

Conceptualising the Emergence of Immigrants' Transnational Communities

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Under which circumstances do immigrant transnational political activities emerge into a sustainable transnational community? First, this depends on the transnational political opportunity structure (TPOS) including both immigrant's country of settlement and the (ancestral) country of origin. Governments' integration and emigration models – that politically incorporate or exclude immigrants or emigrants – may invite or discourage transnational political action. Second, different models of citizenship of both countries, used to define a migrant's membership in society, strongly influence the type of transnational activities. At the same time citizenship contains the norms, values, and loyalties immigrants have in their notion of acting as a good (transnational) citizen.

Immigrants in Western Europe maintain – and sometimes newly establish – a variety of political ties with their (ancestral) country of origin. Such transnational political ties can be ordered into five types of transnational political activities, distinguishing between the direction and the resources that are used: transplanted homeland politics, homeland directed transnational politics, country of residence directed transnational politics, diaspora politics, and locally specific transnational politics (Koopmans and Statham 2003, Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, Nell 2004). Transplanted homeland politics refer to claims expressed in the country of settlement that are directed towards the country of origin in all other respects. For example, conflicts between ethnic groups may be transplanted to the country of settlement just as homeland political organizations –

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as happened in the case of Turkish migrants in the Netherlands (Penninx 1980). In the case of homeland directed transnational politics homeland or country of residence groups use networks and resources in the Netherlands to achieve goals in their home country. Political activities pertain for example to policies of the homeland, opposition to or support for the current homeland regime, or migrants' legal status in the homeland (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). Country of residence directed transnational politics occurs when homeland-based actors mobilize homeland-based networks and resources to intervene on behalf of migrant groups in the country of settlement (ibid). Diaspora politics refers to transnational practices confined to those groups that are barred from direct participation in the political system of their homeland or do not even have a homeland (Koopmans and Statham 2003). Although overlapping with the previous types, locally specific transnational politics refer to activities that specifically connect local communities, such as cities or villages of origin (Nell 2004).

The existence, strength and particular forms of these types of political transnationalism depend on the political opportunity structures (POS, see Kriesi et al. 1995) in the country of residence, the country of origin and the historically evolved international relations which together form a transnational opportunity structure – TPOS - (Ogulman 2003). The concept of a TPOS helps to explain how collective action is communicated and how new networks between social groups are formed as opportunities are seized and created.

These five types of transnational political activities find its expression in transnational communities. These communities depend on active transnational networks that do not fall apart in separate national components. This final demanding criterion will be used to develop an analytical framework to study the emergence of transnational communities.

The TPOS analyses the attitude of the government of the immigration country towards migrants' political participation and how it attempts to incorporate migrants through integration models. As policy is separately made for Turks, Muslims, guest workers, etc., integration regimes reinforce or even create particular identities of different migrant groups . To obtain resources within a POS, migrants need a political agenda that is 'understood' by the respec-

tive government or its officials. These resources may encompass equal opportunities in local politics, the media, and the consultation of (migrant) organizations for affairs concerning migrants. At the same time, the government influences migrants' collective organization by providing them with group-specific resources such as subsidies and organization models.

Similarly the TPOS contains the attitude of the government of the (ancestral) country of origin towards its (former) nationals abroad and their descendents as embodied in emigration models and remigration policies. Complementing social, economic and political factors, the POS of the country of origin may be both an incentive to migrate as well as to remain politically active from a safe distance (Koopmans and Statham 2003).

TPOS also relates to the past and present international relations. First, these relations may be important when state actors create international norms that affect transnational network formation. Next to relations concerning immigrants, such as guest worker treaties and post colonial relations, it is also important whether relations remain peaceful. Second, ethnic interest groups may try to influence the foreign policy of the country of settlement and thereby draw fellow citizens' attention to issues that otherwise would have been overlooked (Mathias 1981).

The TPOS includes the types of citizenship countries use for politically including or excluding immigrants and emigrants. In general, citizenship may be seen as that set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) that define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups (Turner 1993). However, for political in- or exclusion and its effect on transnational practices, citizenship acquisition, free movement, and rights for non-citizens are of particular importance (Vink 2002).

The granting or otherwise of citizenship rights influences the way (multiple) ethnic identities are used and constructed to legitimize transnational action. Ethnic identities are composed of several layers – for example Surinamese, Hindustani, Indian, Dutch, Amsterdam, etc. From a so-called 'intersectional' perspective ethnic positions are seen as complex products of local, regional, national, global relations in the past and the present that are constructed in

combination with class and gender (Wekker and Lutz 2001). An intersectional approach can facilitate our attempt to unveil the complexity of multiple identities of immigrants. The question is when and how those multiple identities lead to vague sentiments (for example listening to Turkish music) and when they are an incentive or basis for active political transnational activities.

Studying the relation between (multiple) citizenship ethnic identities and transnational actors highlights why individuals form and join (trans)national (ethnic) groups. According to Gutman (2003: 210), on the national level people form such associations (1) to publicly express what they consider to be important aspects of their identity, (2) to conserve their culture, (3) to gain material (and other) goods for themselves and their group, (4) to fight discrimination and other injustices, (5) to receive support from others who share part of their social identity, and (6) to express and act upon shared ethnical commitments. This same set of reasons can be applied to transnational political activities and help us understand why particular parts of the migrant community are active and how migrant groups are diversified.

In the transnational political spectrum we can divide activities by individual, collective and governmental actors. Individuals' political participation may take shape in societal and electoral activities. For example, membership in ethnic organizations – a form of societal activity – sheds light on the degree of organization of an ethnic community. Examples of electoral participation are membership in political parties, collection of money for them, and feelings of solidarity with political movements in the country of origin that are expressed in discussions with friends and family. Collective actors mobilize structures through organizations and networks to play an active transnational political role. Political actors in the home country may acknowledge the importance of citizens abroad because these can, for example in the case of dual nationality, vote in national elections. Governmental actors may insert state 'branches' abroad to bind migrants to the state, and to keep an eye on their socio-cultural, religious and political practices that might be a threat for the emigration country.

Active transnational communities that actors may change the TPOS, national POSs or both by their activities and existence. Change in the (trans)national political landscapes refers to aspects

such as the integrity of borders, citizen rights, legitimacy and guarantee of political rights and democratic norms, and social welfare. This impact, however, depends on the type of transnational politics and thus whether the 'target' of action is the country of origin, the country of settlement or both.

The extent to which transnational actors gain access to the political systems does not only depend on the TPOS but also on the societal structure and the extent to which civil society is already transnationalised, not least through the activities of migrants themselves (see Faist 2000). The higher the level of transnationalisation of the civil society, the more likely it is for reciprocity and solidarity to be institutionalised on a collective level rather than on an individual one. A transnational community needs trust and loyalty, a certain 'we-feeling'. Adapting Fennema's (2002) work on ethnic communities in national contexts, the existence of a transnational community can be analysed by examining a number of factors: the existence of ethnic organizations with a focus on or activities towards the country of origin, the density of the networks of those organisations, and availability of ethnic mass media, measured by the circulation of ethnic newspapers, and diffusion of ethnic radio, TV and internet.

Networks of ethnic organizations indicate the form and content of the 'social capital' of an ethnic community. Social capital may be transposed from the country of origin or newly created in the country of settlement. It may, following Putnam (1993), who uses the concept in a national context, consist of networks linked by horizontal relations through which political experience, mutual trust, knowledge, normative structures, and codes of conduct are exchanged. The manifestation of social capital from the country of origin may be dominant in the first phase of settlement. Later on, social capital may be adapted to new barriers and opportunities that rise in the new society and eventually take the form of transnationalised social capital. If this social capital is used transnationally, it will grow as it is used. The creation of networks is crucial for the persistence of transnationalism because it facilitates social communication essential for the forming of a transnational political will and consciousness and therefore collective transnational action. Migrants that succeed to transnationalise their social capital may be able to draw upon mobilization potential such as collective

identities, a sense of solidarity and political consciousness, and an organizational structure that includes both formal organizations and informal personal networks that allow for micro-mobilization (see Faist 2000).

The more transnationalised social capital migrants have at their disposal, the more likely the emergence of a sustainable transnational community becomes. This expectation draws on the positive relation between strong networks of migrants' organizations – constituting social capital – and a high level of political participation in national contexts that Fennema et al. (2000) have demonstrated in the Netherlands. Once a transnational community has arisen it will generate new activities, which in turn reinforce that very community.

The extent to which a transnational community reinforces multiple identities leads us to the question whether a transnational community will construct a transnational citizenship identity, and thus whether globalisation pushes national citizenship towards a post-national type. Do migrants conceive of or identify themselves as members of two or more nation-states? The empirical evidence on this question is to be found in the actions through which migrants express their citizenship identity.

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