

Challenging masculinities?

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Impact statement

At the time of finishing this dissertation in May 2024, return and deportation remains high on the political agenda in both Europe and Africa. The ink of the migration deal of Tunisia barely dried before it was adjusted. In March 2024, the European Commission signed a new migration deal with Mauritania, which includes agreements on return and readmission. In spring 2024, the Pact on Migration and Asylum was approved by the European Parliament and the Council. The legislative proposal regarding the Return Directive is still pending adoption. Meanwhile there have been several deportation warnings from Germany to West Africa, an end to which I do not foresee as right-wing parties are gaining ground in Europe. European states have made increasing efforts to return those considered ‘undesirable’.

Since writing the research proposal for the dissertation, there has been a growing interest in return migration. This research came into being and was conducted in a time just after the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe in 2015. While at first there was a response of support and many volunteering initiatives throughout Europe by citizens and others, there were also xenophobic reactions and the perceived need to differentiate ‘real, deserving refugees’ and ‘bogus refugees’ to keep incoming migration manageable. At the same time, we saw another way of dealing with refugees from Ukraine after the start of the Russian occupation. Meanwhile, there are growing shortages of workers across Europe, and many European countries are dealing with aging populations. This raises questions about how and when migrants can play a role in this and under what conditions exclusion is defensible. I hope this dissertation provides insights into and raises new questions concerning the consequences of inclusion and exclusion practices. It is important to consider the effects of state policies also outside Europe, as we live in a world that is interconnected.

In this section, I outline the societal contributions of this dissertation. I will focus first on the scientific contributions which took place in the form of conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures and open access publications. Afterwards I will outline the overall implications of the study for broader societal actors. I will end by sharing the ways in which this dissertation aims to contribute to knowledge production in science and broader society.

Scientific contributions

Three scientific articles in international peer reviewed journals came out of this research and are currently published. Together they extend the existing knowledge about return migration, deportation and masculinities. A fourth publication, which is not part of dissertation but is based on this work, explores how gendered and racialized positionalities and interactions are negotiated and shifting due to both the researcher’s and the participant’s

experiences in each other's home contexts. Sharing the experiences of having to adjust to each other's intersecting erotic cultural and gendered norms can, despite substantial differences in terms of racialization, gendered experiences and access to spaces, shows how researchers and researchees' positionalities shift and are negotiated as people move in transnational multi-sited migration research. It is under review for a special issue about researching migrant masculinities as female identifying researcher.

Until now, I have presented research findings in national and international academic gatherings, including seven conferences, seminars, and workshops²⁰, and I gave guest lectures. Throughout my research, I shared emerging insights and organized sessions with several groups and collectives at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University, including the Transnational Migration Research group (TMG) and the Ethnography Group. I was also an active member of the Ethnography Safety Group to share dilemmas and questions with other researchers before, during and after fieldwork. Supported by the *Centre for Gender and Diversity*, I also established, together with three fellow Ph.D. students, 'Progress is better than Perfection' writing and exchange sessions. These sessions are aimed at Ph.D. and postdoc scholars related to the *Centre for Gender and Diversity* to share work in progress and exchange feedback on written texts.

In addition, I organized two workshops aimed at the broader Maastricht University community. One workshop was about 'Researching Gender, Sexuality and Health beyond European contexts' with Prof. Dr. Mkhwanazi from South Africa in collaboration with the Centre for Gender and Diversity and the Globalization, Transnationalism and Development Research Group. The second workshop I organized in collaboration with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and Ph.D. researcher Nadine Blankvoort as part of the annual Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE) conference in September 2021. The workshop was named 'Research communication: Migration Researchers in Dialogue with the General Public'. One guest lecture was part of the Globalization Seminar and Symposium where I introduced the students of the minor Globalization and Development at FASoS to deportation and return studies. At University College Maastricht I provided a guest lecture about interviewing and ethnography. I provided many examples based on my dissertation research.

²⁰ The Neuchâtel Graduate Conference of Migration and Mobility Studies (2023)

International Migration Research Network (IMISCOE, 2022 online, 2023)

African Studies Association of Africa (ASAA, 2022)

Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development (MACIMIDE, 2019, 2021, 2022)

Feminist Geography Conference (online, 2022)

Mobilités en Afrique de l'Ouest, Ziguinchor, Sénégal 2020

European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA, 2020 online)

Beyond the Maastricht University community, I was part of the Geography Department at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar (UCAD). There I shared and discussed my progress with PhD students and master students. During the first years of the Ph.D. project, I was also an active member of the reading and writing group about gender and sexualities at the University of Amsterdam under supervision of Prof. Dr. Rachel Spronk, where we shared work in progress.

Beyond the scientific community: societal and professional contributions

Because return and deportation is a topic that is often in the headlines and fosters societal debates in both Europe as well as Senegal, I aimed to share my progress and results beyond the scientific community.

Professional audience

I shared my research with a professional audience who could be working on issues related to migration by publishing my progress in the journal '*Justitiële Verkenningen*', a joint publication by The Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) and Boom publishers. WODC is the knowledge institute for the Ministry of Justice and Security in the Netherlands. *Justitiële Verkenningen* aims to highlight trends and developments in the field of justice and security for practitioners working in those fields. The article I shared, based on my first empirical chapter, was part of the issue on return and deportation.

Throughout my fieldwork in Senegal and in Germany, I had contact with various organizations and practitioners working on topics related to my dissertation. In addition to interviewing practitioners, I also aimed to share developing insights and findings while keeping the anonymity of my participants in mind. Meetings were occasions for both of us to exchange and learn from each other. In both the Netherlands and in Germany I shared preliminary findings with NGOs who have programs of assisted voluntary return in Senegal. During the policy day at Maastricht University on 26 April 2023, I also gave a presentation about my results and had the opportunity to exchange with policy makers working at the Ministry of Justice and Security to monitor and design migration policies. After finalizing the thesis, I aim to go back to Senegal to share my findings with various NGOs working on return and migration in Senegal who have been part of my research and other organizations working with illegalized migrants in Europe.

Media and other contributions

In 2020, I was selected through a competitive procedure to become a 'Face of Science' of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), and I wrote blog posts about my research. The aim of these blogpost was to provide insight about what it means to be a scientist to young people who are deciding what to study, but also for anyone else

who is interested. I shared these on social media such as LinkedIn. Due to the blogposts, I made several new connections, including master students who work on migration and return in West Africa. Besides new connections, it re-established connections with former colleagues and other professionals in the field of migration.

In November 2021, I contributed to a series set up by Euronews about masculinities in Africa. In the series, 'Cry like a Boy', they explored various places in Africa to share stories of men and the way they deal with pressures to conform to male gender roles. I wrote an article about the duality of not sharing deportation experiences, how it can be both painful and empowering for deportees in Senegal. Maastricht University interviewed me and my supervisor, Valentina Mazzucato, about my Ph.D. research and our collaboration in February 2023. The interview was published in the UM magazine aimed at alumni of Maastricht University. It was also featured on the Maastricht University website in July 2023. In the summer of 2023, I contributed to a creative writing piece to the FASoS Creative Writing Anthology edited by dr. Fourie and dr. Höne called: 'Bed sharing practices in a holy city in Senegal'. In October 2023, I was cited as an expert by a journalist of the Dutch newspaper *Financieel Dagblad* to provide background information concerning the increased number of Senegalese migrants arriving on the Canary Islands.

Besides already published and shared findings, I also plan to disseminate the research to a broader audience in the future. In the summer of 2023, I received funding from the valorization funds at the Faculty of Arts at Maastricht University to figure out the possibility of an artistic production inspired by my research. I collaborate with Ilay den Boer, who is a renowned theatre maker in the Netherlands. In the winter of 2023, I went back to Senegal and visited the Gambia to share my current findings and elaborate the results by conducting explorative fieldwork for this artistic project.

The insights, perception and nuance found in this dissertation are relevant for policy makers, practitioners working in the field of migration, but also social workers and people who know those who can be subject to deportation and return. In the end, state decisions are enacted on behalf of its citizens and citizens are also involved in shaping future directions. All in all, return and deportation is a delicate topic with heavy consequences for various actors involved. By sharing knowledge on masculinities in the context of deportation and return and continuing to pose questions to various stakeholders involved, I hope to outline and contribute to knowledge gaps that enables making just political decisions, including for those who are not always seen, heard or acknowledged.