Transnational activities and social-cultural integration of Moroccan and Turkish descendants in Flemish Belgium

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Transnational activities and social-cultural integration of Moroccan and Turkish descendants in Flemish Belgium

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ABSTRACT

The two key questions that this paper seeks to address are: (1) To what extent are Moroccan and Turkish immigrants (and their descendants) living in Belgium involved in transnational activities? (2) What is the impact of transnational involvement on the social-cultural integration of people of Moroccan and Turkish descent into the country of settlement? To answer these questions we carried out quantitative analyses on data gathered in three cities in Flemish Belgium: Antwerp, Genk and Ghent (618 standardized face-to-face interviews). Results show that in both communities transnational activities are common practices. Those of Turkish descent have more contact (by telephone or internet) with family in their country of origin than those of Moroccan descent, but the latter more often send money or goods to their relatives. Besides a clear effect of watching country of origin television, most of the activities investigated have no impact on any indicator of social-cultural integration.

Key words: transnationalism, integration, assimilation, immigrants, Belgium.

Introduction

The first objective of this paper is to measure quantitatively the extent to which Moroccan and Turkish immigrants and their descendants living in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium are involved in transnational activities. The second objective is to examine the impact of these activities on their (social-cultural) integration into the country of settlement. These objectives fill two gaps in international research on transnational activities to which Portes (2003: 888) drew attention in a special issue of the *International Migration Review* devoted to transnational migration.

The first is the need for quantitative studies of transnationalism based on surveys or aggregate official statistics. Most of the pioneering research on transnational activities has been based on the case study method. Although this methodology has its merits, including the capacity to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon and to uncover

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realities beneath appearances, it also has certain constraints. In particular, Portes (2001: 182) mentions a strong tendency to 'sample on the dependent variable', which led to an exaggeration and generalization of the phenomenon in past research (Portes & DeWind, 2004: 836).

The second gap deals with the limited knowledge of the numerical incidence and the significance of transnational practices in different countries. Most of the research on transnational activities has addressed immigrants in the United States. In Europe, the study of the transnational practices of immigrants has been given less attention and is, furthermore, mostly based on qualitative research methods (e.g. Al-Ali, Black & Coser, 2001; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Burrell, 2003; Dahinden, 2005; Christensen, 2008; Scott & Cartledge, 2009). Whether transnational activities impede (or foster) the integration of immigrants has only been examined in a quantitative manner in the Netherlands (Snel, Engbersen & Leerkes, 2006) and Great Britain (Jayaweera & Choudhury, 2008). We will discuss both studies in detail further on in this paper. First of all, we will briefly focus on the concepts of 'transnationalism' and 'integration'.

Transnationalism

The concept of *transnationalism* was introduced into academic discourse in the early nineties when social anthropologists noted that a new kind of migrant population was emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). Glick Schiller et al. (1992: 1) defined transnationalism as 'the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement'. Immigrants who build such social fields were named 'transmigrants'. Transmigrants develop and maintain familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, or political relations that span national borders. They take actions, make decisions, feel concerns and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies at the same time (Glick Schiller et al., 1992: 2).

In the past decade the discovery of the intense interactions that immigrants mediate between their country of origin and their country of residence has led to a growing scholarly interest in this phenomenon, but strong doubts concerning the significance of immigrant transnationalism have also been voiced.[1] Some scholars question the novelty of the phenomenon, stating that there are abundant precedents of it in immigration history (Foner, 1997; Smith, 2003). Others argue that findings from the research on

immigrant transnationalism conducted by the pioneering group are exaggerated or skewed, as subsequent research (in the United States) indicated that less than 15 percent of immigrant family heads take part in transnational activitities on a regular basis (Portes & DeWind, 2004: 835). Still, one could expect a growth of the phenomenon in the future (Portes, 2001: 188). The logic of global capitalism has created a continuous demand for immigrant labour in the advanced countries and has endowed immigrants with transportation and communication resources entirely beyond the reach of their predecessors (e.g. cheap and efficient air transport, telephone, internet, …).

Another debate addresses the problem of the multiple meanings and typologies of what is meant by 'transnationalism' (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). However, Portes (2003: 875) argues that in contemporary literature transnationalism primarily refers to 'cross-border activities of private grassroots actors, including immigrants'. Such activities 'from below' should be clearly distinguished from those of global institutions, multinational corporations or governments and other institutions identified with a particular national state. But what sort of activities are we talking about? Al-Ali, Black & Koser (2001: 618) argue that 'there is no clear and accepted existing typology of what constitutes a transnational activity and what does not'. According to Itzigsohn & Saucedo (2002: 768) 'transnational practices cover all spheres of social action'. Nevertheless, in the literature scholars mostly distinguish between economic, political and social-cultural activities (Portes, 2001; Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002; Snel, Engbersen & Leerkes, 2006).

Examples of economic transnational activities include monetary remittances, migrant entrepreneurship or the collective transfer of resources or products to the local community (for an extensive typology of transnational economic activities, see: Guarnizo, 2003). As Portes (2003: 877) argues, transnational economic ties are of great importance for the development of the countries of origin. For instance, monetary remittances and migrant investments not only play an important role in generating welfare for the families left behind (Koc & Onan, 2004), they also support the financial stability and economic development of the sending countries (for Morocco and Turkey, see Sorensen, 2004 and Içduygu, 2006).

Political activities include participation in electoral activities, political affiliations or political mobilization in the country of settlement (Al-Ali, Black & Koser, 2001: 621; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller, 2003: 1214). Snel et al. (2006: 293) also consider reading newspapers from the country of origin as a transnational political activity. Socio-

cultural transnational activities are 'more affective oriented and less instrumental' than political or economic activities (Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002: 768). Examples are visiting and maintaining contacts with family and friends in the country of origin, joining organizations in the country of residence or the country of origin, participation in cultural activities, watching home country television, etc. (Al-Ali et al., 2001: 623; Itzigsohn & Saucedo, 2002: 769; Snel et al., 2006: 293; Jayaweera & Choudbury, 2008: 95).

Integration

In recent decades the concept of *integration* has received considerable attention in Western European immigration policies and research. Because of its controversiality and its various meanings and definitions, we have previously characterized integration as an 'essentially contested concept' (Van Craen, Vancluysen & Ackaert, 2008: 1). Essentially contested concepts unavoidably lead to disagreements about appropriate use and correct interpretation, because of their evaluative character and the value judgement that they imply. As Phalet and Swyngedouw (2003: 779) argue the concept of integration is used in scientific research as well as in national policy making with regard to immigrant issues, and therefore the term 'bundles analytic concepts together with normative notions or idealised projections of society, which are weighted with very different emotional and attitudinal valences in different groups and contexts'.

Until the late 1960s not 'integration' but 'assimilation' was the common term used in social sciences to denote the process of immigrant incorporation or adaptation into the receiving society. Although the concept of assimilation was first developed in the 1920s by the Chicago School of sociologists (Park, 1928), it was Gordon (1964) who provided one of the most influential theories of assimilation. The so-called *classical assimilation theory*, which is based on the study of immigrant groups in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, emphasizes a straight-forward adaptation of immigrants to mainstream American society. The longer immigrants live in the host society, the more they become entirely absorbed into it and the more differences between ethnic-cultural groups disappear.

This classical assimilation theory has been strongly criticized because it leaves the processes in the host society out of account. Inappropriate government policies or discrimination by the majority population can, however, inhibit assimilation. Furthermore, it was apparent even in the early sixties that the assimilation of

immigrants was not necessarily a linear development. ‘The point about the melting pot’, stated Glazer and Moynihan (1963) in their influential *Beyond the Melting Pot*, ‘is that it did not happen’. Many minority groups rediscovered or continued to cling to their own culture, or followed different paths of assimilation.

Despite the fact that a number of criticisms were countered in subsequent versions of assimilation theory, such as the *segmented assimilation theory* (Portes & Zhou, 1994) and the *new assimilation theory* (Alba & Nee, 1997), day-to-day public discourse in Europe has come to see ‘assimilation’ as a ‘taboo concept’, one that presupposes a complete and unilateral adaptation by ethnic-cultural minorities (Bosswick & Heckmann, 2006: 4). For this reason, policy-makers and researchers have come to prefer such terms as ‘incorporation’ or ‘integration’ (see e.g. Freeman, 2004; Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2005; Dagevos & Gijsberts, 2007; Barrett & Duffy, 2008; Bayram et al., 2009; Vancluysen, Van Craen & Ackaert, 2009). The concept of integration places more emphasis on the importance of changes within and acceptance by the majority group. Penninx (2005: 141), for instance, defines integration as ‘the process of becoming an *accepted* part of society’ and according to Phalet & Swyngedouw (1999: 31) integration is an interaction between the ‘treatment side’ (the majority group) and the ‘adaptation side’ (the minority groups).

Numerous authors have defined dimensions and subdimensions of integration and delineated their interconnections (Veenman, 1994; Vermeulen & Penninx, 1994; Odé, 2002; Esser, 2004; Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2005). We have previously discussed various theoretical matrices and synthesized an over-all framework making a conceptual distinction between structural and social-cultural integration (Van Craen, Vancluysen & Ackaert, 2008: 4). Structural integration refers to the position occupied by ethnic-cultural minorities in socio-economic stratification. Subdimensions of structural integration are position in education and employment, income, quality of housing, and political rights. Social-cultural integration refers to the proficiency in (and use of) the majority language, social contacts, norms and values, and identification. Although there is a conceptual distinction between structural and social-cultural integration, the two processes are in practice interwoven, which entails the possibility of mutual influence between them. For instance, fluency in the majority language will improve educational achievement, and interethnic social contacts can help in finding employment (Van Craen, Vancluysen & Ackaert, 2008: 4).

Transnationalism and integration

In this article we examine the relationship between transnationalism and integration. More specifically, we will scrutinize the impact of transnational activities on the social-cultural integration of people from Moroccan or Turkish backgrounds in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders). According to Portes (2001: 188) transnational activities 'can alter, in various ways, the process of integration to the host society of both first-generation immigrants and their offspring'. Pedraza (2005: 426) seems to agree stating that 'transnationalism has consequences for the extent to which immigrants can assimilate – both culturally and structurally'. In the literature we have found two divergent views about the bearing of transnational activities on the integration of immigrants (and their descendants) into the receiving society.

The first emphasizes the possibility that transnational activities go together with a successful integration. A study among Colombian, Dominican, and Salvadoran immigrants in four US cities showed that economic transnational activities (in this case: transnational entrepreneurship) create economic resources that can empower immigrants to defy exploitation in the labour market and to push themselves and their family into the native middle class (Portes, Haller & Guarnizo, 2001). A study of political transnational activities based on the same data pointed to similar findings: the better educated immigrants are, the more involved in cross-border political activities, they are (Guarnizo, Portes & Haller, 2003: 1229). Portes (2001: 189) concludes that transnational activities provide immigrant groups with 'an extra 'lift' in terms of material and moral resources unavailable to those cut off from these activities'. Also studies among Kurdish newcomers and Kosovars in Canada (Hooshiyar, 2003; Sherrel & Hyndman, 2006) and Latin American immigrants in the United States (Marcelli & Lowell, 2005; Portes, Escobar & Arana, 2009) show that transnational activities do not hinder integration.

The alternative view stresses the negative impact of transnational activities on the integration of immigrants and their offspring, seeing transnational involvement as a hindrance to integration. Sana (2005), for instance, found in her research among male Mexican immigrants to the United States that the transnational activity of transferring money to the country of origin highly correlates with renting a home, the lack of citizenship, and an inferior language proficiency, all signs of weak integration. Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes (2006: 287) argue that the current political view on the relation

between transnationalism and integration is 'that the two are at odds'. They refer to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington (2001), Madrid (2003) and London (2005), emphasizing that those can be considered as 'incidents of transnational political activism'. The view that transnational practices and integration rule each other out corresponds with the assumption of *classical assimilation theory* (Gordon, 1964), which argues that relations with the country of origin or contacts with co-ethnics are shed over time (see above).

Two European studies

Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes (2006) studied the transnational activity of immigrants and its implication for their integration into the host society in the Netherlands. Altogether, they interviewed 300 immigrants from three different categories: older immigrant groups (Morocco and Dutch Antilles), refugees (Iraq and former Yugoslavia) and new labour migrants (Japan and USA). Respondents were selected in the private social networks of the interviewers (who came from the respective migrant groups) and by using a snowball method. Through this method, respondents were asked whether they knew of any other potential respondents.

Results of the study showed that 'transnational activities constitute a substantial part of the lives of migrants in the Netherlands' (Snel et al., 2006: 303). Those activities largely have a social-cultural character (family visits, contacts with relatives in the country of origin), but many immigrants also transfer money to the country of origin. In general, the former Yugoslavs and Americans participate most strongly in transnational activities. The other groups are much less involved in those activities. Furthermore the analysis shows that Moroccans are less involved in transnational activities because of their age of migration: 'the Moroccan respondents who came to the Netherlands at a young age (or were born in the Netherlands) are less involved in transnational activities, and that explains why Moroccans in general participate less in transnational activities than former Yugoslavs and Americans' (Snel et al., 2006: 294).

The main research question of the Dutch study was whether immigrants' transnational activities are an impediment to their integration into Dutch society. On the basis of their findings Snel et al. argue that transnational activities do not necessarily obstruct integration. First, they observed that the immigrant groups that are often mentioned as being poorly integrated (i.e. Moroccans and Antilleans), are no more heavily involved

in transnational activities than the most integrated groups (i.e. Yugoslavs and Americans).

Second, at the individual level, Snel et al. found no correlation between immigrants' transnational activities and their social positions, and with regard to social-cultural integration a regression analysis showed that most transnational activities do not go hand in hand with less contact and less identification with Dutch natives.[2] Only social-cultural transnational activities (like visiting relatives, contacts with family) are related to less identification with native Dutch people. Apart from this effect, the scholars argue that the findings generally support the assumption that transnational activities 'do not need to constitute an impediment to integration' (Snel et al., 2006: 304).

In Great Britain, Jayaweera and Choudhury (2008) examined the transnational activities of recent Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants and the bearing of these activities on their integration into British society. The sample consisted of 155 Muslim and 44 non-Muslim immigrants living in three urban localities (the borough of Newham in London, Birmingham, and Bradford). As in the Dutch study, potential respondents were approached and selected through the method of snowball sampling. Again, interviewers gained access to potential respondents through chain referral.

Results of the analysis indicated that most transnational activities of (recent) immigrants are related to information about, and contact with relatives in the country of origin (e.g. contact with relatives by telephone, home country media consumption, visiting relatives in the country of origin). The incidence of financial transnational activity (e.g. money transfers to families or religious and welfare organizations) was lower and there was little evidence overall for activity in transnational politics or business.

With respect to impact on integration into British society, Jayaweera and Choudhury (2008: 100) argue that 'transnational involvement did not preclude economic, political and social participation in the receiving society'. The more respondents showed involvement in transnational activities, the more likely they are to be employed, have a perception of financial stability, have voted in the general elections and meet people of a different ethnic-cultural background and religion in more spaces. On the basis of these findings, the scholars conclude that 'transnational involvement appeared not to prevent or conflict with economic, political and social integration' (Jayaweera & Choudbury, 2008: 110).

In our view, the studies of Snel et al. (2006) and Jayaweera and Choudbury (2008) have some important limitations. First of all, there is a problem of sampling bias. The major problem of the method used (snowball sampling) is the danger that the sample is not representative. The sample composition could be influenced by the choice of the interviewer and the initial respondents. Moreover, the method also tends to bias towards selecting respondents with larger networks in their own community (see Putnam, 2000: bonding social capital). This could be problematic, as we have found in an earlier study that a high degree of (informal) bonding social capital does not hamper (informal) social contacts with the native population, so-called bridging social capital (Van Craen, Vancluysen & Ackaert, 2008).

A second major limitation concerns the operationalization of social-cultural integration in both studies. Snel et al. (2006: 301) used two indicators to operationalize social-cultural integration: the number of native Dutch people in the social network and the degree of identification with native Dutch people. Jayaweera & Choudbury (2008: 99) only take into account the social capital of immigrants (i.e. participation in organizations involving people of diverse ethnic-cultural and religious backgrounds and the extent of interethnic/-religious social contact). Although these indicators match with important subdimensions of social-cultural integration (see above), we argue that this operationalization is too restricted.

In the Flemish region in Belgium (but also in the Netherlands and Great Britain: see Korteweg, 2006; Alexander, Edwards & Temple, 2007) integration policies focus explicitly on proficiency in the majority language.[3] In Flanders immigrants must follow an *inburgeringstraject* (civic integration trajectory) which includes a Dutch language course and the *Vlaamse Wooncode* (Flemish housing code) requests that persons seeking public or social housing prove their knowledge of Dutch. Empirical studies have also very often emphasized the importance of majority language proficiency (and use) for integration (see, for instance, Ackaert & Deschouwer, 1999; Van Craen, Vancluysen & Ackaert, 2007; Turkenburg & Gijsberts, 2007; Bayram et al., 2009; Hiebert, 2009). Esser (2006:1) even speaks of language as ‘the key to integration’.

In this article we will try to anticipate the two limitations indicated by carrying out analysis on a representative data set (in terms of age and gender) and by including knowledge of the majority language as an indicator of social-cultural integration.

Data

The two central research questions in this article are: (1) to what extent are Moroccan and Turkish immigrants (and their descendants) living in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium involved in transnational activities? And (2) what is the impact of transnational involvement on the social-cultural integration of people of Moroccan and Turkish descent?

The data of this study derive from the *Survey Integratie 2008* a standardized face-to-face survey designed by the *Policy Research Center on Equal Opportunities* to monitor the social-cultural distance between ethnic-cultural minority groups and the native majority and the way they live together in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Vancluysen, Van Craen & Ackaert, 2009). The survey was conducted in three Flemish cities with large Moroccan and Turkish-descended populations: Antwerp, Genk and Ghent.[4]

We focussed on Moroccan and Turkish immigrants and descendants because those communities form the two largest groups of the total non-EU immigrant population in Belgium. At the national level and based on nationality at birth, in 2006 Belgium had a population of 249,623 people with a Moroccan background and 141,570 people with a Turkish background (Perrin, 2007: 14). Furthermore, Moroccans and Turks, along with Netherlanders and Poles, make up the most important groups of newcomers in the Flemish region (Willems, 2008). The Moroccan and Turkish minority groups are also interesting research subjects because they share a historical similarity of arriving as labour migrants during the 1960s and 1970s, followed by family reunion and marriage migration (Reniers, 1999: 680).

We decided to interview the same number of people from each ethnic-cultural group in each city. This would give us sufficient respondents in each subcategory to make meaningful comparisons between the different ethnic-cultural groups, and to use regression analysis to calculate the effect of the variable 'city'. In total the sample comprised 840 persons (420 of Moroccan descent and 420 of Turkish descent). The whole sample – a disproportionately stratified random sample – consisted of six partial samples: per city and per ethnic-cultural group a separate sample (representative with regards to age and gender) was made within the age category of 18 to 70 years old.

The criteria applied by the civic population services to determine ethnic-cultural background, are 'current nationality' and 'nationality at birth'.[5] In Genk the population office also filtered on '(former) nationality of parents' and 'country of birth'. For other

Turkish or Moroccan-sounding names a manual check was made against data in the National Register. These additional possibilities were not available in Antwerp or Ghent.

The fieldwork was carried out between March and July 2008 and produced 618 usable face-to-face interviews: 260 interviews with individuals of Moroccan descent and 358 interviews with individuals of Turkish descent. Respondent drop-out could skew the results if systematic in particular subcategories. A control showed that the answers of members of the Moroccan and Turkish immigrant communities had to be weighed according to gender and city. There was no need to weigh the groups for age.

As the questionnaire was composed in a broader research framework concerning how immigrants (and their offspring) and natives interact in Flanders, we were obliged to limit the number of questions relating to transnational involvements. We opted for three social-cultural and two economic activities that had been shown by earlier studies to be common among immigrants and their offspring (see Snel et al., 2006; Jayaweera & Choudbury, 2008):

- the frequency of contact with family in Turkey/Morocco by telephone or internet (never, a few times a year, about once a month, certainly once a week, almost every day)
- the frequency of visiting family in Turkey/Morocco (never, once every two to three years, once a year, twice a year, more than twice a year)
- the frequency of watching a Turkish/Moroccan-language television channel (never, about once a month, about once a week, multiple times a week, every day)
- the frequency of sending products or goods to family in Turkey/Morocco (never, once a year, multiple times a year)
- the frequency of sending money to family in Turkey/Morocco (never, once a year, multiple times a year).

In the face-to-face interviews, no questions were asked concerning political transnational activities or professional economic activities (e.g. transnational entrepreneurship).

Results

Involvement in transnational activities

Table 1 shows that transnational activities are common practices in both immigrant communities. About 58 percent of the respondents with a Turkish background and 47 percent of the interviewees with a Moroccan background say that they have contact with family in Turkey/Morocco (by telephone or internet) at least once a week. Only 9 percent of the Turkish and 13 percent of the Moroccan descendants never have contact with relatives in the country of origin. Respectively 61 percent and 54 percent of those with Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds surveyed, declare that they visit family in the country of origin at least once a year, whereas 8 percent of the Turkish and 6 percent of the Moroccan respondents say never visiting family in Turkey/Morocco.

A whopping 77 percent of interviewees of Turkish descent reported watching a Turkish-language television channel daily, compared to 45 percent of those of Moroccan descent. Sending money to the country of origin also occurs relatively often. Nearly 49 percent of the Turkish and 63 percent of the Moroccan interviewees transfer money to family in Turkey/Morocco (at least once a year). The incidence of sending goods or products to family in the country of origin is lower. About 31 percent of the Turkish and 49 percent of the Moroccan descendants report being involved in this kind of transnational activity at least once a year.

Bivariate chi-square tests indicate that most differences in transnational activity between those of Turkish and those of Moroccan descent are statistically significant. Respondents with a Turkish background more often have contact with family in the country of origin by telephone or internet ($X^2 = 9{,}31$; df = 4; p = 0,054) and more often watch television channels from the country of origin, than do interviewees of Moroccan descent ($X^2 = 90{,}23$; df = 4; p = 0,000). Conversely, the latter are more involved in sending money ($X^2 = 15{,}39$; df = 2; p = 0,000) and sending goods or products ($X^2 = 26{,}63$; df = 2; p = 0,000) to the country of origin than respondents of Turkish descent.[6] The apparent difference between the two immigrant groups with regard to visiting the family in the country of origin is statistically not significant ($X^2 = 6{,}08$; df = 4; p = 0,193).

The fact that Turkish descendants more often have contact by telephone or internet with family members in the country of origin could be due to differences in migration modalities. Whereas Turkish migration was mainly a migration from rural areas, Moroccan immigrants to Belgium often originated from large cities and provincial

capitals (Surkyn & Reniers, 1996: 53). As Böcker (1995: 159) mentions, family and kinship ties often play a more important role for migrants originating from villages and rural areas than for migrants originating from cities.

The differences between the groups relating to the watching of television from the country of origin can most likely be explained by the unequal provision of 'own media' (Van Craen, Vancluysen & Ackaert, 2007: 39). The Turkish state broadcaster *TRT International* can be received in large parts of Flanders by cable, and dozens of commercial Turkish networks can be accessed by satellite dish. The range of specifically Moroccan television channels that can be accessed is considerably smaller. With a satellite dish only a limited number of Moroccan channels can be received. Viewers of Moroccan descent can watch satellite channels from other Arab countries (*MBC, Al Jazeera, ANN*, etc.), but this is small use to those who speak only Berber.

The differences between those of Turkish and those of Moroccan descent with regard to money transfers (and sending goods or products) could be at least partly explained by the policies that foreign governments have pursued with regard to the diaspora in past decades. From the beginning of migration, the Moroccan government has tried to maintain control of migrants in Europe by explicitly addressing all people of Moroccan descent as its "subjects" and by discouraging their integration in the receiving countries (de Haas & Plug, 2006: 610). By this means the government sought to bind emigrants to the political and financial interests of the Moroccan state and vital remittance flows were originated. These flows of currency are still of considerable economic importance to Morocco. In 2006 the (official) money transfers from emigrants made up 9,5 percent of Morocco's GDP (Ratha & Xu, 2009a). The Moroccan government does a great deal to maintain transfers and investment from those of Moroccan descent living abroad. For Turkey the importance of remittances, amounting to 0,3 percent of GDP, is far less pronounced (Ratha & Xu, 2009b).

Table 1: Transnational activities per immigrant group

Contact with family in Turkey/Morocco by telephone or internet			
	Turkish descent	Moroccan descent	Total
Never	9,1%	13,4%	10,9%
A few times a year	9,6%	14,6%	11,7%
About once a month	23,8%	25,2%	24,4%
Certainly once a week	48,7%	40,9%	45,5%
Almost every day	8,8%	5,9%	7,6%
Total	353 100%	254 100%	607 100%
Visits to family in Turkey/Morocco			
	Turkish descent	Moroccan descent	Total
Never	8,0%	6,4%	7,3%
Once every two to three years	31,5%	40,0%	35,0%
Once a year	57,1%	49,2%	53,8%
Twice a year	2,0%	3,2%	2,5%
More than twice a year	1,4%	1,2%	1,3%
Total	352 100%	250 100%	602 100%
Watching Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels			
	Turkish descent	Moroccan descent	Total
Never	1,4%	16,5%	7,7%
About once a month	2,5%	10,2%	5,7%
About one a week	4,8%	10,6%	7,2%
Multiple times a week	13,8%	17,3%	15,3%
Every day	77,4%	45,5%	64,0%
Total	354 100%	255 100%	609 100%
Transferring money to family in Turkey or Morocco			
	Turkish descent	Moroccan descent	Total
Never	53,8%	37,3%	47,0%
Once a year	21,3%	29,5%	24,7%
Multiple times a year	24,9%	33,2%	28,3%
Total	342 100%	241 100%	583 100%
Sending goods or products to family in Turkey or Morocco			
	Turkish descent	Moroccan descent	Total
Never	70,9%	51,9%	63,1%
Once a year	24,1%	34,9%	28,5%
Multiple times a year	4,9%	13,3%	8,4%
Total	344 100%	241 100%	585 100%

Transnational activities and social-cultural integration

In the literature two opposing views have been found concerning the bearing of transnational activities on the integration of immigrants (and their descendants) into the society of settlement: the first emphasizes the possibility that transnational activities go hand in hand with integration, the second highlights the mutual exclusivity of transnational practices and integration.

To gauge what impact transnational activities actually have on social-cultural integration, three regression analyses were carried out, each time with a different indicator of social-cultural integration as dependent variable: (self-reported) fluency in Dutch (a scale with two items: how much they could make out of letters and folders in Dutch, and how much they could make out of people speaking in Dutch; both items varying from 'very little' to 'very much'), the frequency with which respondents chat with those of Flemish backgrounds who live in the neighbourhood (a six-point scale running from 'never' to 'daily'), and how 'Belgian' respondents feet (a five-point scale from 'not at all Belgian' to 'very Belgian').

The independent variables used were the transnational activities already listed: contact with family in Turkey/Morocco by phone or internet, visiting family in Turkey/Morocco, watching Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels, transferring money to family in Turkey/Morocco and sending goods or products to family in Turkey or Morocco. The two last variables were recoded as two dummy variables (0 = no, 1 = yes). The items were added to the regression analysis separately. This will indicate which type of activity does or does not impact on the subdimensions of social-cultural integration. A difficulty that could arise is that two or more of the independent variables are highly correlated to one another. This is called the problem of multicollinearity (Field, 2005: 175). However, a correlation coefficient matrix with the ordinal variables makes clear that there may be no problem with multicollinearity for these variables: all the coefficients have a value lower than .40 (see table in appendix).

The background variables that were taken into account in the analyses were the ethnic-cultural background (0 = Turkish descent or 1 = Morrocan descent), gender (0 = woman or 1 = man), age, nationality (1= (also) Belgian or 0 = not Belgian), level of education, financial situation (subjective perception: from 1 = getting by with great difficulty on the total household income to 5 = getting by very comfortably on the total household income), the length of stay in Belgium, the ethnic-cultural composition of the neighbourhood (subjective perception: from 1 = almost exclusively people with another

background to 5 = almost exclusively people with a Flemish background) and the city where the respondent lives (Antwerp, Ghent or Genk = reference category). In a first step, only the background characteristics were included in the analysis, in a second step the transnational activities were added.

Table 2: Linear regression of Dutch language proficiency

** p < .05 - * p < .1	I			II		
	R^2 = .56			**R^2 = .57**		
	Standar-dized Coeffi-cients	**Std. Error**		**Standar-dized Coeffi-cients**	**Std. Error**	
(Constant)		0,251			0,339	
Background characteristics						
Ethnic-cultural background	0,033	0,086		-0,009	0,096	
Gender	**0,109****	0,084		**0,116****	0,087	
Age	**-0,561****	0,005		**-0,547****	0,005	
(Also) Belgian nationality	**0,072****	0,113		*0,072**	0,114	
Level of education	**0,196****	0,013		**0,201****	0,014	
(Perception of) financial situation	**0,066****	0,039		0,053	0,040	
Length of stay	**0,531****	0,005		**0,506****	0,005	
(Perception of) composition neighbourhood	*0,055**	0,038		**0,067****	0,038	
Antwerp	**-0,084****	0,106		-0,046	0,109	
Ghent	0,008	0,101		0,013	0,106	
Transnational activities						
Contact with family in Turkey/Morocco by telephone/internet				0,007	0,046	
Visiting family in Turkey/Morocco				-0,056	0,067	
Watching Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels				**-0,113****	0,038	
Sending money to family in Turkey/Morocco				0,009	0,091	
Sending products or goods to Turkey/Morocco				*-0,068**	0,096	

Table 3: Linear regression of chatting with native neighbours

** p < .05 - * p < .1	I			II		
	R^2 = .08			**R^2 = .09**		
	Standardized Coefficients	**Std. Error**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**Std. Error**	
(Constant)		0,424			0,576	
Background characteristics						
Ethnic-cultural background	-0,038	0,145		-0,043	0,167	
Gender	**0,112****	0,143		**0,136****	0,149	
Age	-0,020	0,008		-0,018	0,008	
(Also) Belgian nationality	**0,188****	0,189		**0,199****	0,194	
Level of education	0,064	0,023		0,083	0,024	
(Perception of) financial situation	0,002	0,067		-0,004	0,069	
Length of stay	0,004	0,008		0,061	0,009	
(Perception of) composition neighbourhood	0,054	0,064		0,075	0,066	
Antwerp	**0,110****	0,179		*0,091**	0,187	
Ghent	**0,109****	0,172		**0,127****	0,184	
Transnational activities						
Contact with family in Turkey/Morocco by telephone/internet				0,070	0,078	
Visiting family in Turkey/Morocco				-0,065	0,114	
Watching Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels				0,033	0,066	
Sending money to family in Turkey/Morocco				0,048	0,158	
Sending products or goods to Turkey/Morocco				0,004	0,168	

Table 4: Linear regression of the identification with Belgians

** p < .05 - * p < .1	I			II		
	R^2 = .15			**R^2 = .17**		
	Standar-dized Coeffi-cients	**Std. Error**		**Standar-dized Coeffi-cients**	**Std. Error**	
(Constant)		0,334			0,452	
Background characteristics						
Ethnic-cultural background	**0,188****	0,114		**0,121****	0,130	
Gender	**0,089****	0,112		**0,092****	0,116	
Age	0,024	0,006		0,054	0,006	
(Also) Belgian nationality	**0,180****	0,148		**0,183****	0,150	
Level of education	0,058	0,018		0,066	0,018	
(Perception of) financial situation	*0,058*	0,053		0,059	0,054	
Length of stay	*0,109**	0,006		0,088	0,007	
(Perception of) composition neighbourhood	0,054	0,050		0,058	0,051	
Antwerp	**-0,099****	0,140		-0,081	0,145	
Ghent	-0,036	0,135		-0,039	0,143	
Transnational activities						
Contact with family in Turkey/Morocco by telephone/internet				0,047	0,062	
Visiting family in Turkey/Morocco				0,024	0,090	
Watching Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels				**-0,151****	0,052	
Sending money to family in Turkey/Morocco				-0,025	0,122	
Sending products or goods to Turkey/Morocco				0,004	0,129	

The regression models make clear that the transnational activities of immigrants and their offspring make very little difference to the three indicators of social-cultural integration. After adding the variables the explanatory variance rises by 2 percent at most (from R^2=.15 to R^2=.17; see table 4). The analyses do, however, indicate a number of statistically significant effects.[7]

With regard to (self-reported) knowledge of Dutch (table 2), the results, when controlled for a series of background variables, show an effect from watching home-language television channels. The more often respondents of Turkish and Moroccan descent watch such television channels, the less well they master the majority language. There is also a correlation with the sending of goods to the country of origin. Respondents who carry out this transnational activity, are less fluent in Dutch than those who do not. This correlation is, however, only significant at the .1 level.

Background factors explaining level of Dutch fluency are gender, age, holding Belgian nationality, level of education, length of stay, and the composition of the neighbourhood. Men, younger people, members of immigrant communities who (also) hold Belgian nationality, the more highly educated, those who have lived in Belgium longer, and those living in 'white' neighbourhoods have greater mastery of Dutch than do women, older people, those without Belgian nationality, the less highly educated, those who have lived in Belgium for a short time, and those who live in ethnically concentrated neighbourhoods.

With regard to the influence of transnational activities on the frequency with which those with immigrant backgrounds chat to members of the majority population living in the same neighbourhood (table 3), the analyses show no correlation. None of the transnational activities added had any effect on this subdimension of social-cultural integration. There is only a correlation with the background variables of gender, Belgian nationality, and the city of residence: men, Belgians, and inhabitants of Antwerp and Ghent more frequently chat with native neighbours than do women, non-Belgians and inhabitants of Genk.

Identification as Belgian is also – controlling for background variables – as good as unrelated to transnational activities (table 4). The analyses show only an effect of television viewing. The more often members of immigrant comunities watch home-language television channels, the less Belgian they feel. Other effects are those of ethnic-cultural background, gender, and holding Belgian nationality: those of Moroccan descent, men, and those holding Belgian nationality, feel more Belgian than do those of

Turkish descent, women, and non-Belgians. The effect of the city disappears once the influence of watching Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels is introduced. This indicates that members of immigrant communities in Genk feel more Belgian than do members of immigrant communities in Antwerp because they less frequently watch television channels in a minority language.

Conclusions

This paper tried to fill two gaps in international research on transnational activities: the need for quantitative studies of transnationalism based on surveys or official statistics and the limited knowledge of the numerical incidence and significance of the phenomenon in Europe. In this contribution there were two central research questions: (1) To what extent are Moroccan and Turkish immigrants (and their descendants) living in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium involved in transnational activities? and (2) What is the impact of transnational activities on the social-cultural integration of people of Moroccan and Turkish descent in the country of settlement? To answer these questions we used representative survey data from 618 face-to-face interviews gathered in three Flemish cities with large Moroccan and Turkish communities (Antwerp, Genk and Ghent).

With regard to the first research question, our findings indicated that social-cultural and economic transnational activities are common practices in both ethnic-cultural communities. Only a small minority of the respondents never has contact with family in Turkey/Morocco, never visits family in the country of origin or never watches Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels. More than one out of two respondents transfers money to family (at least once a year) and more than one out of three sends goods or products to relatives in Turkey or Morocco. The transnational activity also differs according to the ethnic-cultural background of the interviewees: those of Turkish descent more often have contact with family (by telephone or internet) and more often watch television channels from the country of origin than do those of Moroccan descent, while the latter more often send money and goods or products to relatives in the country of origin than do those of Turkish descent.

The second research question focused on the relation between transnational activities and social-cultural integration. In the literature, two views were found: one stresses the coexistence of the two, the other states that they rule each other out. Three regression analyses with indicators of social-cultural integration as dependent variables indicated

that neither side is fully right. The impact depends on the type of activity. Most of the transnational activities investigated have no impact on any indicator of social-cultural integration. Frequent contacts with family (by telephone or the internet), regular visits to family in the country of origin or transferring money to family in Turkey/Morocco do not go hand in hand with a poorer command of the majority language, less contact with native neighbours or a weaker identification as ‘Belgian’. We have only found effects of watching television channels from the country of origin and a small effect of sending goods or products. The more Turkish and Moroccan descendants watch Turkish/Moroccan-language television channels, the poorer their Dutch language proficiency and the lesser they feel Belgian. Members of immigrant communities who send goods or products to the country of origin, have a poorer command of Dutch than do those who never do this.

Appendix

Table 5: Correlation matrix social-cultural transnational activities

	Contact with family	Visiting family in T/M	Viewing T/M-language television channels
Contact with family	1	0,360	0,258
Visiting family in T/M	0,360	1	0,103
Viewing T/M-language television channels	0,258	0,103	1

Notes

1. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (1999:2), *Global Networks* (2001:1), *International Migration Review* (2003:3) and *Population, Space and Place* (2004:10) published special issues about immigrant transnationalism in order to redress the weaknesses that had characterized some of the scholarship in this area.

2. In their regression analyses Snel, Engbersen and Leerkes (2006) controlled for group of origin; gender; length of stay; age of migration; education; (also) Dutch nationality; formal paid job and social benefit.

3. In Belgium the federal government determines migration, legal status and citizenship policies. Integration falls under the three regions (Flemish region, Walloon region and the Brussels Capital Region) and language communities (Dutch-speaking community, French-speaking community and the German-speaking community).

4. Since a drastic relaxation of Belgium's naturalization laws, large numbers of Turks and Moroccans have acquired Belgian nationality. The criterion 'current nationality' is therefore useless to building a realistic image of the target group.

5. According to the municipal registers, in 2008 Antwerp had a population of 35,803 people with a Moroccan and 11,689 people with a Turkish background (out of a total population of 471,100). In Genk there live 3,025 people with a Moroccan and 10,632 people with a Turkish background (out of a total population of 64,287) and Ghent counts 3,637 people of Moroccan and 13,718 people of Turkish descent (out of a total population of 237,250).

6. We have no information on the nature of the goods or the size of the sums of money. We can therefore not say with any certainty that the totality of flows of goods and money in the Moroccan community is larger than in the Turkish community.

7. Collinearity statistics (Variance Inflation Factors) indicate that there is no cause for concern with regards to multicollinearity. The largest VIF is smaller than 2. Myers (1990) suggests that a value of 10 is a value at which to worry.

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