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Chapter 1

Relational Transnationalism of Filipino/Thai-Belgian Youths in Belgium:

Mothers, Memories, Emotions and Social entities

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Abstract

The literature on the transnational practices of the ‘second generation’ mainly focuses on children whose parents are migrants, which neglects the offspring of ‘mixed’ couples with different nationalities and/or ethnicities. This chapter addresses this gap by examining the links that children of Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian couples maintain and reinforce with their migrant mothers’ respective countries of origin, as well as the driving forces behind their cross-border practices. The results of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Belgium using children-focused methodology indicate these youths’ relational transnationalism. Those whose mothers keep dynamic transnational connections and transmit them the culture and values of their country of origin exhibit a keen interest in that society and feel close to it. The power dynamics between parents, their economic resources and their children’s age fashion this intergenerational transmission. Interestingly, youths who were born and spent their childhood partly in their mother’s country of origin – the 1.5 generation – show more initiative in sustaining links with that country than their counterparts who grew up in Belgium. This difference stems from the informants’ place- and people-attached memories and emotions. The present study also observes the role of social entities such as the State in shaping the transnationalism of mixed-parentage individuals.

Children of migrants, such as the so-called '1.5' and 'second' generations, are one of the principal objects of scientific investigations within the literature on migrant families. A large number of studies pay specific attention to these children's experiences of assimilation, intergenerational relationships and identity construction (e.g. Attias-Donfut & Wolff, 2009; Boyd & Grieco, 1998; Crul, Schneider & Lelie, 2012; Foner & Dreby, 2011; Haller & Landolt, 2005; Nagasaka & Fresnoza-Flot, 2015; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001). In recent years, migration scholars have started to examine the transnational links and practices of these generations, notably their connections with the country of origin of their migrant parents (e.g. Bartley & Spoonley, 2008; Lee, 2009; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Wessendorf, 2016). Despite this rising interest in young people's transnational lives, the case of children of 'mixed couples' in which partners possess different nationalities (at least initially) and/or ethnicities remains mostly unexplored. Given that these young people grow up in ethnically diverse family settings (see Unterreiner, 2015a, 2015b), the way they build and maintain transnational connections may differ from that of 1.5 and second generations whose parents are both migrants. How do these young people establish, sustain and reinforce their links with their migrant parent's country of origin? What factors and structural forces influence or facilitate their transnational practices?

Understanding the transnationalism of young people requires a phenomenological analytical approach that pays attention to the agency of these individuals as well as to the relational and larger social dimensions of their experiences. Such an approach requires an exploration of the way the 'self', the 'others' and the 'world' are interrelated (Zahavi, 2001). To find out how the 'self' is connected to the 'others', it is indispensable to investigate the intersubjective aspect of experience at the micro level (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Within the context of the family as a social institution, it is therefore heuristic to analyze the way parents influence their children's transnational ties and activities. As Horton argues, 'the self emerges within social relationships, and thus the family [...] may instead be conceived of as a space in which notions of "self" and "other," or of "child" and "mother," are coproduced' (2009, 22). At the macro level, in the vein of phenomenological approach, it is crucial to understand the relations between the social world and human actions. That is why I scrutinise how the social context in which the young people in the present study are enmeshed shapes their transnational practices. In short, I concentrate here on these individuals' 'lifeworld', that is, the 'domain of the everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity' (Jackson, 1996, 7).

As a case study, I examine in this chapter the experiences of children of Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian couples in Belgium. I focus on these mixed families because since the 1980s, a dynamic marriage migration of Filipino and Thai women has been taking place in many European countries, including Belgium. This migration is part and parcel of the rising phenomenon of mixed-family formation in this region of the world: for instance, 17.4 per cent of the marriages celebrated in 2017 in Belgium were ‘mixed’, that is, one partner in the couple is a Belgian citizen and the other has ‘foreign nationality’ (*Office belge de statistique* [Statbel], 2018). In this country, marriage migration can partly explain the numerical dominance of women in both the Filipino and Thai migrant populations. In fact, from 2005 to 2017, women were constantly more numerous than their male counterparts in the aforementioned migrant populations (Statbel, 2019). This was also the case in 2018: 76.4 per cent of 4,415 Filipinos and 85 per cent of the 3,769 Thais in Belgium were women (*ibid.*). The mixed families of these women can be mainly found in the Flanders and Brussels regions. The case of Filipino and Thai women has recently become an object of studies (Fresnoza-Flot, 2017, 2018b; Heyse et al., 2007; Pauwels, 2015), but that of their children remains a terrain to be scholarly explored.

The present chapter, therefore, aims to make the lifeworld of these mixed-parentage individuals socially visible and contribute fresh insights to migration and (mixed-)family studies regarding their transnationalism. Given that the qualifier ‘mixed-parentage’ has been widely used in these research fields to describe mixed couples’ children, I employ it here to refer to my informants. The case of mixed-parentage individuals can unveil the nuances of transnationalism among children of migrants as well as put into reflection the encompassing category of ‘second generation’ that most often eclipses the experiences of less numerical groups of young people.

In the following sections, I review the literature on transnationalism of migrants’ children to highlight the scholarly contributions of the present study. I also explain in detail the methodology I adopted to access the target group of my research and present some demographic characteristics of the interviewed young people. The core of the chapter delves into the transnational practices of Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian informants, notably highlighting the relational and larger social dimensions of their cross-border connections and activities. I mainly argue here that parents, notably the migrant mothers, mainly influence their children’s construction of transnational linkages, which develop as these young people grow up alongside their created cross-border ties. Drawing from my empirical data analysis, I revisit in the concluding section of my chapter the central questions and the aims of my research while emphasizing its

contributions to the study of transnationalism phenomenon in the context of migration and mixed family lives.

Children of migrants and their diverse transnational practices

The emergence of the transnational perspective in the 1990s in migration studies has inspired many scholars to examine the cross-national border ties and practices of migrants and more recently those of their children (Lee, 2011; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Sun, 2013). These studies indicate the varying forms of transnational activities that migrants' offspring engage in and identify new themes to explore in this research domain. Several works demonstrate that young people's transnational connections with their migrant parents' country of origin are less intense than those of their parents (Alba & Nee, 2003). However, scholars point out that children of migrants may appear to have weaker ties with the ancestral homeland but build connections with it in different ways. For instance, in her study of Filipino youth of the second generation in California, Wolf found out that, unlike their immigrant parents that had strong transnational connections with the Philippines, these young migrants experienced an 'emotional transnationalism': they 'maintain ties' with the Philippines 'at the level of emotions, ideologies and conflicting cultural codes, at the very least' (1997, 459). Some young people of Algerian origin in France maintain their transnational links with Algeria through entrepreneurial activities, which do not necessarily require them to reside in that country (Santelli, 1999). On the contrary, some second-generation Indian Americans move to India from where they keep 'affective and civic ties' with their natal country, the United States (Jain, 2019). In Australia, many of the second-generation Tongans do not have direct contact with their parents' country of origin but engage in 'indirect' transnationalism (Lee, 2011). They do so by 'helping to organise fundraising events, providing food, performing Tongan and other Polynesian dances, and otherwise participating in ways that facilitate the overseas community's support of the homeland' (*ibid.*, 308). Other forms of the second generation's transnational activities include making phone calls, sending emails and visiting their homeland with their parents (Orellana et al., 2001). These are what Itzigsohn and Sausedo call 'linear transnationalism', that is, the practices that allow people to maintain 'the ties that link' them 'to their families and place of origin' (2002, 771).

In addition, transnational practices among migrants' children appear non-uniform in terms of intensity. In his study of contemporary migrants' children in the United States, Rumbaut found out that

members of the 1.5 generation who spent part of their childhood in their parents' country of origin were more likely to engage in transnational practices than members of the 'second generation', who had 'no "tingling" sensation, no phantom pain, over a homeland that was never lost to them in the first place' (2002, 91). This case of the 1.5 generation highlights the nuances present in the transnationalism of migrants' children: the category 'second generation' is not a homogenous group as some children of migrants may also have diverse migration or spatial mobility experience. Hence, in the present chapter, I pay attention to these possible nuances in the transnational practices of the children of mixed couples given that some of them are also part of the 1.5 generation, that is, they partly grew up in one country and later moved to a new society to permanently settle there (for example, children adopted by the foreign partner of one of their separated biological parents).

Furthermore, studies on children of mixed couples in which one parent is a migrant rarely focus on these young people's transnationalism. This empirical gap may be due to the general tendency in the literature to treat them as part of the 'second generation', thereby overlooking their particular experience of growing up in a mixed family setting. The fact that one of their parents is an insider citizen and the other a migrant may have an impact on the way they build, maintain and reinforce their social ties with the country of origin of their migrant parent. What is little known about these children is that their transnational practices are mostly shaped by their parents and by the quality of the parental relationship. For example, some lone mothers of mixed-parentage children who are an object of negative social stereotypes and discourses engage themselves in the minority group's 'value system' by cooking their foods, wearing their clothes and learning their language (McKenzie, 2013), which allows them to 'creatively' claim 'value for themselves' (Harman, 2010, 1355) and also to socialise children in their father's culture. This suggests how the social image of mixed family members can push mothers to embrace indirect transnationalism – consuming the culture of their partner's country – and transmit this practice to their children. Moreover, when parents are separated or divorced, mixed-parentage children mostly experience limited contact with their fathers and their paternal kin living in other countries (Harman, 2013). 'Contact' with kin is 'often viewed as a central link to the children's heritage' (*ibid.*, 1335; see also Britton, 2013), and the absence of it may affect children's construction of social ties with transnational dimension. These ties can shape their identity formation: for instance, Unterreiner (2015b) observes among mixed-parentage individuals in France, Germany and United Kingdom (UK) that those who were socialised in the two countries of their parents, who have strong

affective links with the extended family in the country of origin of the migrant parent and who possess significant social ties in their country of residence display an 'heir identity' (*identité d'héritier*), that is, one with equal identity imprints of both parents. On the contrary, mixed-parentage individuals with strong affective ties with the migrant parent's country of origin, but with fewer social links with their country of residence for various reasons such as being discriminated there, tend to show a 'foreigner identity' (*identité d'étranger*), that is, one oriented towards another country than the country of residence (*ibid.*).

Overall, studies on the transnationalism of migrants' children underline the agency of these young people and the way they construct their 'transnational social field' (Levitt & Schiller, 2004), wherein multiple ties are sustained even at the levels of imagination and emotions (see Nagasaka & Fresnoza-Flot, 2015; Veale & Donà, 2014). What remains to be investigated are the forms (emotional, indirect, linear...) of cross-national border activities that mixed-parentage young people engage to as well as the factors influencing them. Existing works point out the key role that mothers play (*e.g.* Harman, 2010; McKenzie, 2013), the quality of the couple's relations (see Fresnoza-Flot, 2018a, 2018b; Harman, 2013), and the structuring effect of macro forces (Unterreiner, 2015b). Considering all these factors, the present chapter examines the transnational practices and ties of children in Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian families in Belgium. By doing so, this chapter can bring out the nuances in the way we understand the transnationalism of mixed-parentage individuals in the context of migration.

Accessing the mixed-parentage young people in Belgium

The present chapter draws from a three-year study (2012-2015) of children and childhoods in a mixed family setting in Belgium, specifically children of Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian couples. For this study, I adopted a 'multi-sited ethnographic approach' (Marcus, 1995) by carrying out fieldwork within the three regions of Belgium (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels) as well as in the country of origin of the migrant parents – Thailand and the Philippines. I employed several data-gathering methods during my fieldwork in different social settings, including informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, observations, analyzing children's drawings and conducting small-scale surveys. These children-focused methods generated rich empirical data about the cross-border lifeworld of mixed-parentage young people. A total of 52 young individuals from 37 mixed families were interviewed during my study, 45 of whom have Filipino or Thai migrant mothers and Belgian fathers (17 biological and three adoptive). The present chapter

examines specifically the case of these 45 young individuals whose lives are situated in cross-border social spaces linking Belgium and their mother’s country of origin. For consistency, the remaining seven of 52 informants are not included in the present analysis: five of them have Thai fathers in couple with Belgian women, and two have Thai mothers in couple with non-Belgian men.

Table 1. The mixed-parentage children interviewed

45 informants	age	birthplace	nationality	family form
25 from Filipino-Belgian families	9 (7-10 years old)	37 (Belgium)	31 (with single nationality:	26 in mixed nuclear family
20 from Thai-Belgian families	12 (11-14 years old)	4 (Thailand)	29 Belgian, 1 Filipino, 1	15 in mixed-blended family
	9 (15-18 years old)	4 (Philippines)	Italian – the nationality at birth of the Belgian father)	4 in single-parent family
	7 (19-22 years old)		14 (with double nationality: 9 Belgian-Thai, 5 Belgian- Filipino)	
	4 (23-26 years old)			
	4 (27-31 years old)			

The ages of the informants ranged from seven to 30 years, and many of them were still students at the time of my interview. I was able to meet these young people through snowballing, notably through their mothers and/or fathers whom I had interviewed on separate occasions, in line with the ‘children-in-families’ approach (Bushin, 2009). This method involves interviewing all family members, resulting in a rich corpus

of data from different social actors. To meet young informants, I frequented and carried out observations in the social spaces of Filipino and Thai women migrants in Belgium – mainly in two Catholic churches where Filipinos congregate and in two Thai Buddhist temples. I also participated in different activities within the Filipino and Thai migrant populations in the country. Before my informal conversations and/or interviews with all the informants, I asked first the consent of their parents and then their permission. I employed this double consent approach also to seek their accord to record my interviews with them digitally. Except for two youths who desired to be interviewed alone and whose parents allowed so, all interviews with informants aged below 16 years took place in the presence of one or two of their parents.

Regarding the parents of the young informants, a majority of them were in a situation of homogamy, that is, they had similar levels of education or social class backgrounds. In the present study, I observed three forms of family: nuclear-mixed family comprising the mixed couple and the children born of their union; single-parent mixed family formed following conjugal separation or divorce, and ‘mixed-blended family’ (Fresnoza-Flot, 2017) composed of the mixed couple and their children from their previous (and present) relationship(s). It is interesting to note that many children of Filipino-Belgian couples live in a mixed nuclear family, whereas most of their Thai-Belgian counterparts have either single-parent families or mixed-blended ones. This social reality can be attributed to the fact that more Thai women in Belgium are separated or divorced from their former Thai partner or Belgian husband compared to their Filipino counterparts. There are also cases of Thai women who have stay-behind children from previous unions, a situation that has been observed among Thai migrants in mixed couples in other countries (see Ruenkaew, 2009). We will see later in this chapter that the family forms in which the informants inhabit have an impact on their transnational practices.

Among the 45 interviewed young people, 14 possessed a double nationality (Belgian plus that of their migrant mother), and 31 had single nationality. Eight of the 45 informants were born in their mother’s country of origin, and the fathers of four of them had the same nationality as their mothers. The remaining 37 informants were born in Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian couples in Belgium. The group of children born in their mother’s country can be qualified as part of the 1.5 generation as they spent their early childhood outside Belgium. Compared to the other 37 informants who were born and grew up in Belgium, these 1.5-generation youths may have different feelings of belonging vis-à-vis their mother’s country of origin, which is also their country of origin. In the following sections, I pay attention to the way this particularity of the 1.5

generation influences their transnationality. To protect the anonymity of all the study informants, I used pseudonyms in this chapter.

The influence of mothers on their children's transnational practices

During a baby-offering ceremony in a Thai Buddhist temple in Belgium, the Thai mother of a young Belgian-Thai boy used her tablet to take a picture of her son sitting next to the Buddhist monk who was at that moment holding the baby of the woman's cousin. The Thai woman told me that she would post the picture on her Facebook account that would be viewed after by her kin in Thailand. This is an example of how mixed-parentage young people in Belgium become linked symbolically and virtually to their mothers' country of origin since their very young age. Mothers act as 'central nodal actors' (Naidu, 2012) between them and their kin back in their mother's home. They are the ones who first develop their children's transnational links as the interview vignette below illustrates:

Researcher: How many times have you come here already in Thailand? You remember?

Boris: Seven.

Researcher: Seven times?

Boris' mother: No, no, no, maybe 10 something.

Researcher: Ten times?

Boris: Really? (asking his mother)

Boris' mother: You are seven (years old). Before that, you came in 2000 [...]. Only three times, three times, that is one time a year. Before we came four times here when you were a baby.

Visits to the country of origin of the migrant mother represent one form of transnational activity of mixed-parentage informants, which can also be observed among children whose parents are both migrants (see Orellana et al., 2001). Such visits generally take place during summer vacations, which their parents decide, notably their migrant mother. These visits appear more frequently when the informants are very young than when they grow up and become busy with school and extra-curricular activities. Some mothers told me that they used to bring their children to their country of origin at any time of the year until the start of

their compulsory education in Belgium. This mandatory schooling prompted them to bring their children to their home countries only once every two to three years during the school vacations of July and August.

Mothers with good economic resources, notably those in mixed nuclear families, bring their young children to their countries of origin every year. However, having economic resource is not enough as the agreement of the Belgian husband appears to matter: for instance, the father of three informants was not enthusiastic about going to the Philippines for vacation, which affected the intensity of their Filipino mother's visits there and later on their interest to go there with her. Moreover, children in single-parent and mixed blended families have less possibility to visit their mother's natal country due to their limited economic resources, which is the case of children of Thai mothers who are mostly separated or divorced. For example, Lamai (11 years old) did not yet visit Thailand since she was born and wished to go there one day. She lived under the care of her mother and two siblings with almost no contact with her Belgian father. Likewise, Selena (31 years old), whose parents divorced when she was almost two years old, confided that she went only twice to Thailand when she was a minor, at the age of four and seventeen.

Once grown up and economically independent, the mixed-parentage children of Filipino and Thai migrant women generally plan their travels to the Philippines and Thailand, respectively. For instance, Selena visited Thailand with her Belgian partner and later got married to him there saying that 'it is very nice there and I also wanted to do it for the family over there'. Other informants sometimes sent 'money gifts' and financial help to their kin, depending on their emotional ties with them. They also maintain contacts with some kin members through phone and/or the Internet, mainly via social media such as Facebook. These transnational practices of grown-up informants are devoid of their mother's influence until they ask her for some advice or information, as the vignette below illustrates:

You know, my Facebook (account) is full of Philippine people that I don't know, but they always add me, and I would ask my mother who is that, then she says 'ah you have to add her because she is the cousin of your uncle you know?'. Yeah, I don't know them more in person, but my mother always tells me 'you have to add her, because you know, actually, she is (part of) your family, you know far, far, far, but she's your family' (Gabriela, 22 years old).

The case of Gabriela suggests the important role of migrant mothers in their mixed-parentage children's construction and maintenance of transnational links using modern communication technologies. Like Gabriela, members of the 1.5 generation who were born and spent their early childhood in their mother's country of origin recognise the importance of such technology to revive cross-border kin ties:

We (her extended family and her) didn't have a very good contact. We heard each other like once a month or something, and at that time, they didn't have a Facebook. It's just like, it was like last year let's say, (we) started to play Facebook, all those stuff, and the contacts become closer (Pim, 23 years old).

Unlike young adult informants, those 12 years old and below had generally limited access to phone and the Internet, and could only talk to their kin during phone calls initiated by their mothers. This indicates again the mother's role in the transnational activities of her children and points to the way age determines possibilities for and exerts constraints on the informants' cross-border connections.

At home, most informants were regularly exposed not only to the Belgian way of life but also to what their mothers called their country's 'culture'. A few mothers of the informants tried to expose their children to cultural symbols they consider as 'Filipino' or 'Thai' by bringing some toys and home decorations from their countries. In the house of two young Belgian-Filipino informants, for example, I saw in their living room three miniature 'jeepneys' (a popular vehicle for public transportation in that country) that their mother had bought in the Philippines. In other homes of Belgian-Filipino informants, there were decorations such as lamps made of seashells, tropical plants like bananas or tissues weaved by ethnic groups in the Philippines; whereas most Belgian-Thai informants had Buddha images and small elephant statues in their homes, as well as sometimes a photo of the King of Thailand. Some informants also become familiar to the Filipino or Thai culture thanks to their mothers who bring them to attend religious activities, register them to cultural classes (language, dance or music) and expose them to cooking Filipino or Thai foods at home (see Fresnoza-Flot, 2020; Gonzalez & Fresnoza-Flot, 2020). This attests that mixed-parentage young people in the present study, like their counterparts in other countries, were engaged in 'indirect transnationalism' (Lee, 2011).

Across the groups studied, I observe how mothers' transnational practices can shape their children's attitude towards their country of origin, the intersubjective dimension of transnationalism. Many cases in my research indicate that if their parents, notably their mothers, demonstrate strong connections with their mother's homeland, children of mixed couples are usually inspired to build and maintain ties with this country. This is what I call 'relational transnationalism' in which we can observe the interconnectedness not only between the self and the others but also between the self and the world. If the children spend some time in their mother's country of origin during early childhood, their positive memories of and emotional attachment to certain places and people can inspire them to engage in transnational activities, as we will observe in the next section.

Place-linked and people-attached memories and emotions as precursors

Memories of places and people, as well as the emotions accompanying them, appeared to be a strong impetus for some informants in the present study. This was particularly the case of 1.5-generation informants such as the one below:

Madee, 30 years old, was born in Bangkok and did her elementary education there. Her parents separated when she was young, and after her mother got married to a Belgian man. At the age of 12, her mother brought her to Belgium and her Belgian stepfather adopted her. Madee's biological father remained in Thailand and remarried another Thai woman. Madee was not able to regularly visit him due to financial constraints and busy school life. She told me during an interview about how she was longing to visit her father and see Thailand at that time. When she got a job, she started visiting Thailand every year and sending monthly remittances to her father. In 2014, I followed her to Bangkok, and she showed me where she lived and studied before she migrated to Belgium. In her former school, she pointed me where she used to play and buy foods after school. She also brought me to the place where her father was living and introduced me to him. For Madee, her future life would be divided between Thailand and Belgium.

Like her, other 1.5-generation informants felt a strong connection with their mother's country of origin not only because they were born and spent their early childhood there, but also because of their

emotional bonds with their kin, and in four cases, with their biological father residing there. As Unterreiner's observes in her study of mixed-parentage people in France, Germany and UK, 'emotion' and 'filiation' are at the 'heart' of these individuals' 'national identification regarding the foreign country of origin' (2015a, 257). Emotion, filiation and positive memories drive the 1.5-generation informants in my study to maintain their links with their country of origin through different ways such as regular visits, communication with kin and friends and in some cases, sending remittance – all instances of 'linear transnationalism' linking one's society of residence to the country of origin of one of their parents (see Itzigsohn & Sausedo, 2002). Sirichai (27 years old), who experienced elementary school education in Thailand, was a member of a football team comprising youth with Thai origin in Belgium. His early childhood spent in Thailand and his emotional links to his biological father and friends residing there motivated him to go back there every year and undergo football training: 'I go training with local players because I have some friends there. They ask me "come play with us"'. Another 1.5-generation informant I called Eda (23 years old) stayed every year in Thailand (her birth country) with her mother and siblings before her elementary schooling in Belgium; they spent five months there during the winter and returned to Belgium in the spring. Aside from this, she was exposed from a young age to her mother's expression of Buddhist beliefs. Her memories of Thailand and her exposure to Buddhism at home inspired her to reinforce her links with Thailand: she went there alone to do an internship in a Buddhist temple for a few weeks, and later on, decided to look for professional possibilities there. Madee, Sirichai, Eda and other members of the 1.5 generation in my study all had childhood experiences filled with vivid memories of people and places in Thailand, which shaped later on their transnationalism. As I also observed in a separate study, 1.5 generation undergoes 'mobile childhoods' (Fresnoza-Flot & Nagasaka, 2015), that is, spatial, temporal and contextual movements during their childhood years due to the migration of one or more members of their family or due to their own geographical movements. The early socialisation of this group in one of their parents' country of origin left unforgettable souvenirs and emotional imprints. For instance, Leah (17 years old) associated the Philippines with her memory of her birthday celebration there when she was young: 'I have a childhood memory. When it was my birthday, I received a cake, and we ate *pancit* (sautéed rice noodles with vegetables and meat)'. Such kind of positive memories motivated 1.5-generation informants to keep their ties with their society of origin.

Likewise, among the informants who were born and raised in Belgium, those who had positive souvenirs of their visits in their mother's country of origin tended to exhibit more interest in maintaining links with that country. For example, Linda (17 years old), shared with me her closeness with her mother's extended family in the Philippines thanks to their regular visits there, which inspired her to engage in 2013 in a sort of 'transnational philanthropy' (Opiniano, 2005). At that time, she and her friends collected donations for the victims of the typhoon Haiyan in the country: 'I did that with a few friends, and we actually collected 230 euros or something. At first, it was a little bit difficult'. In a separate interview with her mother, I found out that Linda encouraged her parents to financially support the schooling of one of her Filipino cousins' children. This was not new for her, saying 'three years ago we also supported a friend of the family's son who wanted to go to college and we also supported him with tuition'. The combined effects of her parents' transnationalism and her positive memories of the Philippines could be seen in Linda's cross-border practices.

On the contrary, informants who had uncomfortable experience in their mother's country of origin tended to exhibit less interest in transnational engagements with that country as Jean-Christophe (16 years old) confides below:

When I was small, it was fine because I was not aware of what they (her mother's kin) were doing, but when I was nine years old, I was bored during three weeks; it was like this every time I was there (in the Philippines). It was repetitive. I understood what they were saying to me. I went to play anyway etc., but I prefer to spend my vacations in Belgium.

Jean-Christophe's experience could be attributed to the fact that he could not speak his mother's language, which is also the situation of many informants. Among the 45 interviewed young people, only 16 (10 Belgian-Thais and six Belgian-Filipinos) could very well speak the language in their mother's country of origin. It is also interesting to note that there are more Belgian-Thai informants who could speak their parents' languages than their Belgian-Filipino counterparts who mostly used their father's language. This can be attributed to several factors, including the power relations between parents. Interviews with the mothers of the informants showed that if the Belgian fathers did not agree that their wives talk to their children in their language, it was difficult for these mothers to develop their children's competence in that language (see

Fresnoza-Flot, 2018a for the Filipino case). However, when parents become separated or divorced, the power dynamics between them gravitate in favour of the mother, specifically in terms of intergenerational transmission. This is the case of many Belgian-Thai informants who live in a single-parent household or mixed-blended family. The mothers of these informants appear to be less constrained than before in transmitting their language and other cultural imprints to them, as their former partners are not physically at home anymore to shape their decisions regarding their children directly. This observation reaffirms the influence of power dynamics between parents on mixed-parentage children's transnational connections. Power relations in this mixed family setting mainly stem from intersecting social class differences of parents, notably in economic terms (*ibid.*).

Other informants who had less contact or visits with their mother's country of origin also had less transnational activities; they appeared to be more emotionally attached to Belgium where they had grown up: 'actually, when I was very small, I had more contacts with my paternal family because we did not go a lot to the Philippines' (Amalia, 12 years old). These varying transnationalism and attachments to their mothers' country of origin did not solely result from intersecting micro-level factors but also from macro-level processes, as the next section unveils.

Inciting transnationalism: the role of the State and other social entities

The transnational links and practices of the study informants were shaped by macro-structural forces such as how their migrant parents' countries of origin include mixed-parentage children in their nation-building efforts and how the migrant populations to which their mothers belong consider them in their reinforcement of cross-border ties with the ancestral homeland.

The countries of origin of the informants' mothers provide possibilities for mixed-parentage children to become part of their nations. Both the Philippines and Thailand offer their respective nationalities to children of (present or former) Filipino and Thai nationals living on their territories or abroad. In the Philippine case, the offspring of Filipino migrants can possess and maintain dual nationality all their life, but before this, their Filipino parent(s) should register their birth in a Philippine embassy or consulate in their country of residence. The demanding registration process partly discourages many Filipino parents from passing their nationality on to their children (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018b). Regarding Thailand, children of Thai migrants are required by the law to retain a single nationality at the age of 20. In addition, young men who

choose the Thai nationality must accomplish their military service to the country at the age of 21. Because of these conditions, many mothers of Thai informants, like their Filipino counterparts, prefer not to pass their nationality to their children, notably to their sons (*ibid.*). Due to the constraints accompanying nationality transmission from Filipino or Thai migrant parents to their children, only 15 (14 with double nationality and one with Filipino nationality) of the 45 study informants possessed the nationality of their migrant mothers. Aside from the possibility of acquiring their respective nationalities, both the Philippines and Thai governments have developed programs to introduce their respective societies and cultures to children of their (former) citizens. The Philippines has the *Lakbay-aral* or study-travel programme for youths aged 15 years and above, whereas Thailand has been organizing since 2010 (except 2012 and 2013) an annual Homecoming programme for young people of Thai and Thai-foreign origin aged between seven and 18 years old (Fresnoza-Flot, 2015). Unlike the *Lakbay-aral* programme, the Thai government's Homecoming programme covers accommodation, food and travel costs. As a result, it is becoming a popular programme among Thai-Belgian youths: for example, during the 2014 Homecoming program in which I participated as an observer, there were two Thai-Belgian children among the 17 participants from seven countries. On the contrary, I am not aware of any Filipino-Belgian youth who participated in the *Lakbay-aral* programme of the Philippine government, at least during my fieldwork.

Another factor influencing the development of transnational links of the study informants is the way Filipino and Thai migrants' associations in Belgium promote their respective countries of origin to their children who are growing up in this country. Compared to Filipino migrants whose associative programmes for young people are mostly religious, Thai migrants organise several activities to encourage young people of Thai or mixed origins to learn Thai language, music, dance and Thai Theravada Buddhism, as well as to appreciate Thai foods and arts such as fruit and soap carving. Filipino and Thai migrants' programmes for young people are usually carried out in places of worship (churches or temples), which play an essential role in instilling inspirations and cultivating desires among young people to build, reinforce and maintain transnational connections with their migrant parents' countries of origin. Although opportunity structures did shape the informants' transnationalism, the influence of their migrant mothers remained powerful. Hence, informants who had exposure and immersion in many cultural and religious activities of Filipino or Thai migrants in Belgium were those with mothers participating actively in those events.

Nonetheless, there was a temporal dimension in such exposure or immersion. For instance, I observed in places of worship of Filipino and Thai migrants that more young children were frequenting those spaces than adolescents and young adults, who mostly engaged in activities with their peers and had already part-time or full-time jobs. These grown-up children could also easily express their wishes not to go anymore to their parents' spaces of socialisation, unlike very young children. Tania (16 years old), confided that she took during 'four years Thai dance (classes) in the temple' when she was younger, and regarding Thai language lessons, she said that at 'nine years old, yeah, now I stopped'. These testimonies show the structuring role of age on the informants' construction of transnational, symbolic ties: the older they get, the less likely they frequent their mothers' social spaces and engage in learning their mother's cultural ways of being.

Discussion and conclusion

The mixed-parentage young people in the present study build transnational connections with the country of origin of their migrant mother most often through the latter's influence. Since their early age, through their mother's initiative, many of these young people have become exposed not only to the Belgian society but also to the migrant population in which their mother is part of and to her natal country. This suggests that the informants' transnationalism is relational, reflecting mainly their mother's cross-border ties.

Such relational transnationalism displays other characteristics: given that it links their society of residence to their mother's country of origin through visits and digital communications, it is also a 'linear' form of transnationalism (see Itzigsohn & Sausedo, 2002). The positive memories and emotions of their mother's society of origin that are produced during such a process aliment the drive of the informants to keep their connections with that society, notably when they grow up. What is striking is that 1.5-generation informants engage more in transnational activities than their counterparts who were born and grew up in Belgium. They create their transnational practices separated from those of their mothers, such as football training and internship. Unlike them, Belgium-born informants are less likely to get involved with the country of origin of their mothers when they get older and become economically independent. Although contacts with maternal kin and visits to their mother's country of origin represent their transnationalism, the strength of their cross-border connections are contingent on whether their memories of and feelings about such contacts and visits are positive or not. This finding echoes Rumbaut's observation about the second-

generation people in the United States who have ‘no phantom pain’ over ‘a homeland that was never lost to them’ (2002, 91), unlike the members of the 1.5 generation who are migrants like their parents.

Furthermore, the other characteristic of the informants’ transnationalism can be described as ‘indirect’ (Lee, 2011): consuming cultural symbols at home that are considered as representatives of their mother’s country of origin such as Filipino or Thai foods and languages, frequenting the places of worship of their mother and participating in different social and cultural activities of the migrant populations in which their mothers are enmeshed. These activities have their temporality: the younger the informants are, the more active they are in their engagement in these practices due to their mother’s influence. As they grow up and become adolescents or young adults, the informants tend to pursue their life paths with less immersion in their mother’s spaces of socialisation in Belgium, which illustrates their agency.

The case of these informants illuminates how the micro context can shape their transnationalism. Aside from their mothers’ efforts to expose them to cross-border practices, other factors are influencing their transnationalism, namely their age; their generation (1.5 or not) of belonging based on birth- and childhood place; the power dynamics between their parents; the economic resources of their mothers and to a lesser extent, the form of the family they inhabit. Contrary to my previous observation that place of residence affects the dynamics of linguistic transmission in mixed families (Fresnoza-Flot, 2018a), the present study did not show any impact of the informants’ region of residence on their transnationalism. It also shows that the possibilities offered by the State and by the migrant populations to establish cross-border links do not always result in active transnational practices of mixed-parentage youth. As I observed, not all of them possessed the nationality of their mother’s country of origin despite the legal possibility to do so. This is because the transnationalism of this group of young people is mainly shaped by their migrant mother’s behaviour and by their own agency. In this case, the micro-level factors appear stronger than the macro-level structuring forces of transnationalism, which can be explained by the fact that most informants were minors and still economically, legally dependents on their parents at the time of the study.

Overall, if we compare the transnationalism of mixed-parentage informants to that of non-mixed-parentage young people called the ‘second generation’ in the literature, it is evident that there is not much difference. Unlike the members of the second generation whose parents are both migrants and are themselves maintaining ties with one particular country, the informants in my study construct and keep transnational links mainly under the particular influence of one parent, that is, their migrant mother. In the future, it would

be interesting to conduct a counterpoint study focusing on the role of migrant fathers in shaping the relational transnationalism of their mixed-parentage children. Other interesting themes to explore concern the way transnational practices of mixed-parentage individuals influence their feelings of belonging and identity construction, as well as how various contexts affect such a process.

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