

Undocumented Migration, Brokerage and Solidarity: an exploratory network analysis of the Brazil-US migration system

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In this paper we investigate the role that the intermediate agents (i.e. brokers) carry out in the international migration process of Brazilians to the USA. Considering that around 60% of the Brazilian immigrants in the US enter irregularly in the country (both undocumented and crossing border illegally), we aim to identify those "intermediate mechanisms" that facilitate the migration in irregular situation focusing the analysis on the migrants' personal networks. We propose the exploratory social network analysis applied to the case study of the Brazilian clandestine migration from Governador Valadares (GV), the main outflow urban area of Brazilian migrants in irregular situation in the US. We analyzed the so-called "industry of illegal migration" in order to identify the social actors that intervene (i.e. brokerage) in the migration process, and try to find out how their roles and functions determine the clandestine migrants' flows, the crossing strategies at the US-Mexico border, and the probability of success of the Brazilian immigrants in the US.

This study is the partial result of the research accomplished between 2005 and 2006 in Governador Valadares city (from now on, GV), state of Minas Gerais (Brazil). Here we present a first exploratory analysis of the relational data (i.e., structural) on Brazilian returned migrants from US. The research aimed to investigate the arrangements and strategies used by Brazilian migrants for the entrance in the US and their insertion in the American society. We tried to verify the association of the clandestine crossing with the "industry of illegal migration" based at the GV area, which not only involves agents and recruiters, but also forgers of documents (counterfeiters), local and international middlemen, as the Mexican *coyotes* and the Brazilian *consules* (the most important brokers in the process, as we shall see).

We hypothesize the existence of a migration system internally layered. On the top we should find the organization of the "institutional brokerage network" based upon market competition among hubs (*coyotes* and *consules*) and connectors (returned migrants and travel agents) that direct especially clandestine flows to US. On the base we should see the small world community composed basically of migrants and non-migrants intertwined personal networks.

Research Design

Empirical facts: 3 major empirical facts underline our research and objectives. **1)** In the last 25 years Brazilian flows to the US have increased substantially and at least 60% of migrants are undocumented – the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2005) estimates around 1,2 million immigrants in the US, being at least 700.000 in irregular situation; **2)** Researchers (Margolis, 1994; Sales, 1999; Soares, 2002) and public authorities (Illegal Emigration Commission of the Brazilian Congress, 2006; The Brazilian Federal Police, 2006) pointed to the existence of an "industry of illegal emigration" with its headquarters at the GV area. Such industry connects various social actors and

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institutions (brokers, migrants, community members, travel and labor agencies, etc) along extensive social networks in Brazil and the US; **3)** In GV area the “American way of life” is legitimated and idealized through collective representation in the everyday life. Thus, in the region has emerged a strong “culture of migration” to the US as the better way of making dreams come true, and such cultural setting supported the creation, organization and expansion of international migration networks.

Theoretical underpinnings: We assume 4 major theoretical underpinnings in order to frame our investigation. **1)** Migration is a social process (Massey et al. 1987), so displacements are projects in a very specific social context that implies migrants and non-migrants, regions and communities (in origin and destination) located in space and time; **2)** Migration is a collective project (Sayad, 1998) and although the displacements result immediately from individual decisions, we believe that one cannot conceive the migratory phenomenon as the product of isolated decisions. Migration implies displacement not only in the territory but also in the social space defined by collective actors; **3)** Migration can be operationalized as a system (Kritz & Zlotnik, 1992; Fawcett, 1987), and we assume that the empirical phenomenon of migration can be formalized in a system of relationships and positions. Such migration system implicates the existence of points [formally, vertexes or nodes] of origin and destination, and channels and paths [formally, arcs or ties] that define patterned structures [the topological nature of empirical displacements, Fazito, 2005 – cf. fig.1, for visual representation of Brazil-US migration system]; **4)** Migration is structured by social networks (Boyd, 1987; Tilly, 1990; Massey et al. 1998), and we assume that migrations, based on the previous premises, take place along the social networks that link the displacements to structural patterns of relationships between migrants and non-migrants in the origin and destination.

Purpose: we aim to investigate the social networks of international returned migrants and to identify how the presence and participation of intermediate agents and their personal connections in the communities might influence the individual’s chance of migrating illegally and to succeed abroad. [We expect in the near future to measure objectively such probability by the comparison of broker’s social capital inside each migrant personal network].

Hypothesis: Our hypothesis is that the migration process (specially the illegal migration) is organized by complex social networks among returned migrants, travel agents, recruiters, forgers and special middlemen (the main local and international brokers, respectively, the *consules* and the *coyotes*) that perform the connections of the migrants and the local community in the origin and destination. We consider that the travel agencies and returned migrants are responsible for the illegal emigration to the US. In the process of displacement those actors perform the exclusive intermediation (and therefore, they are structurally necessary) of the irregular migration. The international migration between Brazil and US would be consummated by the articulation of migrants' social networks (and their community ties) and the "institutional" social networks of "clandestine migration organizations" (incorporated by travel agents, returned migrants and professional middlemen), that enable people cross the border illegally and stay undocumented.

Methods and materials: We applied the Personal Network Model (McCarty, 2001) to the illegal migration case study of the GV area (representative part of the Brazil-US

migration system). We conducted a relational and conventional survey (quantitative) and ethnography (qualitative) in GV along one year. There were selected 50 returned migrants from US (residents in GV area at least in the last six months) that responded socio-demographic inquires about ego (the returned migrant herself) and their alters (i.e., those personal contacts in her egonetwork); and they also responded questions about their personal contacts in everyday life which composed the substrate of the main network matrix. Each migrant elaborated a personal square matrix 60X60, identifying the strength and nature of dyadic relations for all possible in her network. As pointed out McCarty (2001) such approach elaborates a sort of “cognitive map” of personal ties according to the purpose of inquiring. We asked questions about the personal migration project, people who shared strategies and resources, and mainly the contacts and arrangements used for crossing border safely (and illegally), including if used forged documentation and how (from who) have acquired it. We used the snowball sampling technique from 10 randomized starting household-seeds (only stratified by returned migrant’s sex) around the GV area. We built a database with categorical (16) and structural (17) variables. The Personal Network Model suggests that we may compare the topologies (i.e. the structural patterns in each network) against attribute data, and to find out causal associations among migrant’s profiles and the migration system studied (for instance, we could expect to differentiate structurally the clandestine migration system from the legalized one).

The case study exploratory analysis³

GV is a medium city in the southeast Brazil that has 240.000 inhabitants approximately, and possesses a regional economy strongly dependent of the resident immigrants' international remittances from US - according to Soares (1995), from 1980 to 1994 there were invested near US\$ 150 millions in the real estate section of the city through remittances. Starting in the middle of the 80's the emigration flows in direction to US proliferated and stabilized in the beginning of 2000 due to the American government politics of immigration contention. Since the beginning of 90's the North American diplomatic service gives special attention to the GV emigration, and from 1994 it started to hinder the emission of visas to those born in GV (Margolis, 1994; 2003).

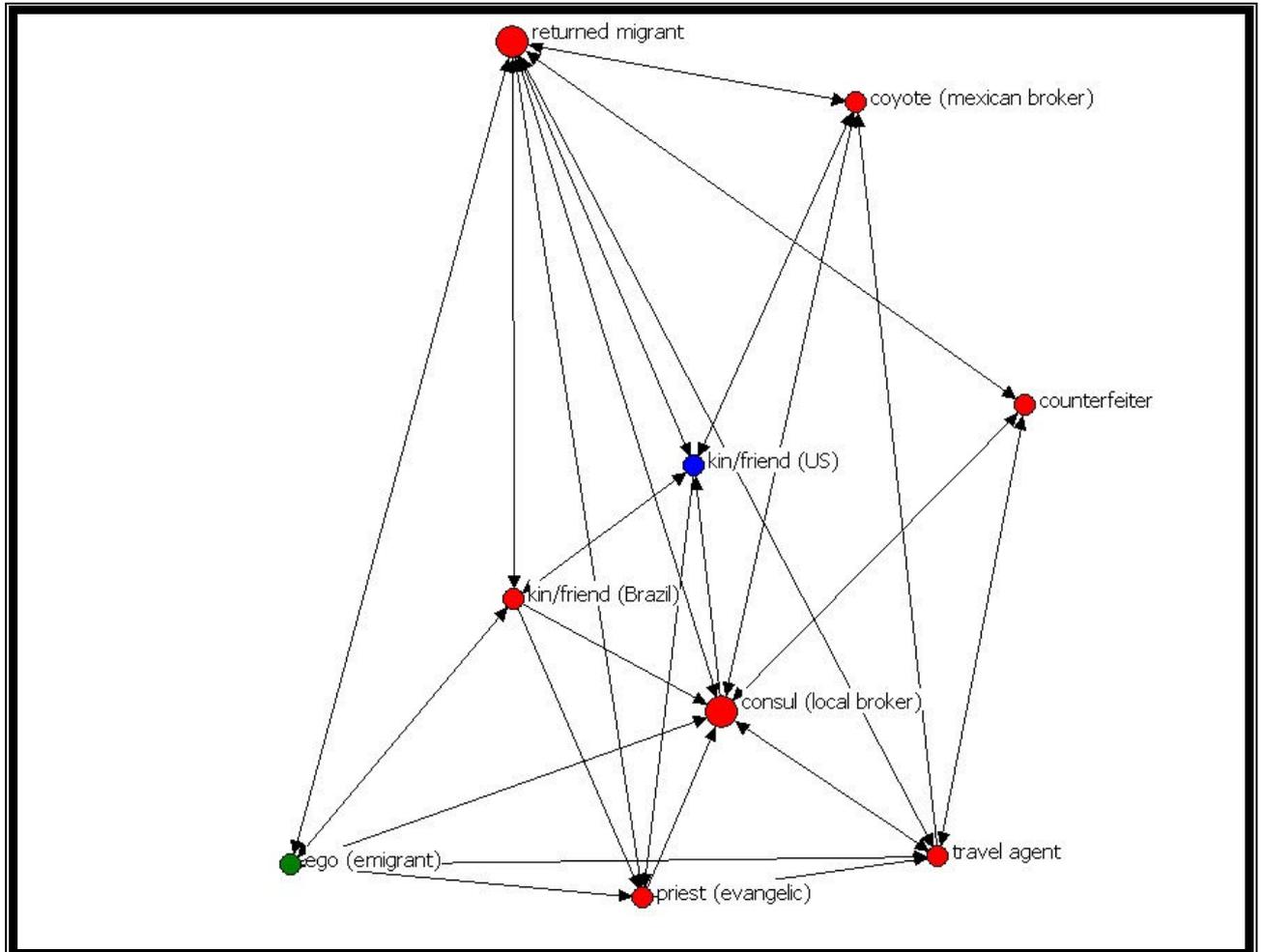
However, the outflows didn't stop and now GV represents the major pole of origin of the irregular emigrations of Brazilians to US (CPMI Brazilian Congress, 2006). After the intense demand for false documentation (from residence vouchers to passports), besides strategies of clandestine crossing, since the beginning of the 90's the "industry of illegal migration" has expanded and consolidated in GV area (Margolis, 1994; Soares, 2002). In 2004, the Brazilian Federal Police identified among the 1000 Brazilian deportees from US more than 300 GV residents and more originating from the GV area. In addition, the Federal Police still verified that more than 30% of all the deportees carried falsified documentation - many of those migrants didn't know that their documents were false.

We noticed along our field work what have been previously observed by other researchers (Sales, 1999; Soares, 2002; Goza, 2003), that the returned migrants have strong participation in the brokerage process and in the success of the illegal emigration. However, we believe that is essential to define how such returned migrants act through

³ Since we have elaborated our database very recently we shall present a brief exploratory analysis though very promising.

their personal networks: either if they perform casually through their family and friend relationships, or if they perform "institutionally" strengthening the instrumental aspect of their personal ties not only with kin and friends but also with "clients" and professional middlemen (like forgers of documents and international *coyotes*).

Figure 1: The Brazil-US Migration System Sociogram (from GV's migrant point of view)



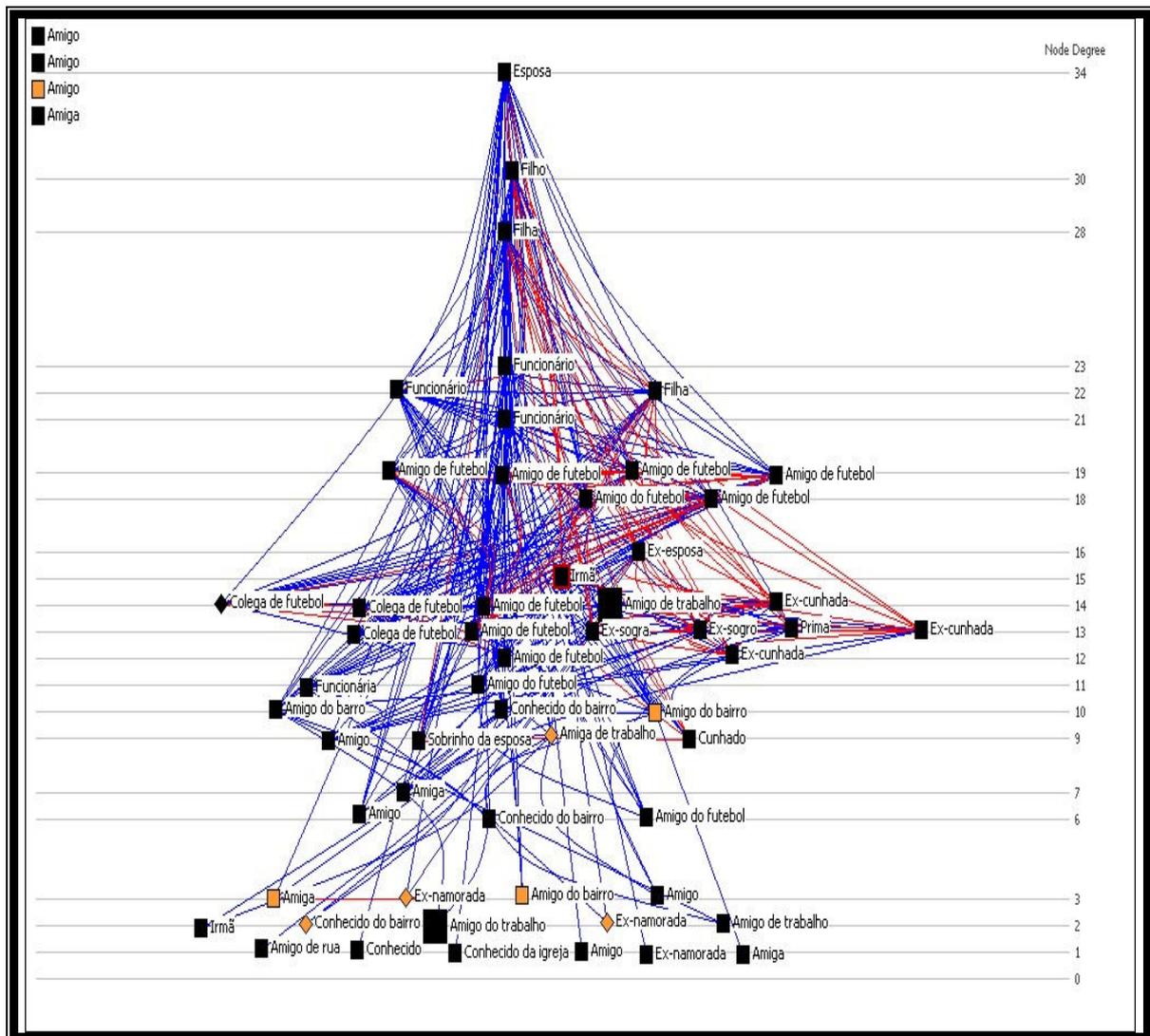
Source: Self-made

In the sociogram above we can see the structural representation of the Brazil-US migration system. It is important to note the position of the returned migrant and local broker roles, the most central roles in the network. This Graph-Theoretical Model only suggests the “social positions” and structural patterns of brokerage (Fazito, 2005), and does not mean the concrete individual interviewed in the research.

Instead, we can visualize below in the fig.2 an example of concrete personal network of a returned migrant – middle-aged white man – which is nested according to the centrality of his alters (this graph was elaborated with the software Egonet 1.0). In the top of the net we observe the returned migrant's wife with more than 50% of her contacts coincident with ego, also specifying the largest proximity (stronger ties) between ego and alter. Thus, in the graph bottom we found the most distant people related to ego (according to the ego personal evaluation). Besides, the illustration still

informs about the strength of the ties among alters (still according to the perception of ego), establishing the red lines for the strong ties (intense proximity), and blue lines for the weak ones. The yellow color nodes indicates alters' current residence in US, and the lozenge format indicates which alters received support from ego for the crossing border (besides documentation acquisition). Finally, the largest size of two nodes in this network (the larger squares) indicates intermediate agents in the personal egonetwork (in this case, distinctively two counterfeiter). The node labels still indicate the nature of relation with ego.

Figure 2: Returned Migrant Personal Network – Hierarchical Centrality



Source: Self-made

In the example of the personal network presented above we came to find out later and indirectly (through the comparison with other personal networks), that the returned migrant (ego) was in fact a local broker, in other words, a *consul*, although he has not declared it in the interview. Such fact suggests that larger brokerage incidence should exist among the returned migrant. Indeed, we should expect to find more brokers than was openly evidenced in the field. The ethnographical work should be more developed so that we could identify this situation objectively. Anyway, it is clear that the industry of illegal emigration from GV to US is powerful, performative and effective,

independent of the macro-politics implemented by the North American government for contention of the illegal immigration.

Exploratory Analysis Results

In this analysis we compared only those variables that showed statistical significance (chi-square and F/Kruskal-Wallis test) for the ANOVA. In the sample of returned migrants (n=50) we found 17 egos who admitted experience of irregular migration (IR) to US and 33 who admitted experience only regular migration (RR).

By and large, concerning the attribute variable analysis we see that there is a significant difference between IR and RR sex composition (see table 1). Those that experienced irregular migration to US are predominantly men, while women dominate among RR's. It was also demonstrated that the irregular ones are more characterized by the occupation in the third sector, which includes mainly service of domestic cleaners, retired and students. Finally, it is significant that the women tend to possess a personal network more integrated by strong ties and with family members, while the men diversify their personal contacts with friends at work and weaker ties (distant family contacts).

Concerning the structural variable analysis we can see that the regular migrants (RR) tend to maintain stronger and wider contacts with other returned migrants residents in Brazil and also Brazilian immigrants in the USA. Besides, such RR tend to possess personal networks with predominance of strong ties with family members. More sensitive measures of the network structure suggest that the RR possess personal networks with high density, centrality and closeness-in. This point toward a network specificity for RR's which is dense and concentrated like the Small World Model (Watts, 1999).

In opposition, we see the IR's networks which are similar to the Scale-Free Model (Barabasi, 2003), that is a very sparse network with few scattered nodes (like the brokers) which concentrate contacts widely and unevenly. Our analysis shows that the IR's have more weak ties in their personal networks, more contact with professional brokers (like *coyotes* and *consules*), and a diffuse network structure (i.e., prevalent weak ties of friendship and work, and less contacts with other Brazilian immigrants in the US). Finally, we observed that those IR's have a different timing experience abroad, remaining up 2 years in the US, while the RR's manage to stay longer.