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CITIZENSHIP, DIVERSITY AND MOBILITY

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Maarten Vink's paper clearly illustrates how a new methodological approach to an old question can produce new insights. Vink's longitudinal 'life course perspective' and his combination of information from different sources allow him to go beyond the old debate about the causal relationship between naturalisation and integration resulting from the more limited data used in the traditional binary approach to this issue. His research also produces results that are highly relevant in the current political debate in several EU Member States. I mention two examples. His findings that the labour market participation of migrants peaks before and not after naturalisation is highly relevant in the debate in states where politicians propose extending the residence requirement for naturalisation. In the Netherlands, a bill is pending in the Senate which would extend the current five-year residence requirement (in place since 1892) to seven years. In its electoral programme for the March 2017 parliamentary elections, the largest current government party (VVD) announced plans for a further extension to ten years. The justification for these proposals is that they would support immigrant integration. The results from Vink's research illustrate that the extension would have negative effects on the labour market participation of those immigrants who are most interested in acquiring citizenship. Moreover, his paper makes it clear that five to ten years after their arrival considerable numbers of refugees are still living in the country of refuge, however much both they and the receiving societies would prefer an early return to their countries of origin.

My first question is whether by presenting aggregate data the author does not underestimate the diversity within the population researched. The migrant population in his data is composed of refugees, nationals of other EU member states, spouses of nationals, economic migrants and in some cases co-ethnics. The differences within and between these categories remain invisible in aggregate quantitative data. For instance, the data presented in Figure 8 of Vink's paper result from widely different behaviours between refugees and nationals from other EU member states, the former category having high naturalisation rates and the latter generally having much lower rates. Vink points to the large differences in the perceived payoff from naturalisation between the different immigrant groups. However, within certain groups the payoffs and the actual naturalisation practice also vary considerably. In the Netherlands, the naturalisation rates of nationals of southern and eastern Member States are far higher than among EU nationals from the northern and the neighbouring Member States.

Second, I doubt whether naturalisation generally reflects a deliberate choice by the migrant to remain and integrate in the society of his country of residence. In his introduction, Vink presents naturalisation as "a deliberate choice by immigrants to link their future with that of the host country." This image often dominates the political and public debate. It may be true for the majority of applicants, at least at the time of naturalisation, but the reality is more diverse. The paper mentions out-migration *after* naturalisation. Recent data on the Netherlands give a first impression of the size and diversity of that out-migration. In 2009-2013 a total of 44,000 persons originating from nine refugee-producing countries were naturalised. Within two years of their naturalisation 14% of these new Dutch nationals left the Netherlands. Some returned to their countries of origin, while others migrated to other EU Member States. Within two years of their naturalisation almost 40%



of the naturalised former-refugees from Bosnia, Iran, Iraq and Sudan returned to their countries of origin. Among former refugees from Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Somalia the return rate was considerably lower (below 10%). The former refugees, who used the right to free movement within the EU attached to their new nationality, migrated from the Netherlands primarily to the UK (40%), to Belgium (9%) and to Germany (7%). More than half of the 6,000 new Dutch nationals who left the Netherlands within two years moved to these three EU Member States.¹ Naturalisation enhances the mobility of new nationals, both to their countries of origin and within the EU.

Apparently, refugees' acquisition of the nationality of their country of refuge enables their return to the country of origin, because it reduces the risks in returning through the protection attached to the new nationality. It also grants the right to come back to the country of the new nationality if the country of origin turns out to not yet be safe or the prospects of successful re-integration in that country is not yet positive. From anthropological research, it appears that out-migration to other EU Member States may be triggered by various factors: better labour market chances (perceived or real), easier access to self-employment in the UK, the presence of family members, or a larger and stronger community of co-ethnics.² Naturalisation may be a liberalisation for those asylum seekers who did not intend to migrate to the Netherlands but were trapped in the Dublin system. In these cases, naturalisation functions as a correction to that system, which almost completely disregards the well-founded wishes of persons seeking protection to go to a specific country in Europe.

These data indicate that it may be promising to

1 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, Migatiegedrag van personen met een specifieke herkomst die in de periode 2006-2013 de Nederlandse nationaliteit hebben verkregen, www.cbs.nl, visited 27 September 2016, and B. Meindersma, Deel vluchtelingen wacht op paspoort en vertrekt weer snel, <http://nos.nl/artikel/2134178>.

2 Jill Ahrens, Melissa Kelly, Melissa and Ilse van Liempt, (2014) *Free movement? The onward migration of EU citizens born in Somalia, Iran and Nigeria, Population, Space and Place*. ISSN 1544-8444.

extend the life course perspective with a focus on the labour market position of new nationals who left the country during the first few years after their naturalisation. Moreover, information from longitudinal quantitative data should be combined with the results of empirical research focussing on the migrant perspective, rather than on the state perspective that is implicit in the data collected by government bodies.

In order to explain the naturalisation patterns of immigrants, Vink's paper looks both at variables in the country of residence and in the country of origin. With regard to the latter variables, the focus is on the political stability and the stage of economic development. But I would suggest that nationality law and practice in the country of origin may be another relevant variable explaining the inclination of immigrants to apply for naturalisation. In the 1970s and 1980s the Dutch rule requiring immigrants who could renounce their first nationality to do so had the effect that Moroccan immigrants applied for naturalisation because they could not renounce their nationality and thus were not obliged to do so, whilst immigrants from Turkey rarely applied because under the Turkish nationality law they could renounce that nationality and were therefore required to do so according to Dutch nationality law. The difference between the naturalisation practices of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants became even more pronounced when in special broadcasts directed at Moroccan immigrants the head of the naturalisation department of the Ministry of Justice explicitly stated that acquiring Dutch nationality did not imply that applicants had to abandon their religion. Only after the renunciation requirement was de facto abolished in the 1990s did large numbers of Turkish immigrants start to apply for naturalisation, causing a peak in the Dutch naturalisation statistics in 1996. Naturalisation practice thus often results from the interplay between the nationality rules of the two countries concerned.



In the final part of Vink's paper it is rightly suggested that much research focuses on the effect on immigrant integration of transition towards citizenship and less so on other types of legal status transition, such as from asylum seeker to recognised refugee or from temporary migrant to migrant with permanent status. I would suggest that the latter status transition is the most promising focus for future empirical research. The many legal barriers to integration attached to the status of asylum seekers (limited access to the labour market, to language courses and to family reunification) and their relatively short length of residence in the country of refuge will make it hard to identify the effects of granting the stronger status that, on paper, allows free access to the labour market. Empirical research on the transition from temporary to permanent residence status will offer a better possibility of identifying the effects of status transition on integration. Moreover, it will allow testing of the hypothesis that the transition towards citizenship "arguably in practice [is the] most relevant legal status transition." Here, I repeat my plea for longitudinal quantitative research to be combined with qualitative research focussing on the immigrant's perspective.³ When the focus of research is on the effects of transition from one legal status to another, we should not forget that a stronger legal status does not always result in a better social position. In her interesting comparative study of different groups of Polish immigrants in the Netherlands, Cathelijne Pool found that before Poland's EU membership immigrants with both Polish and German nationalities, who due to their status as EU citizens had the strongest legal status, nevertheless in practice had a clearly less secure labour market and social integration position due to their lack of knowledge of a language that was understood by the majority population (English

3 Jill Ahrens, *Suspended in Eurocrisis: new immobilities and semi-legal migrations amongst Nigerians living in Spain*, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* (22) 2013 22, pp. 115-140. ISSN 1016-3476.

or German)⁴, their reliance on family contacts and their dependency on private employment agencies.⁵ Legal status is only one among many variables influencing the integration of immigrants.

4 For a long time Poles with German ancestry living in Poland could acquire German nationality without being proficient in the German language.

5 Cathelijne Pool, *Migration van Polen naar Nederland in een tijd van versoepeling van migratieregels*, Nijmegen 2011 (Boom Juridische Uitgevers).

