Making deportable people

Bureaucratic knowledge practices in European deportation sites

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List of publications

- Chapter two


This article is based on Wissink’s master thesis titled ‘Entries and Exits: Conjoined Conditions. The everyday experience and views of state-agents and civil society actors who encounter (un) deportable migrants in the Netherlands’ (UvA 2013). Wissink conducted most of the fieldwork and initiated the first draft, followed by a period of collective writing with Kalir, who had supervised the master project. The author names are listed in alphabetical order.

- Chapter three


This paper resulted from intense collaboration between the two authors. Wissink conceived of the first draft. Data derived from the different research sites of both authors. Major revisions after the first round of peer reviews were made by Wissink. The author names are listed in order of contribution.
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- **Chapter four**


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Summary

MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE. Bureaucratic knowledge practices in European deportation sites

Deportations — the forced displacement of human bodies from national territories — require the existence of a deportable person. But how can we know the deportable person? In this work, this empirical question is raised in places where daily work is organized around ‘deportees’, or people who are ‘perfectly illegal and removable’ in the words of a bureaucrat inside a Deportation Unit. The reader is taken along through various fields differing in scale: from a comparison of practices concerning deportees between the civil society field and state sites to the careful stapling of mugshots behind an office desk. This exploration yields the insight that the exact combination of factors that makes a deportable subject is temporal and situated. This also goes for the concepts that lie at the foundation of deportations: borders, nations, state power, and population management. Exploring what it takes to make a deportee in current bureaucratic practices offers reflections on the interaction of these concepts and their workings on a daily, mundane level.

Chapter by chapter, the reader is taken deeper into what in this work is called deportation bureaucracy; the (file) practices wherein the deportable subject is shaped in alignment with current legal and procedural frameworks. Each chapter questions dominant assumptions that were encountered in the field, to ask anew what is happening in daily deportation practices.

The fieldwork for chapter 2, co-authored by dr. Barak Kalir, took place in the Netherlands. The chapter offers a comparison between deportation case managers on the one hand and NGO workers who deal with people facing deportation on the other. Although often perceived as two opposing sites, significant convergences exist in both daily work settings in terms of the usage of terminology, handling of face-to-face interactions, and views on (non) belonging and justice. This chapter therefore argues that this ‘cosy consensus’, in a country known for its consensus politics, signifies the shared political subjectivities in Dutch civil society spheres and state spaces that can best be
understood as a deportation continuum. Importantly, this continuum creates a sealed-off political realm that restricts the initiatives of activist citizens, imaginaries of citizenship and alternatives for deportation policies.

Chapter 3, written together with dr. Irene van Oorschot, offers a comparison between two different state sites saturated with file-work. The first is a Deportation Unit, the second a Criminal Court. For both locations it holds that file referents — respectively potential deportees or suspects — become subjected to the state through this file-work. Rather than taking bureaucracy as a rational process, the affective modes that are engineered in these bureaucratic practices are analyzed. These are more diverse and layered than mere indifference — an affective mode so often related to bureaucracy, which is sometimes mistakenly assumed to indicate a lack of affect. Bureaucratic action appears to be a deeply affective practice, within which the relationship between caseworker, casework, and the file's referent is carefully calibrated. The chapter shows that affects are locally produced in the relational webs that are mobilized in file-work, and that affects are unevenly produced within and between different bureaucratic practices. Crucial for analyzing how bureaucratic practice contributes to (re)producing sovereign power is the insight that changing interactions throughout file trajectories make bureaucratic affect intrinsically relational.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the ethical implications underlying the methodological choice in this research to follow so-called ‘files-for-removal’ on their trajectories. The research focus is hence a practice here — the file-work — rather than a research population, such as bureaucrats, for example. In file-work, various activities and actors gather. The relations formed between them are constantly in the making, to subsequently be disrupted or wiped out again. Because the trajectory of deportation files are an intrinsically relational process, ethical difficulties occurred as a result. Namely, ethical guidelines are generally centered around a bound-off research group as deserving of ethical treatment from the researcher. However, in practice-oriented research, needs and concerns of those involved in the research differ and might even conflict — think about bureaucrats versus deportees. There is thus no clear answer
possible to the question of how to act ethically; to relate to a bureaucrat in an ethical way would not necessarily correspond to an ethical attitude towards a deportee. Ethical guidelines that assume that research participants are a homogenous entity do not suffice to address differences in the ethical needs of the various actors involved in a practice. This chapter therefore discusses the gap between pre-fieldwork ethics, or “ethics in the books”, and ethical dilemmas that practice-oriented researchers encounter in the field, potentially with a moral burden for a field researcher as a result.

Chapter 5 takes the reader yet one step deeper into the mundane practicalities of deportations to subsequently reflect on the implications of this process in a wider context. Files themselves are followed within a Deportation Unit on their bureaucratically divided trajectories towards making deportable subjects. All kinds of internal and external influences contribute to the situation that criteria to shape a file’s referent ‘in procedure’ as a deportable subject change constantly. Importantly, the file serves as a technique that supports bureaucrats within the Unit to document deportable individuals. This individualization is crucial since the deportation of populations became criminalized in the aftermath of WWII. As it unfolds in daily file-work, however, deportees — those recognized as strangers that should leave the nation — are made in a constellation of various populations, empirically undermining the individualized deportee. These populations vary in kind, from racial and national to administrative. Moreover, these categories of deportable populations change over time and location, indicating that their ‘making’ is situated. Besides deporting individuals, it appears that deportation bureaucracy is essentially a performative practice of ordering population rather than deporting individuals.

In conclusion, this work comes back in chapter 6 to the question following the search for the deportable person, namely; **what does the figure of the deportable person bring about?** A Deportation Unit is a securitized place, meaning that it is not easy as an outsider to get inside, and — likewise — it is not easy for what happens inside to travel outside. Or so it seems. Because despite this dynamic, deportation bureaucracy is intertwined and embedded
in our society. What is more, the securitized layers around deportation enable what can be ‘made’ and ‘done’ by deportation bureaucracy on a societal level: not having access to the process — in a way not even for those inside, due to the obfuscation caused by the bureaucratic jungle — does not give incoherencies a chance to disrupt the making process. Instead, the knowledge that is made in the bureaucratic process can start to work: the deportable person is mobilized and becomes a meaningful figure in our social world. Moreover, the temporal and situated character of the figure of the deportable subject testifies to how the deportable person is only as real as the political imaginary in which this figure is mobilized. This also implies that we could all be a ‘deportee’, a crucial figure in the political project of nation states wherein people come to be part of populations whose belongingness is defined through the nonbelonging of others. Importantly, the deportable figure does not arrive from a faraway horizon where ‘others’ belong but is always already among us; the deportable figure only becomes in our midst.
Samenvatting

UITZETBARE MENSEN MAKEN. Bureocratische kennis praktijken rondom gedwongen uitzettingen in Europa

Uitzettingen – mensen gedwongen uit nationale grondgebieden transporteren – behoeven het bestaan van een uitzetbaar persoon. Maar hoe kunnen we de uitzetbare persoon (her)kennen? Dat is de empirische vraag die dit werk stelt binnen omgevingen waar het dagelijkse werk is georganiseerd rondom ‘uitzetbaren’. Oftewel, zoals een bureaucraat in een Deportatie Eenheid het verwoordde, rondom mensen die ‘perfect illegaal en verwijderbaar’ zijn. De plekken waarnaar de lezer wordt meegenomen verschillen in schaalgrootte: van een vergelijking van werkpraktijken rondom uitzetbaren tussen het maatschappelijk middenveld en de overheid, tot het zorgvuldig nieten van dossierfoto’s vanachter een bureau op kantoor. Deze zoektocht leidt naar het inzicht dat de precieze combinatie van factoren die een uitzetbaar subject creëren, tijds- en situatieafhankelijk zijn. Ditzelfde geldt voor de concepten die aan het fundament liggen van gedwongen uitzettingen: grenzen, naties, staatsmacht en bevolkingsmanagement. Het onderzoeken van wat er vandaag de dag nodig is om uitzetbaren te scheppen in bureaucratische praktijken, levert reflecties op ten aanzien van de wisselwerking tussen deze concepten en de rol die ze vervullen op een alledaags niveau.

Hoofdstuk voor hoofdstuk wordt de lezer dieper meegenomen in wat in dit werk deportatie bureaucratie genoemd wordt, de (dossier) praktijken waarin het uitzetbaar subject gevormd wordt in lijn met de huidige juridische- en procedurele kaders. Elk hoofdstuk bevraagt dominante opvattingen binnen het veld, om zo met een nieuwe blik te kunnen vragen: wat gebeurt er nu eigenlijk in dagelijkse deportatie praktijken?

SAMENVATTING

maar belangrijke overeenkomsten te vertonen wanneer het aankomt op de gebruikte terminologie, het afhandelen van persoonlijk contact en de zienswijzen ten aanzien van rechtvaardigheid en op wie er wel en niet behoort tot de samenleving. In dit hoofdstuk worden deze overeenkomsten, binnen een land dat bekend staat om zijn consensuspolitiek, aangeduid als een ‘knusse consensus’. De gedeelde politieke opvattingen binnen het Nederlandse maatschappelijke middenveld en de overheid tonen dat er sprake is van een deportatie continuüm. Belangrijk is dat dit continuüm een vrijwel afgeschermd politieke ruimte creëert welke belemmeringen opwerpt voor initiatieven van activistische burgers, het voorstellingsvermogen om burgerschap anders in te richten, en het ontwikkelen van alternatieven voor gedwongen uitzettingsbeleid.

Hoofdstuk 3, geschreven samen met dr. Irene van Oorschot, maakt een vergelijking tussen twee overheidslocaties waar het gros van de werkzaamheden bestaat uit dossier-werk. De eerste is een Deportatie Eenheid, de tweede een Gerechtshof. Voor beide locaties geldt dat de referenten van de dossiers, respectievelijk potentieel uitzetbaren of verdachten, onderworpen zijn aan de staat middels het dossier-werk dat hier plaatsvindt. In de analyse wordt bureaucratie niet voorgesteld als een rationeel proces maar verdienen juist die situaties in bureaucratische praktijken de aandacht die betrekking hebben op het gevoel. Het blijkt dat dergelijke bureaucratische affectiviteiten meer divers en gelaagd zijn dan enkel onverschilligheid – een affectieve staat die vaak gerelateerd is aan bureaucratie, soms zelfs in de veronderstelling dat onverschilligheid op de afwezigheid van affect duidt. Dit hoofdstuk laat de lokale productie van diverse affecten zien zoals die plaats vindt in de relaties die zich in dossier-werk vormen. Dit maakt duidelijk dat bureaucratische handelingen ten diepste affectief zijn, waarbij de relatie tussen de bureaucraat die aan het dossier-werkt, het dossier zelf, en de referent van een dossier telkens zorgvuldig afgewogen wordt. Welke affecten in een procedure naar voren komen en waar, is zowel tussen- als binnen de bestudeerde praktijken niet vanzelfsprekend overeenkomstig. Cruciaal bij het analyseren hoe deze praktijken bijdragen aan de (re)productie van soevereine macht, is daarom
het inzicht dat de veranderlijke interacties tussen betrokkenen ertoe leidt dat bureaucratische affectiviteiten intrinsiek relationeel zijn.

_Hoofdstuk 4_ gaat dieper in op de ethische implicaties bijgevolg de methodologische keuze om het traject van zogeheten ‘dossiers-ter-verwijdering’ te volgen gedurende een procedure. Focus van onderzoek is hier een praktijk – het dossier-werk – en niet een onderzoekspopulatie, zoals bijvoorbeeld bureaucraten. In dossier-werk komen diverse activiteiten en actoren samen. De relaties die deze vormen binnen het traject dat een dossier aflegt, worden continue gemaakt en vervolgens weer tenietgedaan of onderbroken. Dat het traject van een dossier-ter-verwijdering een intrinsiek relationeel proces is, leidt tot ethische moeilijkheden. Ethische richtlijnen gaan namelijk veelal uit van een af te bakenen onderzoeksgroep waarop de onderzoeker afstemt wat ethisch handelen behelst. Voor een praktijkgericht onderzoek geldt echter dat behoeften en zorgen van diverse actoren die deel uitmaken van de gevormde relaties verschillen of zelfs conflictueren, denk aan die van bureaucraten ten opzichte van die van uittzetbaren. Hierdoor bestaat er geen eenduidig antwoord op de vraag hoe ethisch te handelen. Ethisch handelen ten opzichte van een bureacraat komt tenslotte niet vanzelfsprekend overeen met een ethische houding ten aanzien van uittzetbaren. Uitgaan van een afgebakende groep, een homogene onderzoekspopulatie, is dus ontoereikend wanneer de focus van onderzoek een praktijk is waarbinnen verschillende actoren met uiteenlopende ethische behoeftes het onderzoeksveld betreden. Dit hoofdstuk wijst er daarom op dat ethische richtlijnen die een praktijkgerichte onderzoeker voorafgaand aan veldwerk formuleert, en ethische dilemma’s die zich eenmaal in het veld voordoen, niet vanzelfsprekend op elkaar aansluiten – met een morele belasting voor de onderzoeker als potentieel gevolg.

In _hoofdstuk 5_ wordt de lezer nog dieper ingewijd in de alledaagse, praktische handelingen van gedwongen uitzettingen alvorens een stap terug te nemen en te reflecteren op de implicaties ervan in een bredere context. Dossiers worden gevolgd binnen de Deportatie Eenheid op hun bureaucratisch verdeelde traject teneinde een uitzetbaar subject te vormen. Door allerlei interne- en externe
invloeden zijn procedurele criteria om de referent van een dossier tot een uitzetbaar subject te vormen constant aan verandering onderhevig. Het dossier functioneert als een techniek die het mogelijk maakt voor bureaucraten in de Deportatie Eenheid om uitzetbare individuen te documenteren. Deze individualisatie is van cruciaal belang aangezien het uitzetten van bevolkingsgroepen strafbaar gesteld werd in de nasleep van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Maar zoals het zich ontvouwt in dossier-werk, worden uitzetbaren – zij die herkend worden als vreemdelingen die de natie zouden moeten verlaten – gevormd in een constellatie van populaties. De empirie ondermijnt daarmee de vermeende individualiteit van uitzetbaren. De populaties waaruit een uitzetbare figuur wordt opgebouwd zijn van verschillende aard, bijvoorbeeld raciaal, nationaal, of administratief. Bovendien verschillen deze categorieën van uitzetbare populaties per tijd en plaats, wat wederom aantoont dat het maakproces van uitzetbaren gesitueerd is. Deportatie bureaucratie, zo blijkt, is in wezen niet zozeer een praktijk om individuen uit te zetten maar een performatieve praktijk teneinde bevolkingen te ordenen.

Tot slot wordt er in hoofdstuk 6 teruggekomen op de vraag die volgt uit de zoektocht naar de uitzetbare persoon, namelijk: wat wordt er bewerkstelligd met de verschijning van de uitzetbare persoon? Een Deportatie Eenheid is een afgeschermd en beveiligde omgeving waardoor een buitenstaander niet makkelijk binnen geraakt, net zomin als voor hetgeen dat zich binnen afspeelt om een weg naar buiten te vinden. Of zo lijkt het maar. Want ondanks deze dynamiek is deportatie bureaucratie ingebed in- en verwikkeld met onze samenleving. Sterker nog, de lagen van afscherming rondom gedwongen uitzettingen maken mogelijk wat deportatie bureaucratie kan bewerkstelligen op maatschappelijk niveau: dat het proces als geheel niet te doorgronden valt, ook niet voor degenen die er middenin zitten doordat de ondoorgrondbaarheid van het bureaucratisch woud hun zicht belemmert, krijgen incoherenties geen kans opgemerkt te worden en zo het maakproces te verstoren. In plaats daarvan kan de kennis die voortkomt uit het bureaucratische proces, zijn uitwerking hebben: de uitzetbare persoon krijgt gestalte en vervult als zodanig een betekenisvolle rol in onze sociale wereld. Het tijdsafhankelijke
en gesitueerde karakter van deze figuur geeft er blijk van dat de uitzetbare persoon enkel zo waarachtig is als de politieke verbeelding waarbinnen zij geschapen wordt. Dit impliceert dat wij allen de rol van de ‘uitzetbare figuur’ toegedacht kunnen krijgen, daar deze figuur een cruciale rol vervult in het politieke project van natiestaten. Binnen dit project is de uitsluiting van mensen bepalend voor de mate waarin anderen juist gerekend kunnen worden tot een nationale bevolking. Het is daarom van belang ons het volgende te realiseren: de uitzetbare figuur verschijnt niet aan een verre horizon waarachter ‘anderen’ behoren maar begeeft zich altijd al onder ons; de uitzetbare figuur krijgt enkel gestalte temidden van ons allen.
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I am grateful to my parents (including Martien of course) and Mathijs and Mirte for giving me the space that I needed to fulfill this exploration. And a special thanks to you, mam, for your patience and for always assuring me of your support in this turmoil. I also want to thank my family in law for their understanding that I received along the way, especially Eva en Chris, Roelof, and Janne Mieke, and a special thanks to Dolf: your generosity proved to be a crucial contribution to this research.

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MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE

About the author

Lieke Wissink has an educational background in Cultural Anthropology (BA 2010, MSc 2013 Cum Laude) and Philosophy of Science (MA 2014). She also undertook a Master program in Political Science at the University of Kerala, India (2010-2011), for which she received an EU-funded Erasmus Mundus scholarship.

During her PhD trajectory, she taught BA courses in the social sciences, fulfilled the role of a PhD-representative at the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research (AISSR), and was actively involved in several initiatives aimed towards a more inclusive university, like the We Are Here Academy. Moreover, Lieke was a research fellow in 2015-2016 at the Group for Research on Ethnic Relations, Migration & Equality (GERME) at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. In 2018 she was a visiting scholar at the Politics Department of the New School for Social Research (NSSR), New York City, for which she was granted a stipend from the Jo Kolk study fund. She is currently involved in participatory research at the lectorate Youth and Society, InHolland, University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam. In this job, she engages with various bottom-up initiatives aiming for the empowerment of marginalized groups and inclusive urban spaces.

From her BA thesis on the diversity policy of the Dutch Youthcare, to both her MA theses — the first on convergences between state actors and civil society workers in the deportation field, the second on undocumented people performing acts of citizenship — to this PhD dissertation and her current work, her research unfolds in political fields where she analyzes local events to address current social dynamics. Her research interests therein lie at the intersection of policy, knowledge and inequality, and studying their interaction ethnographically by raising questions beyond assumptions.
MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE. Bureaucratic knowledge practices in European deportation sites

How are people made deportable? This is the empirical question that is explored in this dissertation. The observations shared are based on years of ethnographic research on deportation practices in locations ranging from civil society spaces, to squats housing illegalized people, to securitized interstate meetings. The main fieldwork site, however, is a European Deportation Unit where daily work is centered around deportation files. On the inside, the author attended to file-work from the moment of people’s arrest to their ‘removal’. The outlook of file trajectories therein is to eventually document a ‘perfectly illegal and removable’ file referent: the deportee.

Through being embedded in deportation bureaucracy as an ethnographer, it became clear that the relations that are formed in these file practices — between case workers, databases, embassies, social workers, quotas, lawyers, and more — constantly change as ‘files-for-removal’ move along procedural trajectories. These contingent interactions that are (de)mobilized in file practices collectively shape the deportee as a situated bureaucratic subject. Focusing on the deportable subject, a figure who can only be known by constantly being made, offers reflections that lie at the intersection of borders, nations, population and state power. What does the knowledge that is created in deportation bureaucracy tell us about our shared, social lives? As this work shows, despite deportation practices taking place mostly behind closed doors, we are all intricately bound up by them.