

## **Abstract**

### **Immigrant Social Networks: The Brazilian Case**

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Social networks encompass many of the most important aspects of an immigrant's migratory experience. This paper examines numerous ways in which such networks have affected past decisions regarding international moves, current immigrant adaptation experiences, and the effects that such networks will likely have on future outcomes. In contrast to other studies that tend to focus only on the positive aspects of social networks, and by extension imply unidimensionality, this study reveals some of the ways in which networks offer differential access to network resources and the possible stratification that may occur within them.

To document the role of networks Brazilian immigration to the United States and Canada is examined using qualitative and quantitative data collected in a Brazilian sending region and US and Canadian destination areas. These data are supplemented with ethnographic data, presented in the words of the immigrants themselves, to underline and provide a more personal touch to the empirical results. Findings reveal that while networks may provide numerous positive benefits, they are also stratified by key factors, including place of origin and gender.

## **Immigrant Social Networks: The Brazilian Case**

### **Introduction**

Anthropologists have long appreciated social networks and their importance (Barnes 1954). However, only in the past two decades has sociological and demographic research begun to seriously explore the importance of this topic.<sup>1</sup> This interest in the area of social networks, especially the resultant theoretical and empirical developments, has led some to conclude that the recognition of social networks is one of the major recent developments in migration studies (Fuentes and Curran 2000). Others suggest that migration itself is a process of building social networks, one that both depends on and reinforces social relationships across space (Portes and Bach 1985).

Theoretically social networks occupy the important but relatively understudied and often ignored middle- or meso-level of migration analysis. While macro-level theories have focused on broader issues found at the aggregate structural level and micro-level theories have concentrated on decision-making at the individual level, meso-level theory examines the importance of mediating social collectives such as the family, the household or kinship group. It is within this intermediate level of analysis that the conceptually important notions of social ties and the content of these ties (e.g., solidarity and reciprocity) enter the migration process. Once networks are understood as social products that link individuals and communities located in sending and receiving societies, an important connection bypassed by other conceptualizations, it becomes possible to develop more precise explanations as to why some regions generate large numbers of emigrants

and others nearby very few (Faist 2000). It also helps clarify how migration flows can become self-perpetuating (Massey, Alarcon, Durand, and Gonzalez 1987) and potential movers become actual ones.

While the proper conceptual positioning of social networks is still subject to some debate, a great deal of empirical research has recently been undertaken in an attempt to more clearly understand how networks operate. These studies have revealed numerous noteworthy characteristics about the importance of such associations in the migration process at both the national and international levels. Many of these qualities are now widely accepted as accurate descriptors. For instance, it is almost universally acknowledged that these informal social structures have the potential to link residents of origin communities with former inhabitants who now reside in other locations, be they other municipalities or countries (Hugo 1981, Massey 1990). Likewise, studies from many countries have established the importance of networks for providing general information, financial support to facilitate the move, assistance with initial expenses and settlement, securing employment, procuring housing, psychological support, and the maintenance of long distance ties with the origin community (Menjívar 2000; Goza 1994; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Tilly 1978; Lomnitz 1977). The collective body of knowledge provided by this emerging literature also reveals that social networks are dynamic and constantly evolving social relations that organize and direct the flow of information, labor and products between migrant sending and migrant receiving communities as they simultaneously reduce the economic and psychological risks and costs associated with migration (Tilly 1990).

However, the widely accepted version of the migration network process just described must still be further specified. This is because much research has tended to employ a one-dimensional focus when examining immigrant social networks. Frequently networks have been viewed as altruistic, democratic, and almost tension free since cultural and kinship ties are assumed to operate for the near equal benefit of one and all. The newest wave of network research has seriously questioned the validity of such assumptions and found them to be insupportable.

For instance, various recent studies have noted the existence of significant gender inequities within social networks (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Menjívar 2000). Age and/or generation may also be used to afford differential access to network privileges. Likewise, socio-economic status (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Roschelle 1997; Belle 1983) and place of origin (Tilly 1990; Faist 2000) have been shown to affect network access in a variety of global settings. In sum, the aforementioned studies indicate the need to be aware of the potential for differential access to power, resources and information amongst those who participate in network activities.

The purpose of the present study is to document the existence and role of immigrant social networks among Brazilians who move to the United States and Canada. To do this several unique data sets, described below, will be utilized. This tri-national data will provide comparative insights into the operation of Brazilian networks and hopefully also serve as a baseline for future studies. I will attempt to avoid making untenable assumptions regarding the one-dimensional nature of networks as I draw upon the research of others who have already highlighted

important cleavages within the U.S. Brazilian immigrant community (Margolis 1998; Martes 1998). Hence actual and potential Brazilian immigrants will not be treated as a monolithic group of similarly positioned individuals. Instead, this examination of immigrant social networks will be cognizant of the ways in which differential access to network usefulness is afforded. Furthermore, because Brazilian immigrants in two nations are examined, structural factors, such as the socio-political context encountered at the historical moment of their arrival, will also be monitored to determine their effect on the emergence and growth of informal networks of support and social assistance.

The next section of this paper briefly discusses the recent appearance and rapid increase of Brazilian immigration to the United States and Canada. Next is a brief methodological section, followed by the core of this study, which will examine the effect of social networks on the past (life in Brazil), present (life in North America) and future activities (to return or stay?) of these immigrants. The final section summarizes the relevance of social networks for examining the Brazilian experience in North America.

### **Brazilian Immigration to the United States and Canada**

Government statistics reveal that since the mid-1980s Brazilians have traveled to the U.S. and Canada in record numbers. Prior to that time this movement was but a fraction of what it is today. The main reason for this tremendous increase, which began approximately 20 years ago, was the worsening Brazilian economy (Goza 1994; Margolis 1994). Although the economic situation in Brazil has somewhat stabilized, the social networks now in place continue to facilitate the movement and integration of additional newcomers. The

number of Brazilian citizens entering the U.S. with non-immigrant visas increased almost continuously over the past 20 years until tapering off after 1998. During that peak year approximately the 935,000 Brazilians arrived with these visas (U.S. INS 2000). Although this figure declined to 733,941 in 2001 (U.S. INS 2003), it was still large enough to rank Brazil ninth among all nations receiving non-immigrant visas.

The Canadian increase in Brazilian visitors parallels that of the U.S. Although the absolute numbers are smaller, the number of Brazilian visitors to Canada has also tended to increase every year, such that they now account for more visitors from South America than any other nation (Statistics Canada 1997). During the period 1987-1998, the number of Brazilians annually visiting Canada increased from approximately 23,000 to 61,000, a 160% increase. Until 1987 Brazilians did not need visas to visit Canada, a requirement instituted in 1987 due in large part to the high numbers of Brazilians arriving at the Toronto airport that year (Goza 1999). Prior to that time relatively few Brazilians even considered going to Canada. However, because of the ever increasing difficulty of obtaining a U.S. visa and the fame Canada was acquiring as a land free of discrimination where one could also get rich, more and more Brazilians opted to go north, to the land of the maple leaf.

Even with the added burden of a visa requirement, it is likely that this flow will continue to increase in the foreseeable future as social networks continue to expand as legal Brazilian residents provide sponsorship to still more new immigrants. Furthermore, as in the U.S. case, many of those who enter Canada as tourists will overstay their visas and seek out employment. This, too, will require

that they at least temporarily put down roots and by so doing increase the density of extant Brazilian immigrant social networks.

### **Methodology**

The initial data used in the study were collected from 450 households in Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais, Brazil in December 1988. Results identified the North American destinations most favored by this immigrant stream. Of the top five one was Toronto, Canada, another was *Cidade Congelada* (a pseudonym for a medium-sized city located in the northeastern region of the United States with a large number of undocumented Brazilian residents). Subsequent data collection projects were undertaken in both locations in an effort to compare and contrast the Brazilian experience in Canada with that of the United States. Such an undertaking was warranted as this population was significantly undercounted in both destination nations (Goza 1994; 1999) and because of the censuses' general lack of detail regarding variables relevant to the immigrant experience.

The data were collected in *Cidade Congelada* between August and December 1990 and in Toronto between August and December 1991. Each sample consists of 195 Brazilian born residents. Because of the non-probabilistic nature of the sampling framework utilized, something that always occurs among populations with questionable immigration credentials, it is inappropriate to generalize to others outside the sampling framework. Still, these data represent approximately four percent of each city's estimated Brazilian population and are believed to be highly suggestive of general trends and patterns among these immigrants (Goza 1999). In an effort to avoid various types of response errors and other data collection biases, all interviewers were Brazilian sociologists.

The initial respondents were located on the basis of addresses provided by relatives earlier interviewed in Brazil. Later a snowball sampling framework was used to help locate the additional respondents required to attain the desired sample size. The instruments used in these studies were designed to gather information on immigrants at various life cycle stages. Thus in addition to basic socio-demographic variables, information was also gathered about employment and educational activities prior to departure, as well as the socio-economic status of the migrants' parents. The questionnaires also contained a detailed employment history matrix for North American work activities, questions about social and linguistic adaptation, migration networks, the international travel experience, remittances, and future plans. Space limitations preclude the discussion of but a few of these measures. The average time required to complete each questionnaire was 40 minutes.

In 1996 dozens of return migrants in Governador Valadares responded to in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews consisted of broadly framed open-ended questions. This format ensured that certain topic areas were covered with each interviewee, but also was flexible enough to allow the pursuit of new lines of questioning as relevant issues emerged. Comments provided during some of these sessions will be inserted below to help emphasize specific points.

## **Brazilian Social Networks**

### **The Origins of Networks in Valadares**

The city of Governador Valadares has long had a reputation for being the Brazilian city of emigrants, and numerous articles, theses and dissertations have been written about immigration and this community. When attempting to discern



the origins of the movement of *Valadarenses* (i.e., residents of Valadares) to North America various explanations were uncovered. While all are plausible arguments with some degree of supporting evidence, we may never know for certain exactly how this flow began. Two of the three most common origin stories are related to the region's natural resources. The first suggests that during World War II U.S. companies came to the region to obtain sheet mica as this was needed for strategic insulation purposes and former suppliers, such as India, were cut off because of the War. The tale continues that after the War some Brazilians were invited back to the U.S. to work in one of any number of capacities.

The second oft heard explanation is that vendors of semi-precious stones made their way to North America for business transactions. The story goes that sales were not very high but the opportunities to become gainfully employed were many, causing some salesmen to reconsider their profession and relocate to the U.S.

The final possibility often mentioned is that in the 1930s and 1940s a series of U.S. Protestant missionaries made their way to Valadares in an attempt to find religious converts. Numerous Protestant churches were created, some of which still remain today. As the story goes, some Brazilians affiliated with these churches were provided the opportunity to travel to and live in the U.S., an opportunity that still exists in Valadares.

Regardless of the veracity of these three origin stories, the fact is that there were some pioneer immigrants who made their way from Valadares to the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Exactly how long these pioneer migrants resided in North America is unimportant for our purposes. What is important is that during their tenure in North America

these individuals were not only acquiring the obvious economic rewards, but they were also investing their time and energy to obtain important coping skills and information on how to survive in their new host society. Because of the cultural differences between the two societies it likely took many months or years to master their new surroundings. Maintenance and adaptation costs to these individuals were likely very high, even if they were target earners planning on an eventual return home. Those who were to follow these pioneer migrants would have a much easier and less costly time, both financially and emotionally, adapting to their new host society—assuming they could benefit from the knowledge and experience of those who came before.

Since the time of the pioneer migrants Valadares has evolved into a hub for international migration. A partial supply side explanation for this is that Valadares is unable to provide its residents with well paying or even full-time jobs, a situation that has worsened considerably since the mid-1980s. As a consequence, many people, even those with significant work experience, found themselves either un- or underemployed and willing to do whatever was required to improve their economic condition. Because of the earlier mentioned pioneer migrants and their migratory descendants, people were increasingly being made aware of new and supposedly better opportunities that were available abroad.

Many who pass through the Valadares migration hub are able to tap into well established social networks and use them to facilitate numerous aspects of their movement. Still, how is it that such well established networks came to be? I believe that the original pioneer migrants “passed the torch” to a second wave of immigrants with whom they shared reciprocal obligations based on either kinship or

friendship (Massey 1990). These well connected individuals had access to the specific privileges the pioneers had to offer. The distribution of these privileges probably continued to fan out as each successive group of immigrants similarly assisted those closest to them who chose to follow in their footsteps. According to Massey, such networks are able to rapidly develop because “every act of migration creates a set of friends and relatives with a social tie to someone with valuable migrant experience” (Massey 1990: 17). Massey used this idea to reinvigorate the term *cumulative causation* first penned by Myrdal over forty-five years ago (Myrdal 1957). Massey’s conceptualization states that as networks become denser (i.e., more people become interconnected by a given migration stream), migration is transformed from a high risk activity to one that is relatively reliable because the quality and quantity of information potential immigrants receive increases significantly. Because of this dynamic and ever evolving series of linkages migration becomes progressively more likely, something Massey refers to as “circular and cumulative causation” (Massey 1990: 4). This expansion of network privileges also helps explain how the Brazilian immigrant profile evolved from that of the original upper-middle and middle-class pioneers to the present profile that consists mainly of those from the middle- and lower-middle class.

### **How Social Networks Operate in Valadares**

In 1989 450 households were interviewed in Valadares. A stratified random sample for the city was generated using a list provided by CEMIG (the state run energy company of Minas Gerais) that rank ordered all residential electrical accounts based on average kilowatt usage over the past six months. Electrical usage was used as a proxy for income and the sample was divided into five socio-

economic strata. Ultimately 90 questionnaires were collected from each stratum. Results revealed no emigrants from the highest or lowest strata. The stratum with highest kilowatt usage, the upper class, revealed a great deal of international travel, but only for enjoyment or brief business trips. The poorest group, the lower class, was dealing with more immediate concerns, like meeting basic daily survival needs. Many among this lower stratum were familiar with the migration process and interested in departing, but they lacked the resources and the connections to enable them to do this. Studies conducted in the U.S. have revealed that poverty can affect how social networks function or fail to function among immigrants (Menjívar 2000). Other U.S. studies have shown that poverty reduced or eliminated the opportunities of families and individuals to participate in domestic social networks (Hogan et al. 1993). Our results suggest that poverty also affects social networks at the place of origin as poor Brazilians were unable to provide assistance to their members interested in emigrating.

The most emigrants came from the second highest or upper-middle class stratum. There were progressively fewer émigrés from strata three and four representing the middle-class and the lower-middle class, respectively. Migrants from the upper-middle and middle-class groups tended to possess at least the equivalent of a high school education while those from the lower-middle class possessed as little as two years of formal schooling.

Thus the emerging pattern was that the upper class had the resources to emigrate but chose to remain where they were. The lowest class desired to leave but had no way to finance such a journey. Hence we will focus on the three mid-level strata and their network experiences.

Amongst actual emigrants two basic patterns were observed. The first applies to but a relatively small group—those with sufficient resources to not require any assistance from others. These individuals were able to legally obtain a visa on their own, usually a tourist visa, and made the trip to North America by themselves. Most of those in this category were males possessing at least some college training, if not a completed four-year degree. Although most people in this category were men, there were also some similarly educated women who easily obtained visas on their own.

Below Paulo, a 27 year old white man from Valadares with a university degree and a middle-class background, explains how he obtained a tourist visa that ultimately enabled him to enter the U.S. and work undetected for several years.

I had just graduated as an electrical engineer ... My visa was a legal one ... Of course to get it I had to exaggerate my income a bit, but that way the visa was approved... Back then it was very common to exaggerate your income in order to get a visa.

Most Valadarenses, however, were not this fortunate. Since at least the early 1990s it has been difficult for residents of Valadares to legally obtain a U.S. visa. Part of this is explained by the region's history as a provider of large numbers of undocumented workers and visa overstayers. This important visa roadblock required potential émigrés to find creative solutions to their dilemma. This is where the presence of social networks and their importance begins to become apparent. If well connected, potential migrants might have access to the information and resources required to help them obtain a visa and enter the U.S. or Canada;

something they would be unable to do on their own. For example, those lacking in resources or a steady employment history but possessing network links might learn of an employer willing to “attest” to an extended work history with a relatively high rate of pay—two signals that one is likely to return to Brazil and thus worthy of receiving a visa. Others might use their connections to “document” that they own various types of possessions in Brazil—another indication that they will likely return in a timely manner. Still others might lump together resources from as many friends and relatives as possible to produce a high bank balance. Once this quantity has remained in the bank for several months they could point to it as an indicator of their financial well-being—another signal that they were unlikely to overstay their visa. In all of these situations the potential emigrant would likely be issued a visa.

Other times it is simply impossible to rehabilitate the socio-economic background of the visa applicant, meaning that they will never be legally permitted to enter North America. In these cases network contacts become exceedingly important, as they are needed to provide the information and support required to undertake an intercontinental journey without proper documentation. Those who find themselves in this situation have various options. The first is to obtain someone else’s passport with a valid visa and a photo that bears some resemblance to them. Although very risky, numerous informants traveled this way. Another technique used with old U.S. visas that did not include photos of the passport holder was to swap passport pages, substituting the page with the valid visa into the passport of the émigré needing a visa. Although both of these techniques were used with some regularity, there was always the possibility of being apprehended when attempting to exit Brazil or when entering the U.S. Still,

networks oftentimes are able to provide information on the best times and places to travel, how to dress to avoid suspicion, and the right answers to provide when questioned.

Others unable to obtain valid visas chose to enter North America in a more convoluted fashion. Individuals choosing this option had no U.S. visa and would never get one. So instead of traveling directly to North America their journeys north oftentimes went by way of Peru and Mexico, as it is relatively easy for Brazilians to travel to both of these nations. Once in Mexico they made their way to the U.S. border, where if things went well, they safely crossed with a coyote or guide. To avoid detection in the U.S. and Mexico they had to heavily rely on the experience and information of their friends and family who had earlier undertaken this route. If apprehended, they would also have to rely on the same people to liberate them and prevent immediate deportation—an unavoidable condition for many apprehended Brazilians who lacked network contacts.

Operating behind the scenes for all of these emigrants, regardless of the visa type of obtained, were the local travel agencies. Many of the travel agency owners had at one time been emigrants themselves. As such they correctly perceived that one way to directly benefit from this out-migration was to sell international airplane tickets. Most experienced agencies also assisted potential émigrés in many other ways. Some agencies provided their own coyotes who guided passengers all the way to the cities of southern California or through the deserts of Arizona. Agencies were also almost always willing to work with those who could not afford to immediately pay for an international ticket—provided their relatives had sufficient financial assets, and were willing to forfeit these if timely

payment was not received. Usually this simply entailed paying rather high interest rates over the duration of the loan period. However, some families made much greater sacrifices to enable one of their own to emigrate as they occasionally sold vehicles, land, farm animals, televisions and/or refrigerators to finance these trips. For many emigrants this trip would have been completely out of the question had they not been able to receive this financial support from their families.<sup>3</sup> This is another example of how trust, reciprocity and solidarity enter into the immigrant network experience. Of course the implication is that those who receive help will pay off the accumulated debt and provide similar assistance to other prospective immigrants and future network members.

### **Social Networks in the U.S. and Canada**

The discussion now turns to the 390 Brazilians interviewed in Cidade Congelada and Toronto, Canada. This presentation will reveal that while social networks do demonstrate some pronounced tendencies, they are not one-dimensional and that there are frequent and important exceptions to the general patterns of network operation.

The data reveal that of the more than 130 municipalities represented by these immigrants Governador Valadares had the largest representation. The Valadarenses comprised 21 and 13 percent of the U.S. and Canadian samples, respectively. When adding those from neighboring municipalities this region's contribution rose to over 25 and 17 percent of each sample. One might suspect that this is the result of the snowball sampling framework utilized. I suggest instead that this is due to established migration networks emanating from Valadares and an indication that Massey's notion of cumulative causation (1990) is also applicable



to Brazilian immigration. Apparently these networks function such that potential immigrants usually do not consider other possible destinations and instead go to those locations where strong network ties to the origin area already exist.

I earlier mentioned the difficulties Valadarenses experienced in obtaining travel visas. In fact, among U.S. residents over twice as many Valadarenses (61%) as non-Valadarenses (28%) indicated that they had a difficult time obtaining a visa. Yet their educational levels and ages were extremely similar. The Canadian situation was different since many respondents entered prior to the 1987 visa requirement, which recall, was the main reason Brazilians began going to Canada in the mid-1980s—entry was virtually guaranteed.

Would be immigrants without a visa had to find creative ways to enter North America. As discussed above, many strategies were undertaken. Over 25% of the total U.S. sample never possessed a valid visa. In Canada the corresponding figure was 9%. Another 59 to 55% of both samples, in the U.S. and Canada respectively, had at one time been legal visitors but their visas had expired by the time of interview. Hence at the time of interview only 17% and 35% of the U.S. and Canadian samples, respectively, were legally in North America. Although networks are important to almost all immigrants, I will argue that they were especially useful to those lacking the proper documentation.

### **The Arrival**

Social networks are at work long before immigrants arrive in their new host society. As earlier discussed, networks can assist with all aspects of the planning, procurement of visas, and travel plans. Network presence was especially pronounced when witnessing how those without visas made their way to North

America. The majority of U.S. immigrants entered by way of either New York City (59%) or Miami (17%) on commercial airlines. However those lacking properly issued visas were unable to do this. While visa difficulties probably deterred many would be emigrants from ever departing, this was not the case for those with access to network ties and resources. For instance, 44% of all Valadarenses interviewed indicated they entered the U.S. via Mexico. In other words two-thirds of the Valadarenses who had a difficult time getting a U.S. visa entered without proper documentation. Because of network contacts they had access to enough reliable information to know that this dangerous and costly strategy had a high probability of success. Among non-Valadarenses only 12% entered by way of Mexico. This result illustrates that while Valadarenses do not have a monopoly on Brazilian social networks and their access, they do however, use them more frequently.

For many, network linkages were also fully functioning in Toronto, Canada at time of arrival. Recall, prior to July 1987 Brazilians did not require a visa to enter Canada. However, both before and after that date individuals were subject to detailed questioning. Numerous respondents indicated that they had been precisely coached on what to say if questioned. The easiest way out of a difficult situation at time of arrival was to claim refugee status. Although Brazilian "refugees" represented a political anomaly in the 1980s, such claims nonetheless served as an effective way to gain legal entry into Canada. This was because a 1985 Canadian Supreme Court ruling on "would-be refugees" (i.e., Singh et al. v. the Minister of Employment and Immigration) stated that refugees could not be turned away without a full oral hearing of their claims, and, while awaiting

determination of their status, would be eligible to work in Canada and receive national health insurance (Goza 1999). Visa overstayers could also file a refugee claimant process at any later date. Word of the effectiveness of this strategy spread throughout the entire Brazilian-Canadian community as over 75 percent of those interviewed had applied for refugee status. The long-term implications of this will be discussed below.

Networks also assisted the newly arriving in other ways. Otocíluo, a 21 year old *Minerio* (i.e., a resident of Minas Gerais state) from Ataléa, arrived in Toronto in 1990, one year after the refugee program had been toughened to restrict fraudulent claims. Otocíluo was traveling with a fake visa purchased in the Valadares area. This was discovered upon his arrival in Toronto. He was arrested and taken to jail. However he was fortunate that he had access to privileged network ties. Because of his network ties he spent less than 24 hours in jail as his contacts in Toronto were able to arrange for a Canadian woman to declare that she was his sponsor. As such, he was freed the next day. Without access to such powerful network ties he certainly would have been quickly deported.

The reception new arrivals receive once they leave the airport also helps highlight how efficient networks can be. To document this efficiency I will briefly demonstrate how networks are able to facilitate one's initial welcome and quick introduction to the North American workforce. Nearly 60% of these new immigrants spent their first night either with friends (39%) siblings (12%) or cousin(s) (7%) already there. In the U.S. 73% either initially stayed with friends (52%) cousin(s) (8%), friends of friends (7%) or siblings (6%). These figures convincingly demonstrate that the majority of Brazilian immigrants had access to at least some

immediate social support from day one of their North American experience. They also demonstrate that there appear to be two types of Brazilian immigrants to North America. The first group consists of those with friends and relatives already in destination areas. The second group apparently lacks, at least at the outset, direct access to social or kinship support networks.

To explore this in additional detail respondents were asked about the number of relatives they had in North America. Nearly 74 percent of those in the U.S. and 55 percent in Canada indicated they had at least one relative present. Twenty-one percent of the U.S. sample had 6 or more relatives living in that country, while in Canada the corresponding figure was 10 percent. These results provide additional support for Massey's cumulative causation concept (1990) and the rapidity with which social networks can grow. Although the presence of networks is less pronounced in Canada than the U.S., I suggest that this is due to the relative newness of the Canadian flow.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Present**

How effective are these social contacts in helping recent arrivals locate employment and sustain an income? Recall, not only is employment critical to the success of any immigrant's stability but entrance into the labor force is arguably the most important form of immigrant incorporation.

The number of days between an immigrant's arrival and when initial employment began reveals that 26% of immigrant men in the U.S. were working within five days of the time they arrived. All of these men found their first job either through the assistance of a friend or a relative. Among the women in the U.S. 20%

were working in five days or less and of these only one (10%) located employment on her own. In Canada 18% of the women were working within five days and again only one (10%) located employment by herself. Among Brazilian men in Toronto 31% were at work within five days, however 23% of this group found employment by themselves. Those with at least one relative present in North America began work, on average, four days earlier than those with no relatives present. In Toronto these figures were 25 and 29 days while in Cidade Congelada they were 19 and 23. The aforementioned results confirm how very quickly these motivated immigrants were inserted into the labor force, even when lacking the proper documentation. They also highlight the strength of social networks in helping procure employment, especially among those in the U.S. where networks have been in existence for a longer time.

The unique data examined in this study enable us to monitor additional variables relevant to the role of social networks and the labor market insertion of Brazilians. The three variables to be discussed below are ethnicity of owner, predominant ethnicity of co-workers, and the number of other Brazilians with whom you worked while at this position. Interesting differences on these variables emerged reflecting the distinct social context of the two communities in which these immigrants found themselves.<sup>5</sup> An examination of the first job held in Canada revealed that 40% of the business owners hiring Brazilians were Portuguese. An additional 11% worked for other Brazilians. Thus more than half of all Brazilians in Canada were likely to speak Portuguese and share cultural ties with the owner of their initial place of employment. In the U.S. 10% worked for Brazilian owners while only 6% were employed by Portuguese. Hence the number of workers employed

by co-ethnics was significantly lower in the U.S. than Canada. Most U.S. workers indicated that their employers were U.S. natives while in Canada a variety of ethnicities were indicated.

The variable predominant ethnicity of colleagues again reveals the degree to which Brazilians and Portuguese interact in Toronto. Nearly 39% indicated that most of their co-workers at their first job were Portuguese. In Cidade Congelada, however, the corresponding figure was only 4%. Toronto's sizeable Portuguese community has existed since the early 1960s and today is very established. Because many Portuguese firms employ a large number of workers, and because of shared linguistic and cultural roots, it is not surprising that many Brazilians work for and with the Portuguese. In Toronto another 27% indicated that most of their co-workers were Brazilian, while in the U.S. this figure was significantly higher at 47%. Thus in both nations the majority of co-workers, regardless of gender, were co-ethnics.

Together the three variables just discussed reveal the strength of the Brazilian community in both locations and the density of social ties within them. In Toronto they also reveal that the strong presence of the established Portuguese community has helped provide not only initial, but also extended support, to the newly arriving Brazilians.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this phenomenon is best reflected by the often heard expression *o Portugues da sombra ao Brasileiro* (i.e., the Portuguese provide shade for Brazilians) meaning that because of cultural and linguistic ties the Portuguese provide Brazilians with various types of support, especially in the areas of housing and employment. However, this relationship is often a love-hate one. For example, the type of discrimination most often cited by Brazilians in

Canada was that they were exploited in one of various ways by the Portuguese (44%). In the U.S. this was the third most cited form of discrimination (8%). In the words of one man:

The exploitation that I encountered in the U.S. really wasn't because of the Americans. Instead, the greatest exploitation I experienced was at the hands of the Portuguese. I always said, come on guys, don't rent from the Portuguese. But, probably because of their inability to speak English, and the difficulties that caused, they ended up falling prey to the Portuguese.

In general the discussion presented thus far reveals a great deal of solidarity and co-ethnic reinforcement among the Brazilians in North America. Still, as earlier demonstrated with the Portuguese, not all is perfectly harmonious beneath this "ethnic umbrella." The empirical data presented above also hide conflicts that exist within the Brazilian community. Since the survey instruments were not designed to address these conflicts I now turn to the words of the immigrants themselves to highlight areas of discord within this population. In the quote that follows a young man offers his appraisal of how Brazilians exploit one another.

There were always Brazilians who took advantage of other Brazilians, and they often did so in the worst way. There were times when, look, they even took advantage of you in the room that you rented with them. They sold you the job you had, and they exploited you while you were at work. It's just so many things. But for those just arriving it doesn't seem so bad because they need a job, they need to work. Still, a lot of people said that this was a

cowardly form of exploitation, a wicked way of taking advantage of other Brazilians.

The following quote by another man documents a general lack of solidarity and how some took advantage of others by selling them work opportunities:

I believe that there should exist some form of solidarity among Brazilians when they're there, but there doesn't. Instead you've got Brazilians selling jobs to one another. There's a lot of that. For example, if you make \$400 a week, they sell you the job for \$800.

The next quote discusses the general problems that another young man perceived to exist among the Brazilian community:

The Brazilian there is very slimy. He'll turn you in for money. Ya, he'll rat you out if he can make some money... I learned, ya, one of the things I learned there was to better understand my people. I don't think that this is only a Brazilian thing, it's the law of survival, isn't it? You, in another country, and the U.S. is a country where if you don't work, you're nothing. There you're worth what you have in your pocket. Isn't that right? You have to find a job right away, because if you don't....you're out in the street. Sadly, there it's the law of the dog, especially among Brazilians. If you don't have money, you're in the street and you don't eat....The big problem is that the majority of the people who go there just don't have the background to make it. They're just not well prepared for life in the First World. They've gone there in search of their treasure and they think that arriving there they



can just pick up \$100 bills. But they get there and the reality is completely different.

The above quotes from immigrants are intended to demonstrate that while social networks can do a great deal to benefit those with access, they do not benefit all participants to the same degree. They demonstrate some of the discord that exists in these emerging communities as those who arrived first or were better connected benefited more.

The patriarchal system of gender relations that exists in parts of Brazil was also seen as affecting the access of women to network privileges. The next quote, provided by a middle-aged man reveals how one Brazilian became wealthy because of the labor of Brazilian women.

I personally knew a guy who today has a lot of money here in Brazil. He earned this money in the U.S. exploiting other Brazilians, especially the women who went there. He had a team of housecleaners and he contracted these women. For example, he would take on a house and get \$50 to clean it, but he would keep \$40 and give the woman \$10. He would just drive over and pick her up, drop her off at the house and later return to take her to another house. It would take the women two hours to clean a house. At the end of the day she'd be exhausted, having earned \$50 and cleaned five houses, but he'd have earned \$200! Today he owns motels here. He doesn't live in Valadares any more. No, he lives in Espirito Santo (i.e., another state). He owns motels, pizzarias and big restaurants. Everything was paid for by enslaving his fellow Brazilians, you know? There's all kinds of this going on up there.

Women perceived the sexist treatment they received from their co-ethnics and sometimes complained loudly. Here is how one middle-aged woman summed up the situation.

Personally, I believe that in Brazil women just aren't considered to be worth much. Men beat them whenever they want and they are always right. Machismo is everywhere in Brazil, that's the way it is. While I was in the U.S. I saw the way women there lived and it may me envious. I never experienced that way of life in Brazil, never. And from what I can tell, because of my age, I never will.

Still another woman indicated how the new social context caused her to view gender relations differently than she had in Brazil.

To begin, I left with the idea that the American man, in general, was an excellent husband. I saw husbands staying home taking care of the kids while the wife went out to play volleyball or tennis at night. For me, having a husband like that would be the best thing in the world. They help out their wives a lot.

Brazilian women in both communities began to form their own networks in response to the perceived machismo of Brazilian men. Because of the new roles women have assumed in North America a great deal of conflict has resulted. The following quote details one case of jealousy and violence.

There's a lawyer in Valadares who has one of his sons doing life in prison in the Boston area. He killed his girlfriend in his apartment there. Man...it was jealousy. It's that thing about women becoming too independent. He just wouldn't allow it, while she was getting more and more that way. Because

she had a job, a car, she was able to divide the rent on a house. Then this guy begins getting jealous, even at her boss. There's a lot of this going on.

In the next quote a Brazilian man provides his interpretation as to why marital conflict occurs among immigrants.

Another problem that you see happening a lot is when the husband goes up there alone and plans to bring his wife along later, but instead they end up separating. Brazilian women are not prepared to be on their own, to be independent. Brazilian women are just too dependent. When she gets there all of a sudden she discovers that she has access to her own job, money, car and the chance to be independent. The first thing she does is stomp on her husband. I saw a lot of this there, you know? To be sincere, about 70 to 80 percent of the couples that go there end up splitting up. And of those couples that separate, usually one stays there and the other one comes back. Today Valadares holds the Brazilian record for separations and divorce.

Although this man's estimate of the number of divorces resulting because of immigration might be high, our research did record dozens of such cases. Without a doubt, exposure to new social contexts had a significant effect on relationships between men and women and sometimes resulted in important transformations. Other aspects of gender relations did not change and as a consequence some women experienced differential access and treatment within networks. Occasionally women were expected to trade sexual favors for job information, a situation men did not encounter. At other times women were the last to know about desirable positions or forced to pay for privileged information that was free to men.

## The Future

All respondents were asked a series of questions about their future plans including whether they would permanently remain in North America. Women in both North American communities found their new freedoms to be liberating and perhaps as a consequence revealed a stronger desire than men to permanently remain. Similar results have been documented among other immigrant women (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). In the U.S. significantly more women ( $p < .001$ ) indicated they planned to permanently remain (39% vs. 25%). In Canada considerably more women and men planned on permanently settling but the difference between the two (48% vs. 44%) was insignificant. The significantly larger number of people desiring to permanently remain in Canada is an extremely important point but because of space limitations cannot be adequately dealt with here. However, because of the success many Brazilians had in eventually converting their precarious status as a refugee claimant to that of a landed immigrant (by way of a complicated trip abroad and a reapplication to enter as a landed immigrant (see Goza 1999)), many are now in a position to attain a great deal of socio-economic success. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, many of those in the U.S. continue to lack proper documentation, a condition that will jeopardize their permanence and future success in that nation.

Among immigrant populations it is not uncommon for people to believe that they will return one day only to realize many years later that this has not yet happened. As such it is possible that many of those stating they will eventually return may never make it. One male respondent explained it to me this way.

Everyone has the dream to go there and become successful. Because only a few are able to do this, most have to deal with the embarrassment of returning as failures. It's like the society, the city condemns them, you know? They say look at him, he went there and he came back a bust. Because of this there are a lot of Brazilians up there hanging out who want to come back, but because of this social problem, they don't have the courage to return.

Others, however, have done very well for themselves and have no intention of returning. Many have legalized their status, purchased homes, established businesses, and given birth to and raised children in North America.

Among those who intend to return the reason most often cited was *saudades*, a word that can best be translated as longing or homesickness. Below are several quotes from various respondents on *saudades* and their effects. These thoughts are from a middle-aged woman.

Saudades, In that country the thing that really kills us is *saudades*. O my God! You are practically isolated there. Do you understand? There the Brazilian is super isolated! When you're there you only talk with other Brazilians. What American doesn't converse with other Americans? For the majority of Brazilians there it's very rare to have a relationship with an American. It only happens after a lot of time there. Like in the case of my cousin, she was in the U.S. 10 years, so she had relationships with Americans. But for me who was just passing through, I never had real personal contacts. It was just the job and work, work, work.

This is what a young man responded when asked why he didn't stay longer:  
"Family. Because of family problems. Saudades".

Yet another woman responded:

"It's the longing for the family that makes you go home sooner."

Perhaps it is because of saudades that networks remain as strong as they do. When asked if additional relatives would come 39% of the respondents in both locations answered yes, a sign that these social networks will continue to grow and become denser as new forward and backwards links are likely to be established. Network ties were also reinforced and saudades suppressed because of regular remittances sent back to loved ones in Brazil. Not only were these used to pay off debts, but also to finance the future trips of other network participants and to help kill saudades (Goza 1999b).

Many of those who come in the future will have a much easier time acquiring visas than those who preceded them. This is because a large number of those present in the U.S. and especially Canada have succeeded in legalizing their status. As such they are now eligible to serve as sponsors for other family members who wish to join them.

## **Conclusions**

This paper documented various aspects of the important role that social networks play in the immigration of Brazilians to North America. This study began with a review of the theoretical importance of properly positioning networks within mid- or meso-level migration theory. Conceptually such placement is very important for it provides a key link to understanding how important mediating social

collectives such as the family, the household or kinship group enter into the migration process. This positioning also helps clarify how individual goals and desires in origin areas can ultimately be affected and modified by structural conditions in both sending and receiving locations.

Next the origins of the Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais migration stream were examined. The development and expansion of this flow, including a discussion of pioneer migrants was then presented, since without pioneers there can be no migrant social networks. The evolution of this movement was discussed and support provided for Massey's theory of cumulative causation. Attention then focused on the ways in which network access can facilitate all aspects of an international journey, as well as incorporation into the host society labor market. By focusing on labor market incorporation the pervasive presence of social networks was clearly revealed. Qualitative and quantitative data were then presented in an attempt to move past the one-dimensional portrayals of some social network studies. These data revealed the discord that exists beneath the Luso-Brazilian "ethnic umbrella" and even amongst Brazilians in both destination communities. For instance, in both locations gender clearly affected one's access to network privileges. One's socio-economic background prior to departure also determined one's ability to participate in network activity. Similarly, place of origin and network connections within that place (e.g., Valadares) meant that some did not need to abandon their international travel plans simply because they failed to receive a legal visa. Rather, those with access to the right network connections always had the option of traveling north using alternative strategies.

In coming years these social networks will likely continue to evolve in new and unexpected ways. Beachheads of Brazilians have now been firmly established in each nation and at the core are 1000's of legal residents and naturalized citizens eligible to eventually serve as legal sponsors for their family members who desire to move north. Many more will opt for the more perilous, unsanctioned journeys described in the text. Regardless of the chosen route, I expect that many more Brazilians will become social network participants and opt to undertake this journey.

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**NOTES:**

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<sup>1</sup> The one important exception to this remark is the pioneering work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1927) that implicitly dealt with concepts that today could be referred to as social networks.

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian flow would only begin much later as an outgrowth of the movement to the U.S.

<sup>3</sup> These international excursions were not cheap, especially when one had to go Sao Paulo-Lima-Mexico City-Tijuana-San Diego. With the services of a coyote, a one-way trip of this variety, without a U.S. visa, could cost as much as \$5000. However, one coyote from Valadares said he could offer a bargain rate for a trip via Mexico City and Tijuana that would only cost \$3000. For this to happen he needed a down payment of 30% with the remainder to be paid in 10 monthly payments.

<sup>4</sup> The U.S. respondent with the longest tenure arrived in 1963, while in Canada the first respondent arrived in 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Recall that Toronto is a cosmopolitan metropolis while Cidade Congelada is much smaller and much less diverse.

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<sup>6</sup> This is based on the fact that when considering all jobs ever held in Canada, ethnicity of owner is listed as Portuguese nearly 34% of the time.