Transnational migrant politics in the Netherlands: historical structures and current events
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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The findings in this dissertation are based on fieldwork in the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey between 2003 and 2005. Data was collected on transnational activities and ties on the individual, collective and institutional levels. Unsurprisingly, the diversity of the migrant groups and the multi-level focus required a variety of approaches and methodologies; this appendix expands on these approaches, data sources, and their relevance for the study as a whole. It considers in turn the analysis of data on individual and collective transnational political involvement, primarily in the Netherlands; the specificities of fieldwork in the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey; and the project’s main methodologies: in-depth interviews and the keeping of a research diary.

Individuals

Research on individual transnational political involvement began with an inventory of existing studies in the Netherlands. As it turned out, the information needed for this project was lacking. To gather this information, I designed a questionnaire for a survey, which was carried out by MA and BA students, trainees and research assistants of the Political Science and Anthropology Departments at the University of Amsterdam in spring 2004 (see appendix B for a full overview of methodology, questionnaires and sampling). We gratefully made use of the addresses the Institute for Sociological-Economic Research (ISEO) of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam made available for this project, used in 2002 for the national survey Social Position and Use of Facilities by Migrants (SPVA). To gain insight into generational similarities and differences within families, we began snowballing within families. This led to 101 interviews with 40 Surinamese, 40 Turks and 21 Kurds.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of closed questions to gather background information. The second part included semi-open questions and more detailed retrospective questions on concrete transnational activities that respondents had participated in or were still involved in. Answers to the first part were written down during the interview; the second, more open part was taped and transcribed literally. This combination of more and less structured parts in the questionnaire proved effective: the structured, quantitative part allowed systematic comparison while the second part provided insight into ‘transnational politics in action’. Respondents’ accounts of political activities in their (former) homeland and in the Netherlands shed light on their activities over time. It also generated the names of the many political organisations they are or had been members of. Finally, the qualitative section helped to understand why people who had been politically engaged in their homeland did or did not continue activities in the Netherlands (see appendix B).
**Collective level**

For research on transnational migrant politics at the collective level, I began with the networks of Surinamese and Turkish organisations drawn by researchers at the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) of the University of Amsterdam (Fennema & Tillie 1999; Van Heelsum et al. 1999; Fennema et al. 2000; Berger, Fennema, Heelsum, Tillie & Wolff 2001; Fennema & Tillie 2001; Van Heelsum & Voorthuysen 2002). On the basis of a topic list, I approached the chairmen of the central federations for in-depth interviews. Though topics in the end varied according to what respondents revealed during the conversations, the interviews in any case included retrospective questions on:

- the founding date, aims, history and members of the organisation
- activities in the Netherlands
- organisations in the Netherlands that they cooperate with
- activities related to or directed towards the homeland
- visits by homeland organisations and political parties to their organisation, and the content and frequency of such visits
- visits of the organisation’s representatives to the homeland, and the content and frequency of such visits
- visits of the chairman in a personal capacity to the homeland, and the content and frequency of such visits
- a list of the organisation’s and chairman’s past and present homeland contacts, and an indication of the content, type and frequency of contact
- other organisations in the Netherlands that maintain strong ties with homeland actors with activities directed towards the homeland
- possibility to provide me with written material (annual reports, magazines, flyers of activities, etc.)
- possibility to add me to the mailing list of their organisation to keep me up to date on their activities.

With these interviews as starting points, I snowballed through organisations in the Netherlands and in the homeland until saturation was reached. I created a computer database containing information on: (a) background information on the respondent; (b) how or through whom I found the respondent; (c) the organisation’s contacts in the homeland, (d) written documents provided by the respondent; and (e) information about the interview. By the end, the database comprised 329 Surinamese and 416 Turkish/Kurdish names; this database was central to the tracing of the transnational ties of Surinamese and Turkish organisations in the Netherlands and drawing the figures with the computer program Netdraw.

The ‘transnational snowball approach’ eventually led to 241 interviews – 105, 112 and 24 for the Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish cases respectively (see table A.1 and appendix C for a detailed list).
Table A.1 Conducted interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representatives of</th>
<th>Surinamese</th>
<th>Turks</th>
<th>Kurds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migrant organisations in the Netherlands</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations in the homeland</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch political parties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branches of homeland political parties in the Netherlands</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeland political parties</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch state agencies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeland state agencies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant observation in the Netherlands

I participated in just under 20 activities of Surinamese organisations in the Netherlands, including festivals, support campaigns for Surinamese political parties, commemorations of the abolition of slavery, the commemoration of East Indian migration to Suriname, seminars, and so on. For the Turkish case I also participated in roughly 20 activities, including demonstrations in the Netherlands and Brussels, the board meetings of European federations, and numerous debates. Finally, I participated in nine Kurdish activities, including festivals in the Netherlands and Germany, as well as debates.

Participation allowed me to verify the information respondents provided during the interviews. Furthermore, it gave me a more realistic picture of the people involved in the activities and what was ‘really going on’. On some occasions, participation allowed me to approach new respondents, to gain access to more radical groups that would otherwise have been difficult to reach, and to interview guests from Suriname or Turkey in the Netherlands. As the list of interviews in appendix C shows, some Surinamese, Turkish and Kurdish politicians were interviewed in the Netherlands rather than their homelands.

Fieldwork in the Netherlands formed the starting point for selecting respondents in the homeland. As fieldwork strategies differed for Suriname and Turkey, the research done in the two countries warrants separate consideration.

Fieldwork in Suriname

In order to prepare for fieldwork in Suriname, I paid the country a two-and-a-half-week initial visit in February 2004. I attended a conference and had meetings with directors of research institutes and university professors; I also interviewed several
politicians. The longest fieldwork period was from May until the end of August 2005. Most of the work took place in and around the capital, Paramaribo.

The period was selected to observe firsthand the national elections, held on 25 May 2005. I closely observed the election campaigns, as well as the support of groups or individuals from the Netherlands and how parties referred to Suriname’s postcolonial relations with the Netherlands for example during campaign speeches. In this period I met many leaders of branches of Surinamese political parties in the Netherlands, in Suriname to support their parties. They in turn introduced me to the national leadership of their parties, many of whom I interviewed after the elections. Finally, I interviewed representatives of the Surinamese state itself, for example (former) ministers and ambassadors.

Although in many ways this period effectively constituted one on-going participant observation, I counted around 31 activities in which I participated, mainly meetings of political parties during the 2005 election campaign but also the celebration of the abolition of Dutch slavery and visits to lectures.

Although the official language of Suriname is Dutch, many politicians underline statements in Sranantongo, the lingua franca of the country. To be able to follow proceedings at such moments, at least in general terms, I took private lessons in Sranantongo during my months in Suriname. I also read the three daily newspapers circulating in Paramaribo and regularly watched the evening news to better understand Surinamese political culture. At least as beneficial, however, were discussions with friends in the country who could explain and elaborate on intrigues and gossip about Surinamese politics.

Fieldwork in Turkey

I undertook a first two-month visit to Turkey in the summer of 2003 to follow an intensive Turkish language course in Istanbul. During that visit, I also conducted explorative fieldwork in Istanbul, Izmir, Izmit and Hacibektas. This included two small case studies, one on city partnerships and one on Alevies. In addition, I interviewed experts, university professors and several NGOs and politicians whose names had been provided by Turkish organisations in the Netherlands and the Dutch consulate in Istanbul.

The second visit to Turkey was a week-long trip in spring 2004 to follow local elections in Diyarbakir, eastern Turkey (considered ‘Kurdistan’ by a part of the Kurdish community). In particular, I studied how a Kurdish umbrella organisation in exile in the Netherlands sent election observers and how this ‘mission’ unfolded in Turkey itself. I also observed the elections more generally and conducted interviews with politicians and NGOs.

The third fieldwork period was a week in October 2004. This time I travelled with an organisation of Dutch politicians of Turkish origin (siyaset.nl) on a fact-
finding mission to Istanbul and Ankara to inform themselves and their Dutch colleagues about Turkey and its preparations for accession to the European Union. Together with the delegation, I visited mayors of districts in Istanbul and Ankara, and a school supported by a Dutch municipality following the earthquake in Adapazari. We also had meetings with the speaker of the Grand National Assembly, members of parliamentary committees working on Turkey’s accession to the EU, an advisor to the Turkish prime minister, and at the Dutch embassy in Ankara. Participation in this delegation was one of the main sources on which I based the case study on the double orientations of Dutch politicians of Turkish origin in chapter 6. It also generated useful contacts for the final and longest round of fieldwork.

During this fourth fieldwork period from early November 2004 until the end of February 2005, I was based mostly in Ankara and Istanbul. Most politicians and state agencies were interviewed in Ankara. Since overseas branches of Turkish political parties have been prohibited for decades, not all migrant organisations in the Netherlands were willing to divulge a full list of their contacts, I simply approached all important political parties in Turkey for an interview and was successful in securing one in most cases. I also interviewed numerous NGOs in Istanbul. Finally, I made short fieldwork trips to small villages in Central Anatolia, including Emirdağ and Kayapınar, where many Turks in the Netherlands come from.

During the winter of 2004 I continued attending Turkish evening classes in Ankara, where I lived with a Turkish woman who further introduced me to Turkish language and culture. During the whole period I discussed Turkish politics with Turkish friends to better understand the political culture. I also read a daily Turkish newspaper in English. Although, as in the Suriname, I consider the whole period as one ongoing process of participant observation, there were around 20 concrete activities in which I participated, including congresses of political parties, seminars, festivals and election campaigns.

**In-depth interviews and triangulation**

All interviews conducted in the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey were taped; most I transcribed myself while a research assistant transcribed a small number of the interviews in Suriname. Most interviews in the Netherlands and Suriname were conducted in Dutch. Interviews in Turkey were conducted in English, German, French and Turkish. The majority of interviews in Turkish were conducted with the help of a translator. I often asked respondents to arrange for a translator, for instance in the Turkish parliament, where professional translators were available. If this was not possible I asked friends whom I knew to be ‘politically neutral’ to translate. My knowledge of Turkish was sufficient, however, to ‘control’ the translator and to check whether his or her translations were correct. When there was no translator available, or when respondents did not approve the use of one, I conducted the interviews in Turkish myself. A Dutch-Turkish friend transcribed these interviews.
The interviews were triangulated through posing similar questions about the same *tie* or *activity* to various people in the Netherlands and the homeland. As appendix C shows, I often interviewed several persons representing the same political party. Additionally, I searched through newspaper databases such as LexisNexis and consulted websites and internet discussion platforms. In the parliamentary library in Ankara I collected reports of the National Grand Assembly, and in the library of the University of Amsterdam, bulletins and publications of Surinamese and Turkish organizations in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, I asked interviewees in the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey to provide me with written material, which was also useful for triangulation.

**Research diary**

I kept a detailed research diary over the entire fieldwork period in the Netherlands, Suriname and Turkey, of around three to four pages a day (on average). It included:

- summaries of the main points discussed in the interviews
- descriptions of the ‘chats’ after the tape recorder had been turned off
- observations during the interviews, such as pictures on the walls or books on the coffee table
- notes on telephone conversations as well as the finding and approaching of respondents
- notes on conversations about politics with friends, matters I read in the newspapers or saw on television
- thoughts on how the findings relate to the overall project, such as reflections on theory and methodology
- descriptions of the activities I participated in
- reflections on my role as a young female researcher and how this may have affected the fieldwork.

When back home organising the material, these diaries proved to be one of the main instruments to reconstruct the fieldwork period, draw preliminary conclusions and lay out the structure of the book.