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## Introduction Exploring transnationalism

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# Introduction

## Exploring transnationalism

FRIDUS STEIJLEN

The idea for this issue with the theme “Transnationalism” was born in 2019 at the eleventh ICAS (International Convention of Asian Scholars) in Leiden. At that convention I organized a double panel under the title “Contextualizing Netherlands-Indonesia Transnationalism”. The idea was to explore how transnationalism works for different groups of people in the Netherlands with ties to Indonesia in the context of a changing relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia, but also with different framings of their region or period of migration.

Because of the former colonization of the Indonesian archipelago by the Dutch, the Netherlands is home to a variety of people with “Indonesian roots”: migrants who left Indonesia after independence, for example, Indo-Europeans and Moluccan from the former colonial army, or Surinamese Javanese who left Suriname. The Netherlands also became home to Indonesian exiles after the violent change of power in the mid-1960s and later also to more recent Indonesian migrants who organize themselves on ethnic or regional background, like the Balinese or Batak.

In one way or another all of them relate themselves as individual or as group to Indonesia. This can be in search of an identity, cultural inspiration, or because they feel politically connected. These transnational relations are not formulated or shaped in a vacuum, and they change continuously. They are heavily influenced by colonial history and contemporary discussions about the colonial past and the relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia. They are also influenced by the present image of Indonesia, for example, as an Islamic country or as an exotic holiday destination. These contexts not only influence how transnationalism between the Netherlands and Indonesia is formed, they also affect how Dutch society looks at these groups with “Indonesian roots” in the Netherlands. By focusing on the mechanism of how these different transnational relationships work and how, for example, the same discourses in the Dutch society might work out differently for different groups, we hoped to understand the mechanism of transnationalism better.

At the convention we had papers on six cases varying from “postcolonial migrants” like the Moluccans, Indo-Europeans, Chinese, and Surinamese

Javanese, to political exiles from Indonesia and Indonesians who became stakeholders for victims of Dutch violence during the Indonesian-Dutch conflict. The discussion was intense and fruitful and was most of all an attempt to explore the complexity of transnationalism in more depth.

*Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* has enthusiastically welcomed the papers for a special issue. In the cooperation with *Wacana*, the title of the theme for this issue is "Exploring transnational relations". The long period between the ICAS conference and the time slot available for a special issue in *Wacana*, and also the disruption in working on our projects because of Covid-19, new employment, and other hassles during that time have resulted in the withdrawal of a few authors who had attended the conference. However, as an academic journal, *Wacana* has also sought eligible articles on relevant topics by an open call for submissions.

The idea is that migrants from a specific area, sometimes with complex multi-migration trajectories, eventually connect with their region of origin and create emotional, cultural, political, or social ties with this area. It contains echoes of Anderson's "imagined communities" and "long-distance nationalism".<sup>1</sup> The idea of this transnationalism was, for me, described by scholars like Mario Rutten and Sanderien Verstappen in a profoundly ethnographic way who wrote about migrants from India living in Britain, in the Netherlands (coming via Suriname) and other places celebrating Bollywood music and films as a shared cultural base for identity, or maybe more aptly: identification. Bollywood stars on tour through Europe were welcomed as "shared" celebrities by all Indian communities in Europe and viewed in the light of being a shared transnational heritage. A transnational community emerged in which India became the cradle and all other migrant countries an addition in the migration trajectory.<sup>2</sup> The significance of "Bollywood" to Indian transnationalism was broad. It influenced different aspects which are important to transnational imagined communities: language, fashion and social codes, and interaction. It was the glue in the transnational feeling.

A concept which often coincides with transnationalism is diaspora. In many studies no clear distinction is made between transnationalism and diaspora. Both deal with processes of connecting migrants or exiles to home countries or regions of origin. There is lot debate about the differences between the two concepts. Sometimes the difference seems to stem mainly from which point of view the phenomenon is studied: from a distance or from the place of origin. In the Routledge *Handbook of Diaspora Studies* the social psychologist Marc Scully argues that "transnationalism" represents the extent to which a life is lived in two or more countries simultaneously, whether this be materially, socially, thriftily, or affectively. Diaspora, on the other hand "represents the extent to which a 'national' life is lived outside the nation without necessarily reproducing the set of meaning-makings around identity that are hegemonic within the

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson (1985/2016, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See Sanderien Verstappen and Mario Rutten (2007, 2015).

nation".<sup>3</sup> Other scholars consider the concepts to be more complex which offer different windows on interconnected processes. In his publication on diaspora and transnationalism, the sociologist Thomas Faist, one of the editors of an IMISCOE (International Migration Research Network) publication on diaspora and transnationalism, argues that transnationalism is used both more narrowly and more broadly than diaspora. The latter refers to groups living outside an (imagined) homeland, while transnationalism is "often used both more narrowly – to refer to migrants' durable ties across countries – and, more widely, to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations".<sup>4</sup>

In this issue of *Wacana*, all contributions use both the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism, or a connected concept. But most importantly, we rely on Faist's understanding of transnationalism and explore transnationalism in more depth using the concept in a historical context as well as understanding transnational relations on an individual level.

In "A double migration; The Surinamese-Javanese diaspora and connections to the homeland" Rosemarijn Hoefte and Hariëtte Mingoen write about the Javanese diaspora which came to the Netherlands from Suriname around the time of its independence in 1975. The Javanese contract labourers established a Javanese community with ties to their homeland in the Caribbean colony. The crux of Hoefte and Mingoens' contribution is how the Javanese from Suriname have created homes in different places of settlement while still connecting to the original homeland, Indonesia, as well as with Surinam. This contribution shows how complex networks of relations are maintained, resulting in multi-identification with communities in different places.

Tying in with the Javanese from Suriname, describing a long trajectory of transnational relations is my own contribution "Searching transnational relations between Moluccans in the Netherlands and the Moluccas". The essence this article describes how the transnational relations of Moluccans have changed over the seventy years Moluccans have been living in the Netherlands. It runs the gamut from the changing dimensions and dominances from the political aspiration to achieve an independent South Moluccan Republic to small-scale cooperation to help the Moluccas to develop. Because this article covers several generations, it shows how new generations and new circumstances – like new technologies – produce changing transnational relations.

The story of political exiles in "Indonesian political exiles in the Netherlands after 1965" by David Hill is like the Javanese from Suriname, a through migration but within the context of a life in exile. Hill explores how individual political exiles, who could or did not want to return to Indonesia after the military regime of Suharto came to power in the 1960s, made choices about where they wanted to live and why they ended up in the Netherlands. He describes how, under these circumstances, they defined and maintained a sense of Indonesian identity. In Hill's contribution we can read what the impact of the political context of

<sup>3</sup> Marc Scully (2019: 98).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Faist (2010: 9).

their exile trajectory has been as well as their transnational relationship with Indonesia.

In her contribution, "Transnational connections; Diasporic (re)turns to Indonesia", Jorien van Beukering explores transnational relations by looking at two "return"-trips to Indonesia. Her focus is the accounts of – second generation – Adriaan van Dis, a well-known writer whose father was born in the Netherlands Indies and – third generation – Lara Nuberg, whose grandparents were born there. By delving into these two case studies Van Beukering shows how different generations can be differently motivated and give meaning to their transnational connections in another way.

Caroline Drieënhuizen casts a critical eye on the concept transnationalism taking it a step farther in her contribution, "Objects of belonging and displacement: artefacts and European migrants from colonial Indonesia in colonial and post-colonial times". She does so by comparing how objects help to create identity and have helped to establish transnational bonds in the colonial and post-colonial periods. It is interesting to think in terms of transnationalism, or imperial orientation as Drieënhuizen defines it, when looking at how Europeans in the colony created a connection with the Netherlands through objects. What is the difference between nostalgia in the post-colonial migrant houses and nostalgia or longing in the homes of colonizers? In her contribution, Drieënhuizen also point out the displacement which comes with transnational relations and identification.

Jamie Stern links to displacement in her article, "Three generations later; Transgenerational trauma in the Indo population residing in the United States", by focusing on traumas. Based among other sources on surveys she undertook in the USA, she explores how transnational feelings relate to cultural diversity and how the traumas of a first generation are passed on. This is particularly interesting because Indo-European migrants in the USA relate themselves not only to Indonesia, but also to the Netherlands. And these relationships are defined in a society which is fundamentally based on migration and, compared to the Netherlands, without a strong connection to Indonesia.

The complexity of transnational relations is revealed in all its dimensions in Nicole Immler's contribution, "The Netherlands Indies; Rethinking post-colonial recognition from a multi-voicedness perspective". The main theme of Immler's article, is one organization, in particular its frontman, which stands up for the rights of victims of violence perpetrated by the Dutch military during the independence war in Indonesia. She shows how the intense transnational relationships of activists lead to multi-voicedness, even on an individual level. Immler's contribution forces us to think about how to understand transnational relations concentrated in one person or a small group. This is beyond multi-voiced diaspora communities.

In this *Wacana* issue we explore transnationalism. Because the neatly balanced approach of different communities in the Netherlands with links to Indonesia which we had in mind after the ICAS convention did not work, we deepened

our research, ending up with a more variegated picture of transnational relations with Indonesia. The contributions are about language, about belonging, about acceptance in a host country, about identifying with kin and with society – the welcoming society but without ever forgetting the one which was left behind. It is about the past and traumas, but also about the future. Transnationalism is, as comes to the fore in the contributions in this issue, about belonging, the effect of the past, traumas, and about language. This issue deals with people, whether they be a group (Javanese, Moluccans, Indo-Europeans) who ended up in the Netherlands (or migrated through to the USA) or individuals like exiles or Indonesians who advocate for victims of colonial violence. What they share is Indonesia as a navigational beacon in their transnational orientation. The broad use of transnational relationships which comes to the fore in the contributions supports the interpretation of transnationalism as more than just a relationship. It can be operationalized on a personal level, it is about feelings but also about networks. And much more.

To come back to Thomas Faist, to whom we referred earlier in this introduction. The title of his contribution in the IMISCOE publication was “Diaspora and transnationalism; What kind of dance partners?” (Faist 2010). The point we want to make with this *Wacana* issue is that the “dancers” all have their own history and bonds with the region of origin, including trauma and their own multi-positions, leading to multi-voicedness.

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