Making deportable people

*Bureaucratic knowledge practices in European deportation sites*

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**Publication date**
2020

**Document Version**
Other version

**License**
Other

**Link to publication**

**Citation for published version (APA):**

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Bibliography


MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE


MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE


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MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE


MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE


MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE


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MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE

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.
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Chapter four


- Chapter five

Wissink L (under review) Making Populations for Deportation: Bodies, Bureaucracy and Belonging. Political and Legal Anthropology Review.
MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE

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, casefile, 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.
UITZETBARE MENSEN MAKEN. Burecratische 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?

Het veldwerk voor hoofdstuk 2, geschreven met dr. Barak Kalir, vond plaats in Nederland. Het hoofdstuk maakt een vergelijking tussen casemanagers van een Deportatie Eenheid enerzijds en medewerkers van een lokale NGO anderzijds. Zij allen hebben te maken met uitzetbaren in hun dagelijks werk. Deze twee werkplekken blijken niet tegengesteld te zijn aan elkaar
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 bureaucrataat 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 conflicteren, 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 bureaucraat komt tenslotte niet vanzelfsprekend overeen met een ethische houding ten aanzien van uitzetbaren. 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 behoeften 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 afgeschermde en beveiligde omgeving waardoor een buitenstaander niet makkelijk binnen geraakt, net zomin als voor hetgeen dat zich binnen afspelt 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 degener 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’ toebedeeld 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.
Acknowledgements

Making a dissertation, too, is a relational process. Thinking, fieldworking, and writing require the formation of collaborations. I am incredibly grateful for the innumerable interactions that contributed to shaping this manuscript.

First of all, I am indebted to dozens of people in the field. I cannot mention you by name here but you are the ones who made this research possible in the first place. To those whom I shared offices with inside Deportation Units I want to say that I realize that my curiosity must have been annoying at times, especially when it concerned practicalities that seemed ridiculously common or unnoteworthy to you. By sharing your thoughts, time, jokes, and concerns with me you made my fieldwork rich, thorough and unique. Thank you for your openness, patience, and generosity. I also owe a lot to professionals whom I met outside of Deportation Units. You, too, generously shared your knowledge and your working lives with me. Thank you for believing in the value of this research. Moreover, the openness of people who face the violence of borders through deportation procedures provided me with crucial perspectives to shape my thoughts.

To start with the seeds of this endeavor, I am grateful to Barak Kalir for seeing a researcher in me before I did and for the opportunity to begin this project at a time when I had never even heard of the term 'PhD'. Willem van Schendel, thank you for your thorough reading and considerate feedback in that first phase, starting from my PhD proposal. And thank you Amade M’charek for encouraging me in the course of that early period to go through with the theoretical turn that I took. The constructive comments on my research proposal from Huub van Baar were also valuable in developing my focus. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of chapters 2, 3 and 5, and the editors of the book Secrecy and Methods in Security Research, Marieke De Goede, Esmé Bosma, and Polly Pallister-Wilkins, for their constructive feedback on chapter 4.
MAKING DEPORTABLE PEOPLE

I am grateful to my supervisors Ria and Tina who guided me to finalize this dissertation. Our collective ‘living room sessions’ always left me with inspiration and new insights and continued to do so once a pandemic caused them to change into ‘living room zoom sessions’. Tina, you did not seem to doubt for a moment whether you should join along the way. Thank you for believing in my work and for your ever thoughtful and gentle feedback. And thank you too for the life lesson that I should simply visualize a holiday in the woods whenever I encounter another ‘bear on the road’ in the future. Ria, your sharp reader’s eye and social engagement always inspired me to improve my work. You master the skill to give the right guidance at the right time, while always assuring me that my work mattered. Also, the way in which you navigate integrity in institutional labyrinths set an example for me. And where should I start to thank you for your far-beyond-duty support? You have been an absolute rock in rough weather. You yourself once told me you felt like a mother tiger defending her cubs whenever I was confronted with yet another setback. But no feline in the world could compete with what you meant for me in the past years. And if there is one person in the world who knows the value of this comparison it has to be you.

It has been a blessing to be accompanied on this journey by the sharp minds of my wonderful colleagues. Among them are: Tania, Else, Willemijn, Busarin, Anneke, Annastiina, Francesco, Oil, Realisa, Annelieke and Justine; the ReThink supporters in the anthropology department, among them Erella, Julie, Kristine, and Rachel; the members of the Moving Matters group of 2014-2015; Sanderien, it has been invaluable to be teaching my first courses with you next to me and also to feel your loyalty when things got challenging; Willy, your support and sense of justice were like a breath of fresh air in environments that could be toxic at times, it has meant the world to me that you stood with me ever and always.

I also wish to thank: Katerina Rozakou, for your witty mind and your rock-steady belief in my work; Oskar Verkaaik, both for the feedback on my work but especially for your advice and understanding during rough times; Annemarie Mol, for your clarity and on-point advice that travelled way
further than the moments when you shared your thoughts with me. Thank you too to my students who always reminded me of the joy that can be found in thinking. It has also been an enriching pleasure to be part of the Refugee Lecture Series and the We Are Here Academy as experiments towards an inclusive university.

And thank you to all who keep the AISSR running behind the scenes. A special thanks to Muriël, Danny, Janus, and Yomi for your ever-swift responses and making the practicalities of this project possible. It has been a pleasure to work with you even though bonds of collegiality appeared difficult to maintain when being dispersed over different floors. Nora, your care in crucial moments has been incredibly important.

I was blessed to spend such a valuable time as a research fellow in 2015-2016 at the Group for Research on Ethnic Relations, Migration & Equality (GERME), Université Libre de Bruxelles. Thank you Saskia Bonjour for introducing me. A special thanks to Andrea Rea: your listening ear, commitment to the cause, and long experience within the field were priceless. And thank you Carla Mascia and Andrew Crosby for sharing your experiences as research partners-in-crime in this challenging field. My equally valuable visiting scholarship at the NSSR in 2018 would not have been possible without the support of Anne McNevin. Both your visit to Amsterdam prior to that as also our conversations over coffee in New York were ever insightful and enriching. It was the generous support of the Jo Kolk Fund that made my stay in New York City possible.

The gatherings on the 17th floor of the Erasmus University were among the most pleasantly challenging exchanges during my writing process. Rogier, thank you for translating my ontological confusion into valid research curiosity at the time. The StateTS workshops we initiated together felt like an academic home to me, a feeling that was nurtured by the people joining these sessions, among them: Maja, Sanne, Jess, Zeynep, Ildiko, Lisette, Ryanne. And of course, you, Irene, but even more so for your rocksteady support and your incredible sharpness, the latter being a source of inspiration to me. The
collective thinking on that same floor during our Reconstructions sessions, which later developed into Compositions, were also valuable in developing the thoughts shared in this thesis. Thank you Rogier and Willem for hosting them and welcoming me. And I am grateful to Femke, for giving me the job opportunity to continue doing what I love most: thinking and engaging.

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.

Without friendships any of this would hardly be worth it. I feel truly blessed with your company in this life; Erik, for the naturalness with which you care and share; Hannah, for always making me feel understood; Kim O, for your treasurable authenticity; Kritshna, for our strong connection that overcomes so many boundaries; Luc, for your warriorship and compassion; Nina, for your groundedness in over two decades of friendship; Noa, for staying so close to the heart despite geographical distances; Sarah, for being such a steadfastly loyal friend ever since primary school; thank you Dominique, Marion, and Vigilenca for our shared passion (or curse?) to always reflect critically on the state of the world; thank you, Gwen, for your editorial help with my proposal; Kim L, thank you for bringing light to dark corners and of course for the patience and engagement that you put into editing the images in this work. Thank you, Sami, Yusuf and Haitham for proving what resilience humans are capable of. Last but not least, it has been incredibly enriching to walk along for a bit with the Better Together Collective towards the end of this research, whose members have no choice but to 'stay with the trouble'. AlHadi, Araby, Aziz, Bashir, Faisal, Mamudou, Mohamed, Salah, Sami, and Suleyman; how I wish you all strength in the present and peace in the future.
I am grateful to Simeon ten Holt and David Darling for composing the music that accompanied my writing. Moreover, the boxing trainings with Esther and my sparring partners were simply the best way to release my mind after a day of thinking. Thanks also to my friends at the Noordermarkt, that warm weekly bath irrespective of my PhD ‘progress’. Also, while getting lost in my screen Mini and Poesie were often the ones who would bring me back to the here and now by sitting on and under my laptop or by imperturbably walking over its keys... and back.

And finally, I come to thank you, Felice. You have been there for me and with me from the insecure beginning, to the bitter middle, to the victorious end. It goes without saying that your critical and independent mind proved incredibly valuable in our endless conversations about my research. Surprisingly (yet caringly) you never seemed to get tired of them. Above all however, I could not have wished for better support than your warmth, love and playfulness that brought much necessary laughter and light throughout this journey of mine – and continue to do so on the journey that we are on together.

To every body and thing that contributed to this research in one way or another, to all who crossed my path for just a moment or for some walking time, to everyone who pointed out sideways or guided me to the main road again: thank you for making this exploration as enriching as it was. And thank you, reader, for engaging with the fruits of it.
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.