Do Transnational Activities Hinder Integration? – A Critical Appraisal Of Assimilation Theory In Relation To Migrant Transnationalism

Introduction
As international migration evolves, a growing part of migrants are involved in cross-national relations. However, we know very little of the spread, nature and consequences of these relations. In line with classic assimilation theory, both scholars and politicians happen to interpret strong links towards the country of origin as impeding integration into a majority culture. At the same time a transnational framework within migration studies has questioned the assimilationist ideas of links towards the country of origin as hindering successful integration into a new society.

Within academic research, transnational engagement has both been stated as a characteristic of people with high social, cultural and economic capital, a feature of a cosmopolitan elite, as well as a reaction towards marginalization, racism and down-mobility (Alba & Nee 2012; Bolognani 2007; Guarnizo, Portes & Haller 2003; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo 2002; Portes 2003). To analyze the maintained cross-national relations in relation to aspects of integration is consequently of great importance in order to understand the living conditions of an emergent part of today’s population as well as enhance informed policymaking on the issue of migrant integration.

Whilst the emergence of transnationalism as a theoretical approach within migrant studies has given rise to a broad qualitative field of study the quantitative examinations of transnational activities have been more limited. Until today, the main quantitative contributions on transnational activities derive from studies of Latin American migrants in the US during the 1990’s (Guarnizo, Portes & Haller 2003; Portes 2003). With the exception of some studies from Germany and the Netherlands (Esser 2009; Schunck 2014; Snel et. al 2008), the consequences of transnational connections in terms of integration within the European context are still vastly unexplored. This geographical bias becomes problematic if one thinks of integration as (at least) a two way process, where the importance of the receiving society should at least theoretically influence also the consequences of migrant transnationalism in relation to integration in that specific society.

By examining the relations between migrant transnational activities and social and economic integration within the receiving society of contemporary Sweden, the
The objective of this study is to provide new empirical knowledge that enables a further evaluation of the accuracy of classic assimilation theory. Different from immigration policies in the US and other countries in Europe, Sweden is a country well known for its multicultural integration policies and political history marked by a social democratic welfare state. Migrants during the post-war period have not only been encouraged to maintain and practice their culture of origin but also been given a minority status as to support their specific interests and participation in democratic processes (Sainsbury 2006; Schierup et. al. 2006). Together with a fast growing share of the Swedish foreign-born population, Sweden therefore is an interesting country to study in order to better understand the importance of the receiving society in the relation between migrant transnationalism and integration.

**Data and methods**

The data used for this study derives from the newly released Swedish Level of Living survey of Foreign Born\(^1\) built on interviews conducted 2010-2012. The sample used in this study consists of 3379 individuals 18-75 years of age and having lived permanently in Sweden for at least five years at the time of the interview.

A third of the sample consists of individuals born in Nordic or other Western countries, almost a quarter are born in African countries and the remains consist of rather equally big groups from Eastern European, Asian and Latin American countries. Overall the sample comprises individuals having lived in Sweden for quite some time and coming to Sweden at young ages. For example, 75% of the sample has lived in Sweden for more than 14 years and 35% of the sample came to Sweden under the age of 16.

Through nested binary logistic regression models social and economic aspects of integration outcomes are evaluated. In a first step two different models, individually fitted to each integration outcome are tested. In a second step the two integration outcomes are tested in crude models including exactly the same set of variables in order to compare the results across the outcomes in a way not possible otherwise because of the unobserved heterogeneity.

The dependent variables are measured through intermarriage and the likelihood of having a Swedish born partner (social integration) and employment (economic

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\(^1\) The survey was conducted by SULCIS - *Stockholm University Linnaeus Center for Integration Studies* in cooperation with Statistics Sweden.
integration). Transnational activity is in this analysis measured through three of the most commonly used measures of migrant transnationalism, number and length of return visits to the country of origin the latest ten years or since migration and sending remittances. Control variables include demographic characteristics, variables related to the specific migration experience and socio-economic and cultural variables.

**Preliminary findings and contribution of the study**

The findings of this study show significant correlations between transnational activities and both integration outcomes, also when well-known determinants of integration are controlled for. The directions of these associations are similar across each aspect of integration but vary with type of transnational activity. This is illustrated in Table 1, showing the results from the crude fitted models used to compare the results between the different integration outcomes. Whilst sending remittances and travelling frequently to the country of origin are positively associated with social and economic aspects of integration, longer duration of stay in the country of origin is negatively associated with integration outcomes.

**Table 1.**

Regression results of having a Swedish born partner and being employed, immigrants 18-75 years with at least 5 years of permanent residence in Sweden.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transnational activity</th>
<th>Intermarriage (social integration)</th>
<th>Employment (economic integration)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
<td>Exp(B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending remittances</td>
<td>1.64***</td>
<td>2.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of visits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never (ref.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 times</td>
<td>1.38**</td>
<td>1.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;5 times</td>
<td>1.52***</td>
<td>1.70***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longest visit &gt;1month</td>
<td>0.73***</td>
<td>0.49***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N                      | 3379                              | 3379                             |
| Log likelihood         | -1791                             | -1817                            |
| R2                     | 0.13                              | 0.19                             |

Levels of significance: ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

Note: Control variables included in all of the above models are: gender, birth region, age at interview, age at migration, squared age at migration, time since migration, squared time since migration, contacts in the country of origin and highest attained educational level. The need for the models to include the same variables in order to better do this comparison, sending remittances is included also in the model of economic integration. However, because of strong endogeneity this specific result should be interpreted with caution.

*Source: Swedish Level of Living Survey among Foreign-born 2010-2012, authors' calculations*
Although questions regarding reversed causality are indeed relevant in this study, it is clear that transnational activities do happen at the same time as migration integrate in a new society. Hence the overall results from this study imply a further critique of the classic assimilationist view, supporting a more pragmatic view of both integration and transnational activities as parts of the same processes.

By analyzing the newly released survey data from Sweden this study contributes with new empirical knowledge to a research field that long have either been neglected as an area for quantitative research or focusing on migrants within the American context. Where previous studies have been focusing typically on the reasons behind migrant transnationalism, this study has especially been designed for analyzing its implications in relation to integration. The results will enable a further evaluation of the accuracy of classic assimilation theory in relation to transnational activities and the importance of the receiving society in that process.

Please note that these are only examples of the preliminary results, final results will be available in time for the PAA meeting.

References


