



Book review of Keskiner, Elif, Eve, Michael, and Ryan, Louise (eds.) 2022. *Revisiting Migrant Networks: Migrants and their Descendants in Labour Markets*. Cham: Springer, 236 pp

BOOK REVIEW

ANNA MATYSKA 

Social networks have been an important analytical tool to explore various aspects of migrants' lives across and within national borders. A new book, *Revisiting Migrant Networks* offers empirical insight into how migrants and their descendants utilize social networks to access diverse employment sectors across varied countries. The book is intended as a critical revisit of earlier studies and aims to fill the gaps in the existing literature. These include the discussion of how migrants and their children actually use social networks to find jobs and advance their careers, what the relevance of social networks is for high-skilled migrants and how migrants benefit professionally from networks beyond their co-ethnic circle. The introductory chapter stresses that previous studies conflated 'bonding ties' with co-ethnic 'strong ties' and 'bridging ties' with outward-looking, 'weak' nonethnic ties, concurrently presuming interethnic solidarity and exploring migration through an ethnic lens (pp. 4–13). The book is meant to go against such presumptions.

The editors of this volume are established sociologists of migration. Elif Keskiner is an Assistant Professor at the Sociology Department of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Michael Eve teaches sociology at the University of Eastern Piedmont, and Louise Ryan is a Senior Professor of Sociology at London Metropolitan University. They have all published on the topic, and the book complements their prior studies, in particular by drawing upon the critical rereading of the concept of migrant networks commenced by Ryan over a decade ago (Ryan 2011, 2016; Ryan et al. 2008; Ryan, Erel & D'Angelo 2015). The book consists of 10 empirical chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue. It addresses migration to Sweden, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, and Switzerland, and explores networks of European and non-European migrants. Four chapters discuss Turkish migrants in Europe.

While at times overstating the shortcomings of earlier research by other authors (which, for instance, did not always presumed ethnic solidarity), the book makes an interesting empirical contribution to the field of migration and network

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studies. Above all, it reconfirms the importance of thinking about migrants' networks beyond the co-ethnic lens and in terms of power hierarchies. The utilization of Ryan's conceptualization of migrant networks, which includes both tie strength and tie direction (Ryan 2011; Ryan et al. 2008), makes for a valuable discussion about the importance of access to higher-positioned actors, especially those beyond migrants' immediate circle, for migrants' employment trajectories.

Ryan's chapter (Chapter 2) offers an insight into how Polish, Irish, and French high-skilled migrants build and use such networks to advance professionally in the public and private sectors in the UK. Keskiner and Ismintha Waldring (Chapter 3), Christine Lang, Andreas Pott, and Jens Schneider (Chapter 4), and Sara Rezai and Keskiner (Chapter 7) show the value of upward ties to non-migrants for the migrants' descendants, mostly of Turkish background, whose families lacked the relevant social capital to help them succeed at the labor market. In Chapter 6, Alireza Behtoui, drawing on his long-term research among Global South migrants in Sweden, conceptualizes migrants' ability to access resources beyond their own immediate social networks as a 'counter-stratification effect of social capital' (pp. 130–133). Although, as he acknowledges, 'the stratification effect of social capital' is more common (p. 130), mechanisms underpinning the counter-stratification effect are vital to understand, as they can help to foster more empowering social structures—an argument emphasized by Maurice Crul in the epilogue of the book (p. 230).

In the final empirical chapter, Martine Schaer (Chapter 10) explores the role of vertical ties in transnational academic careers. Although Schaer does not describe her informants as migrants, as thus the chapter deviates from the general explicitly migrant-focus theme of the book, the chapter brings valuable insight into how early career academics, as highly skilled workers, navigate their transnational moves via networks and how the process is gendered. Namely, she argues that vertical ties are stronger and provide more resources for male than for female academics.

Nevertheless, despite the stress on nonethnic ties and the call for caution against presupposing ethnic solidarity posed by the editors in the introduction, several chapters indicate that ethnic cooperation is still a significant employment resource for many migrants. Behtoui (Chapter 6) writes that a tight immigrant community constitutes an important social capital for Iranians in Sweden. Despite internal divisions and partially due to the cohesion and institutionalization of their community, Iranians have become one of the professionally (and politically) most successful migrants in Sweden (pp. 128–129). In the studies by Keskiner and Waldring (Chapter 3) and Lang, Pott, and Schneider (Chapter 4), the descendants of Turkish migrants who became lawyers utilized 'weak' ties to their transnational Turkish community to gain a substantial customer base. They also benefited from emotional and motivational support provided by their working-class Turkish families. Başak Bilecen (Chapter 8) argues that the circulation of such family resources is also gendered, as especially women need childcare support to be able to access the labor market.

The attentiveness to the migrants' use of diverse personal networks (upward, ethnic, and nonethnic) is a great strength of the book. However, the book leaves certain conceptual, empirical, and methodological questions unanswered or understudied, which also limits its contribution to the field of migration studies.

Firstly, contemporary transnational labor markets are increasingly digitalized and mediated by work agencies (see, for instance, Xiang & Lindquist 2014). Chapters by Ryan (Chapter 2), Yaël Brinbaum (Chapter 5), Behtoui (Chapter 6), and Schaer (Chapter

10) mention this fact, but the role of institutionalized recruitment channels could have been acknowledged more thoroughly in the book's introduction and the conclusion.

Secondly, most of the chapters discuss documented migration to and within Europe. Four chapters focus on Turkish migrants and their descendants. While the relevance of political context for the forging and utilization of networks by the migrants is mentioned (and emphasized especially by Behtoui in Chapter 6), it would have been beneficial if this point was emphasized more strongly throughout the book. How can we understand the relevance of the book's findings and their bearing on the analytical understanding of the concept of migrant networks, considering that many contemporary migrants move clandestinely?

The book could also gain from a more reflexive methodological discussion. While the data source is outlined rather clearly in all the chapters, the researcher's positionality and how it has affected the research results are not discussed. This is surprising considering Ryan's earlier work, where she emphasizes that critical reflexivity is a paramount part of the network research (Ryan 2021). The book also draws on empirical data, which are described as 'rich' and 'robust' (p. 6), but the data consist mainly of qualitative (or quantitative-based) narratives that provide examples of what migrants say their networks do, rather than ethnographic observation of migrants' networking 'here' and 'now.' Narratives are an important source of data. Still, it would be helpful if the authors explicitly recognized both the strengths and limitations of such a methodology for migrant network analysis.

Finally, the argumentation about the division between strong and weak ties sometimes becomes muddled. On the one hand, the book is supposed to challenge the division. On the other hand, only some of the chapters follow this logic. Family ties seem to be presumed as 'strong' ties, and only the 'weakness' of weak ties is questioned. The title of Chapter 3, 'Are "weak ties" really weak?', suggests a conceptual dilemma, and the authors resolve it by suggesting that nonethnic ties that are presumed to be weak can be actually strong. However, as a social anthropologist, I would welcome a more thorough critique of the categories themselves and their sociocultural constructions: when do the categories make sense, and when do they become less relevant (or even constraining) for understanding migrants' everyday realities? How do they resonate with migrants' emic conceptualization of ties of relatedness?

Despite its limitations, the book offers significant insights into how migrant networks are forged and transformed into career-enhancing social capital and how migrants manage to tap into resources extending beyond their co-ethnic circles. It convincingly shows that network analysis is a valuable and needed tool to explore migrants' lives. As such, the book will be of value to researchers interested in migration and migrants' employment careers, including those who are only little familiar with the concept of social networks.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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