

# Political Representation Beyond Citizenship

Yoonis Osman Nuur, Ahmet Ögüt

Column – August 19, 2014

The following text was developed on the occasion of the *Beyond Allegories* debate, for which 250 artists, politicians, union representatives, university professors, dramatists, representatives from refugee organisations and NGOs, journalists, and students gathered together for seven hours in Amsterdam's City Council to discuss the role of art within governance, political mobilisation and action. This debate was organised by Ann Demeester (De Hallen | Frans Hals Museum), Carolien Gehrels (until recently Alderman for Art & Culture, PvdA / Labor Party Amsterdam) and the artists Hans van Houwelingen and Jonas Staal in an effort to forge new progressive alliances. The text will be part of the DVD-book *Beyond Allegories*, a collection of the resolutions and videos that resulted from the project, which will be published this year.



Yoonis Osman Nuur (We Are Here) & Ahmet Ögüt, *Beyond Allegories*, 2014. – Photo by Roos Trommelen

We, Yoonis Osman Nuur (representative of refugee collective We Are Here) and Ahmet Ögüt (initiator of The Silent University), have joined in following three propositions/demands:

## 1. Acknowledgement of We Are Here as an Undocumented Political Party

We Are Here is a collective of more than 225 undocumented migrants and refugees – a *political entity* – that fights for the acknowledgement of each of its members as citizens. We Are Here strives for the right to self-determination of each individual member, which means: the right to equal political representation, access to education, economic participation, healthcare and other social services. Currently, undocumented migrants in the Netherlands have no right to vote, no right to education and no right to perform labour – not even unpaid charity work. This effectively forces them outside of the domain of international human rights that demands equal acknowledgement of every human being, regardless of their background and their educational or economic status. Following this principle of universal equality we demand the acknowledgement of We Are Here as an *undocumented political party* and as the legitimate representative of its cause: striving for the acknowledgment of the peoples of this world, documented and undocumented alike.

## 2. Recognition of the We Are Here Academy and the Right to Education

In collaboration with Dutch academics, We Are Here has started the We Are Here Academy, which teaches undocumented migrants the political and juridical background of the Netherlands. As the struggle of undocumented migrants is largely administrative by nature, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the structures that define a person in the Netherlands either as existent – as a citizen – or as non-existent – as a non-citizen. The latter consists of what theorist Giorgio Agamben refers to as “bare life” (life without administrative, state protection). The We Are Here Academy acts upon the right to education as a *universal right*, in a coalition of documented and undocumented people. We ask universities, art institutions, labour unions, political parties and civil society to acknowledge and support the universal right to education, and to acknowledge that the financing and organising of the We Are Here Academy is a *collective* responsibility of society at large.

## 3. Recognition of The Silent University and the Right to Educate

In collaboration with art institutions, universities and migrant organisations, artist Ahmet Ögüt initiated The Silent University, in which (undocumented) migrants and refugees with an academic background are acknowledged as teachers. The Silent University has departments in the United Kingdom, France, Sweden and Germany, and has contributed to providing legitimacy to undocumented migrants. Furthermore, the Silent University has brought attention to the fact that former migrants who receive citizenship are often not acknowledged for their academic backgrounds. This leads to the destruction of knowledge and of what artist Joseph Beuys refers to as “creative capital”. We ask universities, art institutions, labour unions, political parties and civil society to acknowledge and support the right to educate, and to acknowledge the teachers of The Silent University as bearers of knowledge with *equal* importance to that of so-called native teachers and professors.

All other video registrations of *Beyond Allegories* including the Introduction and Epilogue can be found on this page: [www.vimeo.com](http://www.vimeo.com).

Essay by E. C. Feiss, *On Beyond Allegories* [[onlineopen.org/on-beyond-allegories](http://onlineopen.org/on-beyond-allegories)]

Salima Belhaj & Wunderbaum, *Plea for a Free Zone* [[onlineopen.org/plea-for-a-free-zone](http://onlineopen.org/plea-for-a-free-zone)]

Mariko Peters, Metahaven & Jonas Staal, *Towards an Extra-Parliamentary Democracy!* [[onlineopen.org/towards-an-extra-parliamentary-democracy](http://onlineopen.org/towards-an-extra-parliamentary-democracy)]

Dirk Poot & Foundland, [Mapping the Deep State](https://onlineopen.org/mapping-the-deep-state/) [\[onlineopen.org/mapping-the-deep-state/\]](https://onlineopen.org/mapping-the-deep-state/)

Carolien Gehrels & Hans van Houwelingen, [The Creative City: A Blessing for Administration but a Curse for the Arts](https://onlineopen.org/the-creative-city-a-blessing-for-administration-but-a-curse-for-the-arts/) [\[onlineopen.org/the-creative-city-a-blessing-for-administration-but-a-curse-for-the-arts/\]](https://onlineopen.org/the-creative-city-a-blessing-for-administration-but-a-curse-for-the-arts/)

Ron Meyer & Matthijs de Bruijne, [De Democratisering van de Kunst](https://onlineopen.org/de-democratisering-van-de-kunst/) [\[onlineopen.org/de-democratisering-van-de-kunst/\]](https://onlineopen.org/de-democratisering-van-de-kunst/)

Ron Meyer & Matthijs de Bruijne, [Democratising the Arts](https://onlineopen.org/democratising-the-arts/) [\[onlineopen.org/democratising-the-arts/\]](https://onlineopen.org/democratising-the-arts/)

**Yoonis Osman Nuur** is a We Are Here Academy student and part of the refugee council of the Here to Support Foundation. As a human rights activist and politician, Nuur fights for the visibility and recognition of refugees in limbo, in Dutch society and law. See further: [www.wijzijnhier.org](http://www.wijzijnhier.org).

**Ahmet Öğüt** is a conceptual artist based in Amsterdam and Istanbul. Öğüt is the initiator of The Silent University, an autonomous knowledge-exchange platform led by refugees for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The Silent University aims to make apparent the systematic failure and the loss of knowledge and skills experienced through the silencing process of people seeking asylum. See further: [www.thesilentuniversity.org](http://www.thesilentuniversity.org).

## Crosslinks

Plea for a Free Zone: [onlineopen.org/plea-for-a-free-zone](https://onlineopen.org/plea-for-a-free-zone)

De Democratisering van de Kunst: [onlineopen.org/de-democratisering-van-de-kunst](https://onlineopen.org/de-democratisering-van-de-kunst)

Democratising the Arts: [onlineopen.org/democratising-the-arts](https://onlineopen.org/democratising-the-arts)

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## Tags

Activism, Democracy

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