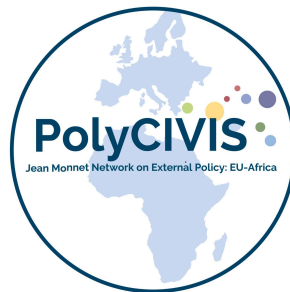


# DEVELOPING AFRICAN-EUROPEAN JOINT TEACHING PROGRAMS

September 2024

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## “WE CAN DECODE THEORIES AND CONCEPTS THAT UNDERPIN XENOPHOBIC SPEECH AND POLICY”

### Interviewee

**Prof. Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot**, FNRS research associate and senior lecturer at Université libre de Bruxelles

**Prof. Pape Sahko**, geographer from Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD)

### Interviewer

**Sebastian Seiffert**, PolyCIVIS Project Manager, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)



Grant agreement No 101127795 PolyCIVIS: Confronting the polycrisis  
in Europe and Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

Prof. Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, FNRS research associate and senior lecturer from Université libre de Bruxelles and Prof. Pape Sahko, a geographer from Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar share their experience in running the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master MITRA. As a program that studies international migration, they insist on the importance of language-learning and including internships within the curriculum. They also reflect on their role as scientists in countering xenophobic discourse.

## THE INTERVIEW

### **[Q1.] What is MITRA all about ?**

**Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot:** MITRA, which is the acronym of Transnational Migrations, is an interdisciplinary Master's program in the social sciences and humanities, taught in both French and English. It addresses international migration and how it impacts contemporary societies. Depending on the students' major, the consortium jointly awards two or three Master's degrees on completion.

ULB is part of the program, which is led by University of Lille (France), since 2019. At the ULB side, it is coordinated by myself as academic coordinator and my colleague Ingrid Necochea Alarcon as administrative coordinator. My background is in transnational migration research.

**Pape Sakho:** The program as it runs today was designed in 2018, against the backdrop of the so-called migration crisis, or maybe more adequately migration reception crisis, that was high on the general public's and policy-makers' attention in most European countries as from summer 2015. In this context, the consortium was keen to help understand the complexities faced by migrants and displaced people, and train future leaders and researchers on migration issues.

As an interdisciplinary Master that analyzes migration from a social sciences perspective, MITRA is in line with EU policies that favour the study of migration within Europe and internationally. Most of today's consortium had already offered a Master on intercultural mediation from 2012, focusing on migration, territories and conflict.

***[Q2.] What will a student learn and do during his/her stay in Brussels?***

**Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot:** ULB is the first place where students in the anglophone track study, for one semester (September to January). I interact with those students within the following four English-taught courses: Migration and gender; Migrant integration policies; Race, ethnicity and diversity politics; Border and migration control. They are all part of ULB's Master in Sociology, specialisation: migration and cultural diversity, which is therefore the Master in which students receive their diploma upon graduation. Credited language classes complete the first semester's offer, which thus amounts to 30 ECTS. Many take French to better integrate in Brussels outside their Master, others take Spanish to prepare for semester 3 in Spain. For the future, we intend to create a methodological course that equips students with valuable analytical tools for their entire Master trajectory.

***[Q3.] What do students learn and do during their stay in Dakar?***

**Pape Sakho:** My university, UCAD, hosts those students who have chosen Senegal as their destination in the 3rd semester. The number of students can vary considerably, we have had from 3 to 13 (almost half of the entire cohort) according to the year. Students can follow seminars, such as on the geography of intra- and international migration, but also carry out field work. Depending on their research interests, they can take methods courses on top. To ease their cultural immersion, they are also taking an introductory course to Woloff, the most-spoken language in Senegal. Another highlight is an internship with one of our partner organisations.

***[Q4.] Could you tell us more about the profile and role of these non-university partners MITRA has been working with in Senegal?***

**Pape Sakho:** At UCAD, we try to organise internships so that they run parallel to academic activities, throughout the semester. Some of these partnerships are formalised through partnership agreements. DIADEM, for instance, hosts students working on international migration, and gives them an active role in the implementation of their programmes. APECSY, a local development organisation offers internships centered on integration of migrants and

conflict resolution. Other organisations can round up the offer in certain specific cases. What all internships have in common is that they induce students into participative and action research.

***[Q5.] When we look beyond Brussels and Dakar, which overall student pathways do exist within the program?***

**Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot:** At application, potential students can choose between two study tracks, one English speaking and one French speaking. The French-speaking track starts in Lille and continues in Cluj (Romania) in the 2nd semester, whereas the English-speaking track takes off at ULB, after which students head to Wrocław (Poland). In the third semester, students can choose among three further EU-based universities, UCAD in Senegal and a Brazilian university. In the fourth and last semester, in which students write and defend their Master thesis, they return either to their S1 or S2 institution. While they follow different pathways most of the time, all students also come together at the start of the programme (helped by the geographic proximity between Lille and Brussels), and for summer schools.

***[Q6.] In a time where xenophobic discourse and policies appear to be on the rise in many countries around the world, how do you see your role as scientists?***

**Pape Sakho:** As researchers we can decode theories and concepts that underpin xenophobic speech and policy. Critical analysis can also reveal certain assumptions that are not always made explicit. We can also try to find counter-narratives, by highlighting stories of successful integration and other good practice.

**Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot:** To counter the discrimination of minoritised persons with migration background, it's important to develop students' critical thinking. One key aspect includes the capacity to challenge terminologies and concepts that reproduce stereotypes. In my classes, I often ask "What do you mean by this term?" Terminologies matter a lot in how societies look at migration, and as scientists we have the possibility to deconstruct, challenge and propose replacements for them.

***[Q7.] What is your advice to colleagues who would like to develop an international Master programme?***

**Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot:** From ULB experience, it is essential to work in tandem between an academic and an administrative resource person. The former can help with pedagogical and

curriculum-related questions, the latter with issues encountered in the fields of enrolment, visa, and housing, and making sure scholarship amounts are paid in good time. It is also required to be in contact with students in the field of mental well-being and health. Changing countries and socio-cultural contexts repeatedly within a short period can be enriching, but also very demanding for students. Offers for psychological advice, including in English, are thus crucial. In terms of the sequence of the Master's, I make extra sure to explain what holds the program together across locations, in particular how a theory or method taught in the first semester will be useful later in conducting field work or the thesis writing.

### PolyCIVIS: confronting the polycrisis in Europe and Africa

PolyCIVIS is a Euro - African collaboration that brings to the forefront the global polycrisis, allowing a better understanding of the impacts of several concurrent major societal crises challenging the world in the form of a polycrisis.

In the wake of the global polycrisis, urgent challenges have emerged, prompting PolyCIVIS to take action. Our initiative is dedicated to addressing these pressing global issues and their interconnected consequences.

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