack of support (Vandevoordt, 2020a). The online community also helps volunteers to find practical support: when Youssef, the guest of Aurélie (27/11/2020), was detained in a detention centre, she posted on the Platform's Facebook group to find contacts for a lawyer and was put in contact with the group *Getting the voice out.* On both the official Facebook page of the Citizen Platform as closed Facebook groups, the Citizen Platform posts press releases, urges public authorities to act, post on the current situation in Belgium, and support other relevant campaigns. In combination with that, Facebook also provides a platform for reaffirming group and moral identity (see Vandevoordt, 2020). Posts about how much citizens have acted in contrast with the inaction of the state in combination with the language of *vnous* formes this moral group identity. Two events were strongly mediatized, and are linked to the Platform's initial mobilization. In November 2020, the trial of the Mawda's death was held. Both the police officer who shot the 2-year old toddler in May 2018 and the alleged smugglers were brought before court. The weeks before and during the trial, there were numerous campaigns that the Citizen Platform supported. The days of the trial there were protests, backed by the Citizen Platform. A second mediatized and politicized trial was the 'criminalization of solidarity' where 11 people were put to court for human smuggling after an appeal of the first trial in 2018. At the end of March, the trial in appeal happened. Again, the Platform posted on their Facebook group an online campaign and the protests and support organized in front of the court building. More so, the criminalization of civil support for illegalized migrants, gave a dimension of civil disobedience to citizens' actions.

Personal contact has also prompted volunteers to become politicized. Especially through hosting-at-home citizens come into contact with the lived reality of their guests. Personal stories of guests bring about awareness of topics such as migration trajectories, border and police violence, etc. Within the structure of hosting-at-home, hosts also tend to accompany their guest through procedures (if they want to claim asylum in Belgium), or medical appointments. Because of this accompaniment, citizens gain knowledge on the broader political context for illegalized migrants. These findings correspond with what Merikoski (2021) discovers in hosting refugees in families in Finland. Merikoski (2021) foregrounds how seeing someone going to a procedure in your own home resulted in a loss of trust in the legal system, government, immigration service, and police, and further politicized the hosts' actions. The spatial and emotional closeness is thus an important politicizing potential in home accommodation (see further in 3.1.).

B) Squats

Both the squats Tilt and Ultra have not used social media platform to reaffirm group identity, or to create a support base for citizens and volunteers. Ultra has used Facebook to launch a crowdfunding campaign for material and financial support. They also launched calls for volunteers to help them move to another location. The 'campaign demand for solidarity' has used social media more explicitly to report and give political context to their actions. They posted regularly on the buildings they occupied, addressing the housing policies of Brussels and the federal approach towards migration. The lack of social media usage can be partially explained because of the informality and criminalization of squats. It can also be explained by the fact that squatting for illegalized migrants does not have the purpose to form a broad civil initiative of refugee support. On a smaller degree, the 'campaign demand for solidarity' addresses urban citizens of Brussels by launching an external campaign to use vacant buildings to house precarious people.

The informal network of social movements, politicizes squat volunteers of Ultra and Tilt. Even though Ultra and Tilt don't occupy space in order to make political claims, they are in contact with support groups that do so. The 'campaign demand for solidarity' is more vocal about the goals of their action, and makes specific claims. They address both the federal as the local level: the collectives criticize the federal approach towards migration and asylum and the regional and local approach of Brussels towards vacancy and affordable housing. *We demand the immediate regularization of undocumented persons, free movement, the closure of detention centres, and the creation of safe and legal migration routes. With regards to housing we demand the end of the*

criminalization of squats and the start of public appropriation of vacant buildings, to end evictions and, above all, to find effective means to ensure decent housing for all (Press release on Facebook, 03/02/2021). Volunteers and activists involved in Tilt and Ultra are also in connection with the political occupation of the *sans papiers* movement. Activists from Tilt were for example also involved in squatting in 'demand for solidarity campaign' and in the *sans papiers* political occupation. Since January 2021 the *Union de Sans Papiers* has squatted several buildings in Brussels, such as a church, buildings in the ULB and VUB, and the National Theatre. The group is asking for collective regularization. Squats such as Tilt and Ultra (and the other squats which opened in the campaign of demand for solidarity) are thus different from the political occupation of the *sans papiers* movement. These squats do not prioritize occupying buildings as a tool to make *citizenship* claims, neither is it their goal to include illegalized migrants in the urban and national realm. However, in the activist scene in Brussels they are in informal contact. Such a network is conductive for a convergence of diverse urban struggles and for forming inclusive solidarity practices (see Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021). These networks and ties with local activists are also a valuable resource for migrants' in squats, as they usually lack this type of political support (see Fleischmann & Steinhilper, 2017; Rosenberger et al., 2018).

Volunteers of the Citizen Platform usually start with their actions to alleviate material needs without less previous experience with migration-related topics or activism. Gradually they become aware of the political context, Belgian and EU migration policies. This happens through building up experience, online Facebook groups and personal contact (especially in hosting-at-home). Even though the Citizen Platform as a movement has no political ideology, they politicize actions by the construction of a group identity. Squat members become aware of the political context of migration and housing partially through their contentious action, and through their connections in the activist network.

2.3. Politicizing effect of space

Camps where big humanitarian organizations operate are often associated with containing refugees in separate spaces from the host society (Diken, 2004). Recent civil initiatives have been staging their solidarity with illegalized migrants publicly visible, thereby pointing at their right to receive humanitarian care (Millner, 2011; Vandevoordt, 2019b). More so, as literature on squats indicate, these informal living spaces are often a result of contested urban space-making.

A) Citizen Platform

2.3.1. Symbolic public space

Maximilian park and the North station are symbolic public spaces where during 2017-2018, there was a double logic of policing and politics, as described by Vandevoordt (2019). Indeed, the park transformed into a space of solidarity where every evening citizens would coordinate the park residents to be hosted in families. Drivers and families would be connected to one specific public place in Brussels. The Maximilian Park also merged the online social media network of the Citizen Platform where thousands of citizens would follow the citizens' actions into the public space of Brussels. It brought both visibility to citizens' actions, but also built upon previous solidarity and civil humanitarian actions, namely the occupation of the park[23]. To use the park as central location for the solidarity movement was not so much a conscious and strategic decision of the civil initiative, but happened rather as a direct response to the numbers of people dwelling in the park. The park's specific location in front of the Immigration Office was also in a certain way *dialectic.* Not even fifty meters away of the federal institution dealing with asylum demands, hundreds of people were dwelling in the park not wanting or actively discouraged to claim asylum. The very institution which could give them protection, served as a tool for exclusion, neglect and discipline. More so, the thousands of citizens mobilizing to open their homes and letting them into their intimate space also contained a political message in a hostile migration context. The reality of migrants' continuous urban arrival in the Maximilian Park has led the Citizen Platform to maintain this valuable location, but as mentioned earlier (in 1.1.) this has transformed. No more dispatching from the park means less visible presence in the urban space of citizens in solidarity with illegalized migrants. COVID-19 and the lockdown has further impelled other solutions to form as the park was evicted by the police in March 2020 out of 'security' and 'health reasons'. The Citizen Platform's main goal now is to guide and inform in the park about the Platform's services, and to register illegalized migrants in their accommodation. There is thus less visible collective action of citizens in solidarity (see Bauder & Juffs, 2020). The Maximilian Park itself has therefore changed from space of policed solidarity to a space of passage.

2.3.2. Claiming urban space for illegalized migrants

The process of space-making, and finding buildings for accommodation for illegalized migrants is politicized. As addressed in section 1.3. both the Citizen Platform as squats direct themselves towards public authorities on a local level in order to create space and revision urban inclusion, in opposition to the federal level. Indeed, civil initiatives, grassroots and refugee movements that push

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[23] I point at the informal camp in the Maximilian Park in 2015, when the Belgian state was unable to provide reception to newly arrived asylum seekers

for solidarity can bring issues to the municipal agenda. These actors are thus crucial in creating the *Solidarity City* (Kuge, 2019). The Platform does this by cooperation and discussion with both the Brussels region as municipalities. In this sense, opening up space for hosting illegalized migrants and discussion with municipalities can push for a more politically welcoming climate on the local scale. As Vandevoordt (2019) already shortly mentioned, urban and municipal governments can be contentious sites of support for migrants (Bontemps, Makaremi, & Mazouz, 2018).

B) Squats

Squatting practices can be interpreted as more contentious than the Citizen Platform, because their actions are – at least in the beginning – in conflict with municipal and local authorities. We can then interpret occupying urban space for illegalized migrants as a form of civil disobedience (della Porta, 2018), as these citizen-activists use their citizenship status and access to the city to act against the rules. Indeed, citizens oppose housing policies by using a *right to the city* discourse (Lefebvre, 1968) and integrate claims to equality in transforming the logic of urban citizenship (Lambert & Swerts, 2019). Here we see that Brussels wants to portray itself as a *Solidarity City* (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019d; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021) but is also using tools as humanitarian policing and depoliticization. Both the fifth building and the seventh building (only for women) of the campaign of solidarity were evicted by the police. For the squat in Jette which the municipality, the private owner (an NGO) and the Brussels region wanted to evict because of the inhumane conditions in October 2020, the activist-citizens from the campaign 'demand for solidarity' squatted several buildings in Brussels to transfer the people to. However, both the private owner, the municipality and the region depicted the situation as if they found a solution for the residents from the squat, thus co-opting the efforts of urban grassroots support groups. In another occupation at the end of February 2021, the municipality and the police evicted the fifth building of the campaign, during a repressive action where 40 activists were nearly arrested. The police action was legitimized because the building would be "protected heritage" not suited for housing. One week after the eviction, the city of Brussels launched a call for temporary occupation of the building. The project call aimed to attract social and cultural activities and artists to temporarily use the building. They specifically mentioned that housing was forbidden. Here, we can see how the city of Brussels prioritizes urban renewal and gentrification strategies over housing of precarious population.

The Maximilian Park and the North station are thus very symbolic public spaces for the Citizen Platform's actions of solidarity, which they used by coordinating hosting-at-home there. This has

changed since 2017-2018 now the park has become rather a place of passage instead of solidarity. Citizens who urge their municipalities to open up small collective shelters and their cooperation politicizes the citizens and also municipalities to create a more welcoming climate. Migrant squats as occupation of urban space mostly present actions of civil disobedience. Squatter support groups use their privilege of citizenship to make claims on urban space and housing for illegalized migrants.

Politicization	Citizen Platform	Squats
Engaging in direct action	Initial moral shock, compassion, online social network	Response to emergency, social network of activists
Gradual understanding political context	Facebook groups and social media, personal contact especially for hosting-at-home	Network of social movements and activists
The politicizing effect of space	Maximilian park and North train station symbolic public spaces, but less visible collective action, discussion with municipalities and Brussels region for more welcoming climate	Contentious creation of space, civil disobedience, transforming the logic of urban citizenship

Table 4: an overview of politicization

3. SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN VOLUNTEERS AND MIGRANTS AND SUBJECT FORMATION

The social relations between volunteers and migrants in both critical humanitarian studies, grassroots civil initiatives and studies of urban informal spaces show ambivalent power dynamics. These relations can oppose the humanitarian approach of aid giver and aid receiver by establishing personal relations. I examine the social relations in the different accommodation spaces of the Citizen Platform and in squats and the different power dynamics they entail. Illegalized migrants can then become different social subjects within such social relations with volunteers of civil initiatives.

3.1. Constructing a social space: care, dependency and community

A) Citizen Platform

The relations between volunteers and migrants take different forms over the different types of accommodation.

3.1.1. Personal care, hospitality and possible dependency

Numerous studies have pointed at the personal social space developed through hosting in families (Merikoski, 2021), as a form of hospitality (see also Clarebout, 2020). Through the personal relationships and social links (see Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; J. Kleres, 2018; Sandri, 2018) migrants are rehumanized. The hosting-at-home structure of the Citizen Platform is a very personal and intimate form of shelter and hosting. The families operate quasi-autonomously of the non-profit association of the Citizen Platform. Migrants hosted in families still use the Platform's services, but families have access to their own network of people in solidarity: *I accompanied Ali to lawyers' appointment, language job, to find a job.* (Vanessa, host, 05/11/2020) As expressed by many hosts, the relationship between host and guest is more complex than one-way assistance (something Malkki, (2015) also addresses in reference to humanitarian volunteers). Often, these relationships are also based on reciprocity and care: social interactions in an intimate space or acts or gestures such as food sharing. Migrants often become part of the family, or a friend, and hosts describe their guests in affectionate terms. Hosting-at-home thus enables the construction of new social subjects for guests, which contends the categories imposed by the state and the EU migration regime. Nevertheless, home accommodation highlights the material, social, and political privileges that enable hospitality of hosts (see also Merikoski, 2021). Guests remain - at least partially - dependable on their hosts, which somewhat (re)produces *humanitarian* subjects. This complex power relation in an intimate social space, home, is reflected in some moments. Vanessa, a host *would end the home accommodation with Ali. When we told him, Ali was emotionally affected by our abrupt decision and did not understand why we would put [a member of the] 'family' on the streets.* (05/11/2020) Similarly, Zaid, a young man I would regularly host at my place, told me how the ending of hosting in his previous family had affected him. This brought up past traumas, feelings of abandonment, loss and betrayal. As a result, he did not want to build up any personal relationships with hosts again.

I noticed intersectional power inequalities based on class, gender, age and racialised notions. Even though there is a diversity in hosts, my respondents were all female. This corresponds with Clarebout's (2020) research on hosting families. More so, these would be mostly middle-class and middle-aged women. This different class, age and gender than most of their guests (often young

men) would bring about a specific power relation of care, which Picozza (2021) calls *maternal care.* Personal relations and intimacy are thus produced through a gendered and maternal ethics. Two of the hosts I interviewed talked to were for example single women and told me how at first, they felt reluctant to host men. These comments also reflect a racialized notion of sexism.

3.1.2. Professional care and impersonal contact

Different forms of relations are established in other accommodation structures of the Citizen Platform. In the big collective centre such as Porte d'Ulysse, and the hotels there is a tendency towards impersonal and professional contact. The routine tasks of volunteers focused on basic needs (such as distributing food) effectively creates less personal and individual contact between volunteers and migrants. The big collective centers are also environments of professional care, as actors such as *Médecins Sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde,* the SISA (with social workers), the hotel staff, cleaning teams are operating. Humanitarian organizations have been criticized for creating hierarchical relations of care giver and care taker (Fassin, 2007). The volunteers that I talked to were definitely aware of the rather impersonal conditions of the big collective shelters. As Kreichauf & Mayer (2021) argue: in conditions of mass accommodation, avoiding paternalism of volunteers towards migrants remains a theoretical desire, but is in practice not always attainable. Even though volunteers and employees are theoretically aligning with treating migrants as *equals*, the reality and daily life in the shelter make this quite impossible. Thus indeed, unequal relations between volunteers and migrants tend to be reproduced. Similarly, creating new social subjects for illegalized migrants is in this setting rather difficult, even though volunteers try speak of "the guys" or use personal names of migrants. Important to note is that there are also certain inequalities within groups of volunteers and employees. When I volunteered in one of the hotels, I witnessed the role of mediators. Mediators have often similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds of people who stay in the shelter, and share the same languages. They often have more personal encounters, while – predominantly – white volunteers did basic tasks.

3.1.3. Relations of accompanied community care

The small collective centres managed by citizens and the Sister House encompass different social relations between volunteers and migrants. Similarly, to Porte d'Ulysse and hotels, the professional services of the Platform are present in these structures. A volunteer from the Sister House emphasizes the *integrated care: It's not just come to sleep at night. It's to have a whole series of*

accompaniment for the women. (Lou, Sister House, 03/12/2020) In small collective shelters and the Sister House, volunteers are trying to build social relationships of equality and solidarity with the people staying there. Community care is important, volunteers cook together with residents, and volunteers have similar tasks as residents (while also forming the supportive tissue): *From the beginning, the tasks from volunteers is not to be the cleaning lady, but rather to have a listening ear* (Lou, Sister House, 03/12/2020). There are some tight rules to make such a community work. The charter formalizes the rules in a document, which both volunteers as residents have to sign (decision-making is discussed under 3.2.). Also, in the Sister House the relations between volunteers and female migrants entail a power imbalance. Lou for example describes female volunteers' engagement to a discourse of empowering and emancipating female migrants on the move. This sheds light on what Braun (2017) calls "charitable femininity", where female volunteers follow a liberalist feminist discourse in "charitable spaces". Female illegalized migrants are understood to be more vulnerable than men, because of the double violence they endure: both the illegalization of the EU regime and as victims of gendered violence. Female illegalized migrants in Brussels become "sisters" in the Sister House – a term which volunteers use – as a means to empower these women.

B) Squats

3.1.4. A community with an inherent hierarchy

In Tilt and Ultra, the volunteer support groups create a social space, a place of community where activists meet and hang out with migrants in the squat: *In this squat some white volunteers pass by and then hang out here and have drinks. They have a smoke with the refugees and we play together. I think the most important thing is to sit around and talk and have a drink. This is the real help.* (Mohammed, volunteer and resident Ultra, 15/01/2021) With volunteers who support migrants in their independent living, without having continuous shifts, this requires a certain level of internal organization of the migrants. Volunteer support groups notice the difficulty for people on the move to invest in community life: *They always felt like contributing a little bit, it became a little family. But in the building or the social life there... They are going to invest the minimum in the building. They don't consider it to be their home, so they don't invest in it that much* (Emilie, volunteer Ultra, 02/01/2021). After all, rule-making is less exhaustive than in the Platform's accommodation. Volunteers are also aware of the inherent hierarchy between volunteers and migrants in their squats: *Just the fact that that the people you are housing have much greater needs than you do, that's a difficult one.* (Sarah, Ultra, 08/11/2020). This power imbalance between volunteers and residents is often also structured around race. Most of the activist-volunteers of Ultra and Tilt are

white, which comes with specific privileges to come into contact with the police or to discuss with the owner and municipality. More so, Barbara (08/01/2021) notices how artists who have joined the volunteer support group of Tilt have different visions and different goals and sometimes impose their radical vision on squats, by ignoring the specific struggles of the residents. Indeed, migrant support groups can overshadow migrants' voices because of different ideological affiliations (see for example (Cappiali, 2017). Thus, in Tilt and Ultra, relations of solidarity and equality are established between volunteers and migrants, which contend humanitarian subject categories of aid giver and aid receiver. New social subjects are created, of active members of a community. However, squat communities are not free of power imbalances.

In short, in hosting-at-home the personal relations between host and guest transform migrant subjects into parts of the family, a friend, etc. However, there is always a risk of dependency in those relations. In spaces such as Porte d'Ulysse it is difficult to establish there is a risk of the reproduction of humanitarian subjects of aid-giver and aid-receiver. In the Sister House and small collective shelters, volunteers seek to support community life and establish relations of care and solidarity. Rules make such a community work. In squats there is a potential for relations of equality and solidarity, however the temporary stay of migrants on their way to the UK poses difficulties to engage in community life.

3.2. Self-management of migrants and how are decisions made

Self-management and autonomy in decision-making of migrants are two practices which can contend certain power dynamics and relations between volunteers and migrants. It shifts the attention from practices of solidarity of – predominantly – white volunteers towards the potential for migrants' autonomous organization.

A) Citizen Platform

Within the Citizen Platform, there is a huge difference in the degree of self-management of migrants in the accommodation and inclusive decision-making. In Porte d'Ulysse and the hotels for example, the guys do not have a lot of autonomy to manage the space, to structure their own lives and to make decisions on their living space. The volunteers and employees of the Citizen Platform (and in the hotels also the hotel staff) do all the daily tasks. Not including the guys in the centre happens with the logic of *we try to avoid favouritism, for example. Because we experienced that some people liked to help in the kitchen, and then it always became the same group. At some point they started to cook something in the kitchen with only this group.* (Oscar, employee in Porte d'Ulysse,

16/11/2020). Decisions are made in a top-down way: neither volunteers, nor residents have power to make substantial decisions in the shelter. In hosting-at-home, the home is also understood to be a site of unequal yet unstable power relations between hosts and guests (Merikoski, 2021). Hosts have the right to decide on basic rules in their own home space. I could see different dynamics in the Sister House and the collective centres. Both the "sisters" in the Sister House and the people staying in small collective shelters are responsibilized to manage their daily life in the shelter, but in different ways. In the Sister House, female migrants are encouraged to become independent following a liberal discourse on empowering women. The Sister House is framed increasingly as a feminist project: *We started from the principle that we had to make the girls responsible for the running of the place, we wanted them to be autonomous, and independent.* (Lou, volunteer Sister House, 03/12/2020) The fact that such a discourse comes from – predominantly – white and privileged volunteers installs maternalistic care, and risks depicting female migrants as powerless, in need of 'saving' by western liberal women. Namely, if the Sister House responsibilizes and empowers migrant women, weren't they empowered in the first place? Every evening there is a *Sisters Talk* where sisters and volunteers talk about managing the space. However, the coordinators and employees make most of the substantial decisions such as the opening new buildings, the financial and material aspects, and the professional services. Regular meetings also happen in small collective shelters. Both in the Sister House and small collective shelters, cultural mediators help translate during meetings. Migrants staying in small collective centres experience more autonomy and independence. The specific responsabilization lays in the fact that the majority of migrants in small collective shelters are in the process of claiming asylum in Belgium. The shelters then function to help them integrate in the neighbourhood and create contacts with Belgian citizens.

B) Squats

A tendency in both squats, Ultra and Tilt, is that their migrants manage their space more independently from volunteers and activists, and that they are more substantially included in meetings, and decisions. Squats have been criticized for how their politics and structures of socialization presume the dominance of Eurocentric conceptions of anticapitalism, antiracism, queer feminism and environmentalism (Picozza, 2021). Bouteldja (2016: 43) calls this "the white immune system" which engenders an implicit imagination of the political and moral superiority of white radical ideologies (Picozza, 2021). Indeed, Robert, a volunteer from Ultra was aware of this dynamic: *You can try – and we did for some time – to get rid of status differences and power imbalances etc. And in itself that is already a very neo-colonial way of working, because who says*

that these people [migrants] want us to impose our specific interpretation of collectivism, to make decisions about something where they live and we don't? (12/01/2021) Similarly, Mohammed, a man who has himself claimed asylum in Belgium, helps the volunteer group of Ultra and lives together with the migrants in the squat. He has the function of a facilitator who forms the link between residents and volunteers, as he understands cultural specificities and speaks the same language. *I will tell you something, things I started to understand is that activists, movements, NGOs are really different here than in my country. There are always people who say: it is my decision, my thing, my benefits, my NGO. I've seen it myself. White people, when you come to this initiative, just be honest.* (Mohammed, 15/01/2021) The migrants organize meetings without the volunteer support group, and decisions are not made in horizontal way or based on consensus, which is normally associated with decision-making in activists' groups: *We had a meeting and I was also yelling. Sometimes, Arabs, we do this during a meeting, but it doesn't mean I hate you. I just raise my voice.* (Mohammed, 15/01/2021) *There are certain hierarchies within this group. People come from different [ethnic] groups. There are people who are older, who have higher education.* (Robert, volunteer Ultra, 12/01/2021). Furthermore, migrants in transit often do not have the time to invest in such a living space, as most of them perceive Belgium as a temporary stop. This points at the unevenly distributed power to participate in decisional process, as activists often enjoy a relative disposability due to their specific class position. Efforts of activists, in Tilt, to organize meetings and squats in a *sociocratic* way have in reality failed, because of the residents' informal organization and temporal stay. *The people who are there, after a week they are in England. So those that are designated as coordinators, there were 8 and within the week four of the coordinators were in England* (Sarah, volunteer Ultra, 09/11/2020).

In the Citizen Platform, self-management and inclusion in decision-making can be found in small collective shelters and the Sister House, where it partially acts to responsibilize residents. In squats, there is also self-management and autonomous decision-making of migrants, but this is not organised in a specific western activist format. Again, self-management is practically difficult because migrants in mobility do not have disposable time to invest.

Social relations and subjects	Citizen Platform	Squats

Social relations	Personal relationships in hosting-at-home with possible dependency, professional care in Porte d'Ulysse and hotels, accompanied community care in small collective shelters and Sister House	Relations of equality and community care in Ultra, more accompanied in Tilt. Relations still entail power imbalance
Self-management and decision-making	Little autonomy in Porte d'Ulysse and hotels, responsibilization through self-management in Sister House and small collective shelters	Self-management with a facilitator in Ultra, challenged self-management because of temporariness of migrants' stay

Table 5: an overview of social relations and subjects

4. CONCLUSION

The spatial and temporal dimension of the Citizen Platform shows that the different types of accommodation infrastructure have very different dynamics. Especially the rotation, the rules of organisation in these big centres produce the possibility for humanitarian government (see Agier, 2011). Further we can see that mainly in the big collective shelters the professionalism of the Platform becomes evident. Smaller collective shelters have developed in a way for long-term hosting, usually people within an asylum procedure. They are less professionalized in terms of distant volunteer shifts, and have a bottom-up way of creating space. In squats there is less professionalization of volunteer shifts, and rules on how long people can stay. In a way, this is up to the migrants, not the citizens organizing accommodation. Then we can see with regards to that, that the living conditions are usually precarious.

The politicization of members of the Citizen Platform happens in slightly different ways than to the members of the squats. Conform with the literature, I found that Platform's members engage in direct action motivated by an initial shock. However, the Citizen Platform has gradually moved towards other forms of mobilizing new members because of their semi-professionalism and their establishment as a civil society actor. Especially, social media plays a function in mobilizing citizens. The awareness of political context is influenced by experience, social media and personal contact (mostly in hosting-at-home). Squats get mobilized in direct action to occupy space for illegalized migrants and to become part of the volunteer support group, through pre-existing links and connections in activist networks and small collectives. However, most of the respondents do not link their engagement in migrant squats to being an activist. They acted because they were morally shocked about the precarity for and policing of illegalized migrants. The politicization that

happens through the use of symbolic public places, is something the Citizen Platform has severely engaged in since 2017-2018. However, because the Platform stopped coordinating dispatching from the park, the Maximilian park has transformed into a space of passage. This means the Platform is less visibly present, acting in solidarity. Squats on the other hand, remain rather informal and invisible because of their criminalization. If we look at politicization which happens through claiming urban space by interacting with local authorities, there is a difference between the Citizen Platform and squats. The Citizen Platform uses more cooperation and discussion with Brussels authorities to create spaces of solidarity and accommodation. This ultimately creates a great potential for urban citizens to push their municipalities to be welcoming towards illegalized migrants, but also to be safe havens. It also creates ways for urban citizens to participate in local politics. Brussels has been cooperative and welcoming for such civil initiatives, willing to support. Squatting on the other hand is a criminalized activity on a local level, because they use unauthorized occupation of buildings to create accommodation for illegalized migrants. Here we can see a double approach from municipalities. On the one hand they continued evictions despite the moratorium. On the other hand, certain municipalities and private owners are very happy for such bottom-up initiatives, and tend to co-opt citizens' efforts in order to meet moral obligations towards humanitarian needs and affordable housing.

When looking at the social interactions held in the daily life in the accommodation infrastructure, there is a noticeable difference within the Citizen Platform, but also between the Citizen Platform and squats. Whereas small collective shelters and the Sister House create social spaces with rules to attempt to constitute relations between *equals* (volunteers and migrants), in Porte d'Ulysse there is a tendency to reproduce humanitarian relations between aid giver and aid receiver because of the impersonal set-up and organisation. In small collective shelters especially, the fact that most of the residents stay in Belgium for a longer period of time (as rejected asylum seekers, asylum seekers with a Dublin claim…) instead of being in transit, opens up these forms of community relations. In hosting in families there is personal contact, which establishes affective relations. Migrants' subjectivities are transformed into members of the family or friends. It also presents an environment where dependent relationships are constructed between host and guest. All of the relations between volunteers and migrants entail power specific imbalances. However, there is a greater awareness of these power infused relation between volunteers and migrants within squats. The fact that volunteers are not constantly present in squats, makes residents self-manage the space according to their logic.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This thesis has investigated the following question*: What are the power dynamics and relations at play in the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels? What is the humanitarian-political variation within and produced by the accommodation of the Citizen Platform and squats in Brussels?* I used the lens of *socially subversive humanitarianism* (a concept of Vandevoordt, 2019b) in order to compare the humanitarian-political and power dynamics in grassroots civil refugee support. I conducted two case studies, a comparative multiple case study, in order to unravel the practices of volunteers and citizens in accommodating illegalized migrants, both as members of and citizens connected to the Citizen Platform, and as volunteer-activists in squatting collectives. Therefore, I analysed four sub notions which were according to the theoretical paradigm and gradual empirical findings relevant in exploring the humanitarian-political balance in grassroots civil refugee support. I focused on spatial and temporal dimensions of the different forms of accommodation, the possibilities of politicization through accommodation, the social relations specifically between volunteers and migrants (including the degree of self-management and inclusion in decisions), and the potential for constituting different social subjects for migrants. These sub notions have allowed me to unravel the power dynamics and political potential of accommodation infrastructure for illegalized migrants, as they are both relevant for the Citizen Platform and for squats. In this way, the concept *socially subversive humanitarianism* has been transformed, and practically implemented.

The Citizen Platform is a well-established civil actor in the field, started to operate in 2017-2018, which has not only accommodated thousands of illegalized migrants in families' homes and their collective shelters, but have also substantially supported people on the move by establishing stable relationships with medical NGO's and expanding socio-legal support through their services. Which has remained relatively absent in academic literature around civil support in the Belgian context are the numerous informal living spaces formed in urban border zones. Indeed, throughout my fieldwork I came across more occupied buildings in Brussels for illegalized migrants, beyond only the squats that I researched. Squats such as Ultra and Tilt are classically conceived through social movement literature and critical citizenship studies. These urban autonomous spaces for illegalized migrants are predetermined to entail a political potential. However, most of their activities can be understood to be alleviating humanitarian needs, as their aim is to house illegalized migrants. By focusing on exactly the parts of these grassroots support movements which seem purely humanitarian, namely the accommodation and hosting of illegalized migrants, I tried to unravel the

political potential of grassroots civil solidarity initiatives. I did this by using the concept of *subversive humanitarianism* not merely as a theoretical idea but in the empirical reality on the ground. Indeed, a comparative multiple case study focusing on accommodation for illegalized migrants has allowed me to point at different forms of grassroots mobilization, which more or less unfold in parallel, although overlaps exist. By comparing the political potential of both the Citizen Platform and squatting collectives in Brussels I add to the comparative possibility of a concept such as subversive humanitarianism. Civil humanitarian organisations have already been associated with entailing complex humanitarian ambiguities, but lack empirical studies on the actual spaces they create. Urban social movements have been traditionally linked with a pre-political organisation and collective action, which I gave a nuanced reading through my research on squatting for illegalized migrants in Brussels. The fact that both cases exist mostly in parallel in a similar context provided me with the opportunity to make substantial comparisons.

I shortly want to discuss the concept *socially subversive humanitarianism.* As *socially subversive humanitarianism* is an inherently relational concept, namely certain actions become political because they go against the ruling socio-political climate, we can ask ourselves the question: for whom are these actions socially subversive? And on which level? If we look at the Citizen Platform as a civil solidarity initiative, all of their actions are essentially subversive as they, in a context of a hostile migration environment, act against the federal state and against the EU border regime. At the same time, the problem with such an approach is that humanitarian action can then only be contentious or subversive insofar it is directed against the ruling socio-political climate (Vandevoordt, 2019b). What became apparent in the last years though, is that the era of State Secretary of Asylum and Migration Theo Francken was quite unique as the logic of policing and politics (Vandevoordt, 2020b) was so present in and around the Maximilian park in Brussels, whilst the State Secretary was putting emphasis on tackling human smuggling only further criminalising and illegalising all migrants on the move. The Belgian stance and policies towards irregular migration has continued to violently neglect a certain amount of people on their territory, whilst further illegalizing subcategories of migrants such as those with an asylum claim subjected to the Dublin procedure and rejected asylum seekers (State Secretary of Asylum and Migration Maggie de Block). The current State Secretary of Asylum and Migration Sammy Mahdi has clearly attempted to further restrict and discipline irregular migration, by focusing on detention and *voluntary* deportation.

My research thus looks at the power dynamics and political potential of civil refugee support on multiple scales, through the lens of specific subdimensions of *socially subversive humanitarianism*. In this sense, I look at the local and intimate level how subversiveness is produced in and through accommodation spaces of the Citizen Platform and squats. I explore the urban and intimate socio-spatial characteristics of informal living spaces for illegalized migrants. I have been able to capture the diversity of humanitarian-political dynamics within a civil initiative such as the Citizen Platform, and in urban squatting collectives. Concerning the Citizen Platform, I have showed the partial institutionalisation and professionalisation of grassroots refugee support. Indeed, in big collective shelters complex dynamics are at interplay with a tendency to reduce migrants to their respective needs, instead of creating the potential for an equal encounter between volunteers and migrants. Nevertheless, the Citizen Platform has kept its grassroots character by maintaining the structure of hosting-at-home and the practice of urban collective shelters. In essence, this means it opens up the possibility for citizens to negotiate their urban citizenship, while pushing for Brussels and its municipalities to become a *Solidarity City* (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019d; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021). However, on an intimate level, we see that for example hosting-at-home entails the danger to reproduce power imbalances between host and guest, noticed in other research around hospitality, creating a form of dependency.

In squats for illegalized migrants, a complex range of dynamics bring about that migrants' squats for people on the move are not necessarily more politically organised. Squatter-activists seem to act as fellow citizens instead of striving for a political goal. By looking at subversiveness on different scales, I have also been able to reconstruct certain assumptions about migrant squatting. On a local, urban level, occupying buildings is rather contentious as it is going against urban policies on housing. As we see cooperation between the Citizen Platform and municipalities (and the Brussels region) on temporarily using apartments and buildings for hosting illegalized migrants, occupying buildings to transform into migrant squats usually happens in conflict with urban authorities.

There are very different power dynamics and relations in different forms of accommodation of the Citizen Platform (such as hosting at home, or small collective shelters). Also, in squats, there are power dynamics at interplay in the relation between volunteer groups and migrants. For example, their contentious character which entails conflict with municipal authorities bring about power imbalances concerning safety. The risk and consequences of police action for undocumented migrants are greater than for documented activists. This is not only because one group has a citizenship status and the other does not, but because illegalized migrants suffer racialisation. Thus, it is important to note that all civil initiatives in solidarity with illegalized migrants will entail

power asymmetries according race, gender and class divisions. In a more intimate way, squats facilitate illegalized migrants in their mobility, by focusing on informal and autonomous living. At the same time, they provide a plethora of options for migrants to regain their voice in ordering their daily life, in correspondence with cultural and personal beliefs, and relationships with their respective community.

I strongly encourage further research on civil refugee support, in the aftermath of 2015: the spontaneous moments of the crisis have namely changed. These moments of solidarity have been replaced by maintained and continued care of mostly civil initiatives which are repairing disciplining migration policies. To focus on such civil initiatives' continuing actions while transforming, shows the evolution of grassroots organisation. It highlights the diverse actors in urban border zones providing humanitarian assistance while standing in solidarity with illegalized migrants. Especially the focus on the urban space has opened up questions on existing urban squatting movements which have been formed opposing national and urban authorities. The two case studies have allowed me to compare two actors in Brussels which are supporting illegalized migrants, which would not be compared because of their supposed differences in correspondence to the literature. Despite their different political potential and power dynamics that I showed in my research, I also foregrounded their similarities. This opens up approaches which critically investigate urban actors engaging in civil initiatives for illegalized migrants. Due to limitations of this research I did not explore urban governments and municipal authorities in their approach towards civil initiatives. In light of the results, this would have gained more insights on the experiences and practices of institutional urban actors in cooperation or conflict to create accommodation for illegalized migrants. It would have also been interesting to do intensive field research and participant observation in all accommodation spaces of the Citizen Platform, but this was not possible because of COVID-19 restrictions and time limitation. I would like to conclude with a quote of Picozza (2021), which is similarly an critique on my own dissertation, as an encouragement for further research:

By recentring white subjects at the core of border contestations, we invisibilize refugee struggles, and reproduce a particular politics of race, which displays a heroized imagery of whiteness, while it objectifies non-white bodies as victims. Refugees are thus often solidarity actors too, through informal practices of assistance during the journey, self-organized mutual aid, participation in wider networks of solidarity together with European citizens and collective political struggles. This non-white solidarity, however, has been continuously criminalized through anti-smuggling politics that particularly target non-white people. Whether in its more explicitly

humanitarian or politicized forms, contemporary refugee support in Europe occurs within a social, material and representational regime of whiteness that determines its political and moral claims; it upholds the democratic, liberal value of asylum, reducing it to a question of welcoming, hospitality and humanitarian assistance, and rarely engaging with the colonial past and present. (128,129)

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