Transnational migrant politics in the Netherlands: historical structures and current events
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The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
8. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the transnational political participation of Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish migrants and their descendants in the Netherlands over a period of roughly 50 years. By comparing sending countries, migrant groups and subgroups within them, the study has aimed to contribute to theory-formation applicable to a broader range of cases. Drawing on a variety of methods – and both primary qualitative and secondary quantitative data – it has analysed transnational politics in the homeland as well as the country of residence. By focusing on transnational activities and ties, it has sought to provide an in-depth view of the mechanisms and larger structures of migrant transnational politics on the individual, collective and state levels.

In more concrete terms, three lines of inquiry have guided the study. First, it has asked how migrants’ political integration in host societies influences political transnationalism and vice versa. Second, it has tried to establish the factors shaping the emergence and development of migrants’ transnational political activities and ties, as well as the intensity and degree of their institutionalisation. Third, in light of globalised communication and the emergence of a second generation in host societies, it has aimed to trace the evolution of migrant transnational politics over time. In its search for answers, the project has employed a comparative, historical and transnational approach. It has investigated the transnational involvement-integration nexus by focusing on both migrants’ national and transnational political participation. To establish explanatory factors, it has compared different sending countries, migrant groups and subgroups. Finally, the ‘time’ factor – generation and length of stay – has been explored through the project’s historical approach.

This concluding chapter brings together the insights gained on the different levels (individual, collective and state) and compares the findings for the three groups under study. The following section summarises the direction and type of transnational political activities found among the three migrant groups and compares how core ties were institutionalised over the three phases of the immigrant settlement process. The second section reviews the explanatory factors prominent in existing studies against their relevance to the cases examined here. The third section draws on the comparative design of the project to highlight how these factors played out differently for the three groups under study; it further introduces two factors which this study found important but which have hitherto received scant attention in the literature.

Transnational politics and the immigrant settlement phase

The key question guiding the empirical chapters on migrants’ transnational political involvement has been: who does what, when and how? Chapter 2 distinguished five types and one sub-type of transnational politics: homeland directed; diaspora;
transplanted homeland; transplanted immigrant; country of residence directed; and locally specific transnational politics. It expected these activities to be channelled through transnational ties between actors in the country of origin and country of residence; transnational ties between migrants originating from the same country but settled in different countries; and transnational ties based on ethnicity independent of the actual country of origin.

Chapter 2 further differentiated between three phases of the immigrant settlement process as formulated by Vermeulen (2005), using the typology to operationalise length of stay/absence. The first phase is a period of adjustment; the second phase is a time of increased adaptation; and in the third phase migrants become permanent residents. Of course migrant groups in their entirety cannot so neatly be placed; individual migration continues, and political refugees arrived later than (post)colonial and labour migrants. Nevertheless, these later arrivals could draw on the organisational networks created by earlier immigrants. As a heuristic device, then, these phases can be applied to the large-scale settlement process of migrants from Suriname and Turkey to the Netherlands.

As Surinamese arrived a little earlier than Turks and Kurds, phase one roughly stretches from the 1950s to 1975. This period covers both the arrival of colonial students from Suriname and the recruitment of labour from Turkey. The second phase begins in 1975 when Suriname gained independence and Dutch labour recruitment in Turkey officially ended. Coups in both Turkey and Suriname in 1980 influenced transnational activities and the migration motives of refugees in this period; the second phase ends in 1987 with the political climate in both countries calming down and democracy gradually being restored. In the third phase, from 1987 to 2005, the second generation of both migrant groups reaches adulthood. This is the phase of permanent adaptation, with migrants focusing on their lives in the Netherlands.

Table 8.1 Dominant directions of transnational politics

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<td>Homeland directed</td>
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<td>Country of residence directed</td>
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<td>Transplanted homeland</td>
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<td>Kurds, Turks, Surinamese</td>
<td>Turks, Kurds</td>
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<td>Transplanted immigrant</td>
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Table 8.1 indicates in which phase migrants and refugees from Suriname and Turkey, including Kurds, were most involved in which type of activity. The following
pages outline how the direction and incentives of the activities and the hierarchy of
ties differ for these three groups. The next subsections elaborate on these findings for
each group.

**Surinamese**

In the first phase Surinamese transnational actors were colonial students involved in
homeland directed politics, motivated by aspirations for Surinamese independence.
Their organisations initially supported activities in the Netherlands and their ties with
actors in Suriname were weak at best. The first students to return to Suriname
established their own political parties, whose leaderships often consisted of the same
individuals who had led Surinamese student organisations in the Netherlands. Student
returnees in this way transplanted immigrant politics to Suriname; as they remained in
contact with the Dutch student organisations, their return created collective
transnational ties as well. Returnees maintained these ties to influence activities in the
Netherlands in order to strengthen their own political position in Suriname. As non-
migrants in Suriname did not particularly welcome transplanted immigrant politics,
their political isolation in Suriname made support from migrants in the Netherlands
even more important.

In the second phase Suriname became independent (1975) and collective
homeland directed and transplanted immigrant politics decreased. Overall, the focus
of migrants’ collective activities shifted towards their lives in the Netherlands. The
arrival of political refugees due to the 1980 coup, however, led to political polarisation
in the migrant community; this in turn fuelled transplanted homeland politics between
small groups of sympathisers and opponents of the military regime. Refugees’
transnational ties, minimal at first, increased when homeland-based actors began
organised resistance against the regime. As a counterweight, the military leaders
cultivated ties with migrants in the Netherlands sympathetic to the regime. Even if the
number of people involved in homeland directed and transplanted homeland politics
was small, their impact was considerable, affecting the whole Surinamese migrant
community. In contrast, the effects of homeland directed and transplanted homeland
politics on Suriname itself remained limited.

The third phase witnessed broader collective engagement in transnational
politics. Old ties were reactivated and new ones emerged after the reinstallation of
democracy in Suriname. Political elites in Suriname appealed to migrant elites for
support, though such collective requests diminished as Surinamese political parties
became more securely established. Nowadays it is generally Surinamese elites or
organisations in the Netherlands that initiate homeland directed activities, even if
individual political leaders in Suriname often request advice from relatives or friends
living in the Netherlands. Such ties influence the daily work of many politicians in
Suriname; transnational ties thus continue to have an indirect influence on Surinamese
politics. More recently, Surinamese elites in the Netherlands have begun to engage in locally specific transnational politics, lobbying for official relations between Dutch municipalities and the Surinamese Republic (and its districts). Finally, transnational ties based on ethnicity exist especially among East Indian Surinamese. These ties facilitate transnational religious, social and cultural activities, but remain insignificant for political mobilisation.

The most durable ties in the Surinamese case have been based on kinship and friendship. Due to the informal and individual character of these ties, the activities they channelled generally had little impact on organised politics in both home and host countries.

**Turks**

In the first phase of Turkish settlement in the Netherlands, the most influential actors were based in the homeland. Their activities were country of residence directed but had a homeland-directed goal. Homeland-based actors did not invite migrants to change Turkish politics but to support existing parties and organisations. With this aim in mind, homeland-based actors directed their activities towards several Western European countries of residence, thereby facilitating the creation of European Turkish transnational organisational networks. As the political climate in Turkey hardened in the late 1970s, the tension between rival political groups was transplanted to migrants’ individual and organisational lives as well.

In the second phase transplanted homeland politics came to dominate Turkish migrant organisations. In opposition to or support of homeland parties and organisations, European (third country) transnational ties became increasingly important in homeland-directed mobilisation. At the same time, homeland-based groups still actively sought the support of migrants and refugees abroad and thus participated in country of residence directed politics.

In the third phase homeland directed activities decreased, partly due to the more stable political climate in Turkey. Focusing on improving people’s political position both as emigrants of Turkey and as migrants in the Netherlands grew in importance. On the Turkish side, there were new ‘image building’ campaigns to facilitate Turkish accession to the EU while actors in both the Netherlands and Turkey tried to disrupt the activities of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the Netherlands, thus involving themselves in transplanted homeland politics. Finally, transnational locally specific politics was ascendant: political campaigning in villages of origin as well as lobbying by migrant civil society and municipal councillors of Turkish origin to establish new diplomatic relations between cities in Turkey and the Netherlands. Though these ties have always existed on a personal/social level, in recent years they have been politically institutionalised and exploited.
In all phases, actors based in Turkey tried to influence the direction of transnational politics; transnational ties institutionalised from above persist on the collective level. To be sure, this does not mean that Turkish individuals and organisations in the Netherlands take orders from Turkish political and organisational leaders – even if this was partially the case in the first and to a lesser extent in the second phase. Certainly in the current, third phase, Turkish organisations have gained significant autonomy and have shifted their focus to permanent settlement in the Netherlands.

*Kurds*

Kurdish transnational politics began in the second phase of immigration from Turkey; the central actors were Kurdish refugees and labour migrants influenced by Kurdish nationalism. In general terms, their activities can be labelled diaspora politics because they have the creation of a homeland as their goal. Transnational ties with actors based in Turkey were kept to a minimum in favour of ties with Kurdish exiles in other European and Middle Eastern countries. Kurdish political leaders maintain a strong grip on the diaspora activities of migrants. As their core transnational activities take place in Europe, conflicts from Turkey were transplanted to host countries.

In the third phase, the course of transplanted homeland politics has depended on the political climate. As the position of Kurds in Turkey improved over the past decade, the scope of diaspora politics and its effect on Turkey has declined. But it is likely that should the political circumstances in Turkey or the Middle East change for the worse – think for example of the Turkish incursion into northern Iraq in February 2008 – this would add fuel to the fire of diaspora and transnational transplanted politics.

Kurdish diaspora politics has traditionally been characterised by its broad scope; the latest trend is transnational mobilisation among ‘Kurds’ and not only among ‘Turkish-Kurds’. Turkish-Kurds in the Netherlands and European diaspora leaders are increasingly concerned with the ‘general Kurdish question’. Recent developments in Iraq, where Kurds have gained more autonomy, may well strengthen this trend in the future.

**The emergence, persistence and development of transnational politics**

Looking at the direction of transnational political activities over settlement phases shows different results for migrants from Suriname and Turkey. Homeland directed activities were most constant among Surinamese; country of residence-directed and transplanted homeland politics were prominent among Turks; Kurds were active in diaspora and transplanted homeland politics. An important finding was that the transnational ties of Turkish actors were generally institutionalised from ‘above’ by state actors or political leaders in Turkey. Kurdish transnational ties were
institutionalised by strong leaders of large and influential political organisations in exile. In contrast, small grassroots organisations or individuals generally institutionalised Surinamese transnational ties from ‘below’. Furthermore, the transnational ties of Kurdish and Turkish groups in the Netherlands that emerged in the first and second phase generally still exist, whereas those of Surinamese have generally diminished over time. How can these differences be explained? To answer this question we first review the explanatory factors – related to both the home and host country – as presented in chapter 2. These are: migration motives, (international) political opportunity structures, (migrant) civil society, political climate and diplomatic relations between the country of settlement and origin (see the previous and next section for length of stay/absence).

Migration motives

Push and pull migration motives determine the types of organisations that emerge in the host country and the direction and scope of transnational activities especially in the first phase of settlement of first generation migrants. The pull migration motives taken into account in this study include social-economic prospects; the push migration motives are restricted to political exiles.

Migrants from both Suriname and Turkey initially did not come to the Netherlands with the idea to stay permanently. Nevertheless, the transnational ties and activities of the (post) colonial and guest worker groups are strikingly different. Colonial migrants hoped to return with diplomas; guest workers with money. In other words, by upgrading their cultural capital colonial migrants aspired to contribute to the political development of the homeland; labour migrants aimed to improve their individual or family economic situation. The Surinamese colonial migrants who arrived early in the first phase belonged to the political elite and upper middle class, whereas Turkish labour migrants often belonged to the sometimes illiterate lower classes from poor rural areas. The transnational political ties and activities of these migrant pioneers differed substantially.

For the early colonial migrants, transnational ties that went beyond personal contacts and which facilitated political activities generally emerged only after some of them returned to Suriname and founded their own political organisations. This picture looks rather different in the case of labour migrants. Here, state and civil society actors were decisive in the creation of transnational ties. The state, civil society and/or political parties were deeply rooted in migrants’ lives, directed migrant organisations, and requested financial and political support. This meant that when homeland actors were heavily involved in the creation of transnational ties, ties tended to be highly institutionalised.

In contrast, patterns of transnational ties and political activities among exiles from the two sending countries under study are highly similar: they tended to continue
their political struggle in the country of settlement. Nevertheless, their transnational ties with actors in the homeland were weak, or at least highly secretive. Instead, exiles often turned to: (1) supranational institutions; (2) the foreign policy of the country of settlement; and (3) migrant civil society (in the Turkish and Kurdish cases this includes migrant organisations in other European countries). Their activities were homeland directed, but took an indirect route. Additionally, state actors, their representatives, and adherents of the regime often tried to hinder refugee activities via the same channels, for instance by organising within migrant civil society. In sum, migration motives affect the transnational ties and political activities of all actors – individuals, collectivities and states – in the first phase of settlement.

**Homeland political opportunity structures**

In general, homeland political opportunities for migrants start taking shape in the second phase of the settlement process. As the migrant group grows, homeland states may feel the need to regulate its political influence. Up to the present, Suriname has provided few opportunities for migrants to participate politically and has denied the possibility of dual citizenship.

Political opportunity structures for emigrants in labour migration sending countries have shifted over time. The Turkish state historically showed great interest in its emigrants; in some fields it had an open political opportunity structure, for example by allowing migrants to vote on Turkish soil. The state further extended several political institutions to countries of settlement: Diyanet to influence religious life; TRT-INT, the state channel for Turks abroad, to provide news and information; and a consultation board for Turks abroad to express their specific needs to the government. The Turkish state has for decades forbidden its citizens abroad to found political parties.

For political refugees and exiles, political opportunity structures in the country of origin played a central role in the first phase of settlement; lack of political opportunities was one of the main reasons to migrate in the first place. Such exclusion was particularly poignant for Kurds, who have sought to achieve their political goals by lobbying and campaigning for equal citizenship and human rights through ministries of foreign affairs in countries of settlement. For refugees as well as for labour and (post) colonial migrants, openness or closure of homeland political opportunity structures has clearly had an impact on the formation and activities of migrant civil society.

**Political opportunity structures in the country of settlement**

Political opportunity structures in the country of settlement start to play a role in the second phase of the settlement process. This conclusion corroborates Vermeulen (2005) who found that in the first phase of settlement both migrants and host state
authorities, due to the (perceived) temporariness of stay, see no need to interact. But as social and political issues arise once a substantial group is settled for a longer time, political responses need to be formulated (Vermeulen 2005: 178). By providing organisational models and representative bodies – as happened in the Dutch case – the influence of host country opportunities strengthen at the expense of those of the sending country.

Ethnic groups excluded from political opportunities in the sending country, such as the Kurds, are more likely to perceive specific political opportunities (geared at integration) in the host country to be exclusive as well, in their view mirroring their exclusion in the sending country. In this specific case host country opportunities were indeed closed, for example through the non-representation of Kurds in the official Turkish advisory board. Such ‘exclusion’ strengthens transnational politics. However, we have also seen that there was much more opportunity for Kurds to protest in the Netherlands than in Turkey. These findings correspond with the expectation formulated in chapter 2 that political opportunities not only play out differently for different migrant groups, but also for different ethnic groups originating from the same country. In this respect, the findings of this study corroborate the findings of authors who claim that exclusive political opportunity structures reinforce transnational activities and inclusive political opportunity structures decrease homeland orientations by fostering integration (Koopmans et al. 2005). Host country political opportunities especially influence the formal (or visible) national or transnational orientation and structure of migrant civil society.

Diplomatic relations

Diplomatic relations between sending and receiving states influence migrant and refugee transnational ties and political activities in several ways. Diplomatic relations clearly affect the migration process. In the case of colonial and postcolonial migration, the route to the (former) motherland is most obvious. Colonial migrants were citizens of the motherland with many of its associated political rights; postcolonial migrants and refugees had a command of the Dutch language and were acquainted with Dutch culture. By far the largest population of Surinamese migrants lives in the Netherlands; due to the colonial history and the fact that a large majority of Surinamese have relatives in the Netherlands, Dutch influence in Suriname is present in everyday life. A substantial number of Surinamese politicians have spent at least some of their formative years in the Netherlands. Postcolonial intergovernmental tensions have furthermore affected transnational political activities: to constrain Dutch influence, the Surinamese elite erected barriers to Dutch-Surinamese as well.

Intergovernmental labour migration agreements have likewise influenced the migration process. Because Turkey signed agreements with several countries, the
Turkish migrant population is spread over Western Europe. This also means transnational ties are more institutionalised on a European level.

Finally, the transnational activities of migrants and refugees can themselves have an impact on diplomatic relations. In times of dictatorship or the repression of specific groups, opponents of regimes aim to change homeland politics by pressuring foreign affairs ministries in host countries to take a stance. This became clear in the 1990s when the Netherlands allowed the installation of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile, straining diplomatic relations with Turkey.

(Migrant) civil society

Migration motives and host and homeland political opportunity structures have a great influence on migrant civil society. In the Turkish case, the central ‘pioneer’ organisations reflected Turkish political streams. While many of these organisations still exist, host country political opportunities have since changed the structure and activities of migrant civil society. Since the mid 1980s – the second phase of the settlement process – Turkish organisations have increasingly focused on their activities in the Netherlands. This did not mean their ties with homeland actors disappeared; rather, the focus became truly transnational, oriented towards both Turkey and the Netherlands.

Host country political opportunities such as participation in advisory bodies and government subsidies weakened formal orientations towards the homeland. The importance given to migrant advisory boards led over time to a dense and diverse network of Turkish migrant organisations. Political streams that opposed each other in the turbulent years of transplanted transnational politics in the 1970s and 1980s were seduced to sit at the table and to work collectively for a common future in the Netherlands. In Dutch integration discourse homeland orientation has a negative connotation; this clearly affects the way Turkish organisations present themselves. Even though many of their activities have a transnational dimension, and some organisations have ties to Turkish political parties, representatives habitually downplay their importance. As Turkish law prohibited branches of Turkish parties and organisations abroad for decades, both Dutch and Turkish policies have discouraged explicitly political transnationalism among migrant organisations.

In the Surinamese case the effect of home and host country political opportunities on migrant civil society is less clear-cut. Homeland political opportunities had a limited effect while specific host country political opportunities led to the founding of many welfare organisations in the 1980s. But apart from organisations promoting return migration, central actors within Surinamese civil society in the Netherlands rarely engage in transnational politics. In the Turkish case politics is more interwoven with migrant organisations’ social, cultural and especially religious activities; among Surinamese migrants party politics is a separate matter, with
branches of Surinamese parties existing out in the open. In both cases migrant civil society reflects civil society in the homeland: highly politicised in Turkey and ethnically fragmented in Suriname.

The empirical chapters have shown that the structure and density of organisational networks in the host country influence not only political participation in the Netherlands, but also the effectiveness of political mobilisation for transnational purposes. In the Turkish and Kurdish cases, networks in the Netherlands and Europe are dense and connect numerous organisations with many members. The Turkish and Kurdish networks further include federations that unite local organisations across the Netherlands. These broader platforms facilitate relations with homeland-based actors as well as collective transnational action including demonstrations and support for specific political parties.

*Political climate*

Political developments in the homelands under study provide ongoing incentives for transnational activism among migrants and refugees. This became abundantly clear in the aftermaths of the coups in Turkey and Suriname in 1980. In both cases military rule created political refugees who politicised migrant communities in the country of settlement, resulting in transplanted homeland politics. Recent political developments in Suriname, however, no longer motivate transnational activism among most Surinamese in the Netherlands. In contrast, most central Turkish and Kurdish migrant organisations continue to respond to political developments in Turkey, in particular negotiations over EU accession.

Apart from political developments, natural disasters such as earthquakes motivate transnational political involvement. In the Turkish case this led to new diplomatic relations between municipalities. In the Surinamese case the general economic malaise appears to be a more important incentive for transnational action. Individual, collective and state engagement in development projects is now more widespread than direct political activity.

*International political opportunities*

The way migrants and refugees turn to the international political opportunity structure is tied to homeland political opportunities for their group and the overall political climate. Turkey’s attempt to enter the EU encouraged Alevi and Kurds to lobby at the supranational level – often in close cooperation with homeland civil society and similar migrant organisations elsewhere in Europe. The joint lobby of Alevi organisations in Turkey and in the Netherlands increasingly takes place in Brussels. In this way, growing opportunities at the European level indirectly strengthen transnational ties with groups in third countries.
Comparing the Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish cases

The previous section reviewed the factors, drawn from the existing literature, that explain the incentives, the direction and the actors involved in transnational politics. This section summarises and explains the central comparative findings. Additionally it draws attention to two factors that are poorly addressed in existing studies: the strength of nationalism and political organisation in the homeland.

The first main findings is that Turkish and Kurdish transnational ties are more institutionalised on the collective level than Surinamese ones. Transnational ties between Turkish organisations and parties are often based on shared ideology and tend to be resilient. When individual leaders step down, ties between migrant organisations and Turkish parties continue. In contrast, transnational ties between Surinamese organisations in the Netherlands and Surinamese political parties are primarily based on kinship, friendship and ethnicity. Moreover, such ties are highly individual and thus tend to be less institutionalised. While these ties tend to persist, they are used for different purposes over time.

The variance in the degree of institutionalisation of collective transnational ties stems from the Turkish state providing more political opportunities for its (former) citizens and their descendents abroad. The Turkish state also was and remains more active in trying to influence transnational politics. In Levitt and Glick Schiller’s (2004) conceptualisation, Turkey can be labelled a *strategically selective state* that encourages certain forms of transnational participation while aiming to manage what migrants can and cannot do. In contrast, the Surinamese state is a *denouncing state* that treats migrants as if they no longer belong to the homeland; migrants are seen as having abandoned the homeland or even as traitors to its cause (ibid.).

The differences in approach lie largely in differences between the two states’ *nationalist* programmes. Since the formation of the Turkish Republic, successive governments have advocated the creation of a singular Turkish identity that ignores ethnic differences. Surinamese nationalism, which originated among Surinamese students in the Netherlands, was explicitly ‘anti-colonial’. Once Suriname became independent, its official nationalism became ‘territorial’. But out of fear that Surinamese from abroad could ‘take over’ the country, Surinamese nationalism still contains anti-colonial elements to reduce foreign influence. Dutch-Surinamese are thus not included in their definition of ‘the nation’.

Strong homeland nationalist programmes thus seem to facilitate institutionalised transnational ties. The Turkish state maintains contacts with emigrants through formal institutions, thereby attempting to limit the creation and growth of opposition groups. The nationalist character of the Turkish state has made it pro-active regarding the political activities of Turkish emigrants, particularly where these are of a transnational character. In contrast, the Surinamese government is more reactive and acts
defensively only once migrants return with new ideas. Finally, the rise of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey has been the main driving force behind diaspora politics.

A second and related finding is that the structure of Surinamese transnational politics is individualist while Turkish transnational politics is collectivist. This is not only due to different homeland political opportunity structures and differences in nationalism; it reflects the organisation of homeland politics. Surinamese politics is informal and individualist; the numerous ethnic groups in Suriname, with a population of less than half a million, have generated as many political parties as Turkey with nearly 70 million inhabitants. The fragmented structure of Surinamese politics is reflected in the way Surinamese migrants are organised in the Netherlands and the way they engage in transnational party politics. Surinamese transnational elites act as individuals.

Furthermore, a third of the Surinamese population lives in the Netherlands; almost everybody in Suriname has close relatives in the Netherlands – certainly members of the elite. These kinship ties are strong and, as in Suriname, used for political purposes. Suriname is a society where ‘everybody knows everybody’ and ‘mofo koranti’ (mouth-to-mouth news) and personal networks are necessary to survive in politics. This pattern is transplanted and transnationalised. In Turkey, in contrast, (especially religious) civil society plays a central role in political mobilisation. Unsurprisingly, Turkish and Kurdish civil society in the Netherlands remains central within transnational political mobilisation which tends to be highly collectivist.

The third finding is that because of their collective character, the scope of transnational politics is broader in the Turkish and Kurdish cases than in the Surinamese case. This is a direct consequence of the quality of Turkish and Kurdish migrant organisational networks. We found that homeland-based state, collective and political actors all contributed to the emergence of these migrant organisations. The Dutch political opportunity structure then facilitated the ties between them. Due to their organisational capacity, Turks and Kurds are able to mobilise more quickly and reach wider publics.

The fourth finding is that dense migrant organisational networks facilitate both national and transnational political participation and thus political integration. We have seen that the leaders of central migrant organisations belong to the transnational and migrant elite. When engaged in transnational politics, their activities skilfully navigate the Dutch political opportunity structure. Other examples of how homeland directed and immigrant politics can go hand in hand include flag-carrying adherents of the illegal Turkish party MLKP demonstrating in the Netherlands against Dutch government policy on migrants and asylum seekers. In the case of the migrant Kurdish leader enjoying direct contact with the minister of foreign affairs, the objective clearly related to Turkey and not to integration. Nevertheless, these and similar activities facilitate migrant political integration by familiarising activists with
the Dutch political system. The acquired skills and contacts can certainly be used in other contexts.

The fifth finding is that very few transnational activities are violent in nature. Even radical groups such as the Kurdish PKK, the Turkish DHKP/C and the Surinamese adherents of Ronny Brunswijk—who support(ed) ‘liberation armies’ on Turkish and Surinamese soil—have very rarely undertaken violent actions in the Netherlands.

The sixth finding is that elite transnational actors are rarely rewarded with political positions in the homeland (though transnational activism can augment one’s status within migrant civil society in the Netherlands). Both the Turkish and Surinamese state are skeptical of returnee influence; if returnees do end up achieving high positions, it is often after many years of proving their loyalty. Such was the case with the first Surinamese return migrants who studied in the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s. Some eventually became leaders of political parties, government ministers and senior bureaucrats, but it took up to fifteen years before they were considered ‘Surinamese’ and taken seriously. Examples of Turkish return migrants from the Netherlands gaining senior positions in Turkey are scarce, though return migrants from Germany have fared better.

The seventh finding is that as first generation migrants realise their residence in the Netherlands is permanent, transnational political involvement on the whole decreases. For the second generation, involvement in transnational politics is more a conscious choice than the matter of fact that it was for their parents. In the Surinamese case we saw a significant decline in transnational political participation. Since the installation of full democracy, transnational activities among both individuals and migrant organisations have generally been limited to development projects; Surinamese politics is a matter of indifference to second generation individuals and their organisations. Among Turks we also observed a decrease in participation, but more striking was how transnational politics has evolved. Homeland politics no longer dominates individual lives and migrant organisations as it did in the 1970s and 1980s. The transnational ties of the first generation and especially the second generation are now used for different purposes and often directed towards the Netherlands rather than Turkey; a calm homeland political climate and length of stay explain this shift. Second and intermediate generation Kurdish individuals and organisations are sceptical of Turkish-Kurdish nationalism; their focus is increasingly on improving their position in the Netherlands as ‘Kurds’. Towards this end they emphasise a general Kurdish identity, not a Turkish-Kurdish one. Despite these shifts, Kurdish and Turkish transnational ties are more likely to persist and develop over time and over generations than among Surinamese, because homeland based actors and diaspora leaders remain responsive to their brethren abroad.

A further finding was that though new communication and transportation technologies have revolutionised the way and the speed with which we exchange
information, transnational politics has not as a result grown more important or broader in scope. Nor has it been deterritorialised; transnational politics clearly remains bound to nation-states and influenced by the opportunities they (do not) provide. Compared to the Turkish and Surinamese cases, Kurdish diaspora politics has a broader scope and involves a much higher percentage of the migrant group – including second and third generations – in its activities. But even here, far from all Kurds are engaged in diaspora politics; the elite forms its activist core. But as Kasinitz et al. (2002) argue, the impact of the core group should not be underestimated; it is likely that structural diaspora ties will be revitalised when political developments in Turkey motivate them to. Diasporas are almost by definition highly engaged in politics.

Finally, on a more abstract level, this study shows that the activities of migrants are often a direct response to political changes in the country of origin or settlement. Activities emerge, change and disappear, often in response to specific political developments. Ties, in contrast, persist even if the activities that led to their establishment have ceased. New activities may be channelled through old ties; in this sense, a shadow of the past remains in contemporary transnational politics. The significance of transnational politics lies in the existence of transnational ties through which collectivities can be mobilised. Once established, they can be used for social-cultural, economic and political purposes. Ties have the broadest scope when they are collective and are more highly institutionalised. Such ties will more likely survive and evolve among second and third generations.

In sum, all the factors drawn from existing literature – migration motives; political climate; homeland, host country and international political opportunities; migrants’ length of stay/absence; (migrant) civil society – influence migrant, refugee, homeland and diaspora-based transnational politics. The comparison of the three cases has shown that the relative significance of the factors vary – between groups, subgroups, and over time – and that their interaction results in remarkably different patterns. Additionally, this study found that: (1) the nationalist programme of the sending country has a decisive effect on the political opportunities it provides to its (former) nationals and their descendents abroad; and (2) homeland political organisation as well as the relative size of the migrant population vis-à-vis that of the homeland affects how migrants organise in the country of residence and the way they pursue transnational politics.

Most studies on transnationalism still focus on migrants in the country of residence and their transnational activities. The primary theoretical contribution of this study is therefore its focus on both ties and activities, which allows studying the structure and process of transnational politics over time. Its second theoretical contribution is that it examines how actors in both the host and home country are motivated to engage in transnational political activity. The politics studied in this
dissertation is about migrants ‘looking both ways’ – it is time for researchers to do the same.