

## **Beyond community: an analysis of social capital and the social networks of Brazilian immigrants in Amsterdam**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper we scrutinize the social networks and the social capital invested within these, of a relatively new and understudied immigrant group in the North-European context. We show how the social networks of Brazilian immigrants in Amsterdam are segmented along strong dividing lines, especially surrounding legal status. We show that this segmentation has different outcomes for migrants belonging to the different segments of the community, and that within these segments, variation also exists. By analyzing in-depth interviews with 30 Brazilian immigrants in Amsterdam, we find that a Brazilian community does not exist, and that assistance, non-assistance, and a commercialization of social relations all take place at the same time among the social networks of Brazilians in Amsterdam. In doing so, we also uncover some of the mechanisms related to these processes and hence provide relevant insights for literature that studies the contexts in which immigrant social networks provide for social mobility and the contexts in which such networks do not.

## **Migrant ‘communities’ and the role of social capital**

When migrants arrive in a new country it can be of great comfort to find other migrants there, particularly co-nationals. These compatriots can provide a feeling of home in a new country, and they can help newcomers find their way in the yet unknown society. From these initial contacts, immigrant communities can emerge. Such communities consist of social networks of immigrants who help each other emotionally, who undertake all kinds of leisure activities together, who share information on various aspects of life in the receiving society, and who help each other find jobs (Van Meeteren 2012; Raijman and Tienda, 2000; Zhou, 1995).

However, communities are not just helpful to migrants (see Portes, 1998). They can become exploitative or form a burden to individual migrants. In our research on Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam, we found that Brazilian immigrants do not always associate with or help other Brazilian migrants. The Brazilian ‘community’ is fragmented along strong dividing lines – especially surrounding legal status, class and education.<sup>1</sup> These dividing lines make it difficult for social capital to circulate let alone get mobilized within the Brazilian ‘community’. Especially when we take a look at migrants with a different legal status, contacts and friendships are hardly ever established. At the same time, help is sometimes provided within smaller sub-groups of co-nationals – such as families or informal institutions that are based on shared characteristics – and highly commercialized forms of ‘community-organization’ have emerged.

## **Immigrant social networks**

The concept of social capital is often used, although in different ways in different strands of research. One of the most well-known definitions belongs to Portes, who borrows from Bourdieu's work. His definition refers to 'the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other structures' (Portes, 1998: 6). Such networks consist of friends, acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours, family members or other contacts people may have with each other. This means that people who are in contact with others, can mobilize these networks to gain material wealth, status or other positively valued attributes of life.

Social networks are used to explain why people migrate to different destinations and they are believed to play a vital role in immigrant incorporation processes (Dannecker 2005; Hagan, 1998; Massey, Alarcón and Durand et al., 1987; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). In addition, social networks of ethnic communities have traditionally played a central role in explaining the different settlement experiences of immigrant communities (Portes, 1995; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996).

Portes (1995) for example developed the concept of 'modes of incorporation' to explain different patterns of incorporation of immigrants. Modes of incorporation encompass three levels of reception, the first being government policies toward different immigrant groups. The second reception level concerns civil society and public opinion, and the third level is the ethnic community. Within the latter, Portes constructs two ideal types: weak and strong ethnic communities. The configuration of the three reception levels constitutes the overall mode of incorporation of a particular immigrant group. Following models such as these, explanations for different settlement experiences of

immigrants are hence partly sought on the level of the ethnic group and in the strength of the social networks of their communities.

Apart from its use in such conceptual models, the concept of social capital is used in empirical studies to explain why some immigrant communities perform better than others. For example, the social capital immigrants mobilize from their immigrant networks is believed to help them find jobs (Drever and Hoffmeister, 2008; De Graaf and Flap, 1988; Engbersen et al., 2006; Van Meeteren et al., 2009; Zhou, 1995) or enhance their school results (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). Like in these examples, scholars have traditionally looked at the positive outcomes of being embedded in the social networks of immigrant communities (Thieme and Siegmann, 2010).

However, such embeddedness does not always avail those involved. More recent research has therefore also drawn attention to the negative consequences of being embedded in immigrant social networks (see Cranford, 2005; Menjívar, 1997; Padilla, 2006; Portes, 1998). Portes (1998), for example points out that close-knit social networks can become suffocating through the negative social pressure that is practiced on its members. Simultaneously, these networks limit opportunities for social mobility to be accrued outside of these dense networks. In addition, many scholars emphasize that some of the immigrant social networks they researched have become exploitative over time (Cranford, 2005; Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005; Mahler, 1995).

Grzymała-Kazłowska (2005) develops an economic explanation for changes in the effects of social networks. She asserts that social capital plays a crucial role in the initial period of immigration. Broad ethnic cooperation is the best strategy when the immigrant group is still small in size, but once the market becomes saturated, the in-

group relations change due to increasing competition. This leads to shrinkage of large cooperation circles that are substituted for small family groups.

However, although research exists that stresses the positive consequences of embeddedness in immigrant network as well as research that points at the negative consequences and that shows how outcomes may change over time, it is important to note that one outcome does not exclude the other. Negative and positive outcomes of embeddedness in immigrant social networks co-exist even within one ethnic ‘community’ (see Cranford, 2005; Padilla, 2006; Portes, 1998). This is probably related to the fact that immigrant social networks can be segmented and that outcomes may vary with this segmentation.

Cranford (2005) argues for studying the contexts in which social networks provide for upward mobility and in which contexts they become exploitative. We also feel it is important to study how different outcomes of immigrant social networks come about. In doing so, we believe it is important to scrutinize *how* immigrant social networks are segmented and analyze whether this segmentation affects the outcomes for those involved.

Immigrant social networks can be segmented in varied ways. Literature on immigrant social networks shows how social networks can be segmented along gender lines and as a result have different consequences for men and women (Dannecker, 2005; Hagan, 1998). Dannecker for example showed that hardly any interaction exists between Bangladeshi migrant men and women in Malaysia creating advantages for men over women.

Furthermore, some scholars point at legal status as a dividing line (Mahler, 1995). However, in most studies carried out in the Netherlands, legal status has not come up as a dividing line. Contrastingly, frequent mention is made of the fact that illegal migrants are able to successfully mobilize social capital through their contacts with legal migrants (Engbersen et al., 2006; Van Meeteren, 2010) and that legal migrants in the Netherlands regard it a moral obligation to help their illegal compatriots in need (Engbersen, 1999).

In Brazilian migration, the importance of social networks has also been identified, for example in the case of Valadarenses going to the United States (Margolis, 1994), Brazilians going to Spain (Solé et al., 2011), Brazilians moving to Japan (Zell and Skop, 2011) or Brazilians migrating to Portugal (Padilla, 2006). In addition, research on Brazilian migrants indicates that their social networks may be segmented as well. Padilla (2006), for example, shows how some Brazilians in Portugal trust their co-nationals in general, whereas others distrust their co-nationals.

In this paper, we take a closer look at the social networks of Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam, how they are segmented and at the conditions that may have lead to that segmentation. In addition, we analyze the assistance that is or is not provided within these networks. Our research questions are: What kinds of social networks exist among Brazilian immigrants in Amsterdam? What conditions lead to the establishment of these networks? And what kind of assistance is (not) provided within these networks and why? By answering these questions, we aim to contribute to the literature that studies the contexts in which networks provide for social mobility and the contexts in which these do not.

## **Brazilian immigration to the Netherlands**

Since the beginning of the new millennium Latin-American migration to the Netherlands has increased strongly, partly as a result of stricter immigration controls in the USA following the terrorist bombings in 2001 (Sandoval, 2008: 9). While Latin-American migration is increasing, many traditional migration flows to the Netherlands are in fact declining due to stricter government policies. Other exceptions to this trend are formed by migration flows from Eastern Europe resulting from the expansion of the European Union and by flows from countries like India that send IT professionals (Van Meeteren et al., 2014). Whereas the latter flows are heavily researched, very little is known about Latin American immigrants in the Netherlands (Sandoval 2008).

Immigrant social networks have been amply studied, and their role is especially known with regard to Latin-American migrants in the USA (Massey et al., 2005). Research on social networks in the northern European context, and especially in the Netherlands, has generally overlooked Latin American migration. Instead, research there focused on migrant social networks of the traditionally largest migrant groups like Moroccans and Turks, on migration from former colonies like the Dutch Antilles or Surinam and on groups related to asylum migration.

Brazilian migrants in the Netherlands form the largest Latin-American group in the Netherlands after immigrants from Surinam, a former Dutch-speaking colony from which immigrants are not generally regarded as Latin Americans (see also Sandoval 2008). According to Statistics Netherlands, there were 39 Brazilians who lived in the Netherlands in 1930, and 139 in 1972. In 1996, this number rose to 6.589 and up to 18.097 Brazilian immigrants in 2011 (Van Meeteren et al., 2014), which means that the

number of Brazilian immigrants in the Netherlands has almost tripled over the last fifteen years. Many Brazilian immigrants live in the urban areas of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. Amsterdam has the largest share with over 17% of all Brazilian immigrants in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup>

Family migration (reunification and formation) is the most important migration motive for Brazilians who move to the Netherlands. Furthermore, 68% of the Brazilian registered population in the Netherlands is female (Van Meeteren and Pereira, 2013). This is probably the result of the high number of marriages between Dutch men and Brazilian women (Van Meeteren et al., 2014). Whereas Dutch native women who marry a foreign spouse tend to find partners from Western Europe or Africa, Dutch native men largely marry women from Eastern Europe, South-East Asia or Latin-America (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow, 2010).

Next to the number of registered Brazilian immigrants, a substantial number of Brazilian immigrants are believed to reside in the Netherlands but are not encountered in the population registers. The exact number of irregular Brazilian immigrants is obviously unknown, but experts estimate that there are between 3.000 and 20.000 irregular Brazilian migrants who reside in the Netherlands, the majority of which in and around Amsterdam (Van Meeteren et al, 2014). The number of irregular Brazilian immigrants in the Netherlands is also thought to have increased over the last decade (see Oosterbaan, 2010). Because the largest share of the Brazilian population, regular as well as irregular, live in and around Amsterdam, we chose to focus on this region. In a recent survey conducted among Brazilians in Amsterdam, 58% of respondents were female and 61% did not have any valid residence permit. The gender division among the subpopulation of



irregular migrants was roughly the same with a little under 60% of respondents being female (see Van Meeteren and Pereira, 2014).

Brazilian citizens are generally allowed to enter the Netherlands (or any other Schengen area) without having applied for a visa. However, before they are granted a tourist visa at the border, they are increasingly asked to demonstrate they have a return ticket, a hotel reservation or place of destination and enough money to sustain themselves during the period of their intended stay (see also Oosterbaan, 2010). While it is relatively easy to come as a tourist, migrants who marry a Dutch national have to pass a language and integration test before they are allowed to migrate to the Netherlands (Van Meeteren et al., 2014).

As said, hardly any research on Brazilians or Latin American migrants has been conducted in the Netherlands. It is important to gain insight in their networks, because it is one of the migrant groups that is still growing, while the ‘traditional’ flows of Turkish, Moroccan and Suriname migrants are decreasing. In the context of increasingly stricter migration and integration policies, this probably means that social networks play a role in organizing migration and settlement (see also Castles, 2004; Padilla, 2006: 6). Moreover, studying Brazilians in the Netherlands provides us with understanding of incorporation processes of relatively new migrants in society (see Padilla, 2006 for a similar argument). All in all, Brazilian immigration to Amsterdam seems to provide an interesting case to study dynamics within social networks.

## **Data and methods**

To find answers to these research questions we analyzed in-depth interviews with 30 Brazilians who reside in the region of Amsterdam in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> We found our respondents through ethnic and community organizations, churches, the networks of a social scientist, social media, and the networks of our interviewers. Through these key persons within the Brazilian ‘community’ we were able to find Brazilian migrants. From there, we used purposive snowball sampling. We approached irregular migrants through people they knew well, therefore, we were able to establish the necessary trust.

Next to the interviews with Brazilian migrants, interviews were conducted with key informants who shared their insights about the evolvement of the Brazilian ‘community’. They were asked questions about the number of Brazilian migrants arriving in and leaving the Netherlands, their main migration motives and the different waves of migrants that came to the Netherlands. This enabled us to purposively select respondents for our sample.

Our sample of respondents is not representative of the Brazilian population in the Netherlands, nor of the population in the region of Amsterdam. However, by using purposive sampling methods we have tried to capture a varied set of immigrants in terms of regular status, age, gender and length of stay that matches with what our key informants told us about the composition of the Brazilian population. Of the 30 immigrants we spoke to, 12 respondents are male and 18 respondents are female. Moreover, our respondents have a wide age-range (between 23 and 73 years old).

We also tried to find respondents who arrived in the Netherlands in different years, who had different reasons for their migration and who came from a variety of regions in the country of origin. Eight respondents migrated before 1990, five during the

nineties, six between 2000 and 2005 and eleven respondents migrated to the Netherlands in 2005 or later. The most important areas of origin of our respondents are Minas Gerais (6), São Paulo (5), Rio de Janeiro (5) and Goiás (3). This resulted in a wide range of stories and opinions.

Respondents were asked questions about their social networks, migration history, perception of other migrants and the help they received or provided. This provided us with rich data that could illuminate the various ways in which contact was established within and between subgroups. It also helped us to see if our respondents received, provided or denied help, and to whom they provided help.

The interviews were conducted between January 2011 and June 2011. Interviews lasted between an hour and three hours and were held at people's homes or in cafés. The interviews were held in the language preferred by the respondents, being Dutch, English or Portuguese. Research assistants, BA, MA and PhD students with relevant interview experience, conducted the interviews. These were recorded and transcribed in English. We coded and analyzed the material using Nvivo software. Through several rounds of coding, we collaboratively formed the ideas that emerged from the data.

### **Formation of Brazilian social networks**

To see how specific social networks emerged among Brazilian migrants, we start our analysis with a concise exploration of our respondent's migration histories. Practically all our respondents already knew someone in the Netherlands when they migrated, and used these contacts in order to get assistance with their migration process in some way. The

type of social contacts they had and the support they received differed though, and this is connected to differences in their migration histories.

Some of our respondents came here as tourists, wishing to explore the world, to do some studying or to gain life experience. They ended up in the Netherlands by chance, like Carolina from São Paulo, who was 23 years old when she moved:

I wanted to leave Brazil and travel for a while, just as a tourist. I wanted to learn English and my cousin said it would be possible to do that in the Netherlands because everybody spoke English here, so I did not need to go to England or the USA. Then I came to the Netherlands to stay here with her and I met her neighbour [who is now her partner].

While Carolina met her partner while she was visiting the Netherlands, many others came to the Netherlands out of love for a Dutch partner they already met in Brazil. When their love persisted, they got married and settled down in the Netherlands. Other Brazilians came to the Netherlands because of an exciting job opportunity. The latter were all highly skilled migrants who hoped to benefit from the work experience they would gain there.

What these migrants have in common is that they all migrated to the Netherlands through regular channels. In addition, they settled down in places where they found a job or where their partners had a home. These were often the wealthier suburban districts around Amsterdam where other Brazilian migrants are hard to find.

In contrast, the migration history of a second group of migrants is quite different. They came with economic motives, and often did not specifically target the Netherlands as a destination. Some of them wanted to go to the United Kingdom but failed to get in. While they planned to use the Netherlands as a transit country, upon their failure to reach

the UK they decided to stay and look for a job in the Netherlands. Most of them did not plan to stay in the Netherlands for a long time. They usually aimed to stay temporarily to earn some money and return to Brazil with their earnings. Some of them still have this objective, others have decided to settle down in the Netherlands.

Those of the second group who targeted the Netherlands as a destination already knew people who were living in the Netherlands before they came. This access point was the main reason for them to migrate to this destination. Family members or close friends could pay for their tickets and find them jobs in construction or housekeeping. What this second group of migrants have in common is that they migrated through irregular channels. Some of them arrived in Amsterdam, others migrated to other places but decided to move to Amsterdam later on, because they thought they could get a job there more easily due to the larger Brazilian presence. The supposedly large Brazilian ‘community’ in Amsterdam is what attracts many to this city. Lucas, a thirty-four-year old former student from Goiás who initially moved to the Hague because he knew someone there says:

I believe that the community here [in Amsterdam] is bigger. (...) It was the best place to search for work, with most opportunities. In The Hague, the connection between Brazilians isn’t that strong. (...) if someone goes away, he or she has to leave his job with someone else. By knowing some people through the course or who are also working in cleaning, I can pick this up. You know, in The Hague I didn’t have such connections.

On the whole, there are two groups of Brazilian migrants in and around Amsterdam. The first group migrated through regular channels and many settled down in suburban areas

like Amstelveen. The social networks of Brazilians from this first group of migrants primarily consist of Dutch people. If they have contacts with other Brazilian immigrants, it usually concerns only a few individuals or a small group.

The second group consists of irregular migrants who mostly settled down in urban Amsterdam. They tend to end up in a circuit where there are a lot of Brazilians, often including friends or family members who can help to find a job or a place to stay. As a result, the social networks of the second group of migrants are predominantly made up of other Brazilian immigrants, in contrast to the first group that arrives in primarily Dutch networks.

These different migration histories created separate social networks for irregular and regular Brazilian migrants. The Brazilian migrants we interviewed made frequent mention of this division. Some of them indicated that they feel *the* Brazilian community does not exist, but that there are in fact two subgroups. Twenty-eight year old Luana from Brasilia explains it as follows:

...there are many Brazilians living in the Netherlands, and the majority is illegal (...). But I think there is another group of Brazilians, extremely qualified, professionally very well qualified in Brazil, that moved to the Netherlands or for professional reasons, or for personal reasons, like a relationship. (...) I believe there is not a community from Brazil that is homogeneous, something like: 'We have this Brazilian community here, let's get together.' It is not like this. There are two distinct communities. There is one group that is going well in their professions, and in general they don't connect to other Brazilians, they are not so interested in connecting with the Brazilian community.

The migrants from the first and the second category do not have a lot of contact with each other. This concurs with research by Oosterbaan (2010), who asserts that legal status is also an important dividing line in the Brazilian virtual ‘community’ in the Netherlands.

From now on, we shall refer to these two groups as regular and irregular immigrants. We use the terms regular and irregular migrants for reasons of readability, and to refer to the analytical categories that stem from our analysis. The reader should note that this obviously does not completely do justice to all empirical diversity we discovered, but that these are analytical types.

### **Divisions between irregular and regular migrants**

Since regular and irregular migrants arrive in the Netherlands through different channels and in different neighbourhoods, they initially do not have any contact with each other. However, after arrival they have opportunities to meet each other. They can for example seek contact with each other online or go to one of the Brazilian bars or restaurants or meet other in a Brazilian church (which most of our irregular and regular respondents frequent). During these religious meetings friendships between regular and irregular migrants could have formed. However, contact between the groups does not solidify, according to our respondents.<sup>4</sup> We found three mechanisms which might explain why regular migrants and irregular migrants do not associate with each other.

First, the irregular migrants often come to work in Amsterdam temporarily to make some quick money. They do not intend to stay for a long period of time and want to return to Brazil. Regular migrants, on the other hand, usually want to stay here for good.

This creates two different rhythms of and opinions on life, which does not produce the best circumstances for friendships to arise. Juan, a thirty-six-year old regular migrant, explains it as follows:

I think that my situation in the Netherlands maybe scares the [irregular] Brazilians. I study, I have a job, I have a stable relationship. It looks as if I'm very serious. I am not untied anymore, like the illegal, who goes out every night to drink and to do nothing at all. No, I have a life, I pay taxes, I have a serious life over here. And they don't.

Unlike what Juan thinks, irregular migrants often do have jobs, but their working hours are flexible, because they work in cleaning or construction and do not have official contracts. However, because of their irregular status they do not have the opportunity to participate in more stable institutions of life, such as regular labour or the formal housing market. This results in life patterns that do not match those of regular migrants.

Second, lifestyle, class and educational differences between irregular and regular migrants make contact difficult. With the migrants we interviewed, legal status often converges with their educational level and socio-economic position. Regular migrants are usually higher educated and from upper middle class or middle class families. Respondents from the second group are lower-educated, from lower middle class families, and they have an irregular residence status or they have a history of irregular migration.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the regular migrants initially looked for more contact with Brazilians because they were looking for a 'home far from home'. However, when they encountered the atmosphere in Brazilian bars, they found themselves not fitting in. Giovanna, a forty-



four-year old woman from Goiás describes the lifestyle and class differences she encountered:

If you go to a Brazilian bar – the expression is very heavy – the lowest level is there. They lift their skirts, show their décolleté, they dance with their mouth on the bottle. Those who are the periphery of Brazil are there. (...) If I would go there, I would start a fight.

Isabelle, a forty-five-year old woman from Rio Grande do Sul, feels the same about the Brazilian bars:

In the beginning when I arrived here in the Netherlands, I went, but it wasn't nice, there was too much vulgarity. I do like it when there are shows (...). But I don't feel like making friends there.

Giovanna further attributes such scenes in bars to class and educational differences. She describes her co-nationals who visit the bars and engage in irregular labour as follows:

The majority hasn't studied in Brazil, the majority was cleaning lady in Brazil, was bricklayer. That is why they stand up with this hard work, four or five years in a row. (...) they were already used to the difficulties of Brazil. They never had a good life pattern. (...) My whole life I had the life pattern of the higher middle class. And I keep it here.

We see here that the regular migrants created strong boundaries between themselves and irregular migrants. Irregular migrants are associated with lower levels of education and class, while the regular migrants are associated with higher levels of education and economic welfare. Moreover, just like Giovanna and Isabelle, most regular migrants perceived their irregular peers as ‘vulgar’ or at least as people they do not want to be associated with. This corresponds with research by Padilla (2006), who also encountered that Brazilians in Portugal ‘otherize’ the co-nationals they do not want to identify with. In our case, these class, educational and lifestyle differences prevent the two groups from interacting.

A final factor, that prevents irregular and regular migrants from having contact, is that migrants may not actively seek out co-nationals because they feel the need to integrate in Dutch society and get acquainted with Dutch people. This applies especially to regular migrants. Miguel, a thirty-six year old migrant from São Paulo says: ‘I am not looking for it. I am busy settling within this culture. If I stay in a Brazilian circle, I would never learn the language or culture.’ An explanation might be that in Dutch culture, there is increasing emphasis on the integration of minorities. Migrants who had to pass a language and integration test might have been confronted with such ideas a lot. Moreover, the regular migrants we spoke to had often married a Dutch partner. This might put more pressure on these migrants to learn Dutch and engage with Dutch people, than in a situation where migrants marry each other.

Interestingly, race was never mentioned as a dividing line between irregular and regular migrants. This is remarkable, because Fry (2000) shows that the concept of ‘race’ is often combined with notions of ‘class’ in Brazil. It is often believed that ‘whites’ are better off than ‘blacks’. However, at the same time, he mentions the myth of a ‘racial

democracy', where Brazil is seen as a harmonious, mixed society, where race is not important. A belief in this myth can be one explanation for our respondents not talking about race. Moreover, in the Netherlands a taboo rests on talking about race – also in academic circles (Essed and Trienekens, 2008). This does not imply that there is no discrimination or that no references are ever made towards such differences, but they are verbalized in terms like ethnicity, citizenship or civilization. This might also hinder our respondents from talking about race as a dividing line, while it might in fact also be a hidden explanation for the lack of contact between them.

All in all, these three mechanisms hamper the development of close social ties between irregular and regular migrants. As a result of this lack of interaction between the two groups, Brazilian migrants who belong to one of the two groups cannot mobilize social capital from the other group. Brazilian migrants' resources therefore only lie within the subgroup they belong to.

### **Social capital circulation among regular Brazilians**

As indicated above, some regular migrants have Dutch partners who can help them find a job and who provide a place to stay. Hence, they mobilize a lot of resources through their social contacts with Dutch natives. Others already have a job on arrival, so they do not need any help finding one from Dutch or Brazilian contacts.

However, apart from these basic needs they sometimes have to mobilize social capital with regard to other aspects of their lives. Language problems, loneliness and cultural differences are issues most of them face. Therefore, most regular migrants ultimately make one or two Brazilian friends or see some Brazilians once in a while.

These are usually informal social contacts or loose organizational forms like dance groups. Within these informal groups, respondents say that they speak Portuguese together, feel the warmth from home and exchange life experiences.

In addition, some partake in more formalized organizational structures. A group of Brazilian lawyers, for example, provides each other with information through the Internet. They also meet each other in person once in a while. Another example of a more formal structure is a group of academic Brazilians:

I started two years ago with a friend of mine, an anthropologist, a group of Brazilians. A network of, we called it network of Brazilian academics in the Netherlands. (...) but then we saw it consisted of a very small group. But then because we wanted to have a greater pool of people to have more dynamics, we formed this group with people who have a certain profile. It is a group of people with an academic formation or with a high educational degree. (Ana, forty-one years old from São Paulo)

It seems that, for regular migrants, such formal groups are only constructed if the people involved have something in common, such as a shared occupation or a common educational level. At the same time, having this common background does not automatically create trustful or friendly relations. Luana for example says:

It is something that takes time. Even with the lawyers group, that is now of 30 people, you see it takes a while for them to relax, and meet and try to help each other. (...) It is a closed group. (Luana, twenty-eight years old from Tocantins)

Whereas, after a while, Brazilians who belong to such groups are usually able to mobilize social capital through their membership of this particular group, there is generally no contact in-between such groups. This means that regular migrants mobilize social capital only through the few friendships or (in)formal groups they sometimes belong to, but not from Brazilians outside of these networks. Their social networks predominantly consist of Dutch people and they do not feel the need to maintain contact with many Brazilians.

### **Social capital circulation among irregular Brazilians**

Unlike the regular migrants, irregular migrants often need assistance when they arrive in the Netherlands. Because they do not know many regular migrants, and hardly have any contact with Dutch people or other immigrants, they need to mobilize social capital through other irregular Brazilian migrants. Irregular migrants first of all need help with migrating to the Netherlands. This kind of help is usually provided by family members or close friends. Fifty-seven year old Adriana from Espírito Santo for example says: ‘People bring the whole family here. They bring the sister, then the daughter. They end up make up a little cleaning “company” here.’

Secondly, Brazilian irregular migrants mobilize social capital in trying to become legal. Fernanda, a forty year old migrant from Rio de Janeiro describes how Brazilians introduce irregular migrants to potential partners:

This Brazilian lady who came here, got married with a Dutch man, brought her two sisters, who also married Dutch men, and now they are all here very happy, seeing each other, so this kind of help also, to find someone. Three beautiful sisters...That happens a lot, someone brings a niece and she starts dating.

Legalizing an irregular residence status by marrying a Dutch native seems to primarily concern women. As said before, Dutch native men do often marry a foreign spouse from Latin-America, while Dutch women seem to give preference to men from other parts of the world (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow, 2010). As marriage is the main pathway to legalization (Van Meeteren, 2010), Brazilian women seem to have an advantage over men in this respect.

Third, as they are excluded from the formal labour market, irregular migrants often depend on their irregular co-nationals to find a job. This assistance has been institutionalized in a system of job-rotation. If someone leaves the country he or she might give his or her job – usually in housekeeping – to someone else. In the past, jobs were given to friends and family, but also to co-nationals one did not know. Being a fellow Brazilian in need was simply enough to provide help. Earlier research by Padilla (2006) shows that Brazilians in Portugal also helped newcomers to find a job. However, individuals who tried to get better jobs were treated with some distrust, because the established Brazilians were afraid to lose their jobs to the newcomers.

As we have seen above, more irregular migrants arrived in the Netherlands and competition for jobs became stronger and jobs got scarcer. Moreover, because of the economic crisis construction work is becoming scarce (Statistics Netherlands, 2010)<sup>6</sup> and although there are no hard figures on housekeeping, we think people might cut down their expenses on housekeeping as well. These are the sectors where our respondents mentioned irregular Brazilians work. These developments initiated a change in the job-rotation system. Nowadays, the jobs that circulate among irregular migrants are only occasionally passed on to family members for free. Others are distrusted, or have to pay money to get a job. The amounts people ask for these jobs seem to vary, but it is usually a

lot of money for those involved. Juliana, a forty-nine-year old woman from Minas Gerais who migrated to the Netherlands in 2003 describes the transition from job circulation to job commercialization:

We used to give work to others; nowadays people sell work to other immigrants. It is a bit different. One person has 10 houses to clean every week, she decides to go back to Brazil and announces she is selling the work at these 10 houses. It could be €2,000 or €3,000. The person introduces the new employee to the new employers, and usually they don't know what is going on. They almost always sell their work.

Fernanda also explains these practices:

There is for example the case of cleaners who go back to Brazil and sell their clients "agenda" to someone else, so some complain that even to know someone's address you must pay at least €200 or €300. They commercialize things, and exploit also the work of others, the two things are together.

This is remarkable, because in Padilla's (2006) research Brazilians distrusted each other, but this did not lead to the establishment of a system of job-selling. This is probably related to the fact that most Brazilians in Portugal are able to work legally, whereas in Amsterdam, a large irregular population exists. Padilla states that Brazilians in Portugal were also financially better off than most other migrants. Other research shows that migration policies may affect the role social networks play for specific types of

migration (Zell and Skop, 2011). As a result, Brazilians in Portugal have better opportunities than the Brazilians in Amsterdam, leading to different social relations.

Whereas before, our respondents felt one could trust another Brazilian simply because he was Brazilian, this is not possible anymore. The lack of jobs can harm relations of trust. Lucas for example tells about his bad experiences with irregular co-nationals: ‘when I am with Brazilians, I cannot leave money, I cannot leave a telephone around with credit on it. So these small things make it difficult [to trust other Brazilians].’

As the group has grown bigger there is no institutional control that can be enforced. In addition, due to the temporary nature of the stay of many migrants, enforceable trust (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993) is difficult to establish. This is aggravated by the fact that Brazil is such a large country and, as we have shown above, that Brazilian migrants in the Netherlands come from all over Brazil. Lucas explains why it is difficult to trust other Brazilians:

Brazilians here are not friendly, they are not people who keep to their words. If you have two or three friends, it is already much. You do not get too involved with other Brazilians.(...) I come all the way from Goiás, and meet here someone from Sao Paulo, this guy doesn't have the same ideas I have, our ideas doesn't connect.

Respondents indicate that they do not trust other Brazilians in general, but only a very small circle of intimate friends and family members. Therefore, they do not always want to help other Brazilian irregular migrants to find a job. Alice, a thirty-three-year old migrant from Minas Gerais who is engaged in domestic work, explained it as follows:



Sometimes your boss asks if you know someone for a friend of his/hers. And then you recommend someone. But I only try to recommend people I know and trust, because when you start to work for someone that person trusts you. You have the key of the house, so you wouldn't recommend someone you don't trust. Often there are valuables in the house etc. So when I am the one indicating a person, I want to know her. I don't indicate just anyone. It is tricky, people trust you. They give you the keys of their houses and say: look this is my house. I would like you to do this and that. So there is a trust issue, you have to trust the person.

Overall, in the irregular group, assistance is only provided when there is trust between the receiver and provider of this assistance, and this trust is nowadays hard to establish. If more and more irregular Brazilians arrive in the Netherlands and economic circumstances are worsening, heightened competition can create even more distrust and further commercialization of social relations (see Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2005; Mahler, 1995 for similar observations). Respondents report a small number of people they can trust, which are usually family members or a few close friends, and they tend to avoid other Brazilians. Hence, these Brazilian migrants are able to mobilize social capital from their 'strong ties', whereas they can (and often must) as well from their 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) to other Brazilians, but only at a high cost.

### **Beyond community**

Embeddedness in immigrant social networks can have different consequences for migrants involved. In this paper, we have shown how the dividing lines operate among Brazilian migrants in Amsterdam and how this leads to different outcomes for different

subgroups. On the one hand, Brazilian immigrants belonging to different subgroups do not assist each other, because they hardly interact due to their different migration histories, lifestyles, rhythms of life, and preoccupations with integration. On the other hand, within the subgroups assistance is surely not self-evident either. Even if migrants associate with each other, Brazilians trust only a few family members, close friends or members of an informal or formal group they belong to. Beyond these more intimate groups of people, contacts with other Brazilians remain superficial and difficult to turn into social capital, or only at a high cost. Having a shared country of origin is simply not enough for social capital to freely flow within Brazilian 'subcommunities'.

These findings are quite remarkable in light of other research findings on immigrant groups in the Netherlands. If we compare our findings to other immigrant groups in Amsterdam we see that they have a lot of contact with each other (The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2008). A representative survey among Turks shows that 44% of Turks solely have contact with people from their own ethnic group (*Idem*). This appears very different from the regular Brazilians we interviewed, who distrust irregular migrants, only have a few Brazilian friends and prefer to have Dutch contacts.

Not only do traditional migrant groups interact with their co-nationals more, they also more frequently assist one another for reasons of solidarity. Regular migrants for example regard it their moral obligation to help their irregular compatriots in need and consequently help them to find jobs and accommodation (Engbersen 1999). Engbersen et al. (2006) refer to the Turkish saying 'hemserim', which means 'I am compelled to help someone from my area of origin' when they explain why Turks assist each other. In

addition, Kloosterman et al. (2002) show how Turkish and Moroccan butchers hire their staff usually from their own ethnic networks.

This does not mean that Turks and Moroccans simply assist any other migrant from their country of origin. The social networks within their communities are also segmented. Part of the explanation for the different patterns found among groups like Turks and Moroccans on the one hand and the relatively new group of Brazilians on the other probably lies in the specific segmentation of their respective communities. Originating in labour migration, Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands have relatively homogeneous backgrounds. They come from villages in the countryside in specific regions. In addition, they usually have a comparable background in terms of low social class and low education which is why class and legal dividing lines are less relevant. Segmentation lines within their communities run along the lines of tribes and regions of origin (Van Meeteren et al, 2014). Within the segments in their communities trust is more easily established, and migrants feel morally obliged to help each other. In addition, partly through ethnic entrepreneurship they are able to do so (Engbersen, 1999).

Our findings are also interesting in the light of research on Brazilians immigrants elsewhere in the world. In these studies, no mention is usually made of Brazilian women who migrate to marry a native resident of the destination country. In the US, the population is largely irregular (Margolis, 1994; Zell and Skop, 2011), while in countries like Japan and Portugal the Brazilian population seems to be largely regular (Padilla, 2006; Zell and Skopp, 2011). Other dividing lines than legal status hence come up in such countries. Padilla (2006) for example finds distrust between Brazilians in Portugal, seemingly stemming from situations where newcomers threaten to take over the jobs of

settled migrants. This may also be part of the reason why there is little trust among irregular migrants in Amsterdam, but the lack of interaction and trust among regular migrants cannot be explained in terms of newcomers and settled migrants. This is more likely to be related to the diverse origins of Brazilian migrants and the fact that their social environment primarily consists of Dutch natives.

All in all, we found that two subgroups of Brazilian migrants exist in the Netherlands that do not have a lot of contact with each other. We tried to explain this lack of contact by pointing at their migration histories, segmentations that are apparent between the two groups, their lack of organization and focus on Dutch networks. However, it is important to note that more mechanisms might be involved. More research should be done to uncover these. Moreover, we recommend future researchers to study Latin-American migrants in a European context, because they make up a relatively new group and differ in their ‘community’ segmentation from the more ‘traditional’ forms of migration towards Northern Europe.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The Brazilian society is divided by ethnic or racial lines. However, ‘racial socio-economic inequality coexists with sociable interracial contacts, substantial intermarriage and residential proximity between non-whites and whites’ (Schrooten, 2011: 208).

<sup>2</sup> These numbers include both immigrants from the first and second generation.

<sup>3</sup> One of these interviews was a double-interview, with a man and a woman. Hence, there are 30 respondents, and 29 interviews.

<sup>4</sup> Three respondents had contact with both groups. They are key persons among the Brazilians ‘community’, because of their specific occupations. We think, however, that they did not succeed in bringing people from different groups together.

<sup>5</sup> Although the irregular migrants are perceived as having a poor background by the regular migrants, they obviously do not belong to the poorest of the poor in Brazil as they could raise enough money to buy a plane ticket to Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Based on investments in construction and job vacancies in 2009-2010 respectively 2009.

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