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Transnationalising Civil Society?:
'Theoretical and Empirical
Reflections on how to
Transnationalise Citizenship

Martin Bak Jorgensen

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Abstract

The paper takes a transnational perspective on developing an analytical framework for understanding how transnationalism interacts with civil society and how immigrant organisations use transnational strategies to challenge the pre-given positions of immigrants within given integration- and citizenship-regimes. Locating transnationalism as part of the political opportunity structure also indicates that the state(s) to some degree can facilitate transnationalism, directly and indirectly. A substantial part of political engagement now occurs via transnational channels. What is uncertain is to what degree, what kind of groups and which types of aims are pursued via these channels and this type of engagement. The paper ends with some preliminary empirical findings of transnational engagement and organisation among Alevis and (Turkish) Assyrians in Denmark, Sweden, and Germany.

Keywords

Transnationalism, political opportunity structures, citizenship, collective identity constructions, collective strategies

Author

Martin Bak Jørgensen, PhD fellow, SPIRIT & Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark, Aalborg University. Email: martinjo@ihis.aau.dk.

Introduction¹

Immigration has challenged both the ideal of the homogeneous society as well as the conventional notion of citizenship as phrased by T. H. Marshall (1992 [1950]). Social communities and organisations such as trade unions, political parties or religious and cultural association have usually been given the ability to enhance relations between individuals and to extend trust, values, identity and social belonging. Whether we focus on the individual or on the role of the organisation as an intervening institution between the state, the political system and the citizen in strengthening democracy (Mikkelsen, 2003), such types of engagement also will have an effect on the processes of immigrant integration. While integration (either in the form of assimilation or in a multicultural manner (Vasta, 2007)) has been the preferred model for incorporating immigrants into nation-states and civil society it can be argued that processes of transnationalism are challenging this way of incorporating newcomers and are transforming civil society by providing immigrants with more options for participating in political processes than the national model offers.

Although institutional arrangements, in this case the citizenship regimes and integration policies, are claimed to be decisive for both the processes of immigrant organisations and the claims allowed into the political decision-making process, the ability to penetrate these structures in order to defend interests and raise new claims should also be recognized. Immigrant organisations are not just victims of the receiving country's political governing and decisions; rather their agency in socio-political discourse should be recognized and their influence on political decision-making process investigated (Yurdakul, 2006). This type of civil engagement will most often occur within the nation-state but at other occasions it will be directed at a cross-national or transnational level. Thus, transnationalism contains (at least) the possibility for social transformation and can be a site for struggle.

This paper focuses on the transnational level. It first presents theoretical reflections towards developing an analytical framework for understanding how transnationalism interacts with civil society and how immigrant organisations use transnational strategies to challenge the pre-given positions of immigrants within the given integration- and citizenship-regime. Locating transnationalism as part of the political opportunity structure also indicates that the state(s) to some degree can facilitate transnationalism, directly and indirectly.

Although its transformative power is still to be investigated it can be claimed that a substantial part of political engagement now takes place via transnational channels. What is uncertain is to what degree, what kind of groups and which types of aims are pursued via these channels and this type of engagement. The second part of the paper ends with some preliminary

empirical findings, some would say rather sketchy, of respectively the Armenian issue and transitional engagement and organisation amongst Alevis, and (Turkish) Assyrians in Denmark, Sweden, and Germany.

The political opportunity structure approach and ethnic relations

Lately we have seen a number of comparative studies arguing that when ethnic groups coming from the same area arrive in different countries or different cities with different political institutions their behaviour will also be different (Ireland, 1994; Koopmans & Statham, 2000; Koopmans et al. 2005; Soysal, 1994). These institutions have been captured by the concept of 'political opportunity structure' (POS). Sidney Tarrow defines it as: "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow, 1994: 85). This approach implies that collective action and organization are part of a political process shaped by the opportunities and constraints offered by the political environment and structures. This is perhaps the main argument for focusing on the institutional configurations in terms of cultural and formal criteria for inclusion in the host society. Choosing a comparative research design within this framework will reveal which factors are decisive for collective actions and behaviour and identify the specific institutions within the countries or cities included in the analysis.

The study of political opportunity structures was originally developed for new social movements as well as drawing on the theories of resource mobilization (e.g. Kriesi et al., 1992; McCarthy & Zald, 1977) but has recently been applied to the field of international migration and ethnic relations, most notably perhaps in the work of Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham. In their analysis, the main political opportunity structures for incorporation of ethnic minority groups are considered to be the citizenship regime of the given national context. They seek to move beyond the rather constraining framework of defining a given country as being either exclusivist, assimilationist or multiculturalist and rightly argue that it is better to replace the three ideologies (or philosophies in the terms of Adrian Favell (1998)) with a two-dimensional space for conceptualizing the dynamics of citizenship (Koopmans & Statham, 2000). This space is defined by the formal access to citizenship on the one hand and the amount of cultural difference and group rights that citizenship allows on the other. The vertical axis covers a continuum of conceptions of citizenship from those that require ethnic bonds as the basis for the constitution

for political community (*jus sanguinis*) to those that emphasize equal civil rights and distribute citizenship on the basis of territoriality (*jus soli*).

In reality most countries will not have such clear-cut criteria but apply a combination of these two options. On the horizontal axis, the continuum runs from conceptions of citizenship that insist on a single uniform culture shared by all people of society, which newcomers should assimilate into, to cultural pluralist conceptions, that seek to retain, or stimulate diversity and cultural heterogeneity. Combining the two dimensions creates four 'extremes'; the assimilationist, the segregationist, the Universalist, and the pluralistic model. However, it should be obvious that these ideal types rarely are found empirically in their purest form. The boxes indicate the four ideal-typical configurations of citizenship derived from this conceptual space. Consequently, it could be argued that most national regimes, political actors and policies will be situated somewhere between the boxes, rather than belonging to a single defined ideal-type. That is exactly the analytical force of this approach, that it can include the complexity of reality. I will not go through these models in detail, as Koopmans et al. already have done so (Koopman & Statham, 2000: 20-29; Koopmans et al., 2005: 11-16); likewise have other researchers who have used this approach (e.g. Togeby, 2003, Vermeulen, 2006).

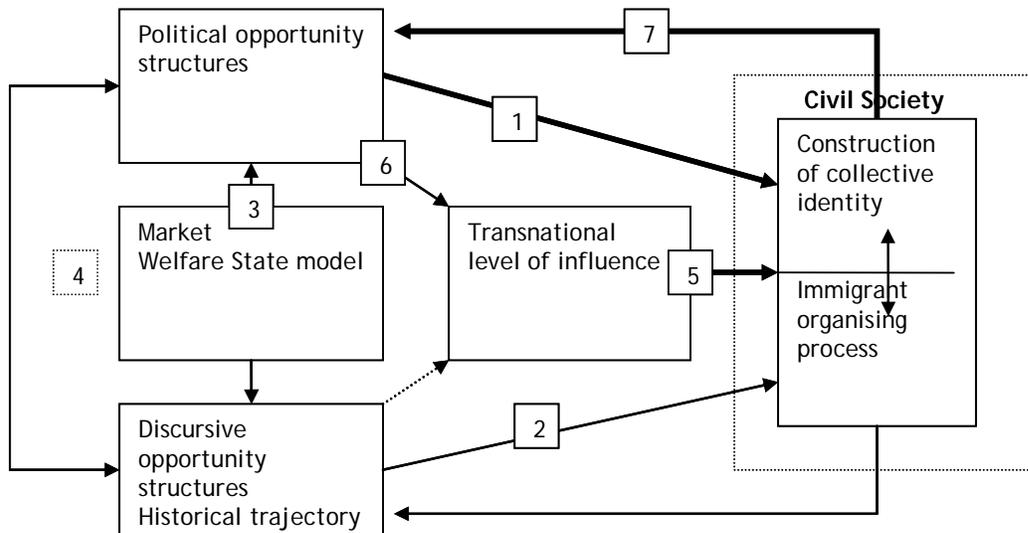
One thing however, their model does not incorporate is transnational formations, though it was not intended to. Their model first and foremost captures the structural frame in terms of policies of citizenship, integration and diversity and thus indirectly the structural position of the immigrants in the given context in terms of access and influence to the opportunity structures. However, other researchers have tried to include the relationship between the historically evolved international relations between the immigrants, the country of origin, and the country of residence under the heading of 'transnational political opportunity structures' (TPOS) (Nell, 2004; Ögelman, 2003).

However, the definition of these has been somewhat reductionist in the sense that transnational engagement is seen solely as the outcome of a structure where the homeland offers little room for discussing ethnic, religious, and other societal issues in combination with a host country that grants considerable associational freedoms but having failed to absorb foreigners into society (Ögelman, *ibid*: 164). If not reductionist it certainly leaves out the possibility that transnational engagement can be more than just reactionary, e.g. as an outcome of discrimination, but also may be part of a constructivist process of democratization. Citizenship conceptualized exclusively in relation to the nation-state by disregarding transnational ties and formations has, in the words of Thomas Faist, "long been an anachronism"

(Faist, 2000: 332). Hence, we need to reconceptualise the overall notions of citizenship and integration. The title of this paper is indeed borrowed from Faist.

The relations between the different factors influencing immigrant organising processes and transnational engagements can be visualized in figure 1.

Fig. 1: Model for collective identity construction and organising processes of migrant groups



The main interest for this article is not the analysis of the citizenship regimes as such but rather the structural influence on transnational social formations. I will return to this theme after having discussed some of the shortcomings this approach has to deal with.

Shortcomings in the political opportunity structure approach

While the POS refers to immigrants' legal situation, their social, cultural and political rights, accesses to formal and substantial citizenship and naturalization laws and integration and welfare policies as well as non-policies (expectations and informal claims) (Ireland, 1994), in short institutional factors, it also has a discursive dimension that shapes minority identities and provides access to the established political channels and political agenda. These opportunity structures could include the likelihood of gaining visibility in the mass media, of cooperating with other collective actors, and of achieving legitimacy in public discourse (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004; see also Gamson & Meyer, 1996 and McCarthy, Smith & Zald, 1996).

This capability will be affected by the political constituency and, as we are talking about *structures*, by long-established cultural conceptions of nationhood. One example could be the

rise (and fall) of the organisation Democratic Moslems in Denmark. It was founded after of the so-called Mohammed cartoon affair, by coupling the notion of a secular (Moslem) religiosity with substantial democracy – in the Danish case meaning both a division between the role of religion in private/public but most notably a rejection of the *shariah* system. Democratic Moslems was supported financially by a number of prominent (non-Moslem) business people and easily gained access to the media.² However, several religious organisations and NGOs also regarding themselves as full-fledged democrats had been raising the same topics, self-understandings, and claims for some years.

They suddenly became positioned as part of the out-group and indirectly part of the problem, as it implicitly was claimed that Moslems not members Democratic Moslems must be non-democratic, because they did not take an unambiguous stance against *shariah*, stressing instead a more spiritual meaning of the word. There was already an organisation with the same name established in 1995, but because they did not have the same support they faced hard times in that period. The success of Democratic Moslems also became the reason for its fall. It did not have the time to build up the administration of the organisation at the same pace as the newborn interest and thus could not accommodate all new members sufficiently. Although the rumours of its death may be exaggerated, as can also be read from their web page, they no longer hold the same position in the ‘mediascape’, probably due to the fact that the founder, the Syrian-born member of the Danish Parliament Naser Khader, who was rather popular among the Danish majority at the time, left the organisation. It has now chosen a new leader and is in the midst of rebuilding its internal structure.³ The case is highly illustrative for immigrant collective organisation in relation to both the political and discursive opportunity structures at this point as well. At the time, that is during and immediately after the cartoon crisis, it was very hard to gain access to media and the political channels without positioning oneself as first and foremost democrat, taken to the extent that new organisations integrated this notion into their collective name. An interview with Kenan Kolat from *Türkischen Gemeinde in Deutschland* (TGD) in Berlin suggests that similar trends could be identified in Germany.

A noticeable weakness of the POS approach has to do with the methodology. It mostly bases the analysis on policy documents and legislative texts. Subsequently, the structures identified are done so accordingly to the official policy. But policies may be implemented in ways not expected or even imagined by the policy-makers, as any researcher within the field of policy analysis will know by heart. Hence, there may be an immense variance in the way a legal arrangement is created at the governmental level to the form it ends up having at, for instance, municipal level. Recent research shows that although there can be substantial differences

between two national approaches, the outcome at a practical level may lead to more or less the same results and problems in the given national context (e.g. Hedetoft et al., 2006). Nonetheless, we need to distinguish between, or at least pay very close attention to, the differences in *discourse* and *practice* and how a given discourse affects social practice. One way of overcoming this problem would obviously be to investigate differences in the national and the local political opportunity structure and by following the entire decision-making process through the implementation phase and later evaluations etc.

Secondly, it can also be rather difficult to identify the decisive structures as they can be both formal and informal and function on different levels. Part of the criticism of the approach has asked whether the POS can be seen as a single independent analytical variable or rather could be considered as the amalgamation of several distinct variables captured under a single heading (Bousetta, 2001). It can too easily end up as an all-encompassing model and thus not explain anything. It certainly demands a focused perspective to get around this problem. However, by looking at how the immigrant organisations relate to and navigate within these structures at *different levels* – not only constrained to the nexus local/national but also incorporating the transnational level - we can potentially reach a more subtle understanding of which institutions affect the shaping and claims-making of immigrant collective organisation and identity constructions.

This point relates to another critique, that the POS approach may be said to contain a somewhat deterministic focus by indirectly claiming that all ethnic/immigrant mobilisation also is POS-driven. This has to do with the narrow focus on the established political channels, such that unsuccessful attempts to turn immigrant organisation into politically effective social movements are lost. The internal struggles, conflicts and reconfigurations of immigrant organisations should not be neglected though. It is important to include this complexity and look at the competitors and the ecological variation (Bousetta, 2001; Vermeulen, 2006). The case of Democratic Muslims provides a good argument for this claim. Indeed when investigating the rhetoric and claims-making of immigrant organisations it can be argued that the ‘internal’ demarcation and self-identification in opposition to other (competing) immigrant organisations are more outspoken and visible than claims directed at the established political system.

The discursive dispute between the *Türkischer Bund Berlin Brandenburg* (TBB) and the *Türkische Gemeinde zu Berlin* (TGB) in Berlin is one such example, as is the criticism raised by the Alevi organization against the Fethullah Gülen movement.⁴ Secondly, we should be careful not to dismiss the agency of immigrant organisations. Although claims taken to national level may not be achieved the claims-making itself still serves an important purpose in the self-identification

and (obtainment of) substantial citizenship. The interplay between *result* and *process* in this sense is of crucial importance for understanding the dynamics with the immigrant organising processes and the internal processes of democratisation and empowerment. The POS approach is often too state-centric and relies on national models of collective identity but an important part of the analysis is exactly to investigate how these fixed representations are challenged and understand the capacity of immigrant actors for changing the existing political opportunity structures. Again the use of the notion *structures* indicates, as Koopmans et al. also stress, that these are not easy to change; it would render the concept useless if it was the case (Koopmans et al., 2005: 22). However, we do find structural changes. For example, in Germany the ethnic conception of citizenship came under pressure and led to an (partial) introduction of *jus soli* and easier access to naturalization in 2000 (*ibid.*). The Swedish debate on changing the perspective from integration to anti-discrimination could also have implications that could lead to structural changes (Jørgensen, 2006). The change of government in 2006 and appointment of a new Minister of Integration and Equality have halted this process somewhat, if not terminated it completely.

In order to understand the possibilities for structural changes we need to refine the analytical scope and look at how immigrants collectively and individually act on different levels (local, national) both within established political institutions but also at the non-institutionalised processes of political organisation and formation (Bousetta, 2001: 17-18) and at transnational organisation and formation. Exactly the transnational social and political ties can provide new and non-national channels for identity processes and claims-making. Next I try to conceptualise the notion of transnationalism within the political opportunity structure framework.

Conceptualising the notion of transnationalism

One of the difficulties in analysing transnational engagement and behaviour is that it covers a huge range of markers. Issues such as dual citizenship, trans-national family ties, patterns of marriages, e-communities, popular cultural exchanges, kinship groups and village-based loyalties, hometown associations (such as the *Henşeleri's*), business networks, foreign investment schemes and the flow of remittances and trans-national political formations and interest groups would all belong in the transnational framework. Transnational engagement and loyalty may also be latent, such as when the football pride of Istanbul, Fenerbahçe, played against the lesser-known Danish football club FC Randers in the 2006 UEFA Cup, it suddenly turned into a match between Turkey and Denmark/Europe with Turks coming to Denmark from all over Scandinavia and the

Northern part of Germany to watch the game, not dressed as supporters of Fenerbahçe, but as Turks with Turkish flags everywhere.⁵

In this framework I take transnationalism to be simultaneously an independent and dependent variable as it will be affected by the political opportunity structures in the settlement countries and the Turkish state but can also be a site for challenging and, in the long run, changing such structures (Fig. 1).⁶ By referring to 'site', I understand transnationalism to be both a physical and mental space – a spatiality that runs close to Faist's conceptualisation of transnational social spaces. These consist of:

[P]entagonic relationships between the government of the immigration state, civil society organizations in the country of immigration, the rulers of the country of emigration (sometimes viewed as an external homeland), civil society groups in the emigration state, and the transnational group-migrants and/or refugee groups, or national, religious, and ethnic minorities (Faist, 2000: 200).

There are prerequisites to speaking of either as transnational formations, political or social ties or social spaces. These are means of long-distance communication and transportation. People need not physically cross borders before we can speak of transnational activities but the activities do need to be taking place in at least two countries. Most of the research literature has mainly been interested in the political dimension of transnationalism and my work is no exception but it should also be acknowledged that the perhaps largest part of transnational activities might be within an economic and cultural dimension, e.g. transnational businesses, consumption of food, music etc. (e.g. Ehrkamp, 2005).⁷ This is a consequence of increasing globalisation that open up markets and means of communication and transportation. But while global processes are detached from the nation-state transnational processes are centred in the nation-states and involve actors from both the state and civil society (Faist, *ibid*; Kastoryano, 1998). The contextual difference also is of great importance in explaining transnational differences. Differences in market conditions, size of immigrant population, discursive opportunity structures in the given country will affect the presence and construction of transnational affiliations, ties and identities. For instance, the size of the Turkish minority in Germany has created a completely different infrastructure in regards to travel options and communication compared to Sweden, where the Turkish minority population is smaller. The Turks in Sweden on the other hand provides a strong example of a migration network (or chain migration) as almost 30,000 out 35,000 migrants have their origin in the small area of Kulu in central Anatolia. Obviously this situation has created some special and case-specific ties. Another example could be the rather favourable conditions for Kurdish identity politics in

Denmark and Sweden, which for instance allows the Kurds to broadcast satellite TV (Rojhelat TV/ ROJ-TV) from Denmark.

Taking the above as the backdrop for the further discussion, I propose four main clarifications of transnationalism, which will be further specified.

First, I include a quite common differentiation between *narrow* and *broad* forms of transnationalism. Here I should specify that I mainly look at political transnationalism and leave out the discussion of cultural and socio-economic forms for now. Narrow transnationalism refers to institutionalised and continuous participation in transnational activities and organisations while broad transnationalism refers to only occasional participation in transnational linkages (Itzigsohn & Giorguli Saucedo, 2002: 770). This should be understood as a continuum of practices where narrow engagement, in terms of political practice, would be actual membership of parties or hometown organisations while broad refers to occasional participations in meetings, cultural or protest events (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

The *second* clarification regards the question of how we identify transnationalism. As already mentioned, by locating transnationalism within the opportunity structures it indicates that the state can facilitate transnationalism to some degree, directly and indirectly. Several scholars within the field has pointed to the common assumption that a closed exclusivist structure may be the incitement for transnational rather than national engagement, such as in the case of Germany. Others claim that an open inclusive structure building on multicultural principles providing more rights to cultural, ethnic and religious minorities may be beneficial for transnational formations and practices (Schiffauer, 1999; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Either explanation need not disqualify the other, as both could be valid in different contexts. Even if we accept the fact that the state can, directly or indirectly, promote, facilitate and impede transnational engagement it can furthermore be very difficult to separate policies of multiculturalism from signs of transnationalism. When using a credit card in a Dutch cash-point I have the option of six different languages, including Turkish. The same act in Denmark will provide you with only four options and no less than 10 in NYC. But is that a sign of multiculturalism or of transnationalism? In the same way education in mother tongue could be taken as token of a multicultural policy (or on the contrary assimilatory/segregationist) but could easily be imagined to stimulate transnational linkages as well. What is often lacking in the research and analysis of transnationalism are concretely defined measurements of transnationalism.

The second clarification of transnationalism in this framework therefore, is the investigation on how transnationalism is accommodated within three different analytical

dimensions, the first being the established political channels: *Which parts of the integration and citizenship policy stimulate or impede transnational engagement?*

Such policies could be special provisions for religious figures from the sending countries or restrictions in regards to family reunification or allowance for dual citizenship. However, it should also be stressed that transnationalism is not for the state to decide alone. The state can stipulate political and social behaviour but cannot control people's sense of belonging. When speaking of attitudes towards multiculturalism we can distinguish between formal and de facto responses but the same distinction cannot be used when speaking of transnationalism. Multiculturalism can be promoted and controlled, but this cannot be done to the same degree when speaking of transnationalism. If a Kurdish refugee wishes to engage himself in Kurdish political issues it is very hard for the host country to prevent or control.⁸

The next part looks at the dimension of the homeland and investigates *How the sending country stimulates transnational linkages in regards to special rights for former and current non-resident citizens and at differential treatments/provisions towards different (minority) groups*

Together these dimensions form the transnational political opportunity structures. The Turkish pink card could be one such institution⁹, others could be special economic options available to non-resident Turks similar to those available to on-resident Indians (NRI's) who are given tax deductions if they invest in India. Low-cost channelling of remittances could be another example as could the official representation abroad, for instance symbolised with numbers and size of consulates and embassies. In regard to the last the Turkish representation in Germany is the largest of its kind globally (leaving out American engagement in Iraq) and the budget for the Directory of Religious Affairs, the Diyanet, is second only to military expenditures in Turkey's fiscal budget.

The last dimension involves the non-institutionalised political context in the receiving country, which is harder to operationalise into a single analytical question. Hassan Bousetta terms this the 'infra-political sphere of civil society' (2001). The infra-political sphere makes room for a much more fragmented and opaque mode of political operation. It focuses on the internal struggles and variations to gain control at community level in civil society without necessarily having reference to the broader established political system. Within the infra-political sphere we find a great variety of competing networks and identities that will be lost if we only concentrate on claims-making at public political level. The internal dispute between the Assyrian and Syriac communities in Sweden (discussed below) is one such example, but also generational conflicts could be lost from the analysis if we do not incorporate this sphere. This type of

collective identity constructions often has a transnational aspect as the examples suggest and hence also are part of a broader process of transnationalising civil society.

The *third* clarification is an understanding of transnationalism as a site of political engagement. This understanding takes its departure point from Yasemin Soysal, Steven Vertovec, and others, in the sense that it is presumed that transnationalism can be perceived as a dialectic between local, national and international questions. Here I am mainly concerned with transnational political ties. This type of activity has been actualised through new and better means of communication technology, which has made mobilisation and enhancement of political participation and organisation possible (Soysal, 1994; Vertovec, 1999).

The *fourth* and final clarification is an understanding of transnationalism as a mode of belonging and as a base for collective identity. This would indicate to view transnationalism as a special type of consciousness among migrants, a way of self-understanding that stresses 'humanhood' and participation in universalist and democratic projects (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003: 15). Several researchers have dealt with this aspect and termed it differently, e.g. cosmopolitanism, transpositionality and nested citizenship (e.g. Faist, 2000) and tried to conceptualise the possible outcome of such practices, e.g. Civic citizenship or Multi-layered citizenship (Kastoryano, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1999). On an analytical level we find different studies showing that among Turks there is a significant percentage saying that they are neither Kurdish, Turkish, or German (or other nationalities) but European, cosmopolitans or simply human beings (Faist, 2000: 225; Kaya, 2004; Kaya & Kentel, 2005). One of my informants described her identity as an 'identity pyramid' where she first and foremost considered herself as human and woman, next as citizen and later down in the hierarchy in ethnic and religious terms (interview with Yildiz Akdogan).

Such a collective identity construction can refer to roles, groups and organisation and can lead to political practices. This form of self-identification was very common among the informants interviewed for my dissertation, who through a deconstructivist strategy tried to position themselves inside and outside the nation-state at the same time. But Castles' comment that "It is possible that transnational affiliations and consciousness will become the predominant form of migrant belonging in their future" (Castles, 2002: 1158) is very much an open question.

Summing up and returning to the headline of this section, the clarifications of transnationalism within the larger POS framework provide the conceptual tools to further investigate how transnationalism interacts in civil society and how immigrant organisations, by the means of transnational strategies, could strengthen democratic voices and challenge the pre-given positions of immigrants within the given integration- and citizenship-regime. It indicates the

usefulness of an actor-centred approach focusing on agency in combination with an institutional approach. However, it also points to the crucial fact that transnational formations and engagements cannot be left outside the discussion of integration and citizenship. Most definitions of civil society refer to politics on a national level (Faist, 2000: 323) but we need to incorporate transnationalism into that equation and investigate political processes taking place at the transnational level of civil society. Civil society in the broadest sense refers to the sphere and activities of autonomous associations and organisations relatively free from state authority. While we cannot speak of a transnational civil society as such, as it would lack formal state structures to guarantee rights of members and autonomy of organisations etc. (*ibid*: 324) it does make sense to employ a processual approach by speaking of *transnationalising* civil societies indicating that the exclusivist understanding of membership in one nation-state only is not the only model for organising society.

Although many a politician probably would want to uphold such a model resting on an assimilatory definition of incorporation, reality shows that even though immigrants do assimilate or integrate into the host states and thus qualify as 'good citizens', the same people also maintain ties to their countries of origin (or even imagined homelands) or maintain and construct a collective identity across national borders and take part in political democratic processes inside and outside the given nation-state. The linkage to the nation-state is due to an underlying understanding of the nation-state as *the* primary organisational unit of society. However, it may become increasingly difficult for the politicians to maintain demands of such an exclusively nation-state orientated definition of integration in the light of the processes of internationalization, European integration, transnationalism and globalization, when, the situation very much resembles the setting Favell identifies:

In the nation-state centered version of integration research in the larger European countries, there is something odd about the fact that the status and success of immigrants gets measured entirely in the terms of social mobility relative to norms of integration into the nation-society, or average national mobility paths; yet it is increasingly normal to think of elites in the same country becoming increasingly transnational in their roles, networks and trajectories. The exclusive destiny of full integration into host nation-states may however not be the norm for immigrants in the future (Favell, 2003: 33).

Neither should the democratic potential of transnational engagement be overestimated obviously; rather we should investigate how civil society associations and organisations can contribute to democratic political processes within the context of a given integration- and citizenship-regime. I find this aspect important and in the remaining part of the paper I will briefly introduce three different examples on transnational social spaces and identifications.

The 'Armenian issue' – mobilising processes across Europe

The first example points to the political opportunity structures in a sending country (in this case the centre of the conflict), the receiving countries and the immigrant communities in Europe and elsewhere. A paradoxical point is that the issue and group at stake, i.e. the Armenian minority, is the least important actor in this case.

The ongoing dispute about what happened to the Turk-Armenian community in the year 1915 under Ottoman rule provides an illustrative example of transnational political processes. Turkey claims that no more than 300,000 Armenians died, that it happened as an act of self-defence and it is illegal under law to conceptualise it as genocide (article 301). Many historians outside Turkey consider it to be a genocide that systematically eradicated 1.5 million Armenians. France, which has both a large Armenian population (400,000) and Turkish population (380,000), has played a leading part in the dispute. In 2001 France officially recognized the incident as genocide and in October 2006 a new law that makes it illegal to talk about this historical incident in any other terms than genocide was proposed (Wivel, 2006). The Turkish response was to cut off all military collaboration with France. The same dispute surfaced in the European Parliament, where a group of parliamentarians wants Turkey to officially recognise it as genocide as a precondition for negotiating EU membership.

However in the national elections in Belgium and the Netherlands it became a political topic that mobilised Turkish minorities. In the Netherlands, the Social Democratic PvdA party had two candidates up for election that denied the genocide, both with a Turkish background, and the ruling Christian Democratic CDA party had one such candidate. All three were taken off the lists. These candidates were first seen as pull factors to gain Turkish votes - which accounts to 235,000 – but instead these candidates now urged the Turkish voters either to boycott the election or to vote for other parties (Egelund, 2006). Turkish immigrant associations took up the same agenda (e.g. the TİCF - *Türk İslam Kültür Dernekleri Federasyonu* - a large umbrella organisation for Turkish Islamic associations). In Belgium the Dutch case had some interesting effects. While some politicians made the same claims as candidates with a Turkish background, one member - the socialist and MEP Véronique de Keyser - changed her position. She argued that recognition of the genocide is desirable but should not be a formal demand out of consideration for the Turkish voters. Critics however claimed that this position was taken to secure her party colleague the post as mayor in the city of Schaerbeek partially through the support of Turkish voters. The examples illustrate how claims-making and identity politics become intertwined between Turkey, European countries, the EU and the Turkish minorities living in Europe and how a political topic can mobilise within and across borders.

The revitalizing of Alevi identity

The Alevis are a religious minority in Turkey with a slight resemblance to Shiite Islam. As such the term 'Alevi' describes a large number of different heterodox communities. They are opposed to Sunni Moslems by regarding Ali as the rightful successor of Mohammed and the name itself also means supporter of Ali. Other than that there are few similarities with Islam. They do not recognize the five pillars of Islam, they reject the idea of mosques and have their own religious ceremonies, the *cem*. Due to the injustice done to Ali by the Sunnis they see themselves as being on the side of the downtrodden and marginalized and adhere to two basic principles of social justice and equality (Argun, 2003). Women traditionally have enjoyed relatively freedom and equality compared to the situation within other Islamic groups and Turkish society in general. Due to this ideological self-understanding the Alevis have been 'natural' partners for left-wing parties and organisations in the last few decades. It is unclear how many people are of Alevi background in Turkey as, until very recently, due to the religious Sunni hegemony, they have kept their religion as a private matter. Estimates vary from 10 to 40 percent (van Bruinessen, 1996) with 30 percent being the often mentioned proportion (Koçan & Öncü, 2004). Both Kurds and Turks are Alevis with the Kurds being the minority within the minority (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

To understand the transnational engagement of the Alevis we need first to look at the citizenship-regime in Turkey. Turkish citizenship and the Turkish Republic has been an "anomalous amalgamation since its conception" (Koçan & Öncü, 2004: 464). On the one hand it excluded religion and various ethnic and cultural identities from politics and the public sphere, while, on the other hand, it promoted a particular religious identity that is a Sunni-based version of Islam, in order to control and promote cultural and social solidarity among its citizens. Claiming to rest on the principle of secularism (as one of the six arrows of Kemalism) the reality has meant that a Sunni-dominated institution has excluded Alevi identity. Even though the Turkish nation-state was created on a communal adherence to a civil identity of politically created Turkishness by all the means of nation-building, it never separated religion and the state fully but instead established an institutionalized state control over religion in the form of the Diyanet. The directorate was established in 1928 and was supposed to represent a 'true' version of Sunni Islam; by doing so the state explicitly adopted the Sunni Islam identity and incorporated it into its institutional structures. The directorate has since repressed and persecuted the Alevi religious minority. For instance it established mosques in villages where Alevis constitute the majority population, and until recently forbid *cem* houses. Even after allowing the establishment of such places (from the early '90s) the Diyanet hired Imams to conduct the prayers in them,

although the Alevis do not recognize this authority. The Diyanet sought to deny Alevi differences by condemning their *cem* ceremonies as deviations from proper Islam. The positive side was financial support although many local Alevi communities rejected these attempts to co-opt their associations. The Diyanet is an example of a context specific opportunity structure that has had a decisive influence on the shaping of Alevi collective identity and position in society.

Sunni dominance was unchallenged until the late 1970s and most notably the early 1990s. Orthodox Sunni groups had long harassed Alevis in Turkey and things escalated dramatically with the incidents the 2nd of June 1993 in the city of Sivas. Thirty-six Alevi artists, musicians and intellectuals attending a cultural Alevi festival were killed. During the resultant protests, random shots fired into tea-houses killed one and wounded numerous others in the Istanbul neighbourhood Gaziosmanpaşa in 1994 (allegedly done by Orthodox Sunni Moslems) where police later opened fire at a crowd killing more than 27 protesters (van Bruinessen, 1996). Up until the '70s the young generation of Alevis had almost completely rejected the religious aspect of Alevism and only took pride in its social and democratic principles. However, the failure of the left in the '70s and the continuously and escalating repression of Alevi identity initiated a transformation where Alevism gradually was turned into first a cultural and later a religious identity. Another consequence of these incidents was that many Kurdish Alevis who earlier had given little support to the PKK now showed more substantial backing.

The incidents led to a massive mobilisation of the Alevis living in Europe. A lot of Turks and Kurds with Alevi background came to Europe as work migrants in the '60s and early '70s. It is estimated that up to 30 percent of the Turkish nationals in Europe are Alevis. Between 1993 and 1996 the number of association members of the Federation of European Alevi Organisations (AABF) grew from 32 to approximately 130 (Argun, 2003: 110; Østergard-Nielsen, 2003). The AABF is located in Cologne and has played a leading role in strengthening the ties among Alevi organisations across Europe. In 2002 the Alevi Organizations in Europe (AABK) was established bringing together 165 member organisations from Germany, France, The Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria and Belgium, according to themselves representing approximately one million Alevis. This brings the Alevi organisation up in league with, for instance, the Kurdish European organisations. The AABF lobbies for constitutional changes in Turkey, recognition of Alevism as an ethnic and religious minority inside and outside of Turkey and to end the Turkish state's official support of Sunnism. The AABF is thus mainly a homeland-orientated organisation. It supports Alevi organisations and political parties in Turkey and has

been given extensive coverage in the Turkish press, because the Federation's endorsement of a particular political party affects the way Alevi votes will be cast in Turkey.

The AABF supported the creation of the *Bariş Partisi* (the Peace Party) in 1996 and the Chairman of AABF at the time even stood as candidate. The party did not understand itself as an Alevi party but as a mass party with a focus on peace. It did not meet the threshold of 10 percent though and dissolved itself afterwards. However, in the recent elections the Alevi organisations tried to mobilise voters in and outside Turkey. This time they did not pursue electoral influence through their own party but attempted to mobilise left-wingers and liberals in general to agree on supporting one party in order to reach the high Turkish threshold. An example is the appeal from the national Alevi federation in Denmark who published the following press release:

The Alevi organisations in Turkey and Europe have lit an *Alev* (flame) to show a path out of the darkness. The Alevi organisations have in the last month decided to influence the political process and the election in 2007. Several parties have already contacted the Alevi organisations to get their support. However, the Alevis have especially encouraged the many Social Democratic and left winged parties to join together in one party and all oppositional groups, popular movements are encouraged to join this party (taken from www.alevi.dk my translation).

The situation today somehow bridges between the approaches pursued in the past. While the European federation is very much orientated towards homeland political affairs the local and national Alevi organisations also have a religious and cultural agenda. The younger generation has sought to revitalize the religious and cultural content of Alevism and even succeeded in creating their own European Youth federation (Association of Independent Alevi Youth – BAGD); but gradually the youth organisations have been absorbed by the main organisations. However, the members of the younger generation whom I interviewed for my dissertation almost all spoke about the spiritual side of Alevism as something they wanted to explore further. The Danish Alevi Youth organisation has held several summer camps discussing these issues and has been very popular among Alevi youth. The national context matters of course. While the Chairman of the Alevi organisation told me that they had received not just criticism but also threats from the Moslem groups in Denmark, the youth had no such stories to tell.¹⁰ However, in Germany the cleavages with the Turkish and Kurdish communities have been much stronger and the Alevi youth there spoke about 'fighting violence with violence' (Argun, 2003: 101-118; Kaya, 2001). I argue that homeland conflicts and cleavages are not transplanted to the receiving society necessarily but are dependent on the structural position of the immigrants in the new context.

Consequently, the mobilisation and re-vitalisation of collective Alevi identity and establishment of Alevi organisations across Europe in the early 1990s had less to do with the national institutional structures than with homeland incidents. The motivation for establishing the organisation came from outside the host countries but their organisation within the host countries may well reflect the institutional arrangements. In Denmark for instance, where there is a low tolerance for Moslem demands, due to their liberal attitude towards women's position and non-fundamental religiosity Alevis are increasingly being recognized on their own as an alternative to Sunni Islam and are not perceived as having the same problems of integrating.¹¹ Perhaps stressing that trend further, the Alevi organisation applied to the Church Minister for recognition as an independent belief system with the related entitlements. The application was approved in late 2007 and the Alevi organisation thereby has send a powerful signal to the public that they are not like the Sunni Moslems. Soon after the organisation acquired this status in Denmark this was used by Alevi Federations in other European countries to achieve the same right and status. Simultaneously the new-born status is made part of the claims-making directed at the Turkish state to obtain minority rights in Turkey.

Assyrian identity – the dream of Nineveh and victory of Assyrika FF

The Assyrians are a Christian minority group coming from mainly Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, of which the majority belongs to the Syrian-Orthodox Church.¹² There is estimated to be around two million Assyrians worldwide. The largest part of these, estimated about 800,000, lives in Iraq and 500,000 are located in Syria. Almost 400,000 have ended up in Europe and the US either coming as work migrants or as refugees. Of these almost 80,000 live in Sweden and a similar number in Germany (Nordgren, 2006). It is the latter two groups that are the main interest for the following section. Most of these people arrived as work migrants from the Tur Abdin region in Turkey where it is estimated that more than 45,000 people have left the region since the 1960s and onwards to the extent that only 5,000 Assyrians are living in Turkey today. Most arrived in Germany through the guest worker scheme and continued on to Sweden after Germany closed for newcomers, where they applied for asylum. The Swedish case is an illustrative example of chain migration as the Assyrians already living in Sweden provided fellow kinsmen with the necessary networks and knowledge needed to enter and settle in the country. This can be further illustrated with the fact that almost 16,000 ended up in the municipality of Södertälje south of Stockholm which has become the unofficial capital of Assyria. The Assyrians, like the Armenian community, take part in an almost classical Diaspora scenario by telling a long story of centuries of persecution perhaps culminating with the, from an Assyrian perspective,

genocide in Turkey in 1915 where almost half the Assyrian population lost their life (according to Assyrian sources). The killing, termed *Seyfo* in Assyrian or literally 'year of the sword' is an important marker for Assyrian identity today. In the words of an Assyrian youngster in Sweden: "I knew what *Seyfo* was before I knew what Hennes & Mauritz was" (quoted from Nordgren, 2006: 131; my translation). The militant struggles in Iraq, that is home for the imaginary Assyrian homeland of Nineveh in the North-East and which serves the dream of a unified and independent Assyria, has made the Assyrian tale seem more like a never-ending story.

Understanding the Assyrian organising processes within a transnational framework leads me first to an important contextual difference in patterns of organising and collective identity constructions. The political Diaspora has its stronghold in the US where the strongest claims-making for national recognition and independence is taking place. It was initiated by the nationalistic exile organisation Assyrian National Association of America which entered the political stage after World War I. One of the important actors is the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA). The AUA and the Assyrian Democratic Organisation (AMO) which since 1957 have been active in Turkey and Syria also helped to establish the national federation of Assyrians in Sweden and the same goes for collective organisation across the globe. However, although the invasion of Iraq and turnover of power initially, at least theoretically, paved the road for Assyrian self-determination, nothing seems to be going in that direction at the moment and at best it remains a utopia. Thus, we can say that there are not really any political structures to take part in for the Assyrian minority.

Nonetheless the idea of the imaginary homeland has played a crucial part in creating, maintaining and revitalizing Assyrian identity. The utopia has led to several international conferences discussing these issues and the continuing publication of the Sweden based *Hujâdâ* journal published in Assyrian, Swedish, Arabic, Turkish, and English language discussing historical, political, cultural, and linguistic issues with subscribers in 35 countries.¹³ Rather than stressing politics, Assyrian identity today emphasises culture. Both in Germany and Sweden, Assyrians are considered to be easier to integrate and more successful than other groups. In Germany many Assyrians own their own businesses and in Sweden they have been able to reach a relatively high level of education compared to other foreign groups in general. Moreover they have been successful in accessing the conventional institutional channels and at the moment two members of the Swedish parliament Riksdagen are of Assyrian background (elected for mainstream parties).¹⁴ The explanation in Sweden has much to do with the extremely dense organizing processes of the Assyrian minority (leaving out the internal demarcations). A very significant number participates in the local, national and international Assyrian organizations, creating a

strong cultural community. The high density of Assyrians living in Sweden led to an unrivalled success of collective Diaspora identity when the football club Assyriska FF won the Swedish Super Cup in 2003 and thus qualified for the UEFA Cup. From then on the team became the Assyrian national team. The final drew in Assyrians from Belgian, Austria, and the Netherlands and even as far as Australia and was broadcasted via satellite to 56 countries (see *Dagens Nyheter* 31st of October 2003).

Compared with the Alevi minority group in relation to transnational relations the Assyrians in Sweden are first and foremost targeting their political actions towards the Swedish state and their cultural actions towards a global Diaspora. Although Assyrian history goes back four and half millennia, Assyrian identity still needs to be constantly renegotiated and reconfirmed like any other social identity. It is not static but has meant something different over time. Like with many other minority groups, be it ethnic or religious, the second generation seems to be most interested in revitalizing the cultural and original parts of the identity. Young Assyrians have been very active in restoring the Assyrian language for instance, bringing it closer to an 'original' state. Conducting an interview with Andreas, Abboud and Rachel from the board of ARS, revealed that Andreas (the senior of the three and from the older generation) thought that the future was in Sweden and the key to recognition was through education and hard work using the already established channels. The younger board members, Rachel and Abboud, both had a dream of a self-governing Assyria and the faint, although in their own words unrealistic, hope of one day 'returning' - not returning to something they had left themselves but returning as an Assyrian 'people'.

Summing up and general conclusions

The three cases each demonstrate how transnational formations and relations are dependent on different factors. First I should once again stress that, due to the limited space available, the analysis has been somewhat sketchy and parts of my theoretical framework have not really been applied in the case studies. This goes most particularly for the analysis of the given national discursive and political opportunity structure. However, one of the things that does occur is the differences in the collective organising processes. Sweden has a strong system of co-optation which encourages immigrants to organise along ethno-national lines in order both to receive state support in terms of finances but also in terms of inclusion in the political decision-making. The Alevi community in Sweden has suffered from this system by being quite small and not meeting the size acquired to gain any support. Thus, they are a very marginal group in Sweden compared to the situation in Germany and Denmark. Recently the Swedish Alevi organisation

has been in contact with the Danish national federation and are now organising themselves along similar lines. When doing interviews with the Swedish board the atmosphere was quite optimistic, but the goal was first and foremost to become a political partner of the Swedish decision-making institutions rather than pursuing cultural or religious aims. We can also argue that the German structure, in being exclusivist in its way of (only recently) incorporating immigrants indirectly, has strengthened the organisations because they have not received support from the beginning and were forced to get a strong support from members.

The infra-political factors, such as a much larger number of Turkish migrants in Germany, has also provided a context with much more ecological variation among the organisations and internal competitors for the administrative positions in the organisations, to the degree that they have served as platform for recruiting people to organisations in Turkey. The organisational support and transfer of leadership these associations offer should not be underestimated. The infra-political sphere also can explain the strong organisations of the Assyrian minority (leaving out once again the internal conflicts). From having a non-recognized status in the beginning, the first groups were granted asylum and work- and residence permits in the late '70s and they provided the later setting for migration networks. Furthermore, being supported in establishing organisations by transnational federations provided the resources needed to rather quickly reach the aforementioned demands put up by the Swedish state and the Assyrian communities are now an influential partner in the immigrant institutions.

Also the homeland political opportunity structure, in terms of citizenship regime plays a role, in this case mainly the Turkish state. As we have seen a peculiar combination of a universalist notion of the citizen synthesized with a particularist religious identity has created a rather exclusivist and intolerant definition of citizenship. It has given rise to the incentive for immigrant groups to organise and orientate themselves towards the political situation in Turkey, most notably the Kurds and the Alevis, taking their claims to not just a national level but also to an international and trans-national level.

Taking a closer look at the proposed clarifications of transnationalism shows that different aspects may provide stronger explanations for some groups rather than others. Both the Alevis and the Assyrians make use of narrow forms of transnationalism, the Alevis in particular, while the Armenian case showed how influence are sought by broad means of transnational engagement. For the latter case it is also interesting to see that, while, Turkish immigrants in Europe were easy to mobilise for the Turkish state, the population in Turkey, or at least in the larger cities, took another position and identified with the Armenian Turks. The killing of the Turkish-Armenian writer and editor Hrant Dink indirectly paved the way for a new

collective identity.¹⁵ Thousands of people from both the majority and minority groups in Turkey joined in Dink's funeral procession with banners saying: "*Hepimiz Hrant Dink'iz* [We are all Hrant Dink], *Hepimiz Ermeniyiz* [We are all Armenian]".

The Alevi case clearly points to transnationalism as a site of political engagement. I found that the Alevi organisation has a national agenda that, for instance, strives towards gaining recognition as an independent belief system which should be appointed distinct rights and at the same time has local affiliations working with local integration organisations - such as study help groups - and provides lectures on Alevi culture and traditions. On a transnational level the organization from different countries tries to put pressure on the Turkish government and create a united opposition for the coming elections to better the conditions and gain recognition for Alevis in Turkey. On all levels the construction of an Alevi collective identity is taking place but by different means and channels.

The Assyrian case also points to transnationalism as a site for political engagement, although we here find an extremely difficult situation in Iraq not really offering any potential solutions in the near future. But we do see political claims in line with Armenian ones for the Turkish state to recognise the *Seyfo*. Instead we find an internal restoration of Assyrian identity and language etc. Both the Assyrian and the Alevi cases show that transnationalism also must be seen as a mode of belonging. Both these groups understand and position themselves in more than one national context. What is interesting of course for the Assyrian case is that a transnational context can be a mental site as well and the idea of self-governing Assyria is very much a 'Neverland in Cyberspace' as one author put it, but nonetheless a mental space of belonging for the Assyrians.

Few of these activities are part of the official institutional channels and the majority take place in a civil society setting. Participation in civil society institutions and in organisations and associations in general can be argued to have positive outcome no matter the orientation and content. Remembering the quite provocative conclusion by Meindert Fennema & Jean Tillie that "*To have undemocratic ethnic organisations is better for the democratic process than to have no organisations at all*" (Fennema & Tillie, 1999: 723; italics in original), tells us that engaging in transnational organizations will also be of benefit for the receiving society and increase the social capital with these groups and enhance social trust. Mandatory integration into a single nation-state with the demand of unconditionally loyalty is indeed an anachronism. Further studies into transnational formations will hopefully tell us more on how the host countries will adjust to this type of participation.

Notes

1 This is a revised version of a paper presented at The 14th Nordic Migration Researchers Conference in Bergen November 2007. It was later presented at a PhD workshop at Aalborg University in March 2008 where I thank Professor Thomas Faist for helpful and constructive comments. It was written while being visiting scholar at COMPAS from October to December 2007.

2 <http://www.demokratiskemuslimer.dk/>.

3 The caricature (cartoon) crisis of which the organisation Democratic Moslems was but one, although prominent, actor had another interesting spin-off. In the aftermath even immigrant anti-Islamic parties such as the DPP recognised that there could be and indeed were differences among Moslems, which indirectly created a somewhat less hostile tone towards the democratic minded Moslems, perceived to be 'good'. The case is an illustrative example of what Anthony Giddens has described as 'the dialectic of power' or 'dialectic of social control' where conflicts and struggles can have integrative effects, and even can be necessary to bring about social change (Giddens, 1985).

4 *Tyrkiet: Tro, tolerance og tavse terrorister* [Turkey: Faith, Tolerance and Silent Terrorists] can be downloaded at <http://alevi.dk/> when opening the Danish language section.

5 See for instance the coverage of the match by the Danish-based Turkish newspaper *Haber* <http://haber.dk/sayilar/HABSPOR0906.pdf>.

6 In line with how the welfare state is related to the citizenship- and integration-regimes. As Grete Brochmann and Anniken Hagelund argue: "The welfare state is both independent and dependent variable in the field of migration: Immigration influences welfare and welfare influences migration. Differences in immigration policies have consequences for welfare policy, just as different welfare regimes have [different] consequences for immigration policy" (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2005: 22; my translation).

7 These can easily be made object for analysis as the 'multi-sited ethnographical approach' developed by George Marcus claims by looking at how culture is embedded in macro-constructions of a global social order (Marcus, 1995). Basically multi-sited ethnography follows the thing, people, language, ethnic group along the global flows it follows the order of global capitalism. Thus it may also follow conflicts that transcend boundaries, and subsequently be of use for understanding transnationalism as well.

8 Although the closure of MED TV in the UK in 1999 and the revoking of the license for the successor MEDYA TV by France in 2004 could be seen as political responses to preventing Kurdish terrorism or nationalism according to the taken perspective.

9 The Turkish state introduced the 'pink card' in 1997, which provides Turkish ex-citizens with a set of rights providing entitlement to ownership of land and property, rules related to inheritance, military service and economical rights and possibilities in general.

10 Although interviews with members of non-Alevi and Moslem organisations told that they were not allowed to hang out with Alevis when they were younger as they were presumed to have way too liberal an attitude to alcohol and sex. In general the youth no matter ethnicity and religion had any problems with members of another group.

11 The same self-understanding was highly prominent in the interviews I conducted for my PhD dissertation with Alevis in Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. Perhaps it can be said to ring true as, in the selection of informants I focused on the larger immigrant organizations and after the first rounds of interviews ended up with an unintentionally over-representation of Turkish informants being Alevis.

12 There has been a great dispute about the self-identification, most notably in the Swedish Diaspora. Other terms themselves Syrians stressing the Aramaic heritage while a third denomination terms themselves Kaldéer because of belonging to the Kaldeian-Catholic Church although claiming an Assyrian ethnicity. For pragmatic reasons I capture all three groups in the heading Assyrian.

13 <http://ars.hujada.com/>; see also Nordgren, 2006:72-76. Here I perhaps should add that the rivaling Syrian organization (Syrianska Riksförbundet) publishes its journal *Bahro Suryoyo* in an even larger edition and have subscribers in an equal number of countries.

14 In an interview with the board of The Assyrian Federation in Sweden (Asyriska Riksförbundet - ARS) conducted in June 2007 I was further informed that an internal investigation showed that 140 persons with Assyrian background stood candidates for election in 2006.

15 See *BBC Monitoring* for abstracts and headlines of Turkish newspapers response to the killing <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6282537.stm>.

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