

# Solidarity and Social Networks – Economic Sociology of International Migration and the Brazilian Case

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## Introduction

This article addresses two main points: 1) one of the greatest challenges of Economic Sociology when studying international migration is not only to offer an alternative to the neoclassical economic approach, but also one that, at opposite extremes, results from a certain oversocialization of phenomena; and 2) to show that migration contexts result from relational processes in which the structure of social ties and their actors interact constantly in order to operate different factors at the micro and macro levels.

In simple terms, as argued by Martes (2010), it would be a mistake to substitute "*Homo economicus*" for the "solidary man" model. It is possible to refuse both methodological individualism and the self-interest postulate from the neoclassical economic model and concomitantly avoid reducing the "immigrant" category to a type of social actor who develops intra-community relations based only on reciprocity and solidarity – thereby overlooking the conflict and disputes within immigrant groups.

The history of recent Brazilian emigration flows demonstrates that the role of social networks is really pivotal to our understanding of the diversity related to the formation of immigrant communities abroad. In the Brazilian case, those communities tend to reinforce the sense of social cohesion and self-identification (as with the "Brasiguaios", in Paraguay, and the "Dekassegui", in Japan), as well as a high level of competitiveness (e.g.: the Brazilian community in the US).

Earlier studies on Brazilian emigration to the US (Margolis, 1993, Martes 2000) have already drawn attention to the lack of community associations among Brazilians, and the internal competition for jobs in the labor market. Almost twenty years after these publications, and as a continuation to these issues, studies carried out at other destina-

tions are now demonstrating how the dimension of solidarity, at least in terms of Brazilians, goes beyond associative practices, incorporation processes and the receiving contexts.

In this perspective, ethnographic work and more conventional sociological research are joined by social network analyses in fostering an understanding of the migratory context and its dynamics. The relational perspective aims to focus on social interactions among individuals, migrants or not, which impact on the collective order. Social Network Analysis (SNA) therefore promotes a deeper comprehension as it is based on a relational sociological perspective on the migratory phenomenon.

Analyzing the migration process, Charles Tilly (1990) suggested that the displacement concerns the "social categories" (such as families, cliques of friends, neighborhoods, etc) in which individuals are embedded. Thus, according to Tilly, in the migration process, the individuals' mobility converts into social and physical displacement by means of social networks (i.e., framed channels of social ties). Consequently, those social networks can show how (micro) individual actions are embedded and interconnected through (macro) global chains of social ties between origin and destination sites.

Brazilian emigration, whether bound for countries in Europe, North America, Asia or South America, can be considered an interesting case in showing the limits of ethnic solidarity and how varied social networks might adopt different strategies in the migration process, opening room for either cooperation or competition among immigrants. As such, the social networks would indicate the patterns of social interaction that account for solidarity.

The Brazilian case under analysis therefore proposes a broadening of the empirical research agenda on migrations to include the following topics: conflicts, cleavage, and mercantilization processes within immigrant group rela-

tions, as well as the conditions related to the formation of solidarity networks.

### **Ethnic solidarity and selling jobs: the self-regulated labor market in Massachusetts**

Criticism of neoclassical theory indicates its reductionist bias, in other words, the reduction of the migration phenomena to a deductive hypothetical model whose premise is the idea that migration processes can be explained through the individual's weighing of the pros and cons of the proposed move. However, from a macro point of view, it is anchored in an economic model of general balance: migrants leave poor countries, where there is plenty of available workforce and unemployment, heading to rich countries, where there is need for labor and salaries are better. From these compensating exchanges results a global balance in the regional "labor market", especially if labor and remuneration factors are taken into account.

Alternatives to the neoclassical economic model have been developed for almost two decades regarding this area of knowledge (Portes, 1995; Martin, 1998). Apart from studies directly anchored in New Economic Sociology, several authors have been trying to draw attention to the fundamental dimensions of migratory processes which fail to fit the neoclassical model: migration is a family decision (not an individual one) and relies on networking processes (Taylor, 1986; Maclaughlin 1990; Boyd, 1989; Massey et al. 1987; Fawcett, 1989); immigrant communities generate their own joint stock and build transnational networks at their destination as well; networks stimulate entrepreneurship and social mobility in the receiving societies (Halter, 1995; Waldinger and Ward, 2000; Bonacich and Modell 1980), and immigrant communities build on ethnic solidarity (Portes, 1995).

These authors reach different conclusions via different routes, but they all converge on certain important points: (a) ethnic networks guarantee access to available job posts, especially for recently-arrived immigrants; and (b) granting access to work is motivated/justified by solidarity, specifically "ethnic solidarity".

From this perspective, explanations of the kinds of job to which these immigrants have access, when not referring to companies belonging to fellow countrymen, have largely been based upon two models: market segmentation and the informal economy. Both criticize the neoclassical the-

ory of a labor market. The informal economy model also levels criticism at the dualism and marginality theory, concluding that informality is a particular type of manufacturing relation. On one hand, informal activities are not limited only to poor regions, while, on the other, they may expand both under conditions of cyclical crisis and unemployment, and of economic expansion.

The formal and informal economies should not be addressed as two independent elements, but rather as interdependent ones. Goods and services are produced through informal activities because the formal economy generates demand for such goods and services. Relations between each of these two sectors depend on specific institutional and social arrangements. A formal and informal economy divide is interpreted, therefore, differently to the one established by the segmentation model, which is sustained by the division between monopolist capital and competitive capital. That is because, according to the informal economy model developed by the three aforementioned authors, small firms operate within a captive market, as expanded arms of major companies for which they manufacture their goods. In similar fashion to the notion of a *captive market*, some authors work with the concept of an ethnic niche (Model: 1993). According to Model, ethnic niche occupations are those in which certain ethnic groups (or national groups) manage to secure some advantage in the labor market, for some particular reason. As will be explained, Brazilian immigrants have cornered the cleaning segment in order to secure a competitive edge over other groups.

In this niche Brazilians have carved out for themselves the practice of job selling appears to be quite common, not only in the Greater Boston Area, but also in London. When Brazilians decide to "sell" the houses they work in, they disclose the information through their friendship, family, religious, and neighborhood networks. However, the sale can also take place when the seller does not know the buyer. In Brazilian newspapers in Massachusetts, for instance, there are ads for houses up for sale. The price represents, on average, the equivalent of three months' wages in each house to be sold and depends, therefore, on the number of houses for sale. A cleaner will frequently clean two houses per day, which means that on the weekly schedule, the seller may have, on average, fourteen houses.

Once someone interested in closing the deal is found, the seller talks to the house owner to explain that they are

quitting the job, but that a Brazilian friend, in her trust, could serve as a replacement. If the house owner accepts the candidate, the deal is closed and the payment is made in cash. This transaction takes place without the house owner ever knowing about it. Access to cleaning work means access to an "American home". Consequently, it is a closed access, since it requires trust.

Among Brazilians, cleaning services are seen as a business. Not by chance, many emigrate with the purpose of becoming cleaners and conceive emigration as an option similar to an investment, even an economic investment. By means of cleaning services, they manage to receive payments, with some couples making up to US\$4,000 per month. It allows Brazilians to transform cleaning services into a symbol of status and social mobility. It is not only a house that is being sold, but something capable of identifying those Brazilians who have started to "make money". This fact softens the traditionally female role assigned to house cleaning to the point of attracting men as well.

One's gaining access to an American house as a worker is compared to gaining control over a "post" or "property". The opening of this commerce testifies to the Brazilian immigrants' entrepreneurial talent, but also uncovers an archaic feature of this country's patrimonialist. Selling jobs is therefore sometimes seen, even by the Brazilian immigrants themselves, as a sign of their "Americanization", but also as an expression of the "jeitinho brasileiro", a self-interested mode of behavior, devoid of any community spirit, and indicative of a lack of solidarity.

We shall see below how social networks impact on the solidarity and social cohesion of immigrant groups. At this point, the most important issue to be stressed is that among those Brazilian immigrant groups there was a "market" based on the premises of solidarity. As such, before the employer, the cleaner behaves as if their motivation was solidarity towards the other Brazilian person. The employer, in turn, agrees to hire the 'friend' for the same reason: assuming that the cleaner's motivation is solidarity and not economic interest, but also because, as indicated by Granovetter, accepting a referral for the job reduces replacement costs incurred. The premises of ethnic solidarity are reinforced by the contracted party, by the contractor and the seller. Trust gained by the cleaning person is transferred to the successor, and that is how replacements take place.

It is essential to note that it is not ethnic solidarity (gifting, economically altruistic reciprocity) but a setting of exchange rules (or market rules) that allows this labor market niche to function within an informal economy in developed countries. On the other hand, appreciation of ethnic solidarity, which is the foundation of an ethnic solidarity as a given value, is one of the elements that allow this "job selling" market to exist. This labor market is competitive to the point that it is possible to sell access to it. However, it does not mean that Brazilians fail to show solidarity or create environments and organizations aimed at this purpose.

### **Solidarity within, competition in between – the role of religious networks**

The churches are among those organizations that yearn for and preserve reciprocity and solidarity, and then Brazilians go to churches believing that there they will find an environment defined by solidarity relationships and trust. However, the efficacy of each religious organization in answering the needs expressed by the immigrants is an essential factor in attracting and promoting the envisaged sociability.

From this point of view, gospel churches, being the most flexible ones, have an advantage over Catholic churches. Essential, however, is the way in which the religious community promotes mutual help among their membership, according to their personal needs. Support offered and solidarity manifested among members contribute to the construction of religious and community identities capable of defining "sheltered environments" for socialization. Symbols and values pursued by immigrants, especially related to social ascension, help explain why Brazilians choose to belong to a certain church and not another. In the dispute to attract new followers, gospel churches manage to meet social mobility desires for their appreciation of economic individualism, albeit with the proviso that this should be compensated for by community involvement offered by churches.

Being a temporary and illegal immigrant, the condition of the vast majority of Brazilians – except for Japan - promotes a strong sense of insecurity and disarticulation, as with many other immigrant groups (Sayad, 1998). This condition forces them to continually live with a disruptive sense of groundlessness. All the same, together with this terrible feeling, Brazilians express negative appreciation of the "community" to which they belong. They complain that they cannot trust each other and that there is no soli-

darity among Brazilians. Churches act on this “loose universe”, in order to assign an emotional and cognitive sense to such negative experiences. Incorporating such experiences into the religious field, they redefine parameters, assign a new meaning to old complaints and reinforce the importance of religious work in building “community”.

However, solidarity promoted inside churches fails to spread easily “outside” churches. Whether to attract or to maintain the followers they already have, both Catholic and Protestant churches, compete fiercely with each other, creating a “market” in which different identities, values, incentives and embarrassments are reinforced within or generate a clash outside.

Campaigns to raise funds and support for NGOs in Brazil, or to supply assistance to people arriving in Massachusetts are common practices within these religious communities. Though business also thrives within the churches. In evangelical religious networks, the faithful not only find encouragement toward economic success, but also a “captive market” for the sale of Brazilian foods, gospel-style clothing and other products the Brazilians like and want to continue to consume in the United States.

In the US, the number of Brazilian churches is growing by the day and Brazilians flock to them because they present and reinforce the idea that they can mold a safe space of sociability, assistance and solidarity in an environment considered highly competitive and geared towards the acquisition of material goods.

The selection process that characterizes Brazilian emigration to the United States and to Europe rarely attracts social segments other than the middle class. People from less privileged backgrounds find it all but impossible to secure the resources and access to the networks that configure Brazilian emigration to the northern hemisphere. Brazilians started emigrating to the United States en masse in the 1980s and have continued to do so ever since in a bid to avoid the threat of social descent, especially when they cannot find access in Brazil to certain types of human capital, especially a university education, which might have helped them fill their gaps, further their aspirations and boost the real conditions available to them on the Brazilian labor market. We are therefore talking about people who are already interested in acquiring material goods and increasing their consumer power. These characteristics are important if we are to understand the differences between the Brazilian immigrants in the United States and the Bra-

zilian immigrants in Paraguay, the subject of the following section.

### Social networks within the Brazilian immigrant community in Paraguay

As a matter of fact, the recent spread and increase of Brazilian flows to the US and other countries seem to point toward the strengthening of an autonomous migration system, that is, a very structured domain of population displacement which interconnects diverse regions of origin and destination with its own network structures, culture, institutions and rules. In addition, the consolidation of such migration systems implies the formation of an environment needed for the diffusion of the so-called “culture of migration” and the “migration market” (Guilmoto and Sandron, 2001).

Regarding migration theory it seems reasonable to suspect that migration systems have durable key patterns shared by diverse countries and flows as well as emergent singularities dependent on the contexts of individuals and collectives engaged in the everyday transactions. For instance, the patterns of Brazilian flows to the US are quite different compared to the Brazilian flows to Paraguay. While in the US the Brazilian community is murky and fragmented, in Paraguay the Brazilian influx has recently congregated around local border cities to form a mild Brazilian transnational community (whose members are the so-called “Brasiguaios”, see Marques, 2009). As such, despite similarities between these flows (such as a heterogeneity of migrant profiles and places of origin), and given that migration contexts are almost never the same, we may find different (and even divergent) outcomes in varied parts of the Brazilian migration system.

Thus, the Brazilian immigrant community in Paraguay seems to be in the process of expanding and consolidating bonds of solidarity, whereas the Brazilian immigrants in the US are far from a cohesive and supportive community. Such differences in the trajectory of community formation evince the central role of social networks in the migration process and the process of immigrant embeddedness at the destination sites (Fazito and Soares, 2010).

Historically, the emigration flows of Brazilians to the US and Paraguay began around 1980 but evolved differently because the social structure from which the flows came evidenced diverse social actors and networks. The Brazilians who migrated to Paraguay in the early 80s were

mainly landless and very poor peasants living near the international border. The mass movement of displaced peasants from the Southwest region of Brazil to Paraguay increased not only because of the economic crisis that imposed shortages in the local labor market, but also due to the presence of strong existing networks based on kinship and domestic economic ties (Sprandel, 2004; Marques, 2009). So, the Brazilians who out-migrated to Paraguay had a very strong communitarian background and cultivated their original bonds even on the other side of the border. At their destination, the Brazilians formed small communities that recalled their original social organization and sustained a kind of social web across the communities near both sides of the border. From such a configuration of solidarity bonds and social cohesion, the Brazilian migrants, upon returning to Brazil in the mid-80s and early 1990s, founded the Brazilian civil movement of landless peasants (the so-called Movimento dos Sem Terra – MST) suggesting a strong commitment to continued cooperation. However, at the same time, the Brazilians who went to the US departed from very different social contexts and established diverse crossing and integration strategies. In addition, from a relational perspective, compared to Paraguay, it is evident that the destination sites in the US provided quite different institutional and social resources to Brazilian immigrants, which would help to explain such a discrepancy between those two fronts of migration.

More clearly the successful adaptation of the immigrants in the destination societies and their integration in the local labor market depends not only on the amount of human capital they possess, but also on the migration context in which the migrants negotiate material, symbolic and expressive resources in order to attain their position in the web of social relations and consolidate their power – such power conveys the assignment of identities as well as the ability to (re)make the rules of social classification.

In this sense, the early arrival of huge flows of Brazilian migrants in poorly inhabited regions (the Eastern Paraguayan chaco) set the routes for the accumulation of strategic resources over time, such as land, manpower, social influence in negotiations with public authorities and new social ties (especially kinship with native Paraguayans). Again, the social networks established between the origin and destination could rely on Brazilian political and economic strategies at the border, and then by the end of the 1990s important cities along the international border flourished on either side, increasing the social capital of the Brasiguaios, and the wealth and political power of the new

Brazilian immigrants (a different migrant characterized by higher social background). As Marques showed, many communities at the border seem to shape their social identities according to the social networks of migration at origin and destination sites, thus strengthening the social cohesion of an earlier transnational community. However, at the other extreme, the recent diversification of Brazilian flows into Paraguay (i.e., different socio-economic backgrounds at the origin and the formation of new Brazilian communities based on rich and powerful landowners at the destination) promotes new social settings in which competition between the generationally distinct Brazilian immigrant communities tends to increase and destabilize the original communitarian way of life.

Hence, an economic sociology of migration demands the reasoning of the patterns of interaction that relate agency and social structure in the formation of migration systems. In the case of Brazilian migration to the US we shall see that two major factors would account for the trends in the process of immigrant adaptation and integration in the labor market, which might in turn explain the consequential feebleness of the Brazilian immigrant community in the US. Unlike the Brazilian migrant community settled along the Brazilian-Paraguayan border (and also the Brazilian immigrant community in Japan), in the US, the Brazilian immigrant community seems to be related to a diverse configuration of social networks which structured communities to maximize “external” competition instead of social identification, cohesion and solidarity.

Those factors should be thought of as endogenous variables that regulate the migration process and could be summarized as follows: 1) the network closure factor.

### Social networks and the migration market

If the social structure resembles a network sewed by layers of social networks, then we should conceive the so-called migratory network as a kind of social network embedded in a very specific context of spatial and social mobility. In other words, since the migration process is a social and collective effort the social networks that stand in the migration context should operate locally the social interactions between migrants and non-migrants in the community, leading to the behaviors and attitudes that govern human spatial displacement.

Thus, we might imagine the entire process of international migration (taking all communities of migrants and non-migrants at the origin and destination sites, as well as global and local markets and the States) as a big social structure composed by global social networks that encompass entire communities which unfold various local social networks that are connected to other local social networks, and so on. These social networks expose the boundaries of a field of social interactions traversed by migration issues negotiated by individuals and groups in everyday life. As Tilly pointed out (1990: 81), the migrant pioneer, the so-called *self-made man*, is nothing but a mythical image that decries the migrant condition, which is essentially the interdependent nature of individual and collective actions focused on social and spatial displacements. The decision to migrate is therefore anchored in a complex social setting that entangles global and local structural (network) properties with which individuals and communities interact.

Consequently, there must be a pattern of social interactions among individuals within and between groups which characterizes the processes of migration. For instance, the Brazilians who migrated to Paraguay (the waves from 1980 to 1995) had similar social and cultural backgrounds at their destination and usually succeeded on the local labor market due to their belonging to a very cohesive and integrated immigrant community. On the other hand, the Brazilians who migrate to the US face a different social setting in which very locally and clustered communities compete with each other on the labor market. Since social networks regard patterns of social interaction of many different types (economic transactions, emotional ties, political hierarchy, etc) and levels (micro and macro), we could say that the migration process is associated with the social networks while individual action toward migration is embedded in those patterns of social interaction that support collective norms, values, hierarchies and roles, connecting individuals and groups at the origin and destination sites. And so, these connections between individuals and collectives are responsible for shaping the migration projects of individuals and groups (including success in the labor market).

Guilmoto and Sandron (2001) suggested the idea of a "migration market" that would be made up of economic and social institutions, community values and social networks which drive the migration process – the migration market is not only a special type of labor market because it is also regulated by cultural values, social institutions and

networks of people and groups. In addition, the author pointed out that, especially in the developing countries where the "migration market" is provided with weak migration institutions (like inefficient hiring system, weak trade unions, poor means of transportation and communication, and inept labor policies) the social networks in the migration context tend to operate broadly and intensively as a counterbalance to the precarious distribution of strategic resources (information, income and emotional support). Also, they suggest that those societies where the "migration market" has poor economic institutions will eventually be occupied by "phony migration institutions", such as illegal labor hiring agencies, which may propel massive irregular migration. In Brazil, weak migration institutions have opened room for the creation and expansion of an irregular migration system based on what Fazito and Soares (2010) called the "institutional network of the Brazilian industry for illegal migration". Local agents (called the "Consul") are the major brokers who connect the migration markets of small cities like Governador Valadares to big metropolises like Miami, New York or Boston, making the Brazilian migrants' dream come true. Those networks are organized and controlled by local and global brokers, interconnecting local agents (who recruit migrants and provide forged documents and visa) with global intermediaries (like the Mexican coyotes at the Mexico-US border, and the brokers on the American labor market, providing usually irregular jobs).

However, in those societies with well-structured labor markets (with weak informal sectors) and strong economic institutions, the local social networks do not tend to be enmeshed and concentrated in one unique framework like the migration context, and so the individuals will avail far less of their personal contacts to provide strategic resources geared exclusively toward migration. In other words, in prosperous societies the social networks are not exclusively related to the migration market and the social actors tend to have more opportunities for entering the local labor markets.

One should keep in mind that the discrepancies between developed and developing societies shaping the "migration market" are relational and have complex effects concerning the production, distribution and consumption of strategic resources for migration. That is to say, the local labor market in the US is interconnected with local labor markets elsewhere in poor and developing countries. So, the networking effects contribute to the formation of a global migration market in which varied local networks (i.e., local

communities and markets) interact. However, the factors that support migration social networks may exert quite reverse effects in the behavior and attitudes of migrants and non-migrants at the origin and destination, even in the same migration system. For instance, the case of Brazilians who emigrated from the same communities and compete fiercely with each other in the local labor markets in the US because of divergent social networks at the destination area – in these cases, social status, cultural values and institutions can represent and accentuate conflict (not only among individuals but also among groups).

### Network closure and the brokerage factors: social capital and solidarity in migration

The social networks in the migration process pose the question of social capital formation and the channels for decision-making and solidarity concerning migrants and non-migrants at the origin and destination sites. Studies in the social sciences have tended to depart from a *substantialist* view of the so-called social capital that is equated with social cohesion, trust and solidarity. Social capital is treated here as relational resources arranged by the topology of social networks in which the individual action is embedded. Also, Lin (2001:12) authoritatively pointed out that, in addition to the social positions embedded in the social networks, social capital should also be understood as a set of material and symbolic resources. We can therefore conclude that social capital is a social network property which can be used, disputed and manipulated by all individuals and groups interconnected in the social context.

Network closure is a process of stabilization of individual actions toward collective order that allows for social properties manageable by individuals, such as trust, cohesion and solidarity. Both strong and weak ties spreading through intermediate social actors can bring about network closure, strengthening social cohesion and cooperation among individuals. In the opposite direction, the idea of structural holes in social networks emerges from the perception that the social fabric is not homogeneous and that the embedment of individuals and social actions can lead to different effects on cooperation or competition.

Accordingly, the sparse density of external relations in-between key positions and roles in the social fabric and its correspondent weak ties tend to generate structural holes, that is, *bridges* that can be occupied only by certain actors

who will be able to intermediate social interactions between distinct social positions (Burt, 1992:23).

Burt suggests that the structural holes are properties of social networks which view social capital as a fundamental strategic resource in the individual social embedment process. The individual who is in-between other social actors should be able to manipulate the strategic resources mounting up in the structural holes. This *tertius gaudens* is seen by Burt as a *broker* who benefits instrumentally from her position in the network topology. She can also cooperate and provide resources for the entire community, but until the equilibrium (stabilization of the collective order) is achieved she will profit more in the short run and so she can stimulate competition and change (Burt, 2000:13). Burt sees brokerage activity as a necessary function in order to guarantee the social dynamics. The broker operates in the social fabric where she manipulates the social capital attained in empty structural positions. According to this perspective, trust, solidarity and social cohesion are reinforced by brokers (and structural holes) in the long run when equilibrium is achieved from dynamic and intense competition between different social groups and/or individuals. Of course, the duration of competition prior to equilibrium will vary depending on the social context – so we could think that migration flows connecting different sites of origin and destination would evolve diversely in dynamics toward both competition and cooperation.

Towards the unification of both factors, network closure and brokerage, Lin (2001: 11) insists that social capital is fundamentally a strategic resource associated with the position occupied by the actors in the social networks. In both the network closure and brokerage perspectives, social capital results from the unique position (the vertex and its edges) occupied by the social actor. In addition, Lin argues that social capital should be measured in terms of the network resources (the structural property) and contact resources (the individual property) attained by the social position. According to Lin, it is not enough for the actor to occupy any favored structural position because he or she also needs to identify the reciprocal expectations of other actors in the network and then evaluate the correctness of a specific instrumental action. Such individual action can reinforce competition at the expense of group cohesion and solidarity, or it can observe normative constraints and preserve collective order towards cooperation in the long run.

Coming back to the Brazilian migration system we could portray different scenarios for social capital production,

distribution and consumption concerning migrants and their communities (at the origin and destination). Thus, in the case of Brazilian immigrant communities, one should expect that more solidarity and internal cohesion would come into sight from the pace of network closure among Brazilians and the intensity of brokerage between Brazilians and non-migrants – this could be synthesized by the counting of existing triads and the proportion of Simmelian ties in strategic social positions. On the other hand, due to low densities within immigrant communities and few and weak ties connecting immigrants to their communities at the origin, one should expect to find an unbalanced situation where competition among immigrants would prevail at the expense of solidarity in the long run.

To illustrate the first case, the earlier Brazilian immigrants in Paraguay (Sprandel, 1992; Marques, 2009) and the contemporary Brazilian immigrants in Japan (Oliveira, 1999; Ribas, 2003; Sasaki, 1999) present a stronger sense of community and denser social networks at their destination site. The high density of networks is reinforced not only by common origins (social status, ethnic identity and historical roots) but also by the migration system topology (to Paraguay and Japan), which induces the social closure of triads – there are very few (and some preferential) destination sites, and a limited number of origins, and the institutional networks (the brokerage system in the migration market) are largely unified in acting against the diversification of, and competition among, channels and agencies in the migration process (Fazito, 2005). Consequently, the Brazilian communities in Paraguay and Japan tend to be more cohesive and unified regarding the local migration and labor market. For instance, in Paraguay, Brazilians take part in political movements to express collective demands, and families promote social gatherings to strengthen kinship ties in order to get in touch with other families and friends at the border (Marques, 2009). In Japan, the recruitment agencies develop strong connections with communities of Brazilians at the origin and destination in order to spread the news about job opportunities.

On the other hand, the Brazilian community in the US is much more fragmented and diverse regarding their social ties at the origin and destination sites. Besides the fact that the Brazilian community in the US is bigger than that of Paraguay and Japan, this immigrant community also has a very heterogeneous social profile, fragmented social ties concerning the local labor market, and a highly competitive institutional network of migration brokers. Migration network density therefore tends to be lower and more apt

to the formation of structural holes and the intensification of competition between different groups of migrants at the same destination sites.

Summing up, we could say that the Brazilian communities in Paraguay and Japan tend to social closure, inducing cohesiveness and cooperation concerning social life and integration in the local labor market. In a different way, the Brazilian community in the US tends to present more competition between diverse social groups and institutional brokers that occupy plentiful structural holes.

### **Distinctive social contexts and solidarities in the Brazilian migration process**

As we showed, while the migration process involving the Brasiguaios (to Paraguay) and Dekasseguis (to Japan) did not fuel brokerage and stiff competitiveness among Brazilian communities, the migration process to the US overtly stimulated fierce competition between local fragmented groups at the origin and destination.

In the 1990's the Brazilian migration flows to the US increased despite the hardening line of American immigration policy. However, migration competition rose in equal measure to the risks of international migration, because the majority of Brazilians had to rely on increasingly fragile and illegal crossing strategies (Margolis, 1994; Fazito and Soares, 2010). This did not happen with Brazilians crossing to Paraguay or with Brazilians out-migrating to Japan. New intermediate organizations appeared in the Brazilian migration system concerning US connections, launching the definitive phase of brokerage and establishing the migration market. The "institutional networks of migration" evolved rapidly and propelled a very competitive and multifaceted migration market related to the US – concentrating their efforts on the expansion of the "industry of illegal migration" (Margolis, 1994). In fact, Fazito and Soares (2010) studied the migration context in Governador Valadares, Brazil, to explain the decision to migrate irregularly to the US. The authors show that returned migrants who benefit from their migratory experience, and especially from their personal contacts, tend to operate as brokers on the migration market. Because they combine strong ties in intimate social circles with the arrangement of weak ties with other brokers in the wide-open migration system, they are able to offer different strategies of displacement and many scarce resources – like trust based on strong ties, and secure border crossing based on weak ties with other



broker organizations at the Mexican-US border. By these means, the returned migrants have become the most powerful brokers of the migration market in diverse Brazilian communities at origin and destination sites.

Although many Brazilian brokers use strong ties to secure market share, their instrumental action is not detached from collective surveillance and it is really common to find examples of tensions and conflicts between brokers and the communities (Margolis, 1994). Fazito and Soares (2010) found that the brokers usually mislead potential migrants, convincing them that the border crossing strategy would be advantageous because they share a sort of strong tie (they could be distant cousins, for example). But in fact the brokers, guided by fierce instrumental action, will take special care only for those migrants that paid enough, and when unsuccessful crossings take place conflicts flare inside the communities. Thus, the increasing competition in the migration market also brings more instability and internal conflicts in the communities at both the origin and destination sites.

Finally, an exogenous factor is now operating in the US-bound Brazilian migration system. Since the Brazilian community is originally fragmented and multifaceted the institutional context of migration that connects different places in origin and destination has contributed to amplifying a distinctiveness of value systems even on a micro level. Hence, the Brazilians seem to prefer to emphasize regional and status differences over similitude, which means solidarities cannot arise (Martes, 2010). Moreover, as great admirers of the American lifestyle, when Brazilian migrants come to the US they strive for complete embedment in the American society, disdaining the Brazilian values that could be supportive of a sort of nationhood solidarity. In the US, the Brazilians want to thrive.

Conclusively, it seems that the formation of a Brazilian transnational community in the US is far from concretizing. We saw that there is a chain of facts that has prevented the Brazilian immigrants from creating a unified and cohesive community in the US. Maybe with the consolidation of some broker organizations that are internally committed to a more pervasive system of values (especially those religious organizations defending entrepreneurship) the future might see new migrant waves profiting from strong and weak ties as well as cultural values in order to empower the Brazilian immigrant community with stronger solidarity.

## Concluding remarks

We have pointed out at length the variation of social contexts in which the Brazilian migration process evolves, and we showed how the structural patterns of social ties (i.e., the social networks) set down the space for migrants' decisions and insertion in the migration market. As we have seen, the solidarity among Brazilian immigrants emerges differently depending on the original social contexts (the concrete web of social ties), the presence of migration institutions and the individuals' perception and ability to act strategically according to their social position in the migration market.

Although the three main Brazilian immigrant communities worldwide (in the US, Paraguay and Japan) have very different stories that delineated diverse social settings, we could devise the explicit relational mechanisms of social networks operating to establish solidarity within those communities. The Brazilian immigrants in Paraguay and Japan tend to reinforce internal social cohesion and solidarity based on the network mechanism of "closure" – that is, migrants are connected mainly along strong ties (based on kinship and friendship from original sites), and migrants are also less dependent on institutionalized channels (where "trust" is not a given). Rather differently, the Brazilian immigrants in the US tend to stir up competition especially between segments from different social classes/ social status or communitarian origin.

Therefore, while one can envisage a sort of transnational Brazilian community tentatively burgeoning along the Brazilian-Paraguayan border and in Japan, the same is not true for Brazilian immigrants in the US, where brokerage presides over weak ties between fragmented local communities.

Additionally, we suggested that social networks do not always promptly induce solidarity (i.e., cooperation and social cohesion) because, depending on the mechanisms of brokerage in a specific social context (like that of Brazilians in the US), competition will set in, based mainly on the strength of weak ties.

Too often, the "immigrant" category tends to be considered, first and foremost, in an oversocialized way, specifically in terms of a different kind of over-socialization. Our aim was to show that solidarity cannot be taken for granted in studies on immigrant groups. Conceptually, the notion of solidarity is constitutive of the "ethnic group"

category. As such, concrete social practices, whether solidary or otherwise, ought to be taken as a subject of investigation as opposed to being treated as analytical presuppositions or as an intrinsic quality of the subject under study. Additionally, social practices that emerge within immigrant communities should be considered simply as reactions to, or reflexes of, the social environment in which they strive to make their space. The migratory process is wrought of concrete social practices that pervade the possible articulations between the two fields: origin and destination. In this sense, there is a set of standardized and distinct social practices among Brazilians, even if heterogeneous, and these will be re-contextualized in specific ways in Paraguay and the United States.

This is why one can speak of solidarity among the peasant settlers in Paraguay, who have articulated their own migratory process around the Landless Movement. However, the same could not be said were we to examine the relations between these Brazilian immigrants and their fellow countrymen who moved to the same country and the same time but are today major landowners. In this case, social class leaves a definitive tear in the Brazilian immigrant contingent.

In the US, Brazilians commercialize jobs that, in other groups, are usually offered as a gift; in other words, as an expression of intra-community solidarity. Even so, solidarity does not exclude interests, and one must not forget that immigrants are attracted to competitive societies. In these societies, market situations and economic interests are present, even if they do not exclude social solidarity. In religious networks, a sense of community is strengthened by practices and expectations that encourage solidarity. These are environments in which trust prevails, albeit not at the expense of the pursuit of economic ascension and the acquisition of consumer goods as part and parcel of "the good life" (especially in evangelical churches).

As a result, it is necessary to explore both solidarity and competition networks as new challenges to migratory studies whose complexities seem to deserve a more detailed empirical investigation. Analogously, it is also important to loosen the notion that internal conflict and low degrees of solidarity are the direct results of the way low-skilled immigrants tend to suffer a hostile reception at their destination sites. Obstacles to social insertion in the receiving nation are not enough in themselves to determine standards of inter-communitarian socialization let alone their fragmentation. This over-socialized view of the immi-

grant not only overlooks so-called cultural baggage, but also fails to take into account the social standards and institutions at the country of origin, as these both pre-date the emigration itself and help form the migratory networks.

Today, one would do just as well to avoid victimizing the immigrant as shun romanticized portrayals of the communities they build.

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