Transnational migrant politics in the Netherlands: historical structures and current events
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1. INTRODUCTION

Migrant politics is as old as migration itself. Political leaders in receiving societies – and later in receiving nation-states – have historically been sceptical of involvements and loyalties that seemingly defied the compartmentalisation of politics into national containers. At present, such scepticism surfaces as concern within host societies over the political ‘integration’ of migrants and anxiety over activities that may contravene host countries’ political and security interests.

Regardless of whether such concerns are justified – in many cases they are built on unsystematic and patchy evidence, to say the least – there has been growing scholarly interest in the political involvement of migrants. Again, most work in this area has focused on migrants’ political ‘integration’ – for example, on their political awareness, participation and voting patterns. At the same time, it has become evident that at least a sub-group of migrants – including second generations – continue to maintain political ties to their country of origin in a wide range of forms. They engage in what can preliminarily be called transnational migrant politics.

Despite the growing interest, at least three serious gaps remain in our understanding of transnational migrant politics. First, it is far from clear how migrants’ transnational political activities and ties to the homeland relate to political ‘integration’ in the country of settlement. Is there a trade-off between the two, as is often suggested in popular debate? Do they swing free of each other? Or do they perhaps reinforce each other after all?

Second, there is little systematic knowledge on transnational migrant politics even when viewed apart from political integration. Why are some migrant groups more involved than others? Why do different groups have different organisational structures, within the country of settlement as well as for contacts with the country of origin? In short, there is insufficient knowledge of the individual, social and political factors that shape transnational migrant politics in its diverse manifestations.

Finally, popular debate is pervaded by the amorphous feeling that ‘globalisation’ – in particular easier cross-border communication – has spurred transnational involvements and loyalties, the internet forums that have sprung up over the past decade to (re-)connect diasporas being but one manifestation. The hypothesis here is that transnational migrant politics is ascendant. At the same time, any such trend may be counterbalanced by the progressive weakening of migrants’ transnational ties as their stay in host countries lengthens and many let go of plans to ‘return’. This is particularly true of migration that followed in the wake of decolonisation and labour migration to Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. By now many migrant families have raised a second generation born in the country of settlement, and it is far from clear whether in net terms the passing of time has seen transnational migrant politics increase or decrease. These three gaps in our knowledge about transnational migrant politics stand central in this dissertation and provide its three guiding questions:
How does migrants’ political integration in host societies impact on political transnationalism and vice versa?

Which factors shape the emergence and development of migrants’ transnational political activities and ties as well as the intensity and degree of their institutionalisation?

How has political migrant transnationalism evolved over time, particularly in light of globalised communication and the emergence of a second generation in host societies?

**Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish migrants in the Netherlands**

This dissertation addresses these questions through a study of Surinamese, Turkish and Turkish-Kurdish migrants in the Netherlands. All three groups have a migration history to the Netherlands that reaches back several decades. The most important group of Surinamese colonial migrants arriving in the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s came on university scholarships and were relatively well-educated (Sedoc-Dahlberg 1971), while a small number of skilled labourers (for example nurses) were also recruited in Suriname in this period (see Cottaar 2003). Study in the mother country was a leading motive for migration (Van Amersfoort & Van Nierkerk 2006: 334).

Broader Surinamese migration began in 1973 when an Afro-Surinamese-dominated government declared its goal of independence for the country within two years, creating fears of race riots as had happened in British Guyana. This triggered a ‘panic’ emigration of eventually 200,000 Surinamese to the Netherlands (Gowricharn & Schüster 2001: 159). A second peak (1979-1980) was fuelled by disappointment over post-independence developments, coupled with the ‘last’ chance for unrestricted emigration before visas became mandatory for Surinamese five years after independence (Oostindie & Klinkers 2001: 245). After 1980, migration from Suriname comprised political migration in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d’état (1980-1987), economic migration and family reunification.

The colonial heritage is clearly visible in Suriname’s ethnic and religious composition. The area was originally inhabited by Caribs and Arawaks (Amer-Indians); nowadays the Surinamese population consists of descendents of African

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2 Reference to ‘migrants from Turkey’ includes (Turkish) Kurds as both Dutch and Turkish registration systems do not list Kurds separately. Far from all Kurds emphasise their Kurdishness or support an independent Kurdistan or a Kurdish federation within Turkey. ‘Turkish migrants’ may thus include Kurds who do not emphasise their ethnicity. Likewise, ‘Surinamese migrants’ refers to a range of ethnic groups that are here not studied separately. The reason why Kurds are studied separately whereas other ethnic groups from Turkey and Suriname are not is that Kurds form a diaspora that views their homeland as ‘occupied’ – which is not the case for the other groups.

slaves (Afro-Surinamese), runaway slaves (maroons), settlers, planters and administrators from the Netherlands, Jews from Portugal and Brazil, indentured labourers from China, British India (East Indians) and the Netherlands East Indies (Java) as well as Chinese and Lebanese traders (Van Lier 1982; Gobardhan-Rambocus 1993; Comité Herdenking 150 jaar Boerenkolonisatie in Suriname 1995; De Bruijine 2006; Oostindie 2006). East Indians and Afro-Surinamese are the largest ethnic groups (see table 1.1). In 2004 the majority of East Indians were Hindu (70 per cent) and a minority Muslim (11 per cent). The majority of Afro-Surinamese, ‘mixed’ people, and Maroons were Christian (78, 70 and 60 per cent respectively) while eighteen per cent of Maroons practiced ‘traditional religion’. The majority of Javanese were Muslim (64 per cent), and a minority Christian (14 per cent).4

Table 1.1 Ethnic self-identification in Suriname, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Indian</td>
<td>135,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Surinamese</td>
<td>87,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maroon</td>
<td>72,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javanese</td>
<td>71,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amer-Indian</td>
<td>18,037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>8,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>61,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/unknown/not reported</td>
<td>37,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Surinamese population</td>
<td>492,829</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Algemeen Bureau voor de statistiek (2005: 31)*

The ethnic and religious diversity of Suriname is present in the Netherlands. As in Suriname, East Indians and Afro-Surinamese are the most prominent, though exact numbers are lacking since ethnic self-identification is not registered. There are an estimated 160,000 East Indians in the Netherlands (Choenni & Adhin 2003), the great majority of whom are Hindu and a small minority Muslim (Ramsoedh 2003). Most East Indians live in The Hague (45,000) (Jones 2004), while the majority of Surinamese in Amsterdam (70,000) are Afro-Surinamese (Van Amersfoort & Cortie forthcoming). The Maroon population is estimated at 5,000 (Hoogbergen 1990), and the Javanese population at 13,500 (Towikromo 1997), of whom 6,000 are thought to be Muslim (Landman 1992) and 500 Christian (Mingoens 2005). Finally, the number of Chinese who migrated from Suriname to the Netherlands is estimated to be around

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5,000 (ACB 1994: 19). Estimates of the number of Surinamese-Amer-Indians are unavailable.

Significant migration from Turkey began a decade later than from Suriname, and was concentrated between 1964 and 1974 when the Dutch and Turkish governments had a labour agreement (General Directorate of Turkish Employment Organisation 2003: 90; see Akgündüz 2008 for a complete overview of Turkish migration in this period). Turkish workers were invited to fill vacancies resulting from rapid economic growth in the Netherlands (Lucassen & Penninx 1997: 54-55). Given the country’s high unemployment and the potential of remittances to cushion the impact of economic crises at home, the Turkish state promoted labour migration (Sayari 1986: 91-92). Furthermore, the Turkish state expected unskilled and/or rural migrants to return from Europe with new skills; they would thus make up for the shortage in skilled labour (Akgündüz 2008: 53). The recruitment of Turkish guest workers was always complemented by spontaneous individual immigration. Kurds were underrepresented in the first wave of labour migration in the 1960s as recruitment mainly took place in western and central Turkey where few Kurds lived. This changed in the early 1970s when labour was increasingly recruited from eastern Turkey (Van Bruinessen 1999). In addition to labour migrants, there were also refugees after the 1971 coup d’état (Bakker, Vervloet & Gailly 2002). Although official labour recruitment stopped after the oil crisis in 1973, immigration from Turkey continued through family reunification, political migration after the 1980 coup, and more recently, marriage migration (Hooghiemstra 2003). Recruited Turkish workers as well as those migrating through family reunification were predominantly unskilled and semi-skilled labourers from rural areas (Penninx, Schoorl & Praag 1994; Dagevos, Euwals, Gijsberts & Roodenburg 2006).

Turkey counts 47 ethnic groups, including Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians and Laz (Andrews 1989); Kurds are the largest group, numbering an estimated 13 million (McDowall 1996: 3). As Kurds are not registered on the basis of ethnicity, official numbers for the Netherlands do not exist. The estimated number is around 50,000; the largest group (roughly 10,000) lives in The Hague (ROB 2001). As in Turkey, most Turks in the Netherlands are Sunni Muslims. Another Islamic (non-Sunni) stream, Alevism, has an estimated 10-12 million members in Turkey, of whom 2-3 million are thought to be Kurdish (Yavuz 2003: 65). The former chairman of an Alevi federation in the Netherlands estimates their number in the Netherlands to be around 80,000.5

**Academic context**

The empirical aim of the current research is to contribute to a better understanding of the three issues flagged earlier – the integration-transnational involvement nexus, the

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5 Interview with HAK-DER chairman, Nijmegen, 21 June 2003.
factors shaping transnational political involvement, and the intensification or waning of this involvement over time. How does the existing literature on migration and transnationalism contribute to these debates? And to the extent that there are gaps in our knowledge, what kind of research is needed to fill them?

While research on activities relating to migrants’ country of origin are gaining ground in international migration studies, especially in the US, to this day migration scholarship in the Netherlands remains dominated by a focus on the position of immigrants in Dutch society. This ‘integration perspective’ has concentrated on factors that allegedly contribute to or hinder the integration of migrants, such as their socio-economic position or cultural background. In contrast, little is known about migrants’ ties with their country of origin and the role these ties play for their participation in Dutch society.

To be sure, the last decade has witnessed the publication of a range of studies on transnationalism in the Netherlands. Most of this work, however, has focused on individual case studies. It includes a literature review on transnationalism and social cohesion (Van Amersfoort 2001), qualitative case studies on transnational citizenship and remittances by Surinamese (Gowricharn & Schüster 2001; Gowricharn 2002), the diaspora activities of Moluccans (Steijlen 2004), Iranian women in exile (Ghorashi 2002), and Ghanaian remittances and social security (Kabki 2007). Transnationalism’s political dimension, however, has yet to be studied. While it has begun attracting scholarly attention in other European countries, most studies have been restricted to Turks and Kurds in Germany (Wahlbeck 1998; Argun 2003; Ögelman 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003c).

The broader European and US literature points to a number of factors expected to play a central role in migrants’ transnationalism. Generally, authors emphasise the influence of host country political opportunity structures, migrants’ length of stay, international relations, homeland political climates and migration motives (see among others Al-Ali, Black & Koser 2001a,b; Koopmans, Statham, Giugni & Passy 2005 and for a detailed review the next chapter). Taken together, however, the structural determinants of transnational politics remain inadequately understood. Crucially, this is due to a lack of comparative scholarship in the field, which has limited the scope for generalisation and an evaluation of different factors’ relative importance to explain the varying patterns of transnational activities and ties. To be sure, several quantitative studies have emphasised comparison (Engbersen, Snel, Leerkes & Van San 2003; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller 2003; Koopmans & Statham 2003; Koopmans et al. 2005; Snel, Engbersen & Leerkes 2006; Portes, Escobar & Radford 2007). Their analytical focus, however, has been on transnational activities, and not on the transnational ties and social structures that underlie the ‘visible’ side of transnational politics. There are, however, good reasons to believe that a deeper understanding of political transnationalism and the forces driving and shaping it necessitate a more thorough
analysis of the emergence, development and decline of the ties that individuals and collective actors maintain. Two points follow.

First, while comparative research on transnational migrant politics is indispensable to gain inferential leverage over the various factors that shape it, the research clearly benefits from qualitative analysis (see also Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004: 1012-1013). Mapping the transnational political ties of migrants and their organisations requires extensive knowledge of particular histories. Precisely because of the political nature of these activities and ties, migrants may have incentives to be cautious in sharing information, for example with journalists and government authorities. Political migrant organisations may use the façade of apolitical cultural associations to conceal ties with radical movements in home countries. In short, there may be more to transnational politics and the ties underlying them than initially meet the eye, requiring robust qualitative components within comparative research.

Second, the shift of focus from migrants’ activities in receiving countries towards the transnational ties that channel them calls for a truly transnational research perspective that breaks with the methodological nationalism of much extant comparative work (for exceptions see Guarnizo et al. 2003; Portes et al. 2007). It can be expected that both the emergence and subsequent development of migrants’ political transnationalism are influenced by actors in the country of origin – political parties and other organisations as well as state actors, for example ministries in charge of emigration and continuing contact with migrants. Migrants’ political transnationalism and its institutionalised ties furthermore evolve in response to developments in the home country. While this point may seem obvious for political diasporas, it may equally apply to other cases, for example when migrants are involved in or react to elections or coups d’état. A truly transnational research perspective must thus include a clear focus on political actors and developments in the country of origin.

The impact of globalisation is a central issue in debates on transnationalism. Some scholars believe globalisation has fuelled migrants’ transnationalism. Others – while acknowledging that globalisation has created new opportunities for migrants to stay in touch with the home country, for instance through email – believe that once migrants choose to stay in the receiving society, ties to the homeland weaken accordingly. Given the dearth of systematic historical research, these debates have by and large remained hypothetical. For instance, it remains unclear whether the second generation is more oriented towards their parents’ homeland because of new communication technologies, or whether such an effect is offset by their greater integration in the receiving society. Addressing this issue requires research that goes back in time to compare generations – to see how both the objective length of stay and the subjective idea about temporariness or permanence of stay have influenced transnational politics. In short, research that aspires to contribute to this debate has to be historical in design and outlook.
The gaps in the existing scholarship generate three specific qualities for research that aspires to address them. First, research should be comparative, and should incorporate qualitative as well as quantitative material. Second, it should adopt what has been called a ‘truly transnational’ perspective, meaning that it gives equal attention to processes, actors and explanatory factors in both the country of settlement and the country of origin. Third, it needs to take into account the historical evolution of transnational politics and the organisations and social structures that channel them.

Case description and selection

The cases in this dissertation were chosen for their potential to address the scholarly gaps identified in the preceding section. In particular, there are four similarities and four differences that make comparison a suitable approach for determining the explanatory factors behind transnational politics. First, migrants from Turkey and Suriname constitute the largest immigrant groups in the Netherlands with sizable second generations (see table 1.2). This allows studying transnational political involvement across generations, and thus changes over time and the impact of migrants’ length of stay.

Table 1.2 Largest immigrant groups by country of origin and generation, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>First generation</th>
<th>Second generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>372,852</td>
<td>194,753</td>
<td>178,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suriname</td>
<td>335,679</td>
<td>185,346</td>
<td>150,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>335,208</td>
<td>167,258</td>
<td>167,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Antilles/Aruba</td>
<td>131,387</td>
<td>78,700</td>
<td>52,687</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://statline.cbs.nl

Second, although migration motives from both Suriname and Turkey have been (and continue to be) varied, both include politics, marriage and family reunification. The coups d'état that took place in both Suriname and Turkey in 1980 are particularly relevant here, for they led to a substantial number of political refugees in the Netherlands in the same period, including many Kurds from Turkey (Bakker et al. 2002: 162-167). This similarity enables the study of the impact of political migration motives and the homeland political climate on transnational politics.

Third, there has been a clear shift within both groups from seeing the stay in the Netherlands as temporary towards acknowledging its permanence. Both (post) colonial Surinamese and Turkish (including Kurdish) ‘guest worker’ immigration to the Netherlands was initially seen as temporary by governments and immigrants alike (Sayari 1986; Böcker 2000; Van Niekerk 2000; Van Amersfoort & Van Niekerk 2006; Akgündüz 2008). The early organisational patterns of Turkish migrants showed a strong focus on Turkey, with the whole Turkish political spectrum from extreme right
to left represented in the Netherlands in the 1970s (Penninx 1980). While these political orientations remain visible, organisations today concentrate more on migrants’ future in the Netherlands than on return to Turkey (Van Heelsum, Tillie & Fennema 1999). In the Surinamese case, organisations’ initial priorities were on the ‘furthering of Suriname’, not on integration in the Netherlands (Van Nierkerk 2000: 70). As in the Turkish case, Surinamese organisations have gradually shifted their focus towards a more or less permanent stay.

The perception of residence in the Netherlands as permanent has affected migrants’ political participation in the host country. What remains less clear is how this shift has fed into transnational migrant politics. The variation that both the Surinamese and Turkish cases exhibit on this point over time allows us to evaluate its relevance for the evolution of transnational politics. The idea of temporariness has also had consequences for the political opportunities that the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey offered migrants. Policies were initially designed to facilitate migrants’ or emigrants’ return and the maintenance of strong ties with the homeland. Today Dutch policies have shifted towards an emphasis on integration in the Netherlands. This enables us to study the impact of political opportunities provided by the host country and country of origin in several phases of settlement.

Fourth, reflecting the population in the countries of origin, migrants from Suriname and Turkey constitute heterogeneous groups in terms of ethnicity and religion. This allows the study of the diversification of transnational politics and thus the question of who is involved. Existing research has exposed ethnicity and religion as leading bases for Surinamese and Turkish migrant organisations and their political mobilisation in the Netherlands (Van Heelsum et al. 1999; Van Heelsum & Voorthuysen 2002). Comparing transnational ties and activities between migrants from two countries and within groups that have migrated from the same country can lay bare the influence of ethnicity and religion on transnational political mobilisation.

In addition to these four similarities between Surinamese and Turkish migrants, there are four important differences. First, the large-scale migration waves from Suriname can be characterised as (post) colonial, whereas immigrants from Turkey mostly arrived as ‘guest workers’. As a consequence, the majority of initial migrants from Suriname belonged to the middle and upper classes; those from Turkey, the lower classes. Surinamese migrants were moreover already familiar with Dutch language and culture; the Turks were not. Studying these two migrant groups with their different backgrounds allows us to establish the impact of different migration motives and social backgrounds on transnational politics. Are there significant differences between the transnational political involvements of relatively skilled postcolonial migrants and unskilled labour migrants?

Second, diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and Suriname on the one hand and Turkey on the other are very different. Due to their colonial ties, relations between the Netherlands and Suriname have been highly emotional, with many tense
periods since independence in 1975. This was especially true in the 1980s and 1990s when Desi Bouterse, the commander of the army, was also in charge politically. Relations have since remained tense, with Dutch governments criticising the use of development assistance sent to Suriname and the democratic government of Suriname criticising the Netherlands for its ‘patronising’ attitude. In contrast, relations between Turkey and the Netherlands are nowadays marked by Turkey’s aspiration to EU membership, an issue that has mobilised Turks and Kurds in the Netherlands (for Germany see Østergaard-Nielsen 2003: 3). Two questions follow: how have diplomatic relations impacted upon Surinamese and Turkish policies for their nationals abroad? How have they influenced the transnational activities of migrants and their descendent in the Netherlands, as well as of those who stayed behind or returned?

A third major difference is the size of the countries of origin. Suriname’s population is less than half a million; Turkey’s is over 70 million. The question here is how this influences the responsiveness of homeland-based actors to migrants’ transnational activities. Do actors in Suriname embrace transnational activities more eagerly than those in Turkey because the migrant group in the Netherlands is two-thirds of the population of Suriname and includes many highly skilled people?

Finally, the scholarly literature suggests differences in Surinamese and Turkish migrants’ political mobilisation in the Netherlands. Surinamese have weak and fragmented networks whereas Turks are organised in strong and dense networks (Van Heelsum et al. 1999; Van Heelsum & Voorthuysen 2002). At the same time, Surinamese have lower levels of political participation in the Netherlands than Turks – which may suggest migrant organisations foster political participation in the country of residence (Fennema & Tillie 1999). For our purposes, the question is how the quality of migrant networks and their political participation in the Netherlands influences their transnational political activities and the ties they maintain with the homeland. Are Surinamese more concerned with homeland matters than Turks because they participate less in Dutch politics? Or is it the other way around, with Surinamese having lower levels of political participation in the Netherlands because they are less involved with homeland politics? Exploring these questions should generate insights into the influence of homeland political participation on political participation in the country of residence and vice versa.

**Research strategy and data collection**

This study distinguishes between transnational activities on the individual, collective and state levels, which constitute transnational political processes, and transnational ties, which are the structures that actors have established and that channel and guide transnational activities. Data collection began with an inventory of existing quantitative studies on the individual and collective political participation of the groups under study, and was followed by qualitative research in the Netherlands,
Suriname and Turkey between 2003 and 2005 (see appendices A and B for a detailed description).

On the individual level, a first inventory was made of the 2002 (and earlier) Social Position and Use of Facilities by Migrants (SPVA) survey conducted by the Institute for Sociological-Economic Research (ISEO) of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Since this survey mostly asked questions to measure individuals’ integration and did not include relevant questions for transnational politics, I designed an additional questionnaire. The 2002 SPVA survey asked respondents whether they would be available for a follow up interview. The addresses that this generated formed the basis of a sample. Since one concern was to study how transnational ties are reproduced by younger generations, we sought additional respondents by snowballing within families. We thus asked first generation respondents to name a second generation relative we could approach for an interview. In many cases, the sample included a respondent of the first generation and a respondent of the intermediate or second generation from the same family. This led to a sample of 40 Surinamese, 40 Turks and 21 Kurds who were interviewed by students of the Political Science Department of the University of Amsterdam in 2004. These 101 interviews provided insight into both the development of transnational ties and activities over time (retrospectively) and allowed for comparison between generations.

The second inventory I made was that of the network analyses of Surinamese (2001) and Turkish (1999) organisations in the Netherlands carried out by the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) of the University of Amsterdam. These networks were constructed on the basis of interlocking directorates, meaning that one person was on the administrative board of two or more organisations. To gather information on transnational political ties and organisations’ activities, I conducted interviews with leaders of Turkish, Kurdish and Surinamese organisations occupying key positions in these networks. During these interviews I posed questions on the organisations’ transnational activities and asked interviewees to provide me with the names of people, organisations and political parties in the homeland with whom they maintained contact.

These lists provided me with the first interviews in Suriname and Turkey. But I encountered two problems. First, not all organisational leaders were willing to share their contacts. Through existing studies, organisational documents, web-based research, newspapers and the like I selected additional interviewees in the homelands. These searches generated organisations that had not been included in the IMES network analyses, but which played important roles. The second problem ran in the opposite direction. Some organisational leaders provided me with more contacts than could possibly be interviewed in a few months. In some cases interviews did not lead to new information. To nevertheless use these ties in my analysis, they were entered into a database that included all contacts I was provided with over the course of the project. The Surinamese database contains 329 contacts; the combined Turkish and
Kurdish one holds 416. This was sufficient data to analyse the IMES networks qualitatively, to update the network, and to include transnational ties with NGOs and political parties in the homeland.

To better understand the role of homeland political parties and their motivation to maintain contact with migrants, I interviewed the chairmen or representatives of all the important political parties in Suriname and Turkey. To include the perspective of the state, national governments and authorities, I interviewed several spokesmen of ministries and (former) ministers in Suriname and Turkey, as well as several Dutch politicians of Surinamese and Turkish origin to study their role in transnational politics. Over the entire fieldwork period I followed the visits of ‘transnational actors’ and tried to observe and interview as many leaders of migrant organisations in their homelands, and Surinamese and Turkish politicians on visits in the Netherlands, as possible. As the list of interviews in appendix C shows, many interviews did not take place in the country of permanent residence. For the collective and governmental/state levels, I conducted 105, 112 and 24 interviews for the Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish cases respectively.

Furthermore, I consulted public sources such as governmental and parliamentary reports and policy documents in the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey and collected bulletins, annual reports and pamphlets of migrant organisations and political parties since the 1970s. I also attended numerous political manifestations, board meetings of umbrella organisations, and cultural meetings in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium as well in Suriname and Turkey. Observations were written down in a detailed fieldwork diary. Finally, I followed language courses in Suriname and Turkey to learn the basics of Sranantongo and Turkish, which facilitated the consultation of written material, aided comprehension of proceedings when observing public events and activities, and most importantly, established trust on the part of respondents (for a detailed description of methodology see appendix A).

The research design and methodology, especially the transnational snowballing approach and participant observation, breaks with the methodological nationalism inherent in most comparative studies.

Outline of the dissertation

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework of this thesis. It reviews extant research and academic debate on transnationalism and integration and defines, maps and operationalises the relevant concepts derived from it. It also uses existing research to refine the research questions, including the explanatory factors – derived from the literature – that have guided data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 aims to validate the explanatory factors outlined in Chapter 2. It assesses the influence of migration motives, political climate, political opportunity structures, migrant’s civil society and length of stay on individuals’ transnational ties and activities over time. In doing so it retrospectively compares the content and form
of transnational activities and ties among Surinamese, Turks and Kurds, with special emphasis on generational continuities and differences. The chapter, which draws on the results of interviews carried out in the Netherlands, presents an encompassing picture of Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish transnational involvement; results are compared by sending country, ethnicity and generation. As political activities can be channelled through ties other than overtly political ones, I here examine relevant social, ethnic and religious ties as well. The focus in any case lies on individuals’ motivation to maintain ties with, and participate in activities concerning, the (former) homeland (of their parents).

Chapter 4 explores the relationship between migrants’ political participation in the Netherlands and in the homeland on the collective level. In doing so, it pays particular attention to Dutch and homeland political opportunities, homeland political climate, and the structure, strength and quality of migrants’ organisational networks. The chapter first reviews the methodology and empirical and conceptual conclusions on migrant networks drawn by IMES researchers. The subsequent sections introduce the main organisations, and the form and content of the transnational ties and activities of Surinamese and Turkish (including Kurdish) organisational networks in the context of Dutch and homeland political opportunity structures between 2001-2005 and 1999-2005 respectively. The concluding section compares and explains the results, and assesses which factors are most influential for transnational politics on the collective level, and under which conditions. Returning to the integration-transnationalism debate, it explains how host country and homeland political participation influence one another.

Whereas chapter 3 explored generational differences between individuals and chapter 4 analysed the transnational ties of organisations over a relatively short and recent period, the chapters that follow have stronger historical components. The historical perspective and the qualitative data presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7 provide in-depth case studies on the development of Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish transnational party politics. First, this allows study of the influence of globalisation on the intensity of transnationalism. Second, it focuses on diversification by looking at the transnational political involvement of different ideological, religious and ethnic groups coming from the same homeland. By doing so, these chapters aim to examine the factors that determine the durability or decline of transnational politics in group-specific cases.

We start from the findings of chapter 4 to analyse the ties between political parties in the homeland (or in exile) with actors based in the Netherlands – from the establishment of the first political organisations in the Netherlands up to 2005. Whereas chapters 3 and 4 began with the perspective of actors in the Netherlands, the following chapters reverse the gaze and begin with homeland political developments, opportunity structures and political parties, and also examine the impact of diplomatic relations. Continuing the analysis of specific groups from chapter 4, chapters 5, 6 and
7 provide a ‘thicker’ description of transnational politics to gain insight into their mechanisms. They investigate the extent to which political parties in the homeland or in exile are integrated into the organisational networks presented in chapter 4, and what these networks mean for the continuation of transnational ties. Due to the specific characteristics of the three groups under study, these chapters are structured differently and pose specific questions that follow from the findings in chapter 4.

Chapter 5 asks how postcolonial history has affected Surinamese transnational politics. The first section describes Surinamese (post) colonial history from 1950-2005. It explores the role of ethnicity in Surinamese politics and asks how it was reflected in transnational politics. The chapter also examines the policies of the Surinamese state for Surinamese in the Netherlands. The subsequent sections describe the transnational politics of colonial students in the Netherlands (1950-1975), transnational politics during military rule (1980-1987), and in a postcolonial democracy (1987-2005).

Chapter 6 addresses the influence of Turkish political parties on the structure of migrants’ organisational networks. The first section describes the Turkish political landscape between 1964 and 2005 and introduces the main political parties. The second section outlines these parties’ representation in the Netherlands and their ties with migrant organisations since 1974. It further examines the activities of important religious and ideological groups and how they have changed over time. The third section explores the interests and policies of the Turkish state towards its (former) citizens abroad since 1982, and how and why government policies have changed. The final section presents a selection of case studies on Dutch politicians of Turkish origin and their ties with Turkish political parties.

Chapter 7 describes the growth of Kurdish nationalism in the 1970s. It introduces the main Kurdish political parties in Turkey and in exile since the 1970s, and examines the extent to which ‘mainstream’ Turkish political parties took up the Kurdish issue. It then turns to the mobilisation of the PKK – which dominated the Kurdish question in Turkey – in Europe. This is followed by descriptions of the ties of the two most important illegal Kurdish parties to Kurdish organisations in the Netherlands, and their activities in European ‘exile’. It furthermore contrasts these with the ties between legal Kurdish parties and Kurdish migrant organisations, and the activities the latter pursue to improve their parties’ chances for success in Turkish elections.

The concluding chapter 8 explains what the empirical conclusions mean for the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2, systematically comparing findings on the individual, collective and state levels for the three groups under study. It asks whether existing theories can explain similarities and differences between Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish transnational politics, and will refine the provisional model outlined in chapter 2.