Researching Migrant Networks:  
Forming and Maintaining Ties at Home and Beyond

Tuesday, June 19th  
11 A.M. – Meeting Room - Third Floor

The role of social networks in creating and sustaining migration flows, as well as in the adjustment and settlement of migrants, has long been recognized in migration studies. However, cross-fertilization between migration research and network approaches is still uncommon. Utilizing a mixed-method network approach, this study contributes in furthering the understanding of how migrant networks operate. Migrant networks are conceptualized as embedded in dynamic and changing systems, and shown as evolving depending on various contexts and situations.

Examined are ego-centric networks of the 134 respondents (58 in London and 76 in New York) in three migration phases: before coming to London or New York; initial period of adjustment; and the current network as a result of the subsequent process of settlement in the place of destination (in total, 402 network maps). In particular, compared are three different occupational groups – nurses, domestics, and care workers. Eliciting migrant networks was embedded within in-depth interviews using both electronic and paper-based network visualization.

The findings suggest contrasting network composition in two global cities and across the three occupational groups. In New York, familial ties play an almost exclusive role in facilitating and supporting the movement of Filipino migrants. In London, most of the research participants relied on former employers (in the case of domestic workers) or recruitment agencies (in the case of nurses and care workers in institutional facilities) to facilitate their move. These differences in pre-migration networks then shaped subsequent network formations, adjustments, and settlement experiences. Findings also illustrate how ties at home, in the place of destination, and in other countries can be maintained, dissolved, or weakened, and how new ones may be forged over time.

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