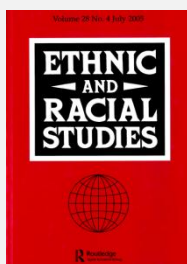


# The human dynamics of migrant transnationalism

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**Abstract:** How is migrant transnationalism shaped by the human dynamics of relationships between migrants and non-migrants? This question is addressed through an analysis of asymmetries between migrants and non-migrants in three spheres of transnational life: the moralities of transnationalism, information and imagination in transnational relations, and transnational resource inequalities. Understanding transnational practices such as sending remittances and facilitating migration, it is argued, requires attention to the dynamics of the relationships between individuals. Fieldwork material from Cape Verde and the Netherlands is combined with secondary literature from other parts of the world in order to develop an analytical framework for comparative research.

**Keywords:** Transnationalism; migrants; non-migrants; moralities; resources; information

Migrant transnationalism is built on interpersonal relationships across borders. There is, by now, broad agreement that these relations can be important for the development of migrants' place of origin as well as for their integration in the place of destination. But how is transnationalism shaped by the human dynamics of relationships between migrants and non-migrants? This article asks what might be intrinsic characteristics of these relationships, and examines how the solidarity of transnationalism is mixed with frustrations and conflict.

The analysis that follows is based on a study of migration from Cape Verde to the Netherlands, elaborated on by means of secondary sources from other parts of the world. I believe that there are intriguing parallels between the micro-level dynamics of transnationalism in a variety of migration settings. I have seen the contours of such parallels when read-

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ing my own material from Cape Verde in the light of studies from Latin America (e.g. Mahler 2001; Sørensen 2002; e.g. Pribilsky 2004), the Caribbean (e.g. Olwig 1999; Goulbourne 2002), North Africa (e.g. Strijp 1997; McMurray 2001) China (e.g. Li 1999; Murphy 2002; Oxfeld 2004), and the South Pacific (e.g. Macpherson 1990; e.g. Lee 2004; Muliaina 2006). In a similar vein, Sørensen and Stepputat (2001) write that ‘we have been struck by the somewhat ahistorical relation between mobility and authority across cultures, geographies, and histories in people’s narratives’.

The purpose of this article is to use ethnographic material to develop an analytical framework which can facilitate research on human dynamics of migrant transnationalism elsewhere and inspire comparisons.

### **Asymmetries of long-distance closeness**

My argument is centred on the notion of *asymmetries* as a key to the analysis of migrant transnationalism at the micro-level. I depart from three propositions about the nature of asymmetries in transnational relationships:

- 1) There are intrinsic asymmetries in the transnational relations between migrants and their non-migrant counterparts in the area of origin.
- 2) The asymmetries can be a source of frustration for both sides.
- 3) Asymmetry does not imply that migrants are always in a powerful position vis-à-vis migrants or the other way around. On the contrary, transnational practices are shaped by the multi-faceted nature of the relationship, with migrants and non-migrants experiencing vulnerability and ascendancy at different times and in different contexts.

The empirical analysis that follows is structured around asymmetries in three spheres of transnational life. This is not an exhaustive nor universally applicable list, but it reflects core elements of transnationalism at the micro-level and is sufficiently broad to illustrate the ways in which different asymmetries interact:

- 1) *Transnational moralities* — Migrants and non-migrants are differently positioned in relation to the moral dimensions of migration and transnationalism. This is a complex argument that will be discussed in detail below.
- 2) *Information and imagination in transnational relations* — Migrants and non-migrants have unequal access to information, different resources for imagination, and form different images about various parts of the transnational social field.
- 3) *Transnational resource inequalities* — There is asymmetry in the distribution of different forms of resources between migrants and non-migrants, not only to material resources, but also to legal entitlements to mobility and residence, and to cultural and linguistic resources.

Before going into each of these asymmetries, I will give a brief background on the empirical research that underlies the analysis, and discuss the meaning of ‘migrants’ and ‘non-migrants’ as social constructions and analytical categories.

### *Dutch–Cape Verdean transnationalism*

Cape Verdeans in the diaspora possibly outnumber the home country residents on the West African archipelago (Carling 2004). After the United States and Portugal, the Netherlands hosts the third largest Cape Verdean diaspora population. The vast majority, about 17,000 people, live in Greater Rotterdam. Migration to the Netherlands started in the early 1960s, when young men were recruited to work in the merchant navy through the port of Rotterdam. Many seafarers later settled in the city and brought family members from Cape Verde. A large number of Cape Verdeans have also migrated to the Netherlands from Portugal and Italy. The second generation now accounts for about 40 per cent of the Dutch–Cape Verdean community, and an additional 17 per cent immigrated as children.<sup>1</sup> While almost 60 per cent of people in Cape Verde have emigrant parents, children or siblings, transnational spousal relationships are very rare.<sup>2</sup> This is partly because of the fragile nature of conjugal relations (Åkesson 2004). Today, men and women emigrate in roughly equal numbers, and with similar motivations and ambitions, although their destinations and sectors of employment may be different.

The research underlying this article is based on fieldwork in Cape Verde (São Vicente and Santo Antão) and the Netherlands (Rotterdam). I conducted participant observation within an informant network of approximately 350 people, and carried out semi-structured, usually recorded, interviews with 102 of them. The names of informants and interviewees in this text are pseudonyms. The numbers in parenthesis denote their age at the first interview, or at the time when participant observation was most concentrated. I was in contact with different parts of the informant network from 1996 until 2007, but extensive fieldwork was limited to the years 2000, 2002 and 2003.

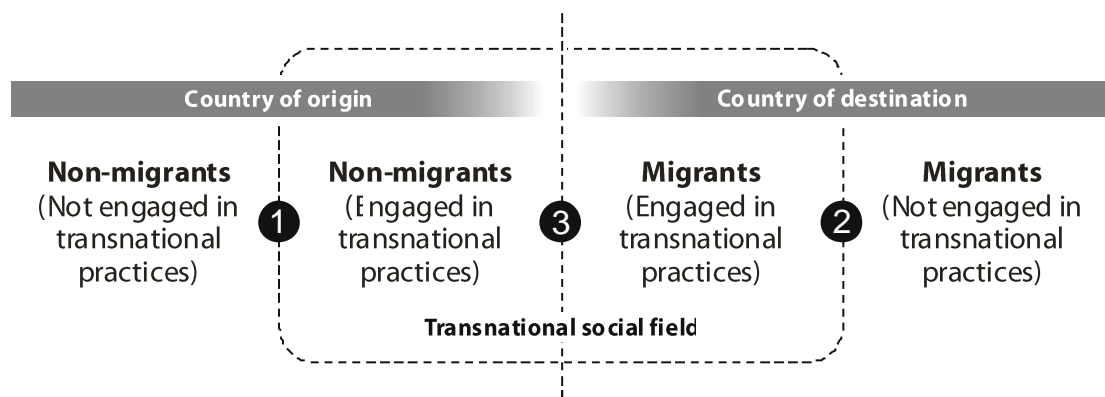
### *Migrants and non-migrants*

Analysis of the relations between emigrants and non-migrants in the country of origin is often lacking, even in research employing a transnational framework.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that transnationalism is often represented as a form of ‘immigrant adaptation’, thereby giving primacy to migrants’ role as immigrants rather than emigrants, although transnationalism is integral to the latter capacity. Attention to processes in the countries of origin has often focused on home country governments or political actors, or on the activities of transnational migrants themselves. Broad-based transnational practices, however, involve exchanges and relationships *between* migrants and non-migrants, and warrant consideration of the non-migrants’ active involvement.

In their review of the transnational turn in migration studies, Peggy Levitt and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen (2004) outline a useful framework for disaggregating the transnational social field. They write that ‘transnational migration creates at least three distinct categories of experience – those who actually migrate, those who stay behind but receive support from those who migrate, and those who do not migrate and have no sources of outside support’. As this article will demonstrate, however, it is misleading to think of non-migrants’ role simply as passive reception (Van Hear 2002). I would therefore not identify the second

group in terms of ‘receiving support from those who migrate’ but rather as non-migrants who are engaged in transnational practices.

Furthermore, I believe it is useful to expand the perspective to include a fourth category, namely *migrants* who are *not* engaged in transnational practices. It has become a shared premise within research on transnational migration that not all migrants are engaged in transnational practices (Van Hear 1998; Levitt, DeWind et al. 2003). Those who are not, do not live their lives within a transnational social field. Nevertheless, they are part of the relevant social constellation much in the same ways as Levitt and Sørensen’s third category, namely *non-migrants* who do not engage in transnational practices. The four-fold categorization that I suggest is displayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** A schematic representation of the transnational social field and its boundaries.

The boundaries between the groups are, of course, blurred. However, they invite analyses of the dynamics of the three interfaces. The limits of the transnational social field in the country of origin (labelled 1 in the figure) may have important socio-economic implications. Having relatives abroad or not can be as important as having patrons locally or not. The corresponding limit in the country of destination (labelled 2 in the figure), has to do with the fascinating question of how transnationalism and integration are related. Both of these edges will have to be addressed elsewhere. What is at issue in this paper is the third interface, the relations between migrants and non-migrants within the transnational social field.

These relations can be discussed at two levels. At the individual level, they concern specific relationships between, for instance between a migrant father and his non-migrant children, or between an emigrant entrepreneur and a worker in the community of origin. At the same time, ‘migrants’ and ‘non-migrants’ are socially constructed categories. Relations therefore also play out at the societal level when migrants and non-migrants ‘in general’ are portrayed in specific ways.

This leads us to consider how migrants and non-migrants can be meaningfully defined for analytical purposes. When studying relations between the two groups, the commonly

shared social constructions are more important than classifications based on demography (e.g. country of birth) or legislation (e.g. citizenship). In Cape Verde, emigrants seem to be identified primarily on the basis of *experience of life abroad*. For instance, second generation migrants, seafarers, and retired returnees, share this experience, although their country of birth, citizenship and current migration status are different. All of them are nevertheless thought of as 'emigrants' in Cape Verde. Their interaction with non-migrants can take the form of long distance-communication, interaction during holidays, or co-residence after return.

When experience is the key to being classified as a migrant, this implies that migrants have something which non-migrants don't have — regardless of the material resources that often result from migration to wealthy countries. As Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Finn Stepputat (2001) have put it, 'experiences of mobility bestow authority on the moving subjects'.

There are, as I will show, similarities between first- and second-generation migrants in their relations with non-migrants. However, the particular characteristics of second-generation transnationalism also merit attention. The emergent literature on this issue shows that the second-generation migrants often find themselves in contradictory in-between positions with respect to ethnic and racial identity, cultural competence, and value systems (Levitt and Waters 2002; Lee 2004; Potter and Phillips 2006). The specific analysis of second-generation transnationalism is beyond the scope of this article. However, the conceptual framework presented here can facilitate the conceptualization of similarities and differences in the transnational experience of different groups in future research.

Having discussed the empirical setting of the case study and the categories migrants and non-migrants, I now turn to the analysis of asymmetries in three spheres of transnational life, starting with transnational moralities.

### **Transnational moralities**

Transnational social fields are often bound together by value systems that may be contested, but nevertheless constitute shared frames of reference. Furthermore, there seem to be common traits to such value systems that are linked to migration itself: the experiences of leaving, being left, and (thinking about) returning appear to have inherent moral dimensions. In other words, migrants and non-migrants are differently positioned within the moralities of transnationalism.

#### *Repaying the gift of communality*

Why do migrants invest their time resources and energy in maintaining transnational connections with their place of origin? In their seminal book on migrant transnationalism, Linda Basch and her colleagues (1994) explained the occurrence of transnationalism with reference to social exclusion, economic insecurity and racism within the urban economies of industrialized countries. The limits to integration and acceptance in the place where migrants spend most of their day-to-day lives thus encourage them to retain transnational

links. In another influential publication, Luin Goldring (1998) convincingly argued that transnational practices are also motivated by migrants' quest for social status. Especially contributing to community development projects, she writes, 'enhances one's status and may reinforce one's identity as a member of the community' (1998). What I propose here is not a competing explanation, but a supplementary and overlapping one that requires neither experience of discrimination nor participation in development initiatives.

Migrating usually means leaving a social group whose sense of communality is reinforced by geographical propinquity. Ghassan Hage (2002) develops a compelling argument on the moral implications of such a departure, showing that migration can be a guilt-inducing process within a moral economy of social belonging. A central element in human life, he argues, is to repay the 'gift of communality' through participation in the family, community or whichever social group is most significant to the individual. By virtue of one's membership, 'one remains in the debt of the community, repaying in small instalments through a life-time of participating in it' (2002). Upon migrating, transnational practices become essential to repaying the debt. While Hage concentrates on how migrants seek to be implicated in the social reality of their countries of origin through the use of news media, I am interested in how migrants' interaction with non-migrants is similarly motivated by a moral economy of social belonging.

The human dynamics of transnationalism are shaped partly by mobility and immobility, and partly by relationships between individuals that are unrelated to migration. For instance, remittances to elderly parents can be a transnationalized form of intergenerational transfers that would have taken place regardless of migration. Transnational relationships between siblings, by contrast, might *acquire* asymmetrical dimensions through migration. In other words, new inequalities between senders and receivers are created because the migration process entails a shift in the balance of power (Gardner 1996). The usefulness of Hage's analysis, and other approaches which I will discuss below, lies in the links with migration itself: they can help understand how the experience of migration adds to other influences on relations between individuals and between migrants and non-migrants as social groups.

Migrants are not driven into a transnational existence by a feeling of guilt, but repaying the gift of communality is a central element in the moral framework of transnationalism. As I will show below, non-migrants frequently criticize migrants for not providing support in the form of remittances or facilitation of migration. Equally important in this context, however, is the more subtle criticism of migrants who 'forget where they came from'. This can be read as a failure to repay the gift of communality. Scornful stories about migrants who return on holiday but do not socialize with their old friends and neighbours, allegedly because they now see themselves as superior, are common among non-migrants in Cape Verde.

The importance of repaying the debt of communality is confirmed by observing how transnational practice often exists in little more than manifestations of relationships. Such manifestations overlap with the notion of 'kin work', defined as 'the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household ties' for instance through visits phone calls

or gifts (di Leonardo 1992). For families whose members live in different countries, kin work is crucial. Active maintenance of transnational family ties can provide a strong sense of belonging together despite geographical separation, and lay the basis for emotional or material support in the future (Goulbourne 2002; Zontini 2004).

In the introduction to their book *The transnational family* Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) use the term 'relativizing' to describe the process of materializing the family as an imagined community. Relativizing often involves substantial financial sacrifices to cover the costs of long-distance travel, communication and gifts. When immigrants in industrialized countries struggle to make ends meet and find that they cannot afford relativizing activities such as international phone calls, this can be a particularly traumatic aspect of being poor (van der Zwaard and de Ruiter 1999).

The preceding arguments show that transnational practices can have both substantive and relativizing functions. Phone calls, for instance, are certainly used to negotiate the use of remittances and discuss facilitation of migration – in other words for substantive purposes. At the same time, *calling or not calling* is of tremendous importance in itself, regardless of the information being exchanged. Even remittances, which have an obvious material function, can also play an important role in reinforcing interpersonal relations. In her analysis of the cultural meanings of money, Celia Falicov (2001) asserts that 'money is a fundamental "glue" that holds the Latino family together' and that monetary gifts or loans constitute 'powerful reinforcers of family connectedness' (2001).

Migrants' holidays are also essential for recognition of social ties, and for transmitting transnational family values to the next generation (Goulbourne 2002). Bringing gifts plays a key role, but manifestations of communality are important in their own right. Social visits are an integral part of a vacation in the country of origin. 'I know that a full week of the holiday is spent on going for visits' said a middle-aged Cape Verdean woman who lives in the Netherlands. 'When all that is over and everybody have received their presents, my holiday starts. I go to beach, go dancing...'

From non-migrants' point of view, it is certainly noticed whether or not they are included in the social sphere of relatives or former neighbours on holiday. Silvino (32) lives in an area of São Vicente with many emigrants are present during the summer. 'Of course, if they are here for a month you don't go out every day' he says. 'What's important is that they come to see you.'<sup>4</sup> The purpose of coming to see him is to recognize the lasting existence of a relation, despite geographical separation and widely different everyday lives.

### *Moral economies of ingratitude*

In developing the argument about the gift of communality, Ghassan Hage (2002) referred to a 'moral economy of social belonging'. The term 'moral economy' is used by social scientists in a variety of ways.<sup>5</sup> A meaningful understanding in the context of transnationalism is the exchange and accumulation of moral 'currency'. In a study of Surinamese transnationalism, Ruben Gowricharn (2004) shows how such currency is not only earned through actions, but is intrinsic to the relations between migrants and non-migrants. Non-migrants hold commonly accepted, morally founded entitlements to support from their migrant rela-

tives which Gowricharn labels 'moral capital'. The transnational relations, he argues, consist both of 'primordial givens' and 'exchange elements' (2004). It is the primordial which constitute moral capital.

The 'exchange elements' can also have moral dimensions. In Cape Verdean transnationalism, there sometimes appears to be a moral economy with a negative currency: being labelled ungrateful. As Lisa Åkesson (2004) puts it, 'migrants are supposed to remember those at home, and through different kinds of support prove that they are not *ingrôt* (ungrateful) to those they have left behind'. It is significant that 'ingratitude' invariably refers to the migrant who fails to remit or stay in touch, and not to non-migrants who fail to appreciate what they receive. The concept is also frequently used by migrants themselves as a submissive disclaimer: 'I know I am ungrateful and should have called more often'.

The idea of ingratitude as a characteristic of emigrants is not limited to Cape Verde. In an analysis of nationalism and African cinema, Jude Akudinobi (2001) reflects on the meaning of ingratitude in the film *Gito, the Ungrateful* (Léonce 1993), the first feature film produced in Burundi. In the film, Gito, a young Burundian man studying in Paris, returns home with his brand new diploma and a heap of illusions. Snubbing his parents, whose appearance testifies to his humble origins, he settles into a posh hotel. Gito's 'ingratitude', Akudinobi writes

is not just defined through an abstract notion of selfishness, but by behaviour deemed at odds with the ideals of the community/nation. The epithet *ungrateful*, pointedly, elicits feelings of indebtedness, abdication of responsibility; and it adds a moral dimension to the story' (2001, emphasis in original).<sup>6</sup>

Gito in the film represents a caricatured version of emigrants who 'forget where they came from'. When Akudinobi refers to indebtedness and abdication of responsibility as constituent elements of the emigrant's ingratitude, it points back to the notion of emigrants' obligation to repay the gift of communality.

### *The pro-migrant turn in discourse*

What I have written about the moralities of transnationalism so far seems to indicate that non-migrants often have the upper hand. It is they who possess 'moral capital' while migrants must repay the gift of communality or risk being labelled ungrateful. In the past, it was also common for official discourse in countries of origin to be deeply sceptical of emigrants. This has changed during the past couple of decades, with a growing number of governments praising their emigrants as national heroes and courting relations with the diaspora in order to attract remittances, investment or political lobbying (Rodriguez 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003). This pro-migrant turn in discourse has, to some extent, bestowed migrants with a more positive image in moral terms. There may be a schism, however, between the welcoming attitude of 'the State' and a less amicable posture among individuals in the bureaucracy. Emigrants who wish to build houses or otherwise invest in the country of origin are often frustrated by a bureaucracy that may be inefficient and unprofessional in relation to what they are used to in their countries of employment. Public servants, on the



other hand, can perceive the emigrants as arrogant and demanding. In typical contexts of labour emigration, emigrants are poorly educated but relatively wealthy compared to civil servants who try to make ends meet with a local salary.

### *Practicing transnationalism in a moral context*

The moral dimensions of transnationalism mean that for migrants, transnational practices such as sending remittances or facilitating migration can be a source of personal gratification, pride and social prestige (Böcker 1994; Goldschmidt 2002). My Cape Verdean interviewees in the Netherlands often talked about their remittance practices with a great deal of pride, not just at the personal level, but with reference to a Cape Verdean tradition of solidarity. Similarly, the veteran migrants explained how facilitation of migration was an integral element of the migration ethos of the 1960s and 1970s:

We went and struggled for documents, so that we could become legal and bring our youngsters, our children, our cousins, nephews. [...] Any relative you liked, you would bring with you to the Netherlands where he would work. [...] And he in turn, will help others. Emigration has to be like that. (Elautério, 67)

Looking back upon their lives as migrants, many expressed a sense of achievement in having helped others to migrate. As one elderly woman put it ‘Even with all the trouble I went through, I managed to get ten people to the Netherlands! Four children, my sister and two brothers, a nephew and my parents.’

With the current restrictive immigration policies in Europe and North America, it is difficult for migrants to meet non-migrants’ expectations of help to emigrate. Many migrants are also unable or unwilling to remit enough money to satisfy their relatives. Such non-compliance often results in moral condemnation, which clearly adds to migrants’ feelings of frustration.

When non-migrants feel that they have an intrinsic entitlement to support from their migrant relatives, they easily react to the absence or inadequacy of such support with indignation. In particular, non-migrants are quick to judge their relatives abroad on the basis of remittance practices. In my first interview with Silvino (32) in his house in São Vicente, I asked him if he had family abroad.

I have a Grandmother in Gabon, I have aunts in Holland, I have cousins in America; I have a lot of relatives in Portugal. Not only there, in a lot of places. But none of them help, man! They never sent anything.

The impressive transnational kinship network is not atypical in Cape Verde. Neither is the unsolicited mention of remittances, or rather, the absence of remittances. After listing his connections proudly, Silvino expressed disappointment. Not because his emigrant relatives are particularly close to him, or particularly wealthy, but because he is not receiving the support from them that he regards as an entitlement. This is precisely what Ruben Gowricharn (2004) referred to as non-migrants’ moral capital. In the case of Cape Verde, Lisa Åkesson (2004) has argued that when non-migrants complain that their relatives ‘send

nothing' this often means 'less than they ought to send' rather than literally nothing. Non-migrants seem to often understate, or not acknowledge, the support they do receive. Åkeson's ethnographic accounts mirror my own fieldwork experiences of non-migrants who barely mention it in passing when substantial remittances or parcels arrive, even after constant complaints about the same relative's failure to fulfil their obligations. A similar picture is painted by Karen Richman (2005) in her study of Haitian migration. Not acknowledging remittances, she writes, constitute a strategy for undermining the hierarchical potential of gift-giving.

### **Information and imagination in transnational relations**

The moral dimensions of transnationalism are closely related to flows of information and the formation of images about one's partners in transnational exchanges. The physical distance between migrants and non-migrants often creates gaps in information. Long-distance communication has become easier with the technological and market developments in telecommunications, but it can still be a struggle, both for migrants with little money to spend, and for non-migrants in remote areas of the developing world (Mahler 2001; Pribilsky 2004; Wilding 2006). Furthermore, communicating means negotiating contested representations, creating as well as filling information gaps. What did my brother in Cape Verde really do with the money I sent him? Is it true that my uncle in the Netherlands is too busy with his work to sort out a tourist visa for me? Such uncomfortable questions are a common element in transnational communication.

#### *Migrants' information about life in the place of origin*

Even migrants who maintain close contact with their non-migrant relatives and return to their country of origin on a regular basis have limited information about the daily lives of non-migrants. When remittances are being sent, for instance, migrants cannot know with certainty what the recipients do with the money, or how the transfers affect their lives. Development economists have been concerned that since remitters cannot directly observe the efforts of recipients to earn money for themselves, non-migrants have an incentive to work less, take bigger risks with their money, or otherwise shirk and rely on emigrants for subsistence. In a study in Mali, farmers who had emigrant relatives were, in fact, found to be less productive than those who did not. Some even colluded to announce fictitious natural disasters in order to attract remittances (Azam and Gubert 2002). Gaps in communication and the senders' limited access to information about local conditions can in other words be used strategically in eliciting and managing remittances.

Concerns among remittance senders tend not to concentrate on productivity losses in the place of origin, but rather, on whether remittances are being spent according to their intentions. One of my informants in the Netherlands, Soraia (29) had left her two daughters with an aunt when she emigrated. She struggled to put aside money for her daughters, and was deeply frustrated because she suspected that the aunt pocketed most of the money intended to buy the girls new clothes for school. Soraia's sister Sandra (36), who also lives in

the Netherlands, regularly sends money to their elderly mother in São Vicente, who has no other source of income. Sandra's frustration is that their mother keeps living in poverty despite substantial remittances. The house is falling apart, there is still no electricity, and no obvious signs of money from abroad. 'The neighbours must think we are terrible people', Sandra said, 'living in the Netherlands and not taking care of our old mother'. What their mother does with the money she receives is still a mystery.

The inability of migrants to observe non-migrants' behaviour often leads to conflict over remittances sent for building or repairing houses. While actual return is often postponed indefinitely, many emigrants build houses in Cape Verde. These are then used during holidays, and often with the view to become retirement homes. A recurrent dilemma for migrants is whether they should supervise the construction themselves during holidays, or let somebody else do the job. The problem with the former option is that holidays lose their recreational value. The problem with the latter is the issue of trust. An emigrant I interviewed during his holidays in Cape Verde, Victor (38) explained the situation:

There are many emigrants who say 'I won't go to Cape Verde again because I sent them money to build my house and they took it all.' And it's true. They take it all. You lose interest. You send € 100,000 for the house; everything goes well. They say the house is growing. And you come and the house is not there, what do you do? You'll feel like going back to Europe for good. There are many, many [who have had this type of experience]. All this is between relatives.

Such anecdotes are heard constantly among Cape Verdean emigrants as well as in other diasporas (e.g. Poel 2005). They vividly illustrate the importance of access to information. Emigrants are in a vulnerable situation because they are far away and cannot know for sure how their money is being spent. Regardless of how often such embezzlement of relatives' funds actually happens, it is significant that the anecdotes are so widespread. Being cheated is perceived as a common risk in relations between migrants and non-migrants and affects the choices people make.

### *Non-migrants' information about life abroad*

Migrants and non-migrants alike can be frustrated by not knowing for certain what goes on 'on the other side'. An important difference, however, is that most non-migrants have never even been to the country where their migrant relatives lead their daily lives. Piecing together available pieces of information about what life there is like, can be a challenge. One of my non-migrant informants in Cape Verde, Jocilene (19), told me that she had confronted her cousin Solange over this. During her holidays in Cape Verde, Solange had given the impression that life in the Netherlands was very good, but Jocilene could not make this fit with what she had heard elsewhere:

I said 'But your aunt told me that your life over there is difficult, that sometimes you go to her house, to chill out, because in your own house you can't relax from work, that you're really deadbeat. Now you're telling me that you're all cool over there, with parties and everything?' I said 'I don't get it. Each of you tells a different story, but I don't know who is telling the truth and who is lying!'

*And what did Solange say?*

She said ‘ah, sometimes I’m tired, sometimes I’m having a good time’. I said ‘even so, people don’t know whether you’re worn out or relaxing over there.’ Then she just said ‘Oh, come on, forget it!’ When you tell them the truth, they want to change the subject right away.

As this story shows, non-migrants relate to life abroad through their relatives neighbours and friends, but have limited ability to verify patchy and sometimes contradictory pieces of information. Jocilene was possibly atypical in her confrontational approach, but it is a recurrent issue that non-migrants have to decide for themselves what to believe. When I asked non-migrants about their impressions of life in the Netherlands, responses were often framed in terms of what their migrant relatives said, leaving open the question of veracity.

When migrants don’t provide the expected support for others to emigrate, this is understandable in the light of immigration policies in Europe and North America. There is often very little migrants can do to help their relatives. The non-migrants in question, however, might wonder or guess why such help is not coming. In my interview with Lorena (25) in São Vicente, she talked about the difficulties of migrating to the Netherlands:

There are many Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands, but nowadays, one doesn’t hear much talk about going to the Netherlands. It’s because of all these problems. You can only go if you have family there. But even if you have family abroad, sometimes they don’t care about sending you papers.

*What do you mean?*

I mean, sometimes they don’t send it. They have to send you a paper, you see. Sometimes they don’t send it to you. [...] They say that they don’t have time, you see. I don’t know if it’s true that they don’t have time or if they don’t want to.

Lorena’s comments illustrate non-migrants’ challenging task of making sense of their relatives’ life abroad. She is fully aware of the barriers to migration, but has no basis for judging migrants’ efforts to provide help. The fact that she has never left Cape Verde certainly makes it harder to assess the plausibility of migrants’ claim that they are too busy.

When non-migrants with relatives abroad don’t receive remittances, or receive less than they feel entitled to, this also creates an information gap. Is it true that the migrants are struggling to make ends meet? Are they remitting to somebody else instead? Or don’t they care about their family who live in poverty? There are, of course, not always simple answers to such questions. But non-migrants will often try to come up with explanations for their migrant relatives’ behaviour. During my interview with Lorena she also talked about her sisters on her father’s side, who live in poverty although their mother and several other relatives are in the Netherlands. Lorena’s mother is in the room and joins the conversation: ‘It’s lack of interest, lack of interest in the family. If they had shown some interest, they would make an effort and send money. It’s just that they’re not interested in helping their family.’

### *Information and imagination*

Questions about access to factual information blend into more complex issues of perceptions and social construction. Information gaps are filled in light of specific imaginations, and information fragments are made comprehensible through pre-existing ideas about life on the other side. An example which often has a traumatic element is the reintegration of deportees. Premature returns are bound to set off speculations. 'There are people who have been in the Netherlands for 20 years without papers' says Silvino (32) in São Vicente, introducing his analysis of early return:

As long as you work, you'll be OK. But if you get involved in drugs and things like that, they'll send you back immediately. [...] When people are deported, they say they didn't like it, that the climate was bad, and things like that. But that's not the truth.

My interviewees included several young men who had been deported from the Netherlands and had to live with such rumours. I myself don't know whether it is true as they told me that their only crime was illegal residence, and that they were denounced by enemies and falsely accused of drug dealing. One of them, Hélder (33) said that he was relieved to have left a nightmarish life as an illegal in Rotterdam and be back in Cape Verde, even with the gossip in his neighbourhood. His story illustrates the fundamental role of information in transnational relations: while his neighbours' guesswork about his life in the Netherlands was a nuisance, he himself took pride in using his knowledge from Rotterdam to see through the superior airs of migrants on holiday:

They come here, and even if you grew up together, they pretend not knowing you. That happens all the time. But I say, you don't fool me. It's where you live that I was. I know exactly what your life there is like. You save a couple of thousand Euro, you come for a holiday, but you don't fool me. When I find work, I can relax with a beer more easily than you. Seriously.

Hélder's account challenges the naïve view of Europe as paradise. Importantly, he speaks with authority because he has seen with his own eyes what other non-migrants have only heard about. Some heard emigrants on holiday say that life abroad was terribly hard, and concluded that the emigrants were lying because they did not want to share their riches. Others observed emigrants showing off with expensive clothes and video cameras, and wondered if it was true that they were really cleaning toilets for the rest of the year. The issue here, of course, is not what the life of emigrants is 'really' like, but that non-migrants' inability to see for themselves is a key inequality in transnational relationships.

In a historical perspective, there has, nevertheless, been an improvement in non-migrants' access to information. The media has played an important role in providing imagery of life abroad, and non-migrants are exposed to a broader variety of migrants' accounts: deportees and second-generation holiday-makers, for instance, can differ greatly from the seafarers and successful labour migrants in what they tell about everyday life in other countries.

## Transnational resource inequalities

Having examined asymmetries in the moralities of transnationalism, in information and imagination, I now turn to the third and final focus of the analysis, namely transnational resource inequalities. In the wake of migration from poor to rich countries, transnational relations between individuals come to encapsulate the gross inequalities of the global economy. Non-migrants' limited geographical mobility, dictated by restrictive immigration policy regimes, represent a second form of resource inequality. Many migrants possess valuable resources in the form of citizenship or residence permits in the country of destination. I refer to these entitlements as *mobility resources*, as opposed to material resources. A third form of resource inequality, which will not be discussed here, pertains to cultural and linguistic competence. Differences in the ability to communicate along the borders of the transnational social field, at both destination and origin, clearly affects relationships between individuals. For instance, second generation migrants' encounters with non-migrants at their parents' place of origin is typically affected by resource inequalities in cultural and linguistic terms as well as by relative wealth (Louie 2001; Kibria 2002).

Material resources and mobility resources play a special role because they underpin two fundamental transnational practices. Sending remittances is a redistribution of material resources from migrants to non-migrants. Facilitating migration can be interpreted as sharing of one's mobility resources. When non-migrants in Cape Verde complain that their migrant relatives 'don't help', the distinction between these two forms of assistance is often blurred.

### *Material resource inequalities*

In the case of Dutch-Cape Verdean transnationalism, per capita purchasing power in the country of origin is less than one fifth of the level in the country of destination. The difference between Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands and their non-migrant relatives is somewhat smaller, but still substantial.<sup>7</sup> Relations between migrants and non-migrants are fundamentally shaped by this inequality — and by contrasting perceptions of it.

Expectations about remittances are shaped in part by non-migrants' assessment of the inequality in material resources. Migrants commonly complain that non-migrants assume that they have unlimited access to easy money. 'Many Cape Verdeans think we pick money from the ground here' said a man who had lived in the Netherlands for almost thirty years. A common explanation for this attitude, was that the Cape Verdean men who emigrated in the 1960s to work at sea earned well and spent very little abroad. When they returned for holidays in Cape Verde, they were allegedly laden with gold, unabashedly squandered their money, and distributed gifts in Santa Claus fashion.

The second generation, i.e. children of migrants, raised in the Netherlands, rarely experience pressure to remit. However, the perceived difference in material resources confronts them during holidays in Cape Verde. Denise (22) talked indignantly about this during an interview: 'Those young people in Cape Verde, they don't understand... What makes me most angry when I'm in Cape Verde is that they think that here in Holland everything is

easy. But it's not, you have to work hard.' Young Cape Verdeans in the diaspora experience non-migrants' expectations and requests during their holidays primarily in three ways. First, relatives and neighbours, usually on their own age, anticipate being treated to disco tickets, drinks and other costs of going out. Second, non-migrants often ask the holiday-makers to leave them their clothes when the holiday is over. Third, non-migrants ask to be sent specific things from abroad. Denise had experienced all of this:

If I go to a party with some friends, of course I will pay their tickets and some drinks. Those things I do. I understand that they have *less* than us. But what I don't like is when people... take advantage. They see you on the street, 'oh Denise, buy me a ticket to the disco'. They see you passing and say 'oh what nice sandals, leave them for me when you go, I'll come and collect them'. [...] They don't think about how we live in the Netherlands, that we have to pay our debts, our insurance, school. They sit there and buy luxury with the money. Like they ask 'oh send me a Discman, send me...' I couldn't buy a Discman for myself.

She went on to complain that if she did offer to leave a t-shirt that wasn't her very best they would say 'no that's from Zeeman, I don't want it. Zeeman, Wibra, Hans Textiel, Bristol, the most... well, the cheapest shops. They know them right away.' Other young Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands were happy to share during their holidays 'I left my cousins lots of things when I left' said one man in his twenties. 'Shoes, clothes. It's easier to find work here. I'll earn money and buy new ones.' Whether it promotes frustration and anger or feelings of solidarity and gratitude, material inequalities and the related expectations of remittances or gifts are central to relations between migrants and non-migrants.

For migrants who are recently arrived or live illegally in the Netherlands, non-migrants' unrealistic expectations are more than a nuisance. One of my informants spent several years in the Netherlands without papers, worked illegally and earned less than €400 per month. She still sent about € 150 every month to her parents and children in Cape Verde. In some cases, migrants simply can't afford to remit to people who expect to be supported by them. In a study of Sudanese migrants in the United States, Stephanie Riak Akuei (2005) writes about Joseph who remitted money to 24 relatives, indirectly supporting 62 persons in five countries. 'In spite of the pressures they cause' Akuei (2005) writes, 'remittances are important social gestures that contribute to senders' well being.' The remittances do so because they engender a highly valued sense of pride and dignity. A few months after her field work, however, Akuei found that Joseph had been forced to change his phone number to ward off remittance requests. He explained to her in frustration: 'It's very shameful, but it is the only thing I can do to stop all of those calls. People just don't understand what we are facing here' (Akuei 2005)

Relating to the material resources inequalities is, of course, also frustrating for non-migrants. Money from emigrant relatives is the main source of income for thousands of households in Cape Verde, as it is in many other developing countries. Not knowing how much money is coming, when it is coming, or if it will come at all, can be trying. For migrants and non-migrants alike, the geographical distance easily creates a feeling of powerlessness in relation to remittances. Sandra, who was worried that the money she remitted to her mother was invisible to the neighbours, was herself scorned by her cousin Vânia (28).

Vânia complained to me that during her holiday in Cape Verde three years ago, Sandra had written down the shoe sizes of Vânia's five children and promised to send them new shoes from the Netherlands. No shoes arrived, however. 'Now my children are saying they have an aunt who is telling lies', Vânia said. 'They are rich, but they don't even send one Euro so we can have a bit of food.'

### *Mobility resources and their yields*

Migrants' mobility resources bestow freedom of movement and residence within the geographical parameters of the transnational social field, something which non-migrants often do not have. Like in many other diasporas, Cape Verde emigrants enjoy the right to dual citizenship and are free to visit or return permanently, should they wish to do so. It is therefore entitlements in the country of destination which determine freedom of movement. Under the present international migration regime, such mobility resources have enormous value, and potentially substantial yields. Based on their study of Salvadoran and Chinese transnational families, Patricia Landolt and Wei Wei Da (2005) call for further research on 'the ways in which physical distance and the ability of some members of the family to cross borders plays out as a source of power and autonomy for some individuals within the family network, and as a site of risk, threat and uncertainty for others'. Analyses in terms of mobility resources and their yields can contribute to this.

The possible uses and yields of mobility resources depend on the context, especially on the requirements of prospective migrants. For Somalis and Afghans, for instance, the challenge may be to finance smuggling to Europe in order to seek asylum. Cape Verdeans, by contrast, have virtually no chance of being granted asylum or residence on humanitarian grounds, and must therefore seek other forms of help. The principal mode of migration to the Netherlands is family-formation migration, i.e. starting a relationship with a citizen or resident that will allow the prospective migrant to settle. Under Dutch immigration regulations, this does not have to be a formal marriage, nor is there a requirement that the couple must have been cohabiting abroad. Most commonly, the couple either meets during the resident partner's holidays in Cape Verde, or they meet in the Netherlands after the prospective migrant has arrived on a tourist visa.<sup>8</sup>

Settled migrants in the Netherlands can basically offer two types of facilitation. First, they can help bring the prospective migrant to the Netherlands on a tourist visa by issuing a declaration of responsibility and other required documents. Second, they can help the prospective migrant into a relationship, either by being the resident partner in a relationship, or by finding another suitable partner. The subsequent arrangements of a relationship can take several forms. The resident partner can agree to marry or give the appearance of a relationship as a favour to a friend or relative, without living together or having sexual relations. Alternatively, the resident partner can do the same in exchange for a payment. Finally, the two may start living together and have sexual relations. The balance between different motivations in the latter case is not straightforward.

Since the late 1990s, it has not been possible to enter the Netherlands on a tourist visa and later remain in the country on the basis of a marriage or a relationship. If the tourist



finds a prospective partner in the Netherlands, he or she has to return to the country of origin while the application is being processed. This accentuates the contrast between settled migrants and prospective migrants, because those who are in the Netherlands on short-term visas or illegally are far from gaining a foothold. They are, in a sense, still non-migrants since they remain in an asymmetrical relationship with the settled migrants.

Where family-related migration is the norm, the gate-keeping role of emigrants is central to their relations with non-migrant relatives. On the one hand, they may facilitate migration of relatives in return for past favours. On the other hand, emigrants can use their power to keep non-migrant relatives in the country of origin to oversee construction, take care of children or provide other services, even when those non-migrants are desperate to leave. Karen Richman (2005) observed this in Haiti, and I experienced it in Cape Verde. A case in point was Evanilda (25) who was raising her emigrant sisters' four children in addition to her own daughter. 'My life is only about feeding nieces and nephews' she complained, adding that her sisters had never done a thing to help her go to Europe.

The value placed on facilitation of migration within transnational moralities means that mobility resources can be used to generate personal prestige and a high moral standing. The same resources can also yield other benefits in relations with non-migrants. The most obvious case is payment for marriages. Until restrictive legislation against bogus marriages was introduced in the Netherlands in the mid-1990s, such arrangements were relatively common among Cape Verdeans. The resident partner was sometimes Dutch, sometimes Cape Verdean. The price of contracting a marriage for documents rose markedly from as little as 2,000 guilders around 1980 to more than 10,000 a decade later. With today's prices, this corresponds to less than € 2000 and about € 7000, respectively.

My impression is that overtly bogus marriages or relationships are less common among Cape Verdeans in the Netherlands today than they were in the early 1990s. Instead, prospective migrants may opt to start living with somebody who may not be their preferred partner in terms of personal attraction, but who can guarantee them the right to live in the Netherlands. This makes it possible for settled migrants to use their mobility resources for sexual exploitation. Men with Dutch citizenship can, for instance, start a sexual relationship with a woman in need of a partner, leave her after a short time 'because the relationship didn't work out', and repeat the strategy with other women. The same is possible when migrants go on holiday to Cape Verde. Migrants and non-migrants alike told me that it is very easy for migrants on holiday to start relationships with local women who see a chance to emigrate, and that many take advantage of the opportunity.

When migrants take advantage of non-migrants for money or sexual pleasure, this reflects an unequal relationship where migrants have power because of their mobility resources. As with remittances and communication, however, the asymmetry causes frustration on both sides. A prospective relationship between a settled migrant and a non-migrant in Cape Verde or on a short-term visa raises difficult questions about trust. Both parties have incentives for pretending to be in love in order to take advantage. Several migrants in the Netherlands, both men and women, told me of past marriages with Cape Verdeans which ended as soon as their spouse had obtained a residence permit.

In Cape Verde, many prospective migrants still have the idea that the first challenge is to arrive in Europe, and then one can sort out the papers later. This is exactly what current policy in Europe seeks to avoid. If you arrive as a tourist, you will have to leave as a tourist. Applications for residence must be filed in Cape Verde. Consequently, bringing a Cape Verdean to the Netherlands on a tourist visa is a big responsibility and risk for the sponsor, and potentially a disappointment for the prospective migrant. Hélder (33) who came to the Netherlands on a tourist visa, invited by his sister, overstayed and became an illegal resident. Now he is back in Cape Verde.

People here don't understand. After I came back, I felt sorry for a few Cape Verdeans I saw there, suffering. Nowhere to sleep. Begging in the street. Even if you are not involved in drugs. Some would get some change from their sisters at the end of the month.

*Your sister who sent for you didn't give you money?*

To be sent for is one thing, being there is another. You arrive and spend a few months without working, they see you, always in the house, they see you eating. They don't see any money. They get fed up with you. Even if they don't say anything, you see it in their faces. I was having such a hard time I never imagined. Now I am here. I don't have any contact with her. My family does, but not me. I did all the housework, I did everything I could. But I couldn't get money without work.

Such conflicts in the wake of facilitating migration are common. As with remittances, solidarity blends into tensions and mutual feelings of abuse (cf. Mahler 1995; Menjívar 2000). Hélder's complaints that people in Cape Verde 'don't understand' were echoed by migrants on holiday. 'They like to ask, but there is nothing you can do' said one man in his fifties. 'You can't help everybody. But they don't understand. That's the problem.'

The distribution of mobility resources affects relations within transnational networks of kinship and friendship. These relations, in turn, affect *whose* migration is facilitated, and consequently bear upon the size and composition of aggregate migration flows.

## Conclusions

A better understanding of human dynamics is central to the further development of transnational migration as a field of academic research. In addition, I would argue, such understanding can help improve policies on migration and development. The current surge in interest in migration and remittances in influential institutions such as the World Bank, the regional development banks, and several national development agencies, might have greater impact when policy measures are attuned to the realities of how the people involved relate to each other. For instance, the challenge of implementing migrant-friendly policies through a bureaucracy of civil servants who may have strained relations with emigrant clients, must be taken seriously (Carling 2005). Attention to interpersonal relations in development policy is not a requirement that is unique to the field of migration. In fact, a recent policy document from the OECD Development Centre concludes that policy implementation is often 'hindered by a failure to consider local human dynamics' (MacLachlan and Carr 2005). With policies related to migration in particular, there seems to be potential for

making better use of the insights accumulated through more than a decade of research on transnational migration in a variety of settings.

The human dynamics of transnationalism are about migrants and non-migrants interacting with each other from a distance and imagining each others' lives. This distance is fundamentally geographical, since it is migration that defines the groups in relation to each other. There is also a distance in terms of resources and information, however, which means that the schism between the groups can remain when they are spatially close, for instance during migrants' holidays. In this article, I have shown how the concept of asymmetries can be a useful analytical tool for understanding relations between migrants and non-migrants. Asymmetries in relation to transnational moralities, information and resources interact with each other and influence the shifting balance of conflict and cooperation in micro-level transnational relationships.

Seeing migrants and non-migrants as socially constructed groups rather than as demographic givens means acknowledging an element of fluidity. At the same time, the differences and tensions between the two groups must be taken seriously. When transnationalism coexists with ever greater barriers to migration, there is a danger of obscuring these frictions through a focus on hybridity and flux and an abandonment of the traditional binary of origin and destination.

## Notes

- 1 Calculated on the basis of unpublished statistics from Statistics Netherlands. The second generation is defined as persons born in the Netherlands with one or two Cape Verdean-born parents.
- 2 Calculated on the basis of unpublished survey data from Instituto de Emprego e Formação Profissional 2002 (N=9596).
- 3 There are, of course, exceptions, including Halstead (2002) Landolt and Da (2005), Parreñas (2005) and Strijp (1997).
- 4 The latter sentence is difficult to translate from Kriol: *Mas important e kel fala* (literally 'Most important is that conversation'). 'Fala' means 'speech' or 'conversation' and refers to the expression *dá fala* (literally 'give conversation'), which is very commonly used in Kriol to describe informal visits. The use of the demonstrative pronoun 'kel' entails a certain ambiguity: 'kel' is used liberally in Kriol because there is no definite article, but nevertheless has a demonstrative quality, indicating that 'that conversation' (a visit by an emigrant on holiday) is a distinct concept.
- 5 The term 'moral economy' is used in very different ways. It was originally coined as a reaction to economic explanations of food riots in England (Thompson 1971). It is still often used to highlight non-economic aspects of 'the economy'.
- 6 Akudinobi also relates Gito to the "been-to" archetype of post-independence African literature, i.e. an African educated in the colonial metropole, embodying notions of cultural superiority. In many African countries, more recent labour migrants have to deal with the fact that the stereotype of "been-to" is already established in the popular imagination.
- 7 The income of Cape Verdean households in the Netherlands is 20 per cent lower than the average (Statistics Netherlands 2003). Among non-migrants in Cape Verde, people who have relatives in the Netherlands are probably wealthier than those who do not, even without taking remittances into account. There are no statistics that can confirm this claim directly, but it is plausible in light

of analyses which show that access to material resources makes it easier to realize one's aspirations to emigrate (Carling 2002).

- 8 Possible migration strategies are more numerous and complex, often involving other European countries. For instance, Cape Verdeans may obtain tourist visas to the Netherlands and then move to other countries where living or working illegally is less difficult. Alternatively, they can move to the Netherlands after acquiring a residence permit in another European country. In both cases, settling in Europe without depending on a relationship may be possible, although assistance from settled immigrants is often a prerequisite for acquiring a tourist visa.

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