Monica Boyd and Joanne Nowak. 2012. Social Networks and International Migration. In Jan Rath and Marco Martiniello (eds.) International Migration and Immigrant Incorporation: The Dynamics of Globalization and Ethnic Diversity in European Life. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, IMISCOE, Pp. 77-103.

4 Social Networks and International Migration

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Introduction

This chapter looks at the relationship between social networks and international migration. It defines social networks and explains the relevance of the social networks approach to international migration. After outlining the main types of social networks involved in migration today, it discusses the heterogeneity of networks based on gender, ethnicity, race and generation. The chapter also reviews the impact on these networks of external forces and characteristics, especially immigration history and policies. The final section critiques the social networks approach and makes suggestions for future research.

What are social networks?

strengths and weaknesses of social ties

Ties or connections between individuals that vary in strength, type and duration (Granovettter 1973; Wellman 1979; Williams 2006) are referred to as 'social networks'. They are often based on reciprocal exchanges or shared goals (Lomnitz 1976; Feld 1981; Gurak and Caces 1992), which can vary over time, depending on the circumstances. Several different variables are used to measure social networks. For example, in the early 1970s, Granovetter focused on the 'strength' and 'weakness' of social ties. According to the author, the strength of an interpersonal tie is based on 'the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie' (Granovetter 1973: 1361). Using these criteria, one can assess whether a tie is strong, weak or absent. Other scholars have measured networks based on their density within a given area. In denser areas, the size of the network increases, and individuals have more contacts with whom to exchange information and resources. However, once networks become too dense, a 'congestion' effect arises whereby individuals have too many friends to transmit information, and this eventually reduces the efficiency of information exchange (Zenou and Wahba 2005). To summarise, the *strength* and *density* of ties are two common measures of social networks.

What is the social networks approach?

meso-level

A significant limitation of current social theories is their inability to relate micro-level interactions to macro-level phenomena. The meso-level nature of the social networks approach bridges this gap by demonstrating how interaction within small groups aggregates to large-scale patterns (Granovetter 1973). In particular, it outlines the connections and relationships among individuals, as well as between individuals and the larger community (Wellman 1979; Goldenberg and Haines 1992). Since the community is understood in terms of networks rather than a bounded physical territory, it can span geographical regions and borders.

A central aspect of the social networks approach, then, is its emphasis on the *networks that connect individuals across time and space*. This is why it is so well suited to the study of migration. Rather than analysing the individual migrant as an isolated and helpless actor, scholars can examine the active connections between migrants and individuals in both the sending and receiving countries, along with the migrant's utilisation of resources from families and communities (Wellman 1979; Massey et al. 1987; Boyd 1989; Tilly 1990; Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey et al. 1993).

How do social networks inform migration research?

Since the late 1980s and 1990s, scholars of social networks have better elaborated the multi-level relationship between social networks and migration (Granovetter 1982; Boyd 1989; Massey and España 1987; Massey et al. 1993; Portes et al. 1999). During this period, the social networks field made three key contributions to our understanding of migration.

why migration persists

The first notable contribution is the explanation of how social networks play a key role in not only developing but also *sustaining migration flows over time*. In particular, migrant networks develop their own internal momentum and eventually function independently of the original forces and actors that created them, including the policies of the host and home countries (Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey et al. 1993). The social networks approach not only addresses why individuals migrate but also why migration persists over the long term.

As the second key contribution, a study of social networks moves the research focus beyond push-pull economic forces and the world-system inequalities shaping migration flows and highlights how migrants themselves shape migration outcomes through their use of social resources and connections (Boyd 1989; Massey et al. 1993).

Rather than individuals autonomously deciding to migrate, their entire household is often involved in choosing who migrates, based on an estimate of who has the best chance of succeeding in the host country (Boyd 1989; Stark 1991; Gurak and Caces 1992; Castles 2000). Individuals from middle-income groups are often the first to migrate, if only due to a certain level of disposable income being necessary to cover transportation and settlement costs. Once these 'pioneering' migrants settle in the host country, they frequently maintain links with their home communities, establishing flows of communication and resources to facilitate the future migration of other family members. Although the more skilled and financially able may be the first to migrate, the resources they provide reduce the costs of migration for others, making the process more accessible (Gurak and Caces 1992; Massey et al. 1993). Using a social network approach, therefore, enables researchers to better identify the resources and actors involved in the migrant's decision-making process.

understanding of 'household'

The third important contribution of the social networks approach is that it does not restrict its understanding of the 'household' to the physical structure in which individuals reside. Migrants often continue to communicate with family members and remain part of a household through transnational linkages (Boyd 1989; Piper 2005). By broadening the research scope to include meso-level and transnational networks, the social networks approach more fully considers the numerous actors and forces that influence where and why individuals choose to migrate.

What types of networks are involved in the migration process?

The three social networks most commonly involved in the migration process are labour, personal (family) and illegal migrant networks. The following section considers each type, and outlines its benefits and costs to migrants.

Labour networks

Labour networks are important to the migration process. They facilitate the transmission of information in regard to employment opportunities, necessary skills and experience, as well as labour contacts. With each successive set of labour flows crossing a border, migrant labour networks expand in size and resources (Gallo and Bailey 1996). Migrants involved in well-developed networks of this type are better able to secure employment before and/or upon arrival in their host countries. If they cannot find work due to labour shortages, or

encounter difficulties having their credentials recognised, they can rely on labour networks for additional employment information, as well as social and financial assistance to start their own business (Gallo and Bailey 1996).

Not all migrants, however, depend on labour networks to find employment within their community. For example, they may find work independently (without the assistance of networks) by drawing on their own linguistic and cultural skills, as well as experience. However, they tend to rely on social networks when a prospective employer is of a different ethnicity (Sernau et al. 2002).

benefits of labour networks

The benefits of relying on labour networks continue to be debated. Networks undoubtedly assist individuals in finding employment, but it is often in the informal sector where migrants have little contact with members of the mainstream population. Consequently, opportunities may be limited to develop a wider range of networks or to learn the host language on the job. In addition, the process is not always efficient. Epstein et al. (2002) say that relying on labour networks and cumulative causation can harm migrants by encouraging 'herd behaviour' which may not match migrants' skills with the most appropriate job positions. Lastly, labour networks can lead to oppressive situations. Members of an immigrant network may recruit other immigrants for exploitative purposes, such as working for low-paying and/or dangerous employers (Anderson and Calzavara 1986).

From the employer's perspective, the benefits of migrant labour networks are similarly mixed. While labour networks may bring an influx of new employees, the reverse is also possible. For instance, if a worker moves to another company, other members of the worker's network may be encouraged to leave the company as well (Anderson and Calzavara 1986).

The importance of labour networks in the migration process exists worldwide. European research shows that informal labour networks, including family, friends and acquaintances, are key sources of information on which immigrants rely; especially those most vulnerable to unemployment, such as young and less educated immigrants (Drever and Hoffmeister 2008).[1] These networks serve as important alternatives to formal degrees and training for migrants who do not have formal credentials. However, other European studies have also highlighted the 'dark side of networks', in countries such as Italy, where immigrants can be segmented into marginal communities and economies (Caponio 2008).

formal or informal

The different returns that migrants receive from labour networks may be related to whether these networks are formal or informal. Scholars argue that formal labour networks may provide better returns to migrants, since networks based on formal organisational ties, such

as schools and professional bodies, are better able to match migrants' skills with appropriate employment (Poros 2001; Vertovec 2002). Others challenge these conclusions. Duleep and Reget (1992) find that, while immigrants admitted through family reunification initially earn less than those admitted on the basis of their skills, the former have higher earnings growth (Duleep and Reget in Gallo and Bailey 1996). Moreover, relying on formal labour networks can create inequalities within immigrant groups. The reality is that not all migrants have access to formal or organisationally-based labour networks, and since employment positions advertised by formal organisations are open to public competition, belonging to such networks offers no guaranteed labour outcome to migrants (Poros 2001; Vertovec 2002). Clearly, the debate on the relative costs and benefits of these different types of networks cannot be resolved without further research.

costs and benefits of remittances

Another debate centres on the costs and benefits of remittances in labour migration. Because remittances represent the exchange of monies across borders, they can be described as financial networks (Boyd 1989). These financial networks are related to labour migration, since the flow of money/earnings across borders relies on the networks developed by labour migrants with their families and communities. Without these quasi-formal channels, sending financial resources and goods becomes more difficult (Piotrowski 2006). Several researchers express concern over the dependence of migrant households on remittances, suggesting that this may lead to reduced productivity and labour market involvement in their home communities (Hellermann 2006; Vathi and Black 2007). Others critique the growing commodification of social networks, which, over time, could reduce their strength and personal meaning (Hellermann 2006). Still others argue that remittances can contribute to growing inequalities within communities of origin by increasing the living standards of migrant families and leaving non-migrant households behind (Waddington 2003). Although the extent to which remittances provide benefits and/or costs to labour migrants remains unclear, ultimately they represent a significant aspect of labour networks, and therefore comprise an important area of research in social networks and migration.

Personal and family networks

personal networks

A second type of analysis considers the personal relations migrants have with members of their host and home communities. These personal networks have at least three types of possible benefits for migrants. First, they assist with the settlement process by providing a sense of community and familiarity, as well as a means by which

migrants may sustain or modify their home culture in the host country (Castles 1990). Migrants also use these networks to maintain emotional contact with their families over long distances and to impart new ideas and practices to relatives across borders (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Herman 2006; Piotrowski 2006). Over time, these personal networks may develop into transnational social spheres in which individuals can maintain a sense of identity and community without regular face-to-face contact (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Longer periods of temporary migration may foster the growth of transnational families – where one or both parents live apart from their families for a given period of time (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Landolt et al. 2008). In such cases, migrant women may arrange personal networks of care in their home communities to look after relatives left behind, or they may try to develop stable transnational networks of care to raise children across borders (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Landolt et al. 2008).

The second benefit of personal networks is that they can also provide social support to migrants involved in protest or social justice activities. These networks can include families in the immediate area, as well as families/supporters in other cities and countries who rally around the same cause (Bakan and Stasiulis 2003; Silvey 2003). By linking migrants across borders and regions, such personal networks enhance migrants' ability to advocate for improvements in living and working conditions (Bakan and Stasiulis 2003).

Third, personal networks can be of benefit by facilitating the transformation of ideas and skills from migrants to their families back home. These socially-based migrant linkages are powerful agents of change because the ideas of the host culture are transmitted by social peers (Lindstrom and Munoz-Franco 2005). However, participation in personal networks can also have its disadvantages. Tilly (2007) argues that while strong ties or 'trust networks' provide access to benefits like social capital, they can impose significant obligations on their members. In particular, networks erect thicker and more strongly demarcated boundaries than other types of social ties. Such boundaries imply privileged benefits, but they can also lead to harsh consequences – such as exclusion – for those who do not fulfil their obligations in the network.

Given these varying results, additional research is needed to weigh the positive and negative impacts of personal networks for migrants.

Illegal migrant networks

criminal networks

Despite a keen interest in illegal migration, few sociologists and political scientists have focused on illegal migrant networks until recently.

A few notable exceptions include studies in the area of sexual trafficking and human smuggling (Portes 1978; Salt and Stein 1997; Hughes 2000), but law and criminology scholars are increasingly using the social networks framework to describe the typology of today's transnational criminal networks (Zhang and Gaylord 1996; McIllwain 1999). In their analysis of the networks involved in transnational crime, Bruinsma and Bernasco (2004) argue that the form of the network depends on the nature of the crime. For instance, hierarchical chain networks with few direct links between members characterise sexual trafficking and smuggling networks, while strong ethnically homogeneous ties predominate in the drug trafficking sector. A networks framework can also explain the seemingly irrational decisions of certain illegal migrants; Kinsella (2006) argues that for members of illicit transnational networks, the enhancement of prestige and power within the network may be more important than increasing short-term profits.

Another contribution of the research on illegal networks is the analysis of reciprocal relationships between legal status and social networks. Early in the development of the networks approach, Boyd (1989) pointed out that illegal migrants often have fewer family and friendship ties than legal migrants. As a result, they are more vulnerable to exploitation in mainstream employment sectors and illegal job markets, both in and outside their own communities. More recent research has demonstrated that a broader range of network ties facilitates obtaining legal status. In her long-term ethnographic study of Mayan immigrants in Houston, Hagan (1998) found that immigrants with a broader range of work, neighbourhood and recreational networks were better able to develop social ties with other long-term immigrants, as well as with native-born individuals. In fact, the latter provided valuable assistance to the Mayan immigrants in securing affidavits for their legalisation efforts, while those without these broad networks faced significant difficulties in settling legally.

The present flurry of government attention on the growing number of illegal immigrants signals a need for additional studies exploring the differences in the use, risks and benefits of illegal migrant networks.

What is the internal variation of networks?

Gendered networks

gender

Historically, research on social networks was often gender-blind, assuming that men dominate social networks and that women simply follow their migrant husbands (Boyd 1989; Matthei 1996; Boyd and Grieco 2003; Piper 2005). However, since the 1980s, scholars have

begun to challenge this orthodoxy, noting that migration decision-making processes and household migration strategies are shaped by gender (Boyd 1989). For instance, in social contexts where norms and mores require women's physical and emotional commitment to a family structure, familial pressure may prevent women from accessing the resources and networks needed to migrate. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) further demonstrates how social forces can intimately impact women and men's mobility. By drawing on her in-depth field work in Mexican migrant communities, Hondagneu-Sotelo is able to show how male migrants, as well as other family members, can limit the information and assistance provided to prospective independent female migrants as a result of patriarchal gender norms that disapprove of female emigration. Even other women within social networks can erect and reinforce barriers to female migration. Hellermann's (2006) study highlights tensions between married and single migrants, where the former assume that the latter are prostitutes.

facilitate international migration

Faced with these obstacles, prospective women migrants develop alternative routes to migration. Family members often accompany women during the migration process to satisfy gender norms and security concerns (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003). Another alternative is the creation of female-only migrant networks, which circumvent the gender barriers found in mainstream male-dominated networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). While this phenomenon has been documented among Mexican female migrants, studies confirm its presence in Europe as well. Hellermann's (2006) study of female Eastern European migrants demonstrates that some women look for alternative networks outside their ethnic community as a result of the paternalistic attitudes they encounter in the more established networks. Recent quantitative work empirically tests the benefits of these gendered networks in terms of how they facilitate international migration. Curran and Rivero-Fuentes (2003) find that having access to a pre-existing female migrant network significantly facilitates international migration for women. Thus, gender-specific networks represent a key resource for female migrants, especially in the pre-migration stage.

ethnic enclaves

The benefits women receive from migrant networks in the countries of destination are more ambiguous. Ethnic enclaves provide a significant illustration of this point. Earlier research found that many ethnic women saw their economic roles as subservient to their male counterparts; they worked with the permission of their husbands and were seen as a cheap, flexible source of labour for co-ethnic male entrepreneurs, often relatives (Anthias 1983; Phizacklea 1983; Boyd 1989). Studies conducted roughly a decade later showed that little had changed. Enclave employment still provided women with low wages, few benefits and scant opportunity for mobility (Zhou and Logan

1989; Gilbertson 1995; Greenwell et al. 1997). However, Greenwell et al. (1997) make an important point regarding the interpretation of these findings. They suggest that if the community in which people are working is lower class, the returns to local networks may differ from the returns experienced by individuals participating in local ethnic networks in higher-class communities. Consequently, scholars must consider the social class composition of the community in which the networks are operating, in order to capture the intersections between gender and class in ethnic enclaves.

gendered division of labour

Moving beyond the specific context of ethnic enclaves, the general employment returns from migrant networks differ by gender. In particular, the gendered division of labour within receiving countries intimately influences the shape of these networks. As a result of segmented labour demand, female migrant networks often channel migrant women into specific feminised labour sectors (Bastia 2007). For instance, numerous studies from the 1990s highlight how personal networks used by female migrants lead to informal, low-wage employment, largely because female network members are concentrated in the domestic and care-giving sectors (Hagan 1998; Hondaganeu-Sotelo 2001). Moreover, the physical restrictions of household-based employment prevent women from forming larger networks and ties, while men have more opportunities for social interaction and networking in their more varied and often public sector workplaces (Bolumar et al. 2007). Livingston's (2006) work among Mexican immigrants confirms that women who use network-based job searches are less likely to find stable, formal sector employment than women who search for employment without help from the network. Informal workplaces can also place women in more vulnerable positions for exploitation and abuse, sexual and otherwise (Bolumar et al. 2007). The opposite is true for male Mexican immigrants, who are more likely to find formal sector employment through their network searches. Since formal sector employment is positively associated with wages and other benefits, the use of migrant networks in job searches often reduces the labour market returns for Mexican migrant women and raises them for men (Livingston 2006).

More recent research suggests that these earlier studies overlook an important interaction between education or class and gender. In particular, Ryan's (2007) study on Irish nurses in Britain reveals that foreign female workers keep the networks they have used in pre-migration and migration stages, but expand their social circles and establish new networks over time. Thus, when female migrants work in more public spheres (nursing), they tend to increase the breadth and width of their networks.

Overall, the impact of gendered networks on the labour market integration of migrants remains complex. In some ways, using gender-specific networks can facilitate employment searches for potential migrants, since they result in at least some form of employment. However, in other ways these networks can also reinforce gendered labour markets within the host societies.

networks influence gender relations

Another avenue of research explores how networks influence gender relations and identities. During the settlement process, women tend to be more vulnerable and socially isolated, and personal networks often represent a key source of support. They can also influence gender norms and relations among female migrants. In a study of gender relations among Mexican family households in the United States and Mexico, Parrado and Flippen (2005) found that the maintenance of friendships among immigrant Mexican women was associated with a higher rate of male involvement in household tasks, as well as greater female participation in household finances. Interestingly, the impacts of social networks on gender relations were significantly greater among migrants in the United States than among their peers back home. Surprisingly, family networks had an effect opposite to that of social networks: regular contact with family members in Mexico provided women with more control and resources in their relationship, but among Mexican migrant women in the United States, contact with family networks *decreased* men's involvement in housework and wives' financial participation in the household (Parrado and Flippen 2005). While it would be simplistic to conclude that family networks do not represent an important resource for migrants, a more nuanced analysis suggests that such contacts can represent additional domestic responsibilities for migrant women and reinforce traditional family norms and values.

social bonds impacted

Social bonds and networks can be interrupted, or at the very least impacted, by the process of migration. When social and family networks are disrupted, the interdependence of husbands and wives increases. However, women are disproportionately affected by the disruptions of their established networks since they often have less developed networks than their spouses and are faced with building new ones. Several studies show that female migrants are often left with the responsibility of building new care networks in their host societies, despite having greater time constraints due to the need to care for their family (Purkayastha 2005; Salaff and Greve 2004). At the same time, if they have left family behind in their home societies, women migrants must continue transnational 'nurturing responsibilities' (Parrenas 2005; Landolt et al. 2008). These additional emotional and time-related obligations place significant pressure on migrant women who already face the challenge of adapting to a new society. In

addition, little is known about the long-term effects of transnational parenting on migrant children.

Given the significant influence of social networks on migrants' lives, additional research into the negative effects of social networks is needed. More specifically, without a gender-sensitive approach to the study of migrant networks, one can overlook why and how women make use of certain social networks over others and underestimate women migrants' social and cultural labour (Salaff and Greve 2004).

Variations in networks due to race, ethnicity and class

The ethnic composition of social networks can create markedly different integration experiences for migrant groups. In particular, Sernau et al. (2002) argue that labour networks among immigrant minorities who have lower levels of human capital may need to be interpreted differently than networks of white professional men possessing higher levels of such capital (and who represent much of the existing labour network research). In addition, scholars need to consider the possibility that labour market information can be circulated along chains of actors with both co-ethnic and non-ethnic network ties of varying strengths. The focus on ethnically homogeneous networks must be expanded to include labour networks with a variety of actors.

ethnic stereotypes

Other studies highlight how ethnic stereotypes held by members of the receiving society can result in the racist treatment of migrants (Simmons and Plaza 1998; Hellermann 2006). Faced with such treatment, migrants are more likely to rely on ethnic networks within their own community when pursuing business and social relations, as well as in deciding where to live (Castles 1990; Zhou 1997). In terms of the latter, while discrimination can partly explain immigrant residential patterns, internal group preferences can also play a role. For instance, research on Muslim immigrants in Europe suggests that members of ethnic or religious groups sometimes voluntarily choose to reside within their own communities. In the case of European Muslim immigrants, this self-segregation is related to a preference to remain near relatives, peers and Muslim institutions (Varady 2008). Thus internal group preferences, as well as ethnic stereotypes and discrimination from the larger society, must be considered in immigrant integration research.

Gender and ethnic stereotypes within the host societies can also intersect to create particular integration challenges for migrants. Ethnographic research shows that women migrants from Eastern Europe experience discriminatory treatment from host societies based on the assumption that women from this region are in the sex trade (Hellermann 2006). Clearly, the relationship between race, ethnicity

and social networks requires additional nuanced and multi-faceted research.

class

One important factor influencing social networks is class. In fact, class issues come into play as soon as a social network begins. As noted earlier in the chapter, studies confirm that individuals from the middle and upper-middle classes are typically the first to migrate from a given community (Massey et al. 1993; Castles 2000). This reflects the significant financial resources needed to migrate and the social capital needed to settle in the host society. However, these class differences are neither permanent nor absolute. While many initial migratory flows consist of individuals with higher incomes, over time migratory paths expand and incorporate other strata of the sending population.

Although these initial class-based effects diminish over time, socioeconomic status continues to affect social networks in other ways. Granovetter's seminal work in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated that lower income groups are more likely to use strong ties consisting of family and close friends. Such ties result from individuals' limited social capital and access to other networks (Granovetter 1982). In contrast, higher income groups are more self-sufficient and can rely on distant networks of weak ties, composed of loosely-connected friends and acquaintances. Importantly, the weaker ties often serve as bridges to a variety of new networks and contacts that enable higher income individuals to expand their social capital and networks (Granovetter 1982). Later studies support Granovetter's findings, showing that higher-skilled occupational groups rely more on networks of professional contacts to secure employment, residence and so on, while lower-skilled occupational migrants tend to rely on kinship networks (Vertovec 2002; Salaff and Greve 2004). However, this rigid dichotomy is not the only possible outcome. Some scholars argue that ties can overlap, such as in the case of family businesses, which involve both formal and interpersonal relations (Poros 2001).

Given the intimate role of race/ethnicity, as well as class, in shaping the nature and operation of social networks, these factors must continue to be researched.

Variations in networks across generations

In addition to variations in networks along ethnic and racial lines, social networks also vary over time and across generations. Much of the literature focuses on the short-term adaptive functions of networks; relatively fewer studies discuss the effects of social networks on second-generation immigrants.

networks across generations

The literature on the second generation of migrants reveals three negative consequences of immigrant networks across generations. First, strong attachment to social networks among second-generation youth in lower-income ethnic communities can decrease social integration and reduce their long-term socio-economic mobility. This barrier to mainstream integration is largely a result of second-generation immigrants adopting 'undesirable' attitudes and characteristics from the underprivileged community into which they have been assimilated (Portes and Zhou 1993; Zhou 1997). Second, personal networks may channel new migrants and second-generation immigrants into bounded ethnic niches, which provide few economic opportunities or occupational choices (Kim 2006). This can eventually lead to a decline in their occupational mobility. Third, participation in ethnic enclaves (or neighbourhoods that have a high representation of their language group) may reduce the likelihood among immigrants of acquiring majority language skills over time (Chiswick and Miller 1992).

Other studies provide evidence of the long-term benefits of participating in migrant networks. Zhou and Portes (1993) argue that when ethnic communities emphasise the importance of education, financial success and mobility, strong ethnic community networks can increase the likelihood of economic advancement among second-generation youth. In addition, more recent statistical models challenge and complicate earlier findings, which found that living in linguistic enclaves retards majority language proficiency over time. Chiswick and Miller (1996) show that the impact of minority language concentration is reduced to statistical insignificance once other measures are included – most notably whether individuals are married to a fellow foreigner, whether a family member (other than spouse or children) is living in the country and whether they use ethnic media.

What external forces influence social networks?

rite of passage

Two external forces have a major impact on migrant social networks – immigration history and immigration policies within host and home societies. Regarding the former, scholars suggest that social norms inducing further migration emerge in communities that have experienced significant migration over time and have a large percentage of migrants abroad (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Curran and Saguy 2001; Massey and Kandel 2002). For instance, studies of Mexican migrants suggest that migration is now a rite of passage for men in migrant-sending communities, influencing them to participate in migrant networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Massey and Kandel 2002).

The immigration policies of both the home and host countries also influence the number and nature of migrant networks. Many countries play active roles in facilitating the emigration of their citizens. A notable example is the Filipino government, which has pursued a labour emigration policy since the early 1980s (Asis 2006; Parrenas 2001). In contrast to the absent or ad-hoc emigration policies of other countries, the Filipino government has created official government departments and programs to manage its migration flows. The Philippine Overseas Employment Administration provides pre-departure orientation to migrants and ensures its emigrants have full access to information on future employment (Tyner 2000; Agunias and Ruiz 2007). In addition, in 1995 the government attempted to increase the protection of its workers abroad through the enactment of the *Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act* (Asis 2005). These government activities facilitate the migration of workers via official routes, thereby reducing the need for migrants to resort to meso-level social networks for assistance.

policies of governments

The activities and policies of governments in the receiving countries are equally influential for three reasons. First, host governments can affect migrant networks through their immigration selection policies and admissibility criteria (Gurak and Caces 1992). The Canadian immigration point system, for instance, formally assesses the prospective contributions of immigrants to the Canadian economy and society based on such criteria as level of skill, knowledge of official languages and education. The majority of new immigrants are therefore highly skilled and educated (Boyd and Alboim 2012). In contrast, the US does not afford privilege to skilled migrants, and many new immigrants rely on family networks in order to enter the country (Green 2004). As a result of the different immigration policies, different migrant networks predominate in the two countries.

Second, policies of the host government with respect to the provision of social services affect the reliance of migrants on social networks (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Collyer 2005). Simply put, the extent to which migrants rely on their own contacts and support networks will vary, based on the level of services provided by the government. For instance, the US has attempted to reduce the social services provided to immigrants through several initiatives, such as Proposition 187 in California, which denies educational and other benefits to illegal immigrants (Martin 1995). When key social services are absent, local migrant networks in host communities are essential for maintaining a decent standard of living (Collyer 2005; Williams 2006).

access to citizenship

Third, social networks are influenced by migrants' access to citizenship status. An increasing number of countries permit citizens to hold dual citizenship, such as Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican

Republic, El Salvador and Mexico (Levitt and De la Dehesa 2003). Such migrants are better able to maintain connections with their home communities because they can more easily return home and/or invest in home businesses. Without this option, migrants often choose to focus their efforts, loyalty and even citizenship on either the home or host country. In brief, if migrants face a difficult naturalisation process, they are more likely to rely on their own networks for information and support than on other members of their host society.

What are the main critiques of the networks approach?

Since the second half of the 20th century, the networks approach has broken new ground in international migration research. Nonetheless, there are three main conceptual criticisms of the field and a number of methodological concerns.

narrow view

First, traditional understandings of the 'migrant network' do not permit a comprehensive study of international migration. Critics suggest that the concept of networks should be expanded to include employers, governments, labour smugglers and all other actors involved in the origin and perpetuation of migratory flows. These less traditional network actors have been largely ignored, as the 'migrant network' concept focuses on horizontal relationships between migrants and their sending communities (Krissman 2005). This narrow view does not allow for an accurate assessment of the many different types of migrant networks and actors today.

A second weakness is the limited attention given to power inequalities within migrant networks and how these influence the lives of migrants. Many scholars point out that social network members do not occupy equal positions of power. As such, migrants can be exploited by actors within their own network as a result of their gender, age, and so on (Evergeti and Zontini 2006; Hellermann 2006). More in-depth analyses of the dynamics and inequalities within networks are needed.

Finally, a third criticism addresses the limited information available on the returns migrants receive from social networks relative to the native-born. Kazemipur (2006) notes that immigrants to Canada receive fewer socioeconomic returns from their networks, mobilise fewer network resources and have less diverse social webs than their native counterparts. Moreover, the pay-offs to network members are significantly higher for immigrant men than immigrant women, and become smaller once the duration of time in Canada is taken into account. Future research might well consider migrants' use of networks, then, as well as the returns they obtain from them, in comparison to non-immigrant groups.

methodological limitations

In terms of methodological limitations, one critique centres on the methods used in networks research. Spittel (1998) argues that the 'network effect' needs empirical verification. The term 'network effects' refers to situations where networks are seen to stimulate migration; for example, when individuals live in a community or household where immigration has occurred they are more likely to migrate themselves. Spittel offers two counter-theses that challenge the empirical validity of this argument. The first, the common-cause hypothesis, argues that individuals within a network may be influenced by a set of common factors, independent from migration ties. In this case, the effect of belonging to a network on the likelihood of migrating is better explained as a spurious relationship arising from a set of common causes. The other argument, the self-selection hypothesis, posits that individuals who are more likely to migrate are also more likely to participate in networks. Interestingly, later in his article Spittel confirms that social networks explain higher rates of migration – net of common cause and self-selection. Future scholars are encouraged to follow in Spittel's footsteps by focusing on the methodological rigour of the networks field, in order to enhance the strength and precision of networks research as a whole.

Another methodological critique posits that only focusing on networks in the migration process reduces the quality of research in this area. In particular, Trappers et al. (2008) argue that if migration were *solely* dependent on social networks and chain migration, immigrants would continuously migrate to the regions where networks are already established. Given the shifting migrant destination points, this is clearly not the case. For instance, in Europe migrants do not concentrate in a few regions, but in many different ones. Rather than resulting from social networks, Trappers et al. (2008) argue that these movements are also a result of business cycle labour shortages. Notwithstanding the influence of networks in individual and household decision-making, the authors emphasise that one must consider how multiple explanatory variables, including socio-cultural and economic, interact at different levels to produce migration outcomes.

validity of criteria

A final methodological concern is whether the criteria used to evaluate the function and/or benefits of social networks are valid. Fuglerud and Engebrigsten (2006) argue that some scholars assess the benefits of social networks based on outcomes that are more favourable to the host society, such as social integration, cohesion and individual success, rather than to the migrants themselves. Scholars studying network participation often portray those who increase their ties with other networks as 'lost' to the original migrant network. Others suggest that this loss could be interpreted as the migrant network undergoing a process of expansion and evolution (Gurak and Caces 1992).

Building on this idea, changes in the location and concentration of networks merit further examination. Light (2006) demonstrates how large flows of migrants into a particular region can actually deflect rather than attract migrants over time. As migration in a given locale shifts from being stimulated by local demand to reflecting network development, poverty levels rise. Light notes that Los Angeles gradually became unattractive to migrants as a result of growing competition in a limited number of available industries and neighbourhoods, not to mention the increasing enforcement of municipal employment and housing codes in the area – the latter undertaken by political figures in response to an influx of immigrants. As a result, since the 1990s migrant flows have diffused beyond the Southwestern states to many different regions of the US as networks in destination sites communicate the changing contexts of reception (or deflection) to prospective migrants. As these emerging patterns show, future networks research must go further than merely explaining why people migrate from A to B; it must begin to analyse 'why they now go from A to C' (Light 2007: 1165).

Conclusion: Lines for future research

Scholars have long highlighted the need to examine different types of networks (Boyd 1989; Fawcett 1989). Significant work has been done to address this concern, most notably in research on the impacts of gender, race and class on networks, as well as the differences between illegal and legal networks. Nonetheless, many research questions remain unanswered.

avenue for future research

A promising avenue for future research involves moving beyond traditional understandings of networks and actors, with 'actors' taken here to mean migrants involved in personal and labour networks. Indeed, new types of networks and actors are implicated in international migration, as the phenomenon expands across regions. Abella (1992) argues that labour recruitment agencies, overseas employment promotion companies and legal contractors played a crucial role in increasing labour emigration from Asia in the late 20th century (Lim 1992). Networks of Mexican lobby groups in the United States are becoming significant players in immigration politics due to their growing numbers, institutionalisation and coordination with other interest groups (Gimpel and Edward 1999). In certain regions (such as West Africa), commercially-based social networks are increasing their presence in migration flows, whereas in the past, ethnic-based networks were dominant (Kress 2006). What are the particular features of these more recent network actors? How do they influence the type and

number of migrants crossing borders? These questions move the orthodox social networks focus beyond the migrants who physically move across borders, suggesting the need to include the growing number of actors indirectly involved in migrant networks.

Similarly, though scholars in a variety of disciplines have begun to study illegal networks, significantly more research is needed. In particular, the focus must move beyond traditional large-scale smuggling networks that operate over the long term, to more micro-scale networks. A notable example is Collyer's (2007) study of small-scale networks' facilitation of illegal migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe. The author highlights the tendency to overlook the role of these smaller networks, consisting of a few individuals and lasting for just a short duration of time, in smuggling in the developing world. Further research is needed to determine how the use of these small-scale illegal networks differs by region, as well as by class, race and gender.

differences within networks

In addition to examining the differences between networks, it is also useful to explore the differences within networks. Hellermann (2006) highlights the relationship between social networks and a migrant's level of human, financial and social capital. While significant work has been done on the minimum level of financial capital needed to take part in migrant networks, the same cannot be said of social and human capital. What basic levels of social and human capital are needed to access migrant networks? Does this vary by gender, ethnicity and region? Another important research question asks how the use of migrant networks differs between older and newer waves of ethnic migrant groups in a receiving country. A recent European study argues that new Polish immigrants to the United Kingdom utilise a variety of networks in their host communities. They sometimes participate in relatively established networks and institutions formed by previous immigrant generations, while at other times they use newer networks and ethnic resources. Technological advances and cheaper modes of transportation facilitate more variety in types of migrants, resulting in 'not just a single "little Poland" in exile, but a multitude of little Polands, as networks rapidly spring up and constantly evolve' (White and Ryan 2008: 1498). By increasing the choices available to migrants, the growing number of networks may reduce the inequalities identified in the less numerous, and more broad-based networks of previous decades. Further research on these subtle differences would surely produce novel findings.

diverse set of tools

To explore these nuanced issues, however, scholars must deconstruct networks along various dimensions and consider a variety of networks. This calls for a more diverse set of methodological tools. Gurak and Caces (1992) suggest that increased comparative and

multi-level examinations of migration networks would provide richer detail on the functioning of migrant networks and better capture the members within them. An example of such analysis, conducted by Miller-Martinez and Wallace (2007), measures the influence of individual, meso-level (cultural) and structural factors on migrant decision-making. This type of analysis offers a rich understanding of the forces influencing social networks today.

Another area of research involves examining differences in the benefits migrants receive from social networks based on citizenship status. Amuedo-Dorantes and Mundra (2007) demonstrate that access to friendship-based networks increases the wages of illegal Mexican migrants in the United States – more so than for legal migrants. However, the reverse is true of family-based networks.

Scholars are also considering the connections between age and social networks. Miller-Martinez and Wallace (2007) focus on how social networks (in terms of their dynamics and composition) vary as migrants age. Do elderly migrants participate in and develop different social networks than younger migrants?

migration and development

A final emerging area of research is the relationship between migration and development. Scholars now assess the positive and negative effects of migration on socio-economic development in the sending and receiving countries. Rather than rely on macro-level and top-down development approaches, this perspective emphasises migrants themselves as agents of development, assuming a role in development projects (such as by sending remittances to their home communities via home town associations or sending monies directly home to family). Much remains to be done, given the relatively limited number of studies available in North America and Europe, (Massey et al. 1996; Castles 2000; Migration Information Source 2007). While an emphasis on migrants as agents of development is important, additional research is needed on assistance that could possibly be provided by the state in both destination and origin countries to help migrants retain ties to their home communities, in order to increase the likelihood of remittances and skill transfers. Recent European research on Kurdish-Turkish immigrants in Denmark, for instance, demonstrates the often-tense political relationship between the host and origin state. The study emphasises the integration of immigrants and the cross-border activities of immigrants engaged in transnational development projects with their home communities (Christiansen 2008). Similar research has been done on Mexican immigrants in the United States facing pressures to assimilate into the host country by severing homeland ties (Glick-Schiller et al. 1995). Nonetheless, additional research within and across regions would help to develop a fuller understanding of these processes.

stimulants and impediments to migration

Another related area of research regards the effect of migrant networks in stimulating or impeding return migration. Haug's (2008) study of return migration among European migrants demonstrates that social capital aspects, that is, the number of household members who have returned, significantly influences return migration. In fact, social capital has the largest effect on return migration – more so than individual factors. Furthermore, return migration decisions are determined by social capital factors *independent* of individual characteristics such as age or employment. However, whether return migration differs as a result of the type of network (labour, personal) remains unclear. This analysis of return migration leads to a further question – under what conditions do certain networks appear, weaken and disappear while others persist? Given current concerns about skill shortages and brain-drain in sending countries, additional insights into how and why return migration occurs are both theoretically and practically useful.

Since its appearance on the academic scene, the social networks approach to the study of migration has evolved from focusing on a handful of actors to including an ever-expanding number of actors and processes stretching across multiple borders. Studies in North America, Europe and elsewhere have contributed to the growth of this research by highlighting the networks and nuances of their particular regions. It is now time to bridge these divides and create 'networks of network scholars' to synthesise findings, develop informed conclusions and suggest fruitful areas for future research. Multi-site research could provide a rich and comprehensive analysis of the function and impact of migrant networks. With increasing migration from a variety of regions, and in the continued absence of any institutionalised international migration regime (Massey 1995), the number of migrant networks is likely to expand significantly in the near future. In an interdependent and borderless world, the networks approach is a valuable conceptual, methodological and policy tool for the study of immigration and migrants.

MAIN IDEAS/CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM CHAPTER

The *strength* and *density* of ties are two common measures of social networks.

A limitation of current social theories is their inability to relate micro-level interactions to macro-level phenomena.

The social networks approach addresses why individuals migrate as well as why migration persists.

Networks help individuals to find employment, but often this is in jobs in the informal sector where migrants have little contact with the mainstream population.

Gender shapes migration decision-making processes and household migration strategies.

Women migrants are usually responsible for building new care networks in the host society, though they are under greater time constraints due to the need to care for their family.

Note

1 Although informal labour networks often consist of friends, family and acquaintances, they are distinct from personal networks. The main focus of informal labour networks is to facilitate labour migration flows, not family reunification.

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