Truly transnational: the political practices of middle-class migrants

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Truly Transnational: The Political Practices of Middle-Class Migrants

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Abstract

Recently various scholars have argued that transnational political involvement among migrants is a rather marginal phenomenon. This conclusion is based on the fact that migrants' political activities are much more often directed to their country of settlement than to their country of origin. However, by solely focusing on migrants' binational political ties, the relevance of political involvement beyond the borders of the nation-state is ignored. Focusing on the geographical scale of different types of political action, this article moves beyond a binational approach. Research on middle-class immigrants in the Netherlands shows that although involvement in homeland politics is indeed quite rare, 'truly' transnational political activities – i.e., activities which transcend the borders of the sending and receiving country – prove to be very common. Taking consumer boycotts as an example, the article further scrutinises the nature of this transnational involvement. It appears that although the migrants' activities in part resemble the 'universalistic' activism of non-migrants as studied in the literature on environmental and human rights movements, many of their actions are more 'particularistic' in character and related to ethnic and religious issues.

Keywords

Introduction

As was the case with transnational migration studies in general (cf. Carling 2007: 17; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 131), early research on political transnationalism consisted mainly of anthropological case studies focusing on migrants or migrant organisations known to be active across borders. These studies were later criticised for sampling on the dependent variable and consequently exaggerating the importance of transnational practices; the impression was given that every migrant is a 'transmigrant' (cf. Kivisto 2001: 556; Guarnizo

et al. 2003: 1213). Although in-depth case studies still exist (e.g. Caglar 2006; Smith and Bakker 2008), research on the quantitative importance of political transnationalism has become prevalent today (e.g. Itzigsohn 2000; Guarnizo et al. 2003; Snel et al. 2006; Waldinger 2008). Many of these latter studies have drawn the conclusion that transnational political action among migrants actually is a rather marginal phenomenon. Differences may exist between and within migrant groups, and some activities are more common than others, but the overall outcome is that only a relatively small percentage of migrants are politically active on a transnational level (cf. Itzigsohn 2000; Waldinger 2008). Migrants' political practices are much more often directed to the country of settlement than to the country of origin (cf. Koopmans et al. 2005; van Bochove et al. 2010).

Although these recent studies have convincingly shown that homeland politics are quite uncommon, this does not mean that transnational political involvement among migrants is altogether exceptional. Because most transnational migration scholars adopt a binational approach, they disregard the possibility that migrants are involved in political activities *beyond* the borders of their countries of origin and settlement. Such 'truly' transnational activities – that is to say, activities that transcend the borders of nation-states – are central to studies on transnational social movements, such as environmental or human rights movements (e.g. della Porta and Tarrow 2005). In contrast to transnational migration studies, however, studies in this field particularly focus on the transnational activities of 'non-migrants'. In this article, I attempt to unite these two lines of research, by exploring migrants' border-transcending political activities.

Based on 225 interviews with middle-class migrants in the Netherlands, I investigate the relative importance of 'truly' transnational political practices compared to the more commonly studied homeland practices. Although homeland politics indeed prove to be quite rare, it is found that many migrants do participate in political actions beyond a binational level. I will further scrutinise the nature of this transnational involvement, paying special attention to consumer boycotts – a type of political action that is almost exclusively concerned with border-transcending issues. To gain more insight in the specific features of migrants' political involvement, I compare their activities with those of 100 native Dutch middle-class respondents. Although both middle-class migrants and native Dutch participate in boycotts directed to 'universalistic' issues such as universal human rights or environmental problems, among the middle-class migrants more 'particularistic' boycotts are also found. It is remarkable to see how many have taken part in boycotts directed to issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war in Iraq, and inequality between blacks and whites. Finally, I will

examine the implications of these findings for the discussion of migrants' transnational involvement. In the following pages, I will first briefly outline my theoretical and methodological approach to migrants' transnational political involvement.

Understanding transnational political involvement

In migration studies, the term transnationalism is most commonly used to point at migrants' links with two nation-states. This is in accordance with Basch et al.'s classic and often-cited definition of transnationalism as migrants' 'social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (1994: 6). Levitt and Jaworsky (2007: 131) more recently argued the term includes 'not just the home and the host countries' but also 'other sites around the world'. Although some scholars adopt such a broader view (e.g. Levitt 2003; Bowen 2004; Colic-Peisker 2006; Mancheva 2008), a majority of empirical studies on migrants' transnational practices and identifications still conceptualise transnationalism in terms of the maintenance of ties with two countries (cf. Morawska 2009: 152-153). According to various critics, the term 'transnational' is in most cases used for migrant ties that might be better referred to as 'international', 'binational' or 'bilocal'. Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2004: 181), for instance, argue that international relations concern the relations *between* two states, whereas transnational relations go *beyond* states. Building on their ideas, Lucasssen (2006) argues transnationalism has become a container concept that needs to be unpacked. He claims that most studies in the field of transnational migration focus on bilocal or binational ties. Bilocal ties exist between specific places in the sending and receiving countries, such as migrants' relations with their relatives 'back home'. Studies that analyse migrant organisations and state institutions are mainly concerned with binational ties (Lucassen 2006: 20). These ties are more political in nature and concern national issues. According to Lucassen, both bilocal and binational ties cannot be called transnational in the strict sense of the word since they focus on links between (localities in) two states.

Lucassen observes a third type of migration studies that does concentrate on ties that transcend the countries of origin and settlement. These 'truly' transnational ties, which he calls panethnic and panreligious identifications, are mainly studied in research on diasporic groups, like Jews and Gypsies (Lucassen 2006: 19). Lucassen (2006: 32) argues that the history of Western Europe 'does not offer many examples' of such a border-transcending form of transnationalism. In literature that is not particularly concerned with migrants, however, the importance of 'supranational' activities and identifications is often said to be

growing. As nation-states are getting more and more exposed to and involved in global economic, cultural and political affairs, people's feelings of solidarity and hostility also expand (de Swaan 2007: 22-23, cf. Nederveen Pieterse 2007: 187). Such expanding contacts and conflicts receive much attention in the literature on social movement organisations (SMOs). Compared with studies on diasporic groups, which focus on 'particularistic' ethnic and religious feelings of solidarity, SMO scholarship is more interested in 'universalistic' ties, concerning environmental issues, and animal and human rights (cf. Koinova 2010: 156). Although, like the early research on transnational migration, many studies on social movements can be accused of selecting on the dependent variable and therefore overstating the importance of this type of action, it can be fruitful to adopt parts of their approach in studying the transnational political activities of migrants. Below, I briefly compare these two fields of study and explain my own approach.

In transnational migration studies, it is usually assumed that migrants' political activities are best understood in terms of the distinction between 'immigrant politics', directed at their position in the country of settlement, and 'homeland politics', directed at their country of origin (cf. Østergaard-Nielsen 2001: 762). Studies on transnational SMOs, on the other hand, are primarily interested in the border-transcending type of transnationalism (e.g. Khagram et al. 2002; della Porta and Tarrow 2005). Tarrow (2005: 29) defines transnational activists as 'people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts'. Remarkably enough, however, scholars of transnational activism also turn to a binational approach as soon as they start talking about migrant activism. Koopmans et al. (2005), for instance, include the 'supranational' level in their general analysis of the political claims making of various actors, but when focusing on migrants in particular, their main concern, too, is whether claims are directed at either the country of settlement or the country of origin. Tarrow (2005: 2) argues that transnational activists are connected to 'the local and the global'. But when dealing with migrants, he claims: 'Like transnational activists in general, immigrant activists live in two worlds – in their case the world of their adopted countries and the world of their homelands' (Tarrow 2005: 48). In this research, instead of falling into this 'binational trap', I will empirically investigate what geographical scales are important in migrants' political involvement.

Next to comparing the importance of homeland politics with what I call 'truly' transnational politics, I will further specify the latter form of political involvement, following Koinova's distinction between 'universalistic' and 'particularistic' transnational activities.

Based on both transnational SMO studies and transnational migration studies, these types of border-transcending feelings of solidarity are expected to be quite rare among migrants. Involvement in environmental or human rights issues is predominantly associated with non-migrants, whereas panethnic and panreligious identifications are believed to be restricted to specific diasporic groups. So far, however, these assumptions have not been empirically investigated.

Most studies of social movements use organisations as unit of analysis. In this article I am not interested in these organisations per se. Similarly to recent studies on migrants' transnational political activities, I collected data at the individual level. What I do adopt from studies on social movements is their focus on political activities that take place outside the 'arenas prescribed for it' (Beck 1997: 98). In addition to 'conventional' political activities, such as voting in elections or involvement in political parties, Barnes et al. (1979) have described the importance of more 'unconventional' political activities, such as participating in petitions, demonstrations and consumer boycotts. Although today such 'protest politics' (Rimmerman 2005: 35) are 'no longer unconventional but have become more or less normal actions for a large part of the citizenry' (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002: 302), in research on migrants' political involvement, this type of political action is usually not considered (Pero and Solomos 2010: 8). With a few exceptions[1], this is also the case in studies on migrants' cross-border political practices. Most studies concentrate on 'activities such as electoral participation (either as voters or as candidates)' and 'membership in political associations, parties or campaigns in two different countries' (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 136, cf. Itzigsohn et al. 1999: 324; Morawska 2009: 153). Since conventional political practices are almost naturally connected with membership in the nation-state, this approach leaves little room for finding types of border-transcending political involvement. In studying the geographical scale of migrants' political practices, I, therefore, study both 'conventional' and 'unconventional' actions. At the end of the next section, I will elaborate on the operationalisation of these various political practices and the geographical levels they concern.

Research methods and respondent characteristics

This article is based on results of the *Transnationalism and Urban Citizenship Project*, conducted between 2007 and 2008 among 225 middle-class migrants in the Netherlands and an additional 100 members of the native Dutch middle class. The main focus of this project is on the citizenship practices socioeconomically successful migrants undertake at different

geographical levels (cf. van Bochove et al. 2010). Instead of investigating only practices directed at the countries of settlement and origin, respondents were asked what activities they have undertaken, where these took place, and what actors and/or issues they concerned. The research combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The respondents were interviewed on a face-to-face basis, using a questionnaire consisting of open- and closed-ended items. In this study, which has an exploratory character, I will present the frequencies of the respondents' answers to give a preliminary insight into the patterns of their political involvement. The qualitative data will provide further explanation of these findings.

The interviews were conducted in Rotterdam, the second largest city in the Netherlands and the city that has the largest proportion of immigrants of any Dutch city. This research focuses on Rotterdam's three largest migrant groups: Surinamese (9 percent of the population), Turks (8 percent), and Moroccans (6 percent) (COS 2008). From each of these groups, 75 respondents were interviewed. Only members of the middle class were selected. Middle-class migrants are an interesting group for studying political involvement, because diverging expectations exist regarding the geographical scale of their activities. These migrants have a relatively high education level which, according to assimilation theory, facilitates their integration into the host society and consequently decreases their homeland attachment (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1216). However, it is also known that a close relationship exists between political participation and education. Middle-class migrants can be expected to be more interested in political issues than migrants with a lower education level. According to Guarnizo et al. (2003: 1229), this political involvement is not limited to the country of settlement, but also concerns homeland issues. Homeland political practices, which are quite exceptional among migrants in general, are thus supposed to be more common among middle-class migrants. I will investigate if this is indeed the case among the migrants studied in this research. Moreover, I will determine whether their political practices also involve issues beyond these two countries.

Following the Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP, in this research migrants are counted as middle class if they meet at least one of the following three criteria: (1) They have a job that requires at least intermediate vocational education, (2) They work as independent entrepreneurs for at least a year, (3) They have a gross income per year of at least € 22.921 (cf. Dagevos et al. 2006). According to the first criterion, which focuses on migrants' job level, 32 percent of the Surinamese population in the Netherlands belong to the middle class (Dagevos et al. 2006: 121). The percentage among Turkish and Moroccan migrants is considerably lower (17 and 14 percent, respectively), but the size of the middle

class is growing among these groups as well. In the period 1991-2005 the middle class among the Turkish and Moroccan population doubled in size (Dagevos et al. 2006: 123). Although comparable figures are not available at city level, Rotterdam, as well as other large cities in the Netherlands, is an important location for the formation of an immigrant middle class.

Since reliable data on the presence of middle-class migrants in Rotterdam are scarce, randomly selecting respondents who meet the above-described criteria would be almost impossible. Therefore, chain referral sampling was used to recruit respondents. Chain referral sampling differs from snowball sampling in that 'multiple networks are strategically accessed to expand the scope of investigation beyond one social network' (Penrod et al. 2003: 102). In this research, multiple 'snowballs' were developed from various starting points. The interviewers recruited initial respondents through various businesses, governmental institutions, community organisations and their own social networks. These initial respondents were then asked if they knew any other potential respondents, preferably outside their own direct circle of family, friends and colleagues. Through these strategies, a varied group of respondents was obtained. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that the results are representative for the whole migrant and native Dutch middle class in Rotterdam. Probably, given that some respondents were recruited from community organisations, there is an overrepresentation of locally active citizens. Consequently, from this research it is not possible to make definitive statements about how many middle-class immigrants or native Dutch in Rotterdam participate in various kinds of political activities. The tables in this article, therefore, present absolute numbers; only Table 1, which compares the general political involvement of the migrant and native Dutch respondents, shows percentages.

The different respondent groups are largely comparable regarding their education level, age, male to female ratio and – in the case of the Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan groups – immigrant generation. About two thirds of the respondents have a higher vocational or university degree. A majority of the respondents are between the age of 25 and 45. In all four respondent groups, the number of male and female respondents is approximately equal. The group of middle-class migrant respondents consists of different immigrant generations. About one-third of these respondents were born in the Netherlands, another third went there before the age of twelve, and the remainder grew up in their country of origin.[2]

The migrant respondents differ with regard to their citizenship status and religion. A rough distinction can be made between Surinamese respondents on the one hand and Turkish and Moroccan on the other. Surinam, a small country in northern South America, was a colony of the Netherlands until 1975. After the country gained its independence, many

Surinamese chose Dutch citizenship and came to the Netherlands. In this research, mainly Creole and Hindustani Surinamese were interviewed, who respectively have West-African and Indian descent. These groups form the majority of Surinamese in the Netherlands. Because Surinamese law does not permit having multiple nationalities, a large majority of Surinamese in the Netherlands only have Dutch citizenship. Of the Surinamese respondents, 72 have a Dutch passport, three a Surinamese one. The presence of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands stems from the period in the 1960s when the Dutch government actively recruited 'guest workers' from the Mediterranean. In the 1970s many Turkish and Moroccan women and children came to the Netherlands because of family reunion. Just like the majority of Turkish and Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands, most of the respondents from these groups have dual nationality. One Turkish respondent and two Moroccan respondents only have the nationality of their home country; four Turkish respondents only have a Dutch passport.[3] Unlike Turkish emigrants, Moroccan citizens who live abroad so far do not have the right to vote in homeland elections (cf. Ben-Layashi 2007).

About 95 per cent of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands are Muslims, compared to 18 per cent among the Surinamese (cf. FORUM 2008: 10). Of the Turkish respondents, 64 call themselves Muslims; among the Moroccans, 73. The others state they are not religious. Within the group of Surinamese respondents, more variety exists: 43 are Christians, 16 are Hindu, 5 are Muslims, and most others do not have a religion. Among the 100 native Dutch respondents, the most common answers were not religious (54), Christian (39), and Muslim (3). These background characteristics contribute to a better understanding of the respondents' political activities. Because of the exploratory nature of this article, however, I will not statistically test the influence of these variables.

The distinction between conventional and unconventional political involvement and the analytical separation of different geographical levels play an important role in this article. These concepts are operationalised as follows.

Conventional political involvement consists of activities taking place in the formal political arena. This type of political involvement is examined by looking at the following activities: (1) Having voted in the most recent elections; (2) Currently being a member of a political party; (3) Currently being a volunteer for a political party.

Unconventional political involvement consists of political activities through alternative channels. Such 'protest politics' are measured by looking at the following indicators: (1)

Having participated in a demonstration in the past year; (2) Having boycotted certain products in the past year; (3) Having signed a petition in the past year.

The *geographical scale* refers to the geographical levels or spatial scales the different types of political involvement concern. The following geographical levels are distinguished: (1) The country of settlement, i.e., activities concerning the migrants' country of residence: the Netherlands; (2) The country of origin, i.e., activities concerning the migrants' homeland: Surinam, Turkey or Morocco; (3) The transnational level, i.e., activities concerning issues that transcend the borders of the countries of settlement and origin.[4] In the section on consumer boycotts, these transnational activities are further specified into universalistic and particularistic activities. The former concern universal human, animal or environmental rights and the latter relate to ethnic and religious issues.

Regarding the geographical scale of unconventional political practices, a distinction can be made between the questions of *where* a certain practice takes place, *to whom* it is directed, and *what* kind of issue it refers to (cf. Koopmans et al. 2005: 254-265). In some cases, the location, the addressee and the issue will concern the same geographical level. For instance, a demonstration taking place in the Netherlands directed to the Dutch government about the national health system can be coded as a 'country of settlement' demonstration. Likewise, an online petition directed to the Israeli government about the situation in Gaza can be coded as a 'transnational' petition. However, in other cases, different geographical levels come together in a single practice (cf. Tarrow 2005: 15). For instance, a demonstration in the Netherlands can be directed to the Dutch government's policy concerning the war in Iraq. In this article, the question of what issue a certain practice concerns will be decisive in determining its geographical scale, because it is this question that is most informative about the nature of respondents' political involvement.

Beyond the homeland? The geographical scale of migrants' political practices

This section examines what political practices the respondents are involved in and what geographical level these practices concern. To give an impression of the relative importance of different types of political involvement, Table 1 shows the percentage of migrants who have participated in various conventional and unconventional practices, regardless of their geographical level. The native Dutch respondents are added for comparison.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents participating in conventional and unconventional political practices

Type of political involvement	Migrant middle class (N=225)	Native Dutch middle class (N=100)
Conventional		
Voting in the elections	92 (N=207)	96 (N=96)
Being a member of a political party	18 (N=40)	13 (N=13)
Volunteering in a political party	10 (N=22)	5 (N=5)
Unconventional		
Participating in a demonstration	8 (N=18)	4 (N=4)
Boycotting a product	31 (N=69)	36 (N=36)
Signing a petition	36 (N=82)	25 (N=25)

The patterns of political participation are very similar among the migrant and the native Dutch respondents. Among both groups voting is the most common activity: more than 90 per cent of the respondents report that they have done so in the most recent local, national and/or homeland elections.[5] The other conventional political practices are much less common. Apart from voting, the most widespread political activities undertaken by these middle-class migrants are signing a petition and boycotting a product. Up to a third of the respondents have participated in one of these unconventional practices. No large differences exist among the three migrant groups with regard to their participation in various political practices. More important for the purpose of this article, however, is the question of what geographical levels these political practices concern. Are the middle-class migrants studied in this research mainly involved in political practices concerning their country of settlement, or do they also participate in homeland politics? And to what extent are these migrants involved in 'truly' transnational practices? I will first examine the geographical scale of their conventional practices, and then I will scrutinise their unconventional practices.

Table 2 shows that conventional practices solely take place on a (bi)national level. This is hardly surprising, given that electoral responsiveness is lacking on the supranational level (cf. della Porta and Tarrow 2005: 5). Regarding homeland politics, the figures confirm the results of previous research. Even among these middle-class migrants – who can be

expected to possess the necessary financial means and human capital to be politically active in the country of origin – practices such as voting in the homeland elections or being involved in a homeland political party are exceptional (cf. Itzigsohn 2000; van Bochove et al. 2010). Of the three Surinamese respondents who stated they have the right to vote in the homeland elections, none has made use of this right. Among the Turkish respondents, 71 have Turkish nationality and therefore can participate in the homeland elections. Six of them have actually voted in the most recent elections. They have done so at a polling station at the airport or at customs during their holidays in Turkey. Many of the respondents in the three groups do not seem to be concerned about whether or not they have the right to vote in their country of origin. Moroccan respondents in particular say they have little trust in homeland political parties, since actual power resides with the king (cf. van Bochove et al. 2010: 352).

Table 2. Number of migrants participating in conventional political practices, classified by geographical scale (N=225)

Conventional political practices	**Country of settlement**	**Country of origin**	**'Truly' transnational**
Voting in the elections	207	6	0
Being a member of a political party	40	0	0
Volunteering in a political party	22	0	0

It is often argued that people with low trust in or no access to formal political institutions who do want to exert influence on certain issues resort to unconventional political practices (cf. Inglehart and Catterberg 2002: 302). However, Table 3 shows that similar to conventional political involvement, among these middle-class migrants unconventional participation concerning homeland issues is exceptional.[6] As is the case with conventional practices, unconventional practices are much more often directed to the country of settlement than to the country of origin (cf. van Bochove et al. 2010). Petitions concerning the country of settlement, for instance, include actions against the Dutch immigration and integration policy or in favour of the establishment of a local youth centre. Country of settlement demonstrations concern, among other things, calls for higher wages and protests against government cuts. Examples of unconventional practices related to homeland issues are attending a demonstration for cheaper airline tickets to Surinam, signing a petition against the proposal of

abolishing dual nationality, and signing a petition in favour of the opening of a medical research centre in Turkey.

Table 3. Number of migrants participating in unconventional political practices, classified by geographical scale (N=225)

Unconventional political practices	Country of settlement	Country of origin	'Truly' transnational
Participating in a demonstration	8	6	6
Signing a petition	47	4	32
Boycotting a product	2	1	65

The fact that unconventional political involvement in homeland issues is quite rare does not mean that these migrants are almost exclusively interested in Dutch local or national politics. Although it is common to analyse migrants' political practices in terms of 'immigrant' versus 'homeland' politics, the data in Table 3 show that in doing so, important 'truly' transnational practices are ignored. Unconventional political practices concerning issues beyond the country of origin prove to be much more common than homeland politics. Activities coded as transnational concern issues such as child labour, animal rights, the war in Iraq, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This category thus covers a wide range of issues that need further classification. Taking a closer look at consumer boycotts, in the next section, I will argue that 'truly' transnational political practices can be categorised into practices based on 'universalistic' and on 'particularistic' feelings of solidarity.

Consumer boycotts: a truly transnational affair

In his extensive study on consumer boycotts in the US, Friedman (1999: 4) defines a boycott as 'an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace'. Although Friedman (1999: 8) observes an increase in the number of transnational claims regarding environmental issues and animal rights, he argues transnational boycotts occur 'far less frequently' than national or local ones. Compared to other political activities, however, the boycotts described by the respondents in this research are exceptionally 'unbounded'. Of the 69 migrant respondents who have participated in a boycott action, 65 have boycotted products because of

transnational issues. Among the native Dutch respondents, this is 34 of the 36 respondents. Many of these boycotts indeed concern 'universalistic' issues, but unlike Friedman, I also found many 'particularistic' transnational boycotts, based on feelings of religious or ethnic solidarity (see Table 4).[7] I will elucidate these two types below.

Table 4. Number of respondents participating in different types of transnational boycotts

Ethnic group	Universalistic transnational boycott	Particularistic transnational boycott
Surinamese (N=75)	12	11
Turks (N=75)	12	8
Moroccans (N=75)	10	21
Native Dutch (N=100)	32	0
Total	**66**	**40**

Universalistic transnational boycotts

According to Stevenson (2003: 120-121), not only organisations like Amnesty International and Greenpeace, but also consumer boycotts directed at brands such as Nike and Gap (accused of using sweatshops) herald 'the real possibility of compassion becoming global'. Boycotts based on such 'global compassion' are common among both the migrant and the native Dutch respondents. This type of boycott, which I categorise as 'universalistic', is unrelated to the respondents' ethnic or religious background and concerns universal human rights, animal rights and environmental issues. The targets of these boycotts are usually companies or products accused of violating certain rights.

> I don't really boycott products, but I do keep an eye on corporate responsibility. If I know that a product is unsustainable or unethical, I won't buy it. Ikea, for instance, uses child labour, so I don't shop there anymore. (Moroccan man, 44 years old)

> If I know that a certain company uses child labour, I don't buy their products. For instance, I would not wear Nike shoes. (Native Dutch man, 38 years old)

> Some products you just do not eat or use, because you know bad things have happened with it. For instance, I do not eat tuna, because dolphins are killed in the nets used to catch tuna. (Surinamese woman, 38 years old)

Many universalistic boycotts have the character of what are sometimes called 'buycotts' (Friedman 1999: 201). In the case of buycotts, actions are not so much concerned with punishing firms for their misdeeds, but rather with rewarding companies or products which are sustainable or ethically responsible.

> I try to be conscious of what I buy and what I do not buy. So I buy Max Havelaar products, because they are fair trade. (Turkish woman, 30 years old)

> I use 'green electricity'. It was a lot of trouble getting it, but I think in this way you really can exert influence, more than through politics. If everyone in the Netherlands would use green electricity, this would really be a signal. (Native Dutch woman, 37 years old)

> I only buy cosmetic products at the Body Shop, because they are animal friendly. (Turkish woman, 41 years old)

Next to these universalistic actions, which concern issues that are extensively discussed by scholars of transnational SMOs, boycotts that are more 'particularistic' in nature appear to be important as well. Many actions of the middle-class migrant respondents concern border-transcending issues related to their own ethnic or religious background. This type of political action receives less attention in transnational social movement scholarship and is also largely overlooked in transnational migration studies.

Particularistic transnational boycotts

Various respondents, mainly Surinamese and some Moroccans, boycott clothes of the American designer Tommy Hilfiger, because they read on the internet that during an interview on the Oprah Winfrey Show, Hilfiger stated that his clothes are not meant for African-Americans, Latinos and other ethnic minorities. Although this interview never actually took place, some respondents complied with online calls to boycott his products.

> I boycott Tommy Hilfiger because he has said that non-whites shouldn't wear his clothes. I don't care that he denies to have said this. The Germans have denied a lot as well. (Surinamese woman, 31 years old)

> I boycott Tommy Hilfiger, because he said: 'If I had known that blacks and Latinos would wear my clothes, I would never have made them'. (Moroccan woman, 41 years old)

Although the above-described 'panethnic' boycott is aimed at punishing a specific company, particularistic boycotts more often target foreign governments. Friedman (1999: 14) calls such boycotts 'transformational boycotts', because 'their objective is to transform issues concerned with objectionable practices external to the marketplace (such as a foreign government's oppressive policies) into consumer-accessible marketplace issues'. Some Surinamese respondents of African descent, for instance, say they boycott South African products because of the country's perceived continuing policy of apartheid.

> I boycott South African politics, by means of boycotting its products, such as South African wine. Some people say South Africa is an equal society now, but I don't believe that. Power still is not equally distributed. (Surinamese man, 50 years old)

> I boycott South African products. That is deeply rooted in me. For instance, I do not by South African wine. It is not a just society. (Surinamese woman, 63 years old)

Moroccan and Turkish respondents' actions are often directed against America and Israel. Two Surinamese respondents who are Muslims also participate in actions directed to these countries. Feelings of hostility towards America and Israel are closely related and mainly have to do with the situation in the Middle East. Although Giddens (2002: xix) argues that anti-Americanism is mainly found in Islamic nations and in poor African countries in which

American capitalism is seen as the source of their poverty, the findings of this research indicate that such sentiments also exist among socioeconomically successful Muslims in western societies (cf. Ameli 2002: 282). The main reasons respondents boycott American products are the country's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Iraq. Many Muslims in Europe are concerned about the fate of Muslims in other parts of the world (Modood 2007: 137). Through protest actions such as boycotts and demonstrations, these 'panreligious' identifications become politicised (cf. Bradley 1996: 26). One Moroccan male explicitly says he never buys 'products of Jewish manufacturers'; more often, however, these boycotts target companies which are seen as symbols of the United States, such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola.

> I boycott American products. I don't buy Coca-Cola because America is involved in several wars and supports Israel. (Surinamese woman, 24 years old)

Another well-known border-transcending issue related to religion is the 'cartoon controversy'. In 2005 the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, which 'were being reprinted in fifty countries' and led to 'anti-Danish demonstrations and boycotts virtually across the Islamic world in early 2006' (Nederveen Pieterse 2007: 180). Some Moroccan and Turkish respondents have joined these actions. However, it was not always easy for them to find Danish products to boycott. For instance, a Turkish respondent said he has boycotted Dove soap, a Danish product according to him, whereas a Moroccan respondent has boycotted the same soap, because it was said to be a product from Israel. The Dove brand is actually Dutch in origin. Paradoxically, in shaping their transnational identities, these respondents are searching for national symbols that often prove difficult to find in a globalised world.

Although many migrant respondents participate in particularistic boycotts, not all of them are convinced that these actions will really make a difference.

> I used to boycott Coca-Cola and McDonald's, because they financially support the state of Israel, so Israel can continue its warfare. But to me, it's all or nothing. If you boycott these companies, there are 101 other companies you should boycott. But I don't, so I stopped boycotting altogether. I asked myself if my one euro would make any difference. Not that I eat at McDonald's that often now, but I do drink Coca-Cola. It's just the best coke there is. (Moroccan woman, 26 years old)

However, because they do not have many alternatives with which to exert influence on these transnational issues, many respondents say boycotting products is better than doing nothing.

> I boycott Israeli products, because I disagree with Israel's policy and I don't want to support it by buying its products. It's probably nonsense. I don't know if it helps at all. But at least I do something. (Moroccan woman, 35 years old)

Conclusion and debate

Recently, Rainer Bauböck (2010) has argued that the term 'transnationalism' as used in transnational migration studies can be regarded for various reasons as a misnomer. However, instead of abandoning the concept altogether, Bauböck suggests it is more fruitful to further contextualise and specify it. In studying the geographical scale of middle-class migrants' political activities, I have followed this strategy. This exploratory research has at least three important implications for the study of migrants' transnational activities and identifications.

The first point relates to the fact that migrants are often regarded as people living 'dual lives'. This is not only true for politicians who are worried about migrants' potential divided loyalty, symbolised by dual citizenship, but also for transnational migration scholars who seem to be convinced that migrants' activities and identifications are best studied on a binational level. Since they only focus on the ties migrants maintain with their countries of origin and settlement, many studies in this field become a self-fulfilling prophecy: the conclusion is always that migrants are in one way or another 'divided' between two countries. By not predetermining the geographical scale of migrants' involvement, this research made it possible to detect various kinds of 'truly' transnational identifications. The middle-class migrants not only identify themselves as 'Surinamese', 'Turks' or 'Moroccans' or as 'citizens of the Netherlands', they also feel connected to 'blacks' and 'Muslims' in other parts of the world and as 'world citizens', they are concerned about universal human rights and global environmental problems. Colic-Peisker (2006: 213) argues such transnationalism beyond the homeland is typical for relatively highly educated migrants, like the ones studied in this article. The working class, according to her, 'largely fits into the dominant model of transnationalism as a way of living between the "old" and the "new" country'. Future research is needed to further investigate this relationship between class, binationalism and nation-state transcending involvement.

Second, differences and similarities between the transnational practices and identifications of migrants and non-migrants deserve future attention. In transnational migration studies, cross-border activities and plural identities are usually regarded as if they are specific for migrants. However, present-day advanced communication and transportation technologies, which are seen as the most important condition for migrants' binational ties (cf. Morawska 2009: 12), are available to non-migrants as well. Although the examples of transnational activism given in social movement literature – such as attending an anti-G8 demonstration or fighting whalers on a Greenpeace boat – are quite exceptional, many of the non-migrants studied here do sign online petitions or search the internet for product information to protest against border-transcending environmental, animal or human rights issues. Such 'universalistic' transnational activities are also found among the middle-class migrants, although to a somewhat lesser extent. Among these respondents, especially 'particularistic' feelings of solidarity stand out. While della Porta (2005: 200) argues activism is increasingly based on 'flexible' and 'tolerant' identities instead of on experienced stigmatisation and the need to build a 'we', among these middle-class migrants exclusive identities based on ethnicity and religion are still important. This type of transnational solidarity might be a form of what Morawska (2009: 197) calls 'oppositional transnationalism', which is a reaction to prejudice and stigmatisation experienced in the country of settlement. Together with migrant/non-migrant comparisons, this possible relationship between perceived exclusion in the host society and panethnic or panreligious identifications needs further examination.

Finally, the universalistic and particularistic transnational identifications found in this research are mainly expressed through boycott actions and petitions. Such actions are often said to be based on 'thin' solidarity, that is to say, solidarity that is rather anonymous in nature and does not require a high level of personal commitment (cf. Komter 2005: 198; Turner and Rojek 2001: 220). Practices like performing voluntary work in the local ethnic community, which also proves to be quite common among these middle-class migrants (cf. van Bochove et al. 2010: 352), are argued to be founded on a 'thicker' type of solidarity, since such activities are often based on 'personal responsibility and commitment toward concrete human beings' (Komter 2005: 198). However, 'local', face-to-face activities are not self-evidently more meaningful to individuals than 'global' or 'virtual' ones (cf. de Koster 2010). Further empirical research is needed to learn more about the intensity of panethnic, panreligious and universalistic feelings of solidarity. In studying such ties, instead of equating the local with

'thick' and the global with 'thin' solidarity, the geographical scale and substantiality of activities and identifications should be treated as two different dimensions.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Exceptions are, for instance, Guarnizo et al. (2003) and Snel et al. (2006). However, in these studies unconventional practices are only studied on a binational level. Studies of the Kurdish diaspora (e.g. Wahlbeck 1998) often do pay attention to unconventional practices beyond the nation-state level.

2. In the case of respondents of Surinamese, Turkish or Moroccan origin who were born in the Netherlands, when the terms 'homeland' or 'country of origin' are used in this article, they refer to the respondents' parents' country of origin.

3. Moroccan emigrants cannot give up their homeland citizenship.

4. In this article, the European level is not taken into account because, apart from voting in the European elections, none of the declared activities were directed to the European Union or explicitly concerned EU issues.

5. The fact that such a high percentage of migrant and native Dutch respondents have voted in the most recent elections can be partly explained by their high education level and the probable overrepresentation of locally active respondents. Moreover, in the local elections in 2006 the turnout rates among Moroccan and Turkish migrants in Rotterdam were remarkably high, because many migrants wished to make a statement against the anti-immigrant sentiments of the right-wing party Liveable Rotterdam (cf. van Bochove et al. 2010: 352).

6. In Table 3, a single respondent can be counted more than once, for instance when he or she has participated in more than one petition concerning different geographical levels. In the case of signing a petition, five migrant respondents did not remember what their action was about.

Of the migrant respondents who boycotted a product, one did not remember what product she had boycotted and one did not want to disclose this.

7. In Table 4, a single respondent is counted twice when he or she has participated in both types of transnational boycotts. One Dutch respondent who participated in a boycott did not remember what the aim of the action was. Another participated in a boycott action concerning the Dutch national level. Six boycotts coded as 'transnational' could not be easily classified as either 'universalistic' or 'particularistic' and are, therefore, not displayed in Table 4. These boycotts, for instance, concerned statements against the global capitalist system and a gender issue.

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