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Informal Employment and Immigrant Networks: A Review Paper

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Abstract

This paper reviews some recent literature relevant to the *Immigrant Work Strategies and Networks Project*. Although it touches on some of the literature about informal employment, it concentrates on literature about immigrant networks in an attempt to work through concepts and draw out relevant indicators to be adopted in the research. This brief review reveals a number of theoretical currents in networks research which include a pro-solidarity thesis; challenges to the solidarity thesis; the issue of networks and markets; the roles of immigrant agency and finally, a critical approach that incorporates the main aspects of these theoretical options.

KEYWORDS: Immigrant networks; networks; solidarity; embeddedness; social capital; immigrant work strategies; informal employment; informal economy; integration.

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INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRANT NETWORKS: A REVIEW PAPER[1]

Introduction

In Britain today there is a general perception that asylum seekers, irregular migrants and other 'shady' migrant groups and ethnic minorities are driving the growth of a hitherto non-existent informal economy. Deregulated labour markets lead to flexible and casualized labour and this in turn can lead to high and low wage sectors, unregulated work and an informal sector. However, the public perception is that immigrants and other ethnic minorities are the direct cause of these effects. These groups are seen to be hiding from the law - through tax evasion, through circumvention of labour laws, by being instrumental in lowering wages and by defrauding the public purse through social security scams. While there seems to be a moral panic about asylum seekers and the asylum process, the 'pull' factors in the UK economy and policies that attract irregular migrants and undocumented workers have been, until recently, conveniently ignored (Duvell and Jordan 2002a; Duvell and Jordan 2002b). Some governments have chosen to ignore parts of the informal sector in order to allow some industries or firms to compete in the international markets and to subdue protest about inadequate delivery of services and jobs. Furthermore, western democracies are well aware of the reasons behind the 'push' factors. Nearly all refuse to acknowledge, much less to change, their implication in the economic and political problems experienced by underdeveloped countries.

Over the past fifty years, one of the main goals of the advanced economies was to achieve full employment and universal welfare provision. This clearly has not occurred in the UK, and given the visibility of irregular migrants in certain industries, the prevalent view has been, until recently, that migrants are providing the 'push' factor that creates an informal sector. However, there is a sizable amount of welfare and economic activity in advanced economies that has not been formalised, including family care and voluntary

work. As Carnoy and Castells (2001, 12) suggest, '[t]he state reduces its role as guarantor of social protection, and individualizes its relationship with most citizens'. In the UK, this occurs through the policy orientation of the 'third way' with the emphasis on communities to organise themselves. Therefore, we can safely say that in none of the advanced economies and western democracies are social needs met solely by the formal economy and formal institutions. Although the informal economy was previously seen as a sphere outside of the activities and regulations of the formal, organized economy, many now understand that the formal and informal economies are intimately linked and are shaped by each other in a complex process of economic, social, and political relations (Mingione and Qassoli 2000; Portes, et al. 1989).

The position of immigrants and other social groups in informal employment leads us to a number of questions that form the basis of this project. In the first instance, we need to understand the economic, legal, policy, institutional and environmental factors that contribute to its character and to the extent of such employment. In terms of economic circumstances, we need to understand the changes in industrial structures that may have led to an increase in the informal economy. For example, what are the effects of de-regulation on participation in the formal and informal labour market? How have government policies, such as tax laws, contributed to informal employment? In political and economic terms, what are the 'push' factors for asylum seekers and economic migrants? Are certain marginalised groups such as women, immigrants and ethnic minorities 'pushed' into informal employment due to gender or racial discrimination; are they worse off in certain geographical localities; why do people engage in such employment; what type of work do they engage in; is it always low-paid and exploitative?

Secondly, family and community life cycles require social and financial stability within longer–term patterns of change. Thus, for immigrants and the 'white British', how are their work and socio-cultural strategies shaped or

mediated by their networks and communities. How are global conditions and global/local networks played out at the local level? In terms of human agency, how are networks, practices, meanings and identities constructed by immigrants and whites in the process of developing work strategies at the local level? Thirdly, what are the effects of their work strategies, including participation in informal employment, on settlement patterns and their accommodation into the community? What are the long-term effects or outcomes on social integration of these forms of work? In other words, can participation in informal work provide a relevant and positive contribution to immigrant integration into the national 'imagined community'? Are networks a substitute for lack of information and resources from the welfare state? Are social networks the driving force of immigrant accommodation?

Paid Informal Employment in a Segmented Labour Market

Reference to unregistered or undeclared work, the informal sector or the informal economy, can be confusing as these terms do not distinguish between paid and unpaid informal work. As noted earlier, one type of unpaid informal work involves voluntary work and socially embedded social care mostly carried out by women in families and communities. A number of authors prefer to use the term 'informal employment' to denote a relationship where labour is paid by a wage or a fee (Pfau-Effinger 2003; Williams and Windebank 1998). Although they are linked, this distinction places the emphasis on employment, which is more the focus of this project, rather than on the informal economy or sector. Furthermore, in order to avoid the danger that the 'informal' becomes the 'other' to formal employment or to the formal economy, the emphasis remains on the relationship where informal and formal employment and economies are shaped by each other.

Informal employment is heterogeneous and 'ranges from 'organised' informal employment undertaken by employees for a business that conducts some or all of its activity informally to more 'individual' forms of informality' (Williams

and Windebank 1998, 30-32). Informal employment can be highly paid and autonomous work or low-paid, exploitative work. Others prefer to differentiate between 'informal activities' which may not result in a weak position. In this case, the work may be 'embedded in routine strategies' where there may be convergence between employer and employee. For example, retired workers may be topping up their income or they are 'moonlighting' at two jobs. On the other hand, some are 'atypical jobs' which are much more precarious and unpredictable. Here people may 'depend on income from activities whose fragmentation and flexibility may not be compatible with household needs' (Ghezzi and Mingione 2003, 96).

Informal employment can be voluntarily entered into as when someone decides to leave their job for informal work or they may take on additional undeclared work. Due to strong competition, some may choose informal employment rather than set up their own enterprises. Increasingly, informal employment plays a contradictory role in advanced economies for, while it may be seen as a way of circumventing state regulations, it clearly provides people with work strategies that ensure reasonable living conditions. It can also contribute to 'social cohesion' through the social capital that circulates within and across networks and communities (see Pfau-Effinger 2003, 7). People's work strategies may be influenced by structural factors, including ethnicity and gender. But for many there is also a level of agency involved in what Bauman (in Engberson 2001, 223) calls the development of 'life strategies' based on quality of life decisions as opposed to 'survival strategies'. However, such options do not apply to certain categories of immigrants such as irregular immigrants, nor for asylum seekers who have few political rights (Engberson 2001, 223). Similarly, the long-term unemployed have fewer and fewer opportunities and networks as time goes on, hindering their ability to engage in formal or informal employment. In fact, (Williams and Windebank 1998) come to the conclusion that the informal labour market is not just a peripheral form of the formal labour

market. Rather, it is best understood as a segmented labour market with its own hierarchy.

The nature of segmentation was poignantly revealed in a case study of 1986 census data of Quebec city. Lemieux et al (1994 in Williams and Windebank 1998, 34-36) found that those on lower income, men, students and the unemployed were more like to carry out informal employment. However, the results of the Lemieux et al. study (Williams and Windebank 1998, 34) indicate that:

> …although the unemployed are more likely than the employed to engage in informal employment, they do not constitute the vast bulk of the informal workforce. Indeed, just 12.8 per cent of all informal workers are unemployed. The formally employed, meanwhile, constitute 35.2 per cent of all informal workers and earn more per hour for working informally than their marginalised counterparts. So too do those who earn a higher formal income.

They found that 'informal employment…is clearly segmented along the lines of formal income and employment status. It is a similar story when gender disparities are examined. Not only do a slightly higher proportion of men and women participate in informal employment…but men receive higher hourly informal wage rates than women…' (Williams and Windebank 1998, 34). Therefore, gender, class and, one may include, ethnic segmentation can be reproduced in the informal labour market. Ethnic segmentation, ethnic enclaves, the ethnic economy all conjure up popular prejudices about immigrant segregation, accommodation and their networks in local communities. As with many of the biases about the informal economy, 'ethnic solidarity' is also seen either to deter or promote not only integration but also immigrant segregation. The development and persistence of social networks comprises a significant part of the immigrant settlement process, particularly the work strategies they adopt for quality of life and survival.

Pfau-Effinger (2003, 7-8) provides a useful list of demand-side and supply-side strategies connected with informal employment. Demand-side refers to strategies developed by enterprises and private households, while supply-side relates to workers:

Demand-side

- Informal employment is used as alternative to small enterprises or self-employment due to lack of resources or high levels of competition.
- Large enterprises provide informal employment in order to compete in aggressive markets especially in areas or regions where unemployment is high and there is a weak labour force.
- In areas where social welfare is not available or inadequate, for example to undocumented migrants, informal work provides a way of increasing welfare in everyday life strategies.
- The urban middle class enter the informal market through informal arrangements with clearners, child carers, gardeners etc; also highly skilled professionals enage in top-up work.

Supply-side

- Informal employment can be used as a top up to low unemployment and other social benefits.
- Where migrants are not given the opportunity to integrate into formal employment. For example, their qualifications may not be accepted or due to racist practices of employers.
- Where the unemployed take on informal employment that helps them 'strengthen social relations and networks'. This type of informal work 'takes place in a kind of 'moral economy' of private households and neighbourhoods and is more based on solidarity and help in social networks' (Pfau-Effinger 2003, 9).

Networks

The study of networks has become an essential topic of immigration research for both sociologists and anthropologists. In this project, we are interested in networks not only to examine how they facilitate work and life strategies, but to investigate how they provide the basis for integration for immigrants into their neighbourhood, into their ethnic/immigrant communities and into the broader 'imagined community'. A simple definition of a social network is that it refers to links made through personal relationships including kinship, friendship and community ties and relationships. Immigration networks can include associations in the country of settlement, and intermediaries such as labour recruiters, smugglers, immigration consultants, ethnic community relationships, economic relationships and ties etc. Boyd indicates (1989, 661):

> Social networks based on kinship, friendship and community ties are central components in migration system analysis. They mediate between individual actors and larger structural forces. They link sending and receiving countries. And they explain the continuation of migration long after the original impetus for migration has ended.

In order to understand how social relationships and network systems are developed, network analysis (Boyd 1989; Brettell and Hollifield 2000) and theories on transnationalism (Vertovec 1999) emerged as important foundations of analysis. In migration studies, understanding the links between sending and receiving countries became increasingly important as the process of globalisation began to shrink time and space through the transfer of people as well as of information and communication technologies, trade and resources, and aid. The migration systems approach illuminates the links between the micro and macro aspects of the migration process as constructed through structural factors, networks, families and individuals. Among their numerous functions, networks are often conceived of as either enabling or disabling. Portes suggest that 'networks are important in

economic life because they are sources for the acquisition of scarce means, such as capital and information, and because they simultaneously impose effective constraints on the unrestricted pursuit of personal gain' (Portes 1995, 8). Thus, they can be empowering in that individuals are able to take advantage of their networks through a positive flow of information, resources and links. Yet they can be constraining due to some structural factor or where members of networks and communities act as gatekeepers to the flow of resources. The State, for instance, through exclusionary policies often places constraints on the productive capacities of networks.

Networks and the State

Structural conditions as well as the role of the state and its policies need to be taken into consideration when examining the types and functions of social networks. Global economic relationships link national economies and governments. They can also influence domestic economies as well as policies and employment structures. There are also political alliances and trade and tariff agreements with sending countries. As Boyd suggests, there are two mechanisms that link these relationships to migration – networks and household survival strategies. Structural and policy factors provide the context and networks provide the means with which to deal with current economic, political and social conditions (Boyd 1989, 645). Households and networks mediate between the individual and the broader structural, social and cultural contexts.

National states play a major role not only by shaping migration patterns but they can also influence the types, magnitude and density of immigrant networks. National states enter into bi-lateral trade treaties, produce labour recruitment laws, national industry and labour market regulations as well as immigration laws and policies that do not always have the intended outcomes. Engbersen shows how immigration laws in many EU countries, for instance, have created 'external border controls', completely excluding certain categories of people. 'Internal border controls', include the

introduction of identification cards, and inspections and surveillance of 'the excluded' on the streets, on housing estates, of social welfare recipients. These policies of exclusion, both inside and outside national borders, 'contribute to the marginalisation of undocumented immigrants and the weakening of patterns of solidarity within ethnic communities' (Engberson 2001, 243). Immigrant networks, short-term and long-terms patterns of accommodation, household and work strategies all suffer from restrictive policies of exclusion.

Engbersen (2001) lists three unintended consequences of such policies in the Netherlands. First, they generate their own crimes that in turn generate their own systems of control; secondly, restrictive policies have negative effects on the self-regulating and enabling aspects of immigrant communities and networks. It has become increasingly difficult for immigrant communities and networks to provide formal and informal help to those with illegal status, driving some into further illegal and criminal practice (see also (Collyer 2003); thirdly, due to the policing of undocumented immigrant workers, many are denied the rights they do have - such as legal rights and educational rights of children (Engberson 2001, 242-243).

Types of Networks

Beyond definitions, an outline of the types and characteristics of networks is also necessary. Social networks include immigration networks concerned with the actual movement of people, family units and chain migrations. They can also be conceived of as relationships where social capital circulates among immigrants in their new place of settlement. Some networks are focused more towards the country of origin and emphasize a transnational approach while others are more concerned with the local context (Gold 2001, 74). Both types of networks are usually intimately connected, with a concept such as 'transnationalism' providing a broad description for networks as process. The social network approach is seen as a method of abstraction where individuals are seen as 'nodes' linked to each other to form a network (Vertovec 2003,

646). This however, is simply one method of analysis that can be used as a descriptive metaphor. While some believe the individual is the unit of analysis in the social network approach, others (Boyd 1989; Pfau-Effinger 2003) suggest the domestic unit, as sustenance and socializing agent, should be the focus the analysis.

A third unit of analysis is the network itself as a collective unit, often based on shared struggle (Tilly 1990, 84). For Tilly the process of agency is central. He suggests that 'networks migrate' and that 'units of migration' are neither individuals nor the households but rather collectives 'linked by acquaintance, kinship, and work experience'. The migration process is more commonly seen as a continuous process of 'collective transformation involving the use of old social networks and categories to produce new ones'. Cultural practices are also collectively constructed into new hybrid cultures (Tilly 1990, 83-84).

Networks are multidimensional and vary in type. For example, Engbersen comes to the conclusion that networks can be either 'substantial' and provide 'lasting support' or they can be 'limited', providing 'temporary support' (Engberson 2001, 231). His research shows that type and extent of assistance varies considerably between immigrant group. Limited support may occur due to divisions in communities (see Gold 2001, 70-71) or where long established communities have become less willing to sponsor new migrants (Collyer 2003). Different networks can also exist within communities (Duvell and Jordan 2002a) where, for instance, recent arrivals may have developed their own networks within longer standing communities and apart from them. Similarly, networks can change over time due to a variety of circumstances. These variations are not only due to the characteristics of communities. In her seminal article on networks, Boyd highlighted the importance of bringing in previously neglected gender issues into the analyses of migration and settlement networks (Boyd 1989). Among other points, she illuminated the need to incorporate in any analysis the gender division of labour, gender differences in the economic decision-

making process in the family, and the changing modes of women's work (Boyd 1989, 656-657).

Social networks research reveals a number of contradictions about how to understand the properties of networks in immigration research. Furthermore, the study of networks is approached through a number of theoretical approaches to which we shall return later. One central characteristic of networks is the strength or weakness of ties within and across networks (Granovetter 1973). In addition to the problem of strength versus weakness, some consider that strong ties may provide a better basis for 'expressive action' as it may be easier to give support to those on equal footing in the network; whereas 'instrumental action' – helping others less well known in the network – may work best where weaker ties exist (Lin 2001). Another feature includes multiplicity of practices such as transfer of resources including financial help as well as needed support and solidarity. A third comprises the density of connections between individuals and across networks. Portes indicates that (1995, 12):

> Clusters of kin are overlaid by multiple work, religious, and recreational ties. Family cliques are, in turn, heavily linked to one another by residential proximity, occupational pursuits, and church activities. In these situations, where "everyone knows everyone else", community norms proliferate and violations of reciprocity obligations carry heavy costs. Solidarity within family cliques is intensified as a way of differentiating them (and sometimes protecting their members) from an already dense web of "outside' relations.

Kadushin found that where gaps exist in a network (perhaps an absence of ties) a competitive spirit is more likely to exist, while those with dense ties are more likely to cooperate (De Luca 2003, 3). Other characteristics, mentioned earlier, refer to the enabling and constraining aspects of networks. Thus, networks can construct places and spaces of solidarity where

social capital circulates to the benefit of its members. Or it can, in some circumstances, marginalise and exploit some members and sub-groups within the network.

The Solidarity thesis

In his leading article on 'the strength of weak ties', Granovetter (1973) introduced a new dimension to the analysis of networks. Previously, strong ties had been considered to be more effective in the transfer of information and resources, and in achieving community cohesion. Based on Gans' (1962) original study, Granovetter's analysis of the Boston Italians, caught up in neighbourhood renewal disputes, revealed that the strong ties of this fairly cohesive community ultimately worked against them. He went on to develop his definition of the strength of interpersonal ties – amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy (mutual confiding), reciprocal services, which is not too dissimilar to Putnam's later definition of social capital (Putnam 1993). Granovetter speculated (though did not come to any final conclusion) that if strong ties exist within a tight-knit group that does not mix much with others outside the group, then crucial information and resources are less likely to flow into such a community or network. He suggested that 'bridging ties', again taken up by Putnam (2000), would be a useful characteristic to examine (Granovetter 1973, 1367):

> A rough principle with which to begin such an investigation might be: the more local bridges (per person?) in a community and the greater their degree, the more cohesive the community and the more capable of acting in concert. Study the origins and nature (strength and content for example) of such bridging ties would then offer unusual insight into the social dynamics of the community.

Later, concepts such as 'embeddedness' and 'social capital' advanced the idea of the use of interpersonal ties and social networks in both economic and social relations. Granovetter (Granovetter 1985) developed the notion of

'embeddedness' particularly in relation to economic behaviour. He argued that economic behaviour was not simply based on rational and self-interested decision but that interpersonal ties and networks, what he called 'embeddedness' were a major factor in economic life (Granovetter 1985, 481-482). He later developed the notion further to include 'relational embeddedness' – concentrating on economic actors' personal ties' and 'structural embeddedness' pointing to a person's broader ties and networks (Portes 1995, 6).

How people are able to mobilise social, economic and political resources depends on the characteristics of networks and people's embeddedness within them. Some of these characteristics, usually referred to as 'social capital' include norms of reciprocity, social trust, cooperation and practices of civic engagement (Putnam 1993). Typically, social capital is defined as an accumulation of social, moral and economic resources within groups or social collectivities. Such resources might include such tangible as interest-free loans, employment information, help with housing etc. However, Portes states that 'the resources themselves are *not* social capital; the concept refers instead to the individual's *ability* to mobilize them on demand' (see also Lin 2001; Portes 1995, 12). He goes on to differentiate between *altruistic* and *instrumental* types of social capital ranging from values and bounded solidarity belonging to the former type, while reciprocity and enforceable trust, where ties are weaker, belong to the latter (Portes 1995, 15).

Some research demonstrates that strong ties and embeddedness are important for the transfer and circulation of resources and information. For example, in contrast to Granovetter's 'strength of weak ties', Grieco (in De Luca 2003, 2-3) illustrated that immigrants with strong ties, through a process of chain migration in the 1980s, were able to access relevant information, hospitality and a job on arrival at a steel city in the UK. Lin (2001) also suggests that strong ties can be useful for maintaining resources

(expressive), whereas weaker ties may be more helpful to gain or develop resources (instrumental). In terms of ethnic solidarity, networks can be safe havens for the socially excluded, particularly for those experiencing various forms of racism (Wahlbeck 1999).

Immigrant networks are often linked to the process of immigrant integration. There are two important issues here. The first is that the process of integration in a culturally diverse society is often seen as a path to be taken only by immigrants to accommodate themselves into the host society. Secondly, immigrants, even undocumented immigrants, usually construct and contest the degree and intensity of accommodation into their new context. Instead of understanding immigrant accommodation as a typical, passive form of integration or inclusion, immigrant agency operates through the construction of social, economic, political practices and conditions of everyday life. Networks can be emergent structures, operating as constructive and productive processes. Thus local and global immigrant networks construct cultural meanings and work strategies as part of a process of accommodation and resistance to dominant modes of power relations. Smith reminds us that people practice 'multiple forms of accommodation and resistance to dominant power relations' at the local level (Smith 2002, 118-119):

> Cities thus may be usefully conceptualized as local sites of cultural appropriation, accommodation, and resistance to "global conditions" as experienced, interpreted, and understood in the everyday lives of ordinary people and mediated by the social networks in which they are implicated.

Challenging the Solidarity Thesis

If networks are mainly seen in their positive light – they transfer information and resources, they are productive, others caution that they can also impose constraints – they can marginalize and exploit. There is a body of literature

that challenges the 'solidarity thesis' since 'contemporary networks are differentiated by class, gender and place, rather than by ethnic identity alone' (Meagher 2004). In other words, while social networks consist of high levels of social capital, they can also be exploitative and marginalizing of various members; there may be unequal forms of political control and unfair redistribution of resources; differences between older and newer members may exist; differences may also exist between the cultural brokers and cultural preservers in the network; there may be changes to the regulatory and political environment, namely state policies and the role of the media; and off course, there may be undue pressure and discrimination on women by the network so that women may find it difficult to change old gender roles. Finally, although women often play a dominant role in setting up informal networks they, along with sub-ethnic groups, can often be excluded from more powerful, male-dominated networks.

As a result, some weaker members may not have the ability to access the available resources. Some may not have the social capital to benefit from the resources available in the network. Others may simply be too poor to create new ties. This can make them susceptible to exploitation by the more powerful members. In addition, some network members may renege on their obligations, leaving weaker members without assistance. Or, they simply may choose not to provide assistance. Immigrant exploitation of co-ethnics is well documented (see Jordan and Duvell 2002; Tilly 1990). Tilly points out that distinctions can emerge between ethnic groups leading to 'a hierarchy of advantage and opportunity' (Tilly 1990, 93). As mentioned earlier, solidarity may not work due to state policies and regulations. For example, Collyer found that since some 'new migrants have effectively been 'priced out' of the social capital market in France by strict post entry migration restrictions, the strong ties of their family are of less value to them and the weaker ties become even more important' (Collyer 2003).

Some research has found that availability of social capital and embeddedness, and hence marginalisation or exclusion from networks, varies within and across groups and can no longer be assumed (Collyer 2003; De Luca 2003; Engberson 2001). In a paper presented to the 2003 Metropolis conference, David Ip reveals the conservative nature of 'social capital' as an analytical category when studying migrants who want to start up businesses. In research conducted in Australia covering Chinese groups from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, Ip has found that despite having much wanted financial capital to be invested in Australia, they are still discriminated against to the point where many are finding it impossible to set up their businesses. He claims that they may have all the social capital in their community, but ultimately they are still unable to set up businesses due to the discrimination of authorities and their culturally inappropriate rules (Ip 2003). Social capital, according to Ip, undermines a sharper political economy analysis that analyses racism in the Australian community and economy more generally. On the other hand, in her study of the Chinese in Milan, De Luca poignantly found that (De Luca 2003, 18-19):

> every person can manipulate his/her social networks in different ways in order to achieve his/her goals. Some seek their personal achievement mainly within the community, while others chose or are forced to build ties with the local population and institutions with the intention of improving their living conditions.

The significant implication to be taken from challenges to the solidarity thesis is the variation within and across groups as well as the effects of policy and of the economy. Furthermore, some research indicates that social networks no longer play the role of mediators based on 'bounded solidarity'. The role of social networks is clearly changing.

Social Networks: a critical approach

There are a number of theoretical currents in network research (see Meagher 2004). Although much of the research has been influenced by Granovetter's early work, some of it, functionalist in nature, claims that where public institutions and public morality are weak, informal networks more easily emerge. This research has a tendency to blame individuals. Other research concerned more with economic governance in organization theory suggests that networks are seen as a more efficient form of economic governance than either markets or bureaucratic hierarchies (Meagher 2004). A more critical approach relevant to our research is concerned with solidarity and embeddedness, which at the same time is concerned with problems of marginalisation and the position of weaker members, including the poor. Local and national socio-economic conditions, policies, differentiation in communities, as well as agency in everyday life need to be taken into account.

One approach that encompasses these analytical issues is the 'mixed embeddedness' approach (Kloosterman and Rath 2001) which has been adopted mainly for the study of ethnic small businesses and entrepreneurs though, conceptually, it is not too different from that suggested by others (Meagher 2004; Pfau-Effinger 2003; Portes 1995). Mixed embeddedness includes an analysis of the opportunity structure and of the level of agency and embeddedness in social networks. The opportunity structure can be examined from a number of angles. For example, they suggest a three-level approach that includes the national, regional and local contexts. In each of these contexts it is necessary to understand the broader economic, institutional and policy issues such as labour market policies and opportunities, and opportunities on the demand side of the market. At the local level, neighbourhoods provide the locus for the operation of social networks (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, 187):

> …neighbourhoods imply proximity and in this sense they constitute the obvious concrete locus for many social networks and hence for the nurturing of social capital that is so important in many migrant businesses. It is particularly at this level that the way actors are positioned in social networks (and their social embeddedness), and the way the markets they are active in are structured, come together and epitomise our concept of *mixed embeddedness.*

This has methodological implications for our study in that we need to examine the opportunity structures in the neighbourhood as well as in the broader area, particularly in the regional town and in the city. For example, one question we need to examine is – what labour markets do exist in the area; what paid work do people do in the area. In other words, what opportunity structures exist in the area? What council/government labour market policies exist for the area? What ethnic businesses exist in the area? What skills and qualifications do the migrant themselves have that are not accepted or used? Are their hierarchies of opportunities for different immigrant groups?

Conclusion

What do we mean by networks? On reviewing the above analyses and definitions, and particularly that of Boyd (1989, 661) the implication is that migrant social networks are typically migrant 'ethnic' networks. For our research we need to have a broader understanding of networks to include people outside the immediate ethnic group such as people from other ethnic groups, travel agents, smugglers; employers, landlords and other agents; and of course, family, friends and fellow country people; ethnic, religious and other support organisation. To assume that networks are exclusively 'ethnic' can be misleading (Duvell 2004).

There are a number of issues regarding networks that we need to keep in mind for our research. These are: the function of networks such transfer of

resources and information; gatekeepers to this flow; agents and markets; links between the micro and macro aspects of the migration process. We also need to consider the type of network, including factors such as multi-dimensional (lasting or temporary); strength/weakness; density (family networks overlaid by markets, religious, residential; multiplicity – more than one function (financial help as well as transfer of information).

This raises the question about our main unit of analysis – should it be the domestic unit (as Boyd (1989) suggests); should it be the individual (in a particular immigrant/ethnic group); or should it be the network (Tilly 1990)? Given that we are interested in paid informal employment, then we will probably go with individuals in a number of immigrant groups. The emphasis is not on the domestic unit, for then we would have to include unpaid informal work which is not an aspect included in our main aims. Nor is the emphasis on the network itself as the main unit of analysis but rather we are interested to see what they are and how networks facilitate immigrant work strategies and their involvement in informal paid employment.

In conclusion, a brief overview of the literature on networks reviewed in paper reveals number of theoretical currents:

- **Pro-solidarity thesis** –embeddedness (Granovetter 1985)) - the importance of interpersonal ties in economic relations and economic life - that we are just not economically rational beings but that networks and ties count; weak and strong ties also important – seminal work on the 'strength of weak ties', on the circulation of information and resources. Aligned to this debate is the notion of social capital – which I think is best defined by Portes and Landolt (2000) who suggests that resources themselves are not social capital. Rather the concept refers to an individual's *ability* to mobilize resources on demand. Here find research that supports the argument that strong

ties have positive outcomes in terms of ethnic solidarity and the circulation of information, resources etc.

- **Challenges to the solidarity thesis** made on basis of differentiation – class gender, place, race/ethnicity etc. Networks can be highly exploitative, marginalising and restrictive of various members; unfair redistribution of resources etc. Women, older members, the poor, ethnic minorities within larger groups etc can experience such problems.
- **Networks and markets –** expand notion of social networks to include 'informal market networks, market agencies and market mechanisms such as advertisements or buying and selling processes of information, false documents, and jobs'. These are sometimes seen as an advantage to ethnic social networks as they help to retain independence and invisibility/anonymity. Duvell shows how this works positively (upward mobility) for the Poles in the UK (de-regulated market) who have a looser set of connections than the Turks who have closer knit groups (Duvell 2004). This may include economic governance – organization theory and economic geography. Networks seen as more efficient forms of economic governance than either markets or bureaucratic hierarchies (Meagher 2004).
- **The role of immigrant agency** – immigrant agency in everyday life; networks as processes of resistance. Actor-oriented research – 1) Emphasis on agency rather than structure; 2) Looks at specific obligations, personal ties, community, neighbourhood etc; 3) Networks can be emergent structures (includes post-modernists such as Appudurai where more agency-oriented and ant-structuralist) (Meagher 2004).
- **A critical approach** - mixed embeddedness (Kloosterman, et al. 1999) – includes analysis of opportunity structure (broader economic, institutional, policy issues – our first aim – at national, regional and local level); agency and embeddedness. This critical approach questions the role of networks both in terms of solidarity and in terms

of differentiation; takes into account immigrant agency and resistance; analyses opportunity structures and policy issues.

All these factors will have an effect on immigrant integration. Immigrants adopt multiple forms of accommodation and resistance to dominant power relations at the urban local level. Typically, they will have already put in a large amount of effort to accommodate themselves into their new society, community and neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the most basic aspect of integration has to do with access to social equality and participation.

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[1] This is a draft review paper for the *Immigrant Work Strategies and Networks Project* by Ellie Vasta. This paper is concerned more with networks in order to work through relevant concepts and indicators that can inform the research. The aims of this project are 1) to examine the legal, policy, institutional and economic factors that lead immigrants into informal employment; 2) to investigate the immigrant work strategies (both informal and some formal employment) in various localities; 3) to explore how these economic and social work strategies are shaped or mediated by their social networks; 4) to analyse the effects of particular work strategies (ie informal employment) on settlement process and immigrant participation/integration.