Webs of compatriots: Relationship networks among immigrants

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Studies on migration have used the notion of social network to describe population flows between countries and the incorporation of immigrants into the new receiving context. In this case, the concept of a network tries to identify patterns of interaction between displaced individuals in order to determine, among other aspects, their influence on the following: the decision to emigrate, geographical relocation, family regrouping, the formation of communities of compatriots, the acculturation process, psychological adaptation, and social integration.

The two issues for which a wider body of literature has been produced regarding social networks among immigrant populations are migration chains and psychological adaptation:

1. Migration chains are displacement and relocation processes of networks that involve relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Chains have a bearing on the decisions that are made before undertaking international travel and on the subsequent settlement process. For instance, the location of friends and relatives conditions the choice of a destination, while the ripeness of the migration chain defines, to some extent, the structure of opportunities for interpersonal relationships (both in terms of maintaining contacts and developing new ones).

2. Social support networks provide resources that facilitate the adaptation process. Interpersonal relationships of newly arrived immigrants involve an exchange of information and of instrumental support that is useful for coping with an unfamiliar environment. At the same time, the availability of confidants and emotional support is a necessary condition for subjective psychological well-being. Social integration and support relationships promote health and help to cope with stressful circumstances.

As we can see, social support networks are useful for understanding the dynamics of international displacement, both in terms of migration flows and of the integration process in the places of destination. Support networks allow a combination of micro and macro perspectives, and they can be incorporated into the literature of migration chains through research on the psychological adaptation of immigrants.

This paper summarises part of our work concerning social support networks among immigrants. It combines a compilation of some of our most significant findings with the formulation of hypothetical arguments that are based on previous evidence.²

We shall develop three main points: first, we shall briefly present the concept of social support; second, we shall review—with immigrant populations—some dimensions of this concept, such as the multiplicity of providers, help exchanges, and the collective context of migration chains; finally, we shall propose a classification of

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² The research I refer to in this paper comes from studies conducted for over a decade. However, its content has particularly benefited from my most recent conversations with Neil Armitage, Ainhoa de Federico, Alexis Ferrand, Daniel Holgado, Carlos Lozares, Christopher McCarty, and José Luis Molina. I acknowledge all of them.
the types of support chains involving immigrants with less than ten years of residence in Spain.

However, before addressing each one of these points, we shall examine three concrete examples of personal networks affecting foreign residents in Spain. These three cases will serve as an illustration of immigrant network variations and an introduction for the object of our analysis in the following sections.

Rosa, Estela, and Max. Three cases of immigrants' personal networks

The description of personal networks tries to identify the structure of personal networks involving relatives, acquaintances, and friends. We shall now analyse briefly the cases of three foreign residents in Andalusia (Spain). The graphics reflect the strong bonds existing between the acquaintances and the providers of support mentioned by the interviewees. We took into account size, structure, composition, and multiplicity. Each graph follows these patterns:

1. The interviewee does not appear on the sociogram. What it shows is the relationships existing between the people the interviewee listed as friends, relatives, and acquaintances.
2. The ties between nodes indicate that two people are very well acquainted.
4. The size of each node reflects the number of different types of assistance provided to the interviewee by a particular tie. Therefore, the bigger nodes are the most important support providers.

We chose foreigners of three different nationalities who present variations regarding their time of residence in Spain and their living conditions. This will allow us to show the diversity of personal networks.

Case 1. Ecuadorian woman, 33 years old

Rosa is an Ecuadorian who has been living in Seville for three years. She lives in a flat which she shares with six other recent immigrants: her husband, who immigrated after she did, four compatriots, and a Bolivian woman. Rosa keeps regular contact with her mother and six children, who live in Ecuador, and, as she stated in her interview, she “gets help from her husband for everything.”

Her personal network is minimal, dense, and homogenous. With the exception of Maria—a Bolivian immigrant who works with her as a housecleaner and is also her flatmate—all the people she mentions are fellow citizens. The only provider of polyvalent support is her husband. More than half of her network consists of relatives who live in Ecuador, with whom she communicates by phone twice a month.

The formation of small groups of compatriots is one of the socialisation strategies followed by recent immigrants in their destination country. Association with other people who are in the same situation comes as a response to the need for human contact and sociability, while it also allows for the sharing of housing expenses.

However, it seems reasonable to think that migrating has had a negative effect on Rosa's access to support, seeing as she is surrounded by a small group of compatriots, and she has been forced to concentrate her requests for help on her husband.

A detailed description and justification of the procedure used for the study and representation of personal networks can be found in the literature cited in the bibliography.
Case 1. Rosa, an Ecuadorian who has lived in Seville for three years.

Case 2. Argentinean woman, 44 years old

Estela is from Argentina. She has lived in Cadiz for six and a half years. She works as a cook in a restaurant and is active in five community organisations. Almost half of the contacts she mentions are people from Spain: the restaurant's proprietor, four acquaintances from an organisation, and a friend.

The most significant part of her support network consists of three Argentinean female friends—Isabel, Beatriz, and Carola—her brother Adrián, and Maica, a Spanish friend. Estela's son occupies a central position within her personal network because he knows all of its members, although he is not an active support provider. She also stays in touch by phone and E-mail, about twice a month, with two brothers and a female friend, all of whom are Argentinean.

Regarding its composition in terms of nationalities, Estela's personal network is clearly different from Rosa's. Estela has developed relationships with Spaniards at her workplace—namely with her boss—and at a community organisation, where she has three acquaintances. In addition, she mentions a Spanish female friend. The work and associative spheres are environments where socialising with the local community can lead to friendships in the medium-term.

In the second place, Estela's personal network—in comparison with Rosa's—is also characterised by a greater distribution of support sources. While in Rosa's case the husband played the only important role, Estela has four friends and a brother who are polyvalent help providers in Spain.
**Case 2.** Estela, an Argentinean who has lived four and a half years in Cadiz.

**Case 3. Italian male, 36 years old**

Max is Italian and has been working with a European institution in Seville for five years. He lives with his girlfriend, who is also of Italian origin. His relationships are divided into three distinct groups: a group of Spanish friends from the fitness centre where he exercises, a group of Spanish friends from his workplace, and a group of four people with whom he keeps in touch in Italy.

Max's girlfriend plays a central, hinging role within his network, since she is connected to the three groups that form it and two of its key members. Three of Max's Spanish friends play a role as polyvalent help providers; in other words, they are synergetic ties. In addition, he keeps in touch with his parents and two Italian friends almost daily, through E-mail and telephone calls.

The composition of his personal network is a combination of Spaniards and Italians. But in this case, the fact that two thirds of the contacts are Spanish stands out. Moreover, the majority of the providers of polyvalent support are also Spanish. Except for his Italian girlfriend, the rest of his synergetic ties are Spanish friends from his fitness centre and workplace.

Max's personal network seems to reflect a well-developed process of social assimilation that shows strong integration in the local community. This can be seen both in the composition of his personal network (where there is a greater presence of Spaniards) and in the multiplicity of the providers (there are more polyvalent providers who are members of the receiving society).

Another interesting aspect is the network's open structure, which is divided into three well-defined areas: the group from work, the friends from the gym, and the parents.

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4 The term “immigrant” does not usually apply to residents from other European Union countries, as is the case here. However, the basic process of international displacement, acculturation, and psychological adaptation is the same. There are differences in the institutional conditions and the attitudes of the receiving population, among other issues, but it is a valid case for the purpose of our study and provides an interesting comparison.
and friends in Italy. In comparison with Case 1, which is a dense and cohesive personal network, Max's network shows a higher average betweenness.

**Case 3.** Max, an Italian who has lived for five years in Seville.

The three support networks we have presented show variations regarding size, composition, structure, and multiplicity of the support providers. We can summarise the differences as follows:

1. **Composition.** Rosa's personal network (Case 1) is the most homogenous in terms of composition, while the networks of Estela and Max are composed of compatriots and Spaniards in varying degrees. We can formulate the hypothesis that emigrating increases the opportunities for contact with members of other groups, which, somehow, makes changes in composition more likely, depending on the length of time spent in the new environment.

2. **Structure.** Rosa's personal network (Case 1) is the most dense and cohesive, while those of Estela and Max include subgroups that are more or less defined, with a greater average betweenness. We can suppose that the acculturation process implies composition changes that are also reflected in the structural properties of the personal network. This means that the indicators of average betweenness can, perhaps, serve as an empirical approach to the process of acculturation.

3. **Multiplicity.** The three cases present variations in the distribution of sources of support. On the one hand, in Rosa's network (Case 1), the availability of help is more concentrated in one individual (her husband), while in Estela's and Max's networks at least four polyvalent help providers stand out. We can also take into account how multiplicity is distributed between the different nationality groups. In that case, Max (Case 3) is the one with the widest distribution of providers across groups, which shows his greater level of integration in Spanish society. We can formulate the hypothesis that the process of social assimilation within a given population group is reflected in the multiplicity between players from
different social groups. Therefore, the proportion of polyvalent ties with Spaniards perhaps can be used as an empirical approach to the process of social assimilation into the local community.

4. **Size.** There isn't much difference in the size of the three cases studied. The personal networks of Rosa, Estela, and Max contain 13, 14, and 16 players, respectively. However, differences can be observed within the core support providers. The number of ties that provide three or more types of help are 1, 5 and 4, respectively. Despite the diversity of personal circumstances, we can hypothesise that emigration is a process of rebuilding the personal network, whose size is recovered, somehow, depending on the length of time spent in the new environment (and after a clear initial decrease in the available support resources).

As we have seen, support networks can be examined from different points of view, and they present different dimensions that are susceptible of analysis. Before going into further detail regarding immigrants' social support networks, we shall clarify the concept of social support.

**Social support networks**

The term *social support* applies to behaviours, individuals, transactions, and social systems. The concept includes *multiple dimensions of social relationships*. Therefore, it becomes necessary to define it by separating its specific components, as we shall proceed to do. The conceptual outline we shall follow is shown in Figure 1.

One of the most basic distinctions involves differentiating between social integration, the structure of the social network, and the relational contents:

1. **Social integration** is connected to the mere existence and quantity of social ties. In other words, this dimension distinguishes solitude and isolation from different levels of integration. It can be assessed by taking into account the size of the network, the number of friends and relatives, the contact frequency, or the number of important roles played by an individual.

2. The **structure of the social network** refers to the distribution and organisation of the social ties. The overall structure of the relationships can be represented using indicators for the density, centrality, and grouping of players. It can also use indirectly information on the composition, reciprocity, and multiplicity of relationships.

3. Finally, **social support** is one of the functional contents of social relationships. Social support refers to positive aspects of relationships—namely, instrumental help and the provision of affection or information—which can potentially contribute to promote psychological well-being and ease stress. On the other hand, relationships can also be the source of quarrels, worries, and social control functions.

Integration, structure, and functional contents overlap to some extent. The structural characteristics of the network presuppose social integration. Likewise, support—or any of the other functional contents—presupposes structure and social integration. When we use the concept of “social support networks,” we generally refer to the subgroup within the individual's personal network that provides information, instrumental help, and emotional support. As a result, the functions, structure, and integration levels are simultaneously involved.
There is a second distinction regarding the cognitive and behavioural aspects of support. *Perceived support* is cognitive in nature and is related to the individual's subjective assessment of the functionality of his close social environment. One way of assessing it is by asking the individual about the people he considers to be available in case he needs help, advice, or information. On the other hand, *received support* is behavioural and is related to help behaviours that have actually taken place. For example, we can quantify the material help a person has received during the previous month.

In addition, within perceived support we can differentiate the dimensions that are purely cognitive in nature—such as the perception of availability of support—from those that also include an element of assessment on the individual's part, such as the level of satisfaction, appropriateness, and sufficiency assigned to his immediate interpersonal environment.

In brief, we have identified at least five different concepts that can be addressed separately for analytical purposes: (1) social insertion; (2) the structure of the social network; (3) help exchanges (that is, the support received and the support lent); (4) the perception of the available support, and (5) the assessment of the appropriateness of the support. Obviously, social support involves all five concepts. However, conceptual nuances are necessary to refine and improve the research on this subject.

Let us consider momentarily the case of immigrants. What are the consequences of international displacement? Is there a decrease in the level of social connectivity after relocation? Does migrating have a different effect on the structure and the functions of support? How does the fact of relocating to another country affect the exchanges of help and the perception of available support? Are ties kept with the place of origin? How are social networks reconstructed in the new environment? What changes can be observed in the composition of personal networks?
The different dimensions of social support help us understand the changes experienced by immigrants regarding their interpersonal relationships. Let us now review what we know on this subject.

Research on immigrants' support networks

The reconstruction of international immigrants' social support networks has been described by paying close attention to changes occurring in their size and composition. In some cases, the cultural peculiarities of certain displaced ethnic groups have also been studied. The three most common topics of research are as follows:

1. Assessing the impact of displacement on the amount of available support;
2. Verifying the primarily family-oriented composition of the networks of individuals who come from traditional cultures, and
3. Detailing the changes that the immigrant's personal environment experiences over time in the new receiving context.

In the first place, emigrating seems to affect the size of the support network. Recent immigrants have a lower level of help availability than the local population. Moreover, this fact can be observed within different populations and contexts. Documented examples include Mexican and Central American immigrants in the United States, Asian immigrants in the United Kingdom, Latin American and African immigrants in Spain, and even domestic seasonal migrations within the United States. This is an important finding, seeing as the size of the support network is a fundamental dimension that has important repercussions on the adaptation process and is interconnected with all the other support variables. We shall address this matter later in the essay.

The second line of research reveals the existence of support networks consisting primarily of family members. In many of the immigrants' home societies, an extended family structure is quite common. This is true of the Asians, Latin Americans, and Africans who have taken up residence in the United States and Europe. Support behaviours among immigrants—such as providing housing and helping to find employment—sometimes reflect the reciprocal economic obligation existing between members of an extended family. The comparison between Mexicans and Anglo-Saxons in the United States shows that the former have more relatives and fewer friends in their personal networks, while they also develop a greater contact frequency with relatives. This becomes especially significant if we take into account the great impact that close relatives have on the quality of life of immigrants.

However, networks of kinship partly respond to the structure of opportunities immigrants find within the receiving context. For example, a greater or lesser family composition seems to depend on the time of residence, the degree of family regrouping, the migrating generation, and the size of immigrant communities of compatriots, among other factors. This is why it is necessary to take into account changes that take place over time, which is the third issue that concerns us.

Generally speaking, the support network grows gradually through time. During the first settling stage, the personal environment tends to be small, mostly consisting of relatives and compatriots, and there is a high contact frequency with both groups. Later on, members of the receiving society begin to enter the network. Therefore, it seems

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5 Whereas studies performed on the general population yield on average between 10 and 11 providers, in different immigrant populations the average results vary between 4 and 8 providers of social support.
that as the support network increases in size, its composition becomes more diverse. Here are some examples that illustrate this process.

Within the population of Polish immigrants newly arrived to the United States, a curious phenomenon has been observed involving a segmentation of the instrumental and emotional functions within the personal network. The main source of emotional support consists of other compatriots from the same migratory wave, while instrumental and informative support is provided by Polish immigrants who preceded them. This type of “segmentation” is not common among the general population, where people usually have a close circle of relatives and friends who provide all types of help. During the first stages of relocation, immigrants need more help and have fewer opportunities for receiving it. At that time, relationships with other compatriots are crucial. Immigrants from the same wave provide primarily emotional support, partly because they lack material resources that can be exchanged with their equals. As an alternative, tangible support is obtained from compatriots from previous waves, partly because they have less in common with them and, therefore, are less appropriate sources of emotional support.

Personal situations develop very differently, but after this first stage, in which help requests are concentrated on a small group of compatriots, the usual dynamics involve the expansion and increase of personal contacts. In the case of female immigrants in Canada, three successive stages have been observed. First, contacts are limited to the closest circle of relatives, and there may be some relationships of intimate friendship. In the medium term, this reduced circle becomes insufficient to respond to the women's needs, so relationships expand to include other members of the ethnic and religious community, who share the same values and with whom it is easier to communicate. Finally, relationships with members of the receiving society develop, lessening the immigrant’s feelings of segregation and allowing him to have a confidant outside the groups in which he usually participates, thus maintaining his sense of privacy.

The same phenomenon can be verified among Salvadoran refugees in Canada. Since there is not a wide, structured, Salvadoran community, the newcomer's social life is practically limited to the family. Taking part in sports and other leisure activities allows them to then establish contact with other compatriots. Relationships with Canadians begin to develop at the workplace and are easier for those who are fluent in the language.

The personal network is, consequently, a dynamic system: as we have seen, it is transformed by the relocation process, giving rise to a new map of relationships that consists of a mixture of members of the former network, people who have moved together (often the family group), and new members who enter the network when the situation allows it. However, while this new environment is configured, some needs can remain temporarily unmet. We are thinking, for example, of the case of emigrating families: each one of its members can miss part of the personal network they have left behind and, at the same time, they may feel overwhelmed by the resulting increase in help requests coming from their relatives. Family regrouping and the incorporation of members of the local society are two basic stages in the reconstruction and reorganisation of the personal network.

This representation agrees, in general terms, with our research regarding support networks among African and Latin American immigrants in Spain. Table 1 summarises some of the most relevant data from the studies we have conducted over the past 13 years. Although in most cases they are immigrants who have recently arrived to Spain, some polls conducted in Argentina are also included.
The average size of the support networks varies between 4 and 11 ties, with a theoretical average of 7.7 providers. Compatriots make up approximately two thirds of the total support network, despite fluctuations that are characteristic of specific populations. These support networks show a smaller size than those resulting from polls conducted with the general population, which include approximately 10 members on average. They are also rather homogenous networks, with a predominant presence of other immigrants of the same nationality. However, contact areas with the receiving population are observed, which introduce compositional diversity.

Immigrants' support networks are affected after their journey. In the first place, there is a reduction in the availability of active support providers. The most common scenario is to have a small group of relatives and compatriots, ranging between 4 and 7 individuals. This initial limitation regarding contact opportunities leads immigrants to get the most out of their available resources. For example, small groups of immigrants of the same nationality, who face a similar situation, are formed. In addition, help requests are concentrated in the available ties, which increase their multiplicity. For instance, a close friend, a sibling, or a partner may cover all the needs when other contacts are scarce. As a result, the support structure is often not sufficient. There may be cases in which immigrants have to depend only on one provider to help them with all the problems of everyday life while, in other cases, needs may be left unmet.

The psychological adaptation of immigrants can be described as the reconstruction of their active support networks. Generally speaking, there is a gradual increase that is concomitant with a more balanced distribution of support functions among the available providers. Two of the phenomena that make a decisive contribution to this development are family regrouping and integration into the local community. Both have an affect on the size and distribution of multiple ties within the immigrant's personal network. In the following sections, we shall try to explain these changes from different points of view. First, we shall focus on the collective level of migration chains.

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<td>Maya Jariego et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Argentineans (n = 67), Ecuadorians (59), Germans (37) and Italians (37) living in Seville and Cadiz.</td>
<td>Size: 10.74, Composition includes two thirds of compatriots. Size varies between 8.5 in the case of Ecuadorians and 14.8 in the case of Germans.</td>
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<td>Tonón and Maya Jariego (2006)</td>
<td>Moroccans in Spain (n = 59); Paraguayans (25) and Bolivians (19) in Argentina.</td>
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<td>Maya Jariego (2003)</td>
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<td>Maya Jariego, Martínez and García (1999)</td>
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<td>Martínez, García, Maya Jariego, Rodríguez and Checa (1996)</td>
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Migration chains
The changes we have just described regarding personal networks are part of a wider process by which geographical relocation affects populations of individuals. We could say, metaphorically speaking, that social networks “migrate” from one place to another. This phenomenon has important consequences. For example, chains can condition the evolution of personal networks in different ways:

1. Immigrants belong to very dynamic relational communities that are undergoing change, since they are composed of individuals who are reconstructing their personal networks. Therefore, a great level of relational instability within the community can be expected. We can hypothesise that the rate of change in immigrants' personal relationships is higher than that of the communities of origin and destination. This would imply a more unstable relationship system, especially in the first stages of relocation.

2. The size and organisation of the expatriate community determine the structure of opportunities for establishing new contacts. For instance, the situation of a small group of pioneers trying to carve a niche for themselves cannot be compared to the situation of immigrants who are part of mature chains and come into a community that is already established. We can assume that the number of compatriots in the place of destination has an effect on the size and composition of the personal networks of newly arrived immigrants.

3. The level of family regrouping can condition the distribution of support functions. Emigrating generally implies a full or partial separation from the closest circle of family and friends, a group that normally plays a central role in providing social support. Quite frequently, individuals place an important part of their support expectations on the resources that are available to them, as a substitute for their family. However, as family regrouping takes place, these functions can revert to the closest relatives.

As we can see, from the point of view of migration chains, emigrating can be regarded as a process of relocation and incorporation into the social network of the immigrant minority within a wider, more structured, receiving community. This entails changes in the relationships inside and outside the migrating group, which are central for understanding the evolution of individual resettling.

We look into migration chains in order to understand the decision to emigrate, the spreading of emigration within the social structure, the psychological adaptation, the insertion into the minority of compatriots and into the wider receiving community, and the patterns of social segregation. The evolution of an immigrant population is related, to some extent, to the evolution of its migration chains. The Indian Sikh community in Great Britain is a good example. Although this is a very strict community in terms of its religious practices, which include the interdiction of consuming alcohol, during the first settling stages there were many cases of alcoholism. However, as the community grew with the arrival of new compatriots, it recovered its social control patterns, which significantly reduced the number of new cases.

We can also illustrate this issue with our own data. Figure 2 shows an example of chain family regrouping. It comes from a study we conducted regarding Indian immigrants in Argentina. Dhan Singh is the father of one of our key second-generation informants who settled in Salta. Dhan arrived to Argentina by ship in 1937; he disembarked illegally in the port of Buenos Aires and moved to Rosario de la Frontera,

6 With Lía de la Vega, Universidad del Salvador (Buenos Aires, Argentina).
in the Salta province. He is the forerunner of six subsequent displacements, which is why Tara, his cousin, refers to him as a kind of “patriarch” who has great influence on the rest of the family. Dhan successively facilitated the migration of a brother (Gurdial), a cousin (Ardit), and a friend (Jiwa). Cousin Ardit also brought a brother (Tara) who, in turn, brought his cousin (Sukhdev). Finally, after the family arranged the wedding, Sukhdev travelled to India to get married and take his wife (Baljeet) to Argentina. The regrouping process spans 37 years from the beginning until Baljeet’s arrival.

It is easy to infer differences in the adaptation process, for example, between Dhan and Sukhdev. The former was the pioneer of this family chain. He arrived in Argentina at a time when there were hardly any other established compatriots. Therefore, he had to create his own reception environment and probably had many opportunities for social assimilation with Argentineans. On the contrary, Sukhdev was received by a relatively large family group. In addition, he also had access to the indirect relationships his relatives had formed over time, which facilitated his process of social integration. In other words, he joined a group of relatives and compatriots, which in turn was surrounded by the social fabric they had woven over decades.

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** Family regrouping chain in a group of Indian immigrants in Argentina.

The very same dynamics were persuasively summarised by a Haitian informant when we spoke about his personal relationships in Seville: “Making a new network of friends and acquaintances is not enough. The difference is that I don’t have access to the networks my grandparents wove. That’s being an immigrant.” Indeed, geographical relocation not only alters the closest circle of support; it also changes how the individual fits into the social structure of reference. Individuals are generally aware of the changes in their closest environment. Most of them actively try to retrieve and maintain their contacts, while they develop new ones. However, they are unaware of the changes that are experienced by the social structures of the places of origin and destination through the migration chains. In other words, the social structure has subconscious effects that are not taken into account by the psychology literature on social support. However,
these effects provide us the framework to understand the dynamics of personal networks.

**Support exchanges**

Instrumental and expressive resources flow through the networks. From their personal relationships, immigrants obtain company, advice, money, and emotional support, along with many other types of support. Each individual is, at the same time, a provider and a receiver of support. Therefore, social support may be construed as a dynamic of exchange between social players.

The different factors that play a role in support transactions are the availability of resources for the exchange, the appropriateness of the resources for the existing needs, and the dynamics of reciprocity and endogamy in the relationships:

1. Recent immigrants tend to associate in small groups of compatriots. Frequently all the members of the groups find themselves in a similar situation of need. Sometimes they lack resources to share, especially when it comes to material and instrumental aspects. However, these groups are very valuable during the adaptation period. They guarantee a basic level of support at a time when available help has been reduced considerably. They also allow people who are going through a similar situation to share their experiences of acculturation, including the stressful ones.

2. The nature of the exchanges depends on the type of help. Instrumental help is based on the possession of specific, tangible resources, while in the case of psychological support it may often be enough to simply be available. Also, companionship and the expression of personal feelings can be implicit in other forms of support. However, in both cases there often exists an expectation of reciprocity within the relationship, even if it is not specific to the type of resource that is shared.

3. Moreover, exchanges are limited by the **homophily** of relationships. There is a certain tendency to socialise with people who share common characteristics. For example, groups are formed on the basis of age, gender, ethnic group, and type of work. However, these associates generally also tend to be similar in terms of the type and amount of resources they possess, so they reinforce pre-existing social roles and hinder social mobility.

Let us consider an example of the dynamics of support exchange. It comes from a comparative study of Paraguayan Bolivian immigrants in Argentina and Moroccan immigrants in Spain. Figure 3 shows the levels of support lent and received during the previous month in terms of eight different types of help.

In the first place, we can see that psychological support is exchanged more frequently than instrumental support, and on average it also shows a more balanced outcome between what is contributed and what is received. Giving money or lodging are the least frequent behaviours. In contrast, the most frequent ones consist of sharing concerns and showing willingness to be available when needed.

If we look at the results as a whole, it seems that support exchanges have some connection with level of family regrouping. Both the support lent and the rate of exchange are higher for those whose relatives had immigrated prior to them than for those who acted as pioneers or simply did not have other emigrants in their family.

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7 With Graciela Tonón, Universidad de Lomas de Zamora, and Universidad Nacional de La Matanza (Buenos Aires, Argentina).
Figure 3. Support exchanges between Paraguayans and Bolivians in Argentina, and Moroccans in Spain

This general description is valid for the three studied groups. However, differences between groups can also be observed. For example, Moroccans declare having received significantly more financial help and more attention to their personal problems than the other two groups. Within this group, the patterns of reciprocity are also different, as is shown in Figure 4. The ratio reflects the relationship between the levels of support lent and received. In all the behaviours, the help provided is greater that the help received, and the magnitude of the difference between the two is comparable. The lowest reciprocity level occurs in the case of house chores, lending money, and actively listening to problems.

The Moroccan group is the one with the worst ratio of support behaviours. Although the level of support provided is comparable to the other groups, the level of support received is higher. This difference is also confirmed in the levels of instrumental and psychological support received. In any event, the ratio is particularly negative regarding instrumental help. The Moroccans have negative ratios in the two types of support, and the Paraguayans only in what concerns instrumental support. The Bolivians, on the other hand, have positive ratios in both categories.

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8 Ratio = support lent / support received. The ratio is negative when, overall, more is given than received. In this case we are analysing reciprocity by types of support, although the respondents probably do not make this distinction themselves. The perception of exchanges is generally more global than analytical.

9 Except in the case of companionship, which is, by definition, a reciprocal behaviour.
Figure 4. Reciprocity of support exchanges in three groups of immigrants.

Through this example we have shown that the type of resources, expressive and instrumental, is useful in characterising the type of relationship that takes place. Ties vary according to the quantity and type of exchanged resources. Nonetheless, the specific exchange patterns are determined, to a large extent, by the context of the relationship. The structure of opportunities and the availability of resources limit the possibilities of giving and receiving help. As a matter of fact, this is one of the clear phenomena that can be observed among recent immigrants.

**Multiplicity of support providers**

Multiplicity refers to the amount of types of help lent by each provider. For example, we may seek out certain people only when we need advice. However, others act as confidants, lend money and, at the same time, provide instrumental help. Both cases show different levels of intensity, frequency, or “strength” of the tie, and they reveal the existence of different types of relationships.

The structure of the personal network normally comprises a small core of relatives and intimate friends. These are synergetic relationships, which fulfil different types of needs and give rise to a group that is relatively stable through time. This core is formed by providers with the highest level of multiplicity. Around them there is a wider group of specialised ties, which originate weaker relationships that change more easily.

Is this description valid when applied to immigrant populations? Does displacement affect the distribution of multiplicity within the personal network? In the study mentioned earlier regarding Indian immigrants in Argentina, we drew a typology of the ties that provide help. First, we applied a social support interview that examines 6 different types of help: confidant support, material support, advice, social reinforcement, instrumental help, and companionship. Then, we systematically analysed the various combinations of types of support shown by providers as a whole. We specifically examined the 6 types of combinations in 2,226 providers mentioned by the respondents.

This means that there are up to 64 possible combinations, if we take into account the presence or absence of each one of the categories. For example, one tie provides advice and social reinforcement; another one provides advice, social reinforcement, and

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The *Arizona Social Support Interview Schedule*, by Manuel Barrera.
company. In principle, we could find up to 64 different types of ties. However, a much smaller number was necessary to have an overall view. As we can see in Table 2, only 11 types of ties cover practically three fourths of the 2,226 providers analysed:

1. More than half provide only one type of specific support (52.2%), company being the more common resource.
2. 12.71% of them reach the status of synergetic tie, showing availability for practically any type of support request.
3. Finally, it is of interest to point out that a small group of partners or companions (9.07%), provide different combinations of emotional support, social reinforcement, and company.

In other words, there are three well-defined levels of multiplicity in the relationship, which correspond to the same number of types of relationships, according to the type of help they provide: specialised contacts that provide a specific type of support; companions who share emotional and informative support; and synergetic ties that reflect more intimate, polyvalent relationships.

Leaving other considerations aside, in the hypothetical support network of an Indian immigrant in Argentina, 7 of 10 ties provide specialised support. In addition, the network includes a small core of synergetic ties, whose functions are reinforced by a reduced segment of companions. In this case, we are referring to a group that includes first- and second-generation members with long average times of residence, whose description may be quite similar to what we would find in the general population. Among more recent immigrants we can probably observe, in addition to the reduction of their network, a greater concentration of functions in the available ties.

Table 2. The 11 most frequent multiplicity configurations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of help</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Accumulated percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company provider</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>659</td>
<td>29.60</td>
<td>29.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergetic tie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>9.88</td>
<td>39.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>45.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material help</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>132</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>51.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive feedback</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>57.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companion 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>61.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergetic tie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>64.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companion 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>67.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice provider</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>69.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidante support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>72.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companion 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>73.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Types of help: A: emotional help or the expression of personal feeling; B: material or tangible help; C: advice or information; D: positive feedback or social reinforcement; E: physical or instrumental help; and F: company or social participation.

Multiplicity gives us an insight into the evolution of interpersonal relationships and the distribution of support functions, both on an individual and on a group level. We can assume that relationships increase their multiplicity through time. In other words, a support provider is a specialised contact before he or she becomes a companion with whom we share company and advice. With time, this companion can also become a polyvalent friend who provides synergetic support. From this point of view, personal relationships develop in successive stages that involve greater depth and scope. The lifespan of a relationship—despite its advancements, stagnations, and setbacks—follows a path in which a progressive exchange of new types or resources takes place,
going from a specialised relationship framework to the sharing of a variety of social situations. Suppose a workmate becomes a friend. In the transition from one type of relationship to another, the exchange of contents increases, going from work-related conversations to personal advice, or to providing help, for example, in moving to a different house. In addition, the relationship spreads to different contexts: it outgrows the workplace and may lead to pleasurable meetings at home or on a football pitch.

However, we all have a limited sphere of relationships that is connected to specific space-time coordinates. We have a small number of polyvalent ties that responds to a logic of distribution in support functions. When a relationship acquires more depth, another one may possibly lose its relevance. We can formulate this as a hypothesis of competition between all the active multiple relationships. For example, when a teenager starts university, his relationships of friendship change, and new ones appear within his closest, most intimate circle. Some childhood friends may remain latent, outside the core of active exchanges. Although the relationship with the childhood friend may be retrieved at any moment and become active when a crisis arises, it is no longer part of the privileged group of active multiple support providers. Therefore, multiplicity is a good tool to determine the part of the personal network in which exchanges of support are taking place at a specific point in the individual's life.

Finally, we can also address the collective distribution of multiple ties. Just as we spoke of the distribution of support relationships within the personal network, we can also speak of the distribution of multiplicity on a collective level. We can construe multiple relationships as part of a collective market of social support. Spending time with some individuals implies not spending time with others, unless we think in terms of group friends and acquaintances but, once again, spending time with certain groups implies not spending time with others. Groups or pioneer immigrants can form cohesive groups as a result of the scarcity of resources and the limitation of opportunities. However, as the community of compatriots grows, the development of multiple relationships introduces a disaggregating component, which results in the formation of different groups.

Displacement implies, for immigrants, that many of their relationships change their status or remain latent. During the relocation effort, support functions are concentrated in the (often meagre) available resources. Naturally, it takes time to develop new polyvalent relationships. However, as family regrouping takes place, a new reorganisation of the support functions develops, determining which ties are multiple and which aren't.

**Types of immigrants' personal networks**

As we have verified in this paper, immigration is a form of ecological transition. Geographical relocation leads to changes in the size, composition, and structure of immigrants' personal relationship systems. The dynamics of personal networks are a reflection of the psychological adaptation to the new environment. Therefore, the systematic analysis of social support constitutes a useful tool for describing an individual's level of acculturation and adaptation. In particular, drawing a typology of networks is an efficient strategy for classifying immigrants according to their progress in the new environment. It allows for the identification of the most frequent constellations of support, which, in turn, reveal the individual's condition of adaptation.

This was the approach we used to examine the situation of African and Latin American immigrants in Spain. Using five different samples, we applied to each one a cluster analysis of their personal networks, then integrated them into a single
classification through the hierarchical cluster. Table 3 summarises the resulting typology.

Support networks vary in size and composition over a continuum that renders them broader and more heterogeneous. Networks grow from the endogroup toward the exogroup, from the family toward friends, and from compatriots toward members of the receiving society. Regrouping and the incorporation of Spaniards are the two basic network development strategies.

The most frequent configurations are made up of relatives and compatriots, and they have a comparatively small or medium size. Insufficient support structures occur more often among women, especially when they are divorced or widowed, in which case they coincide with a significantly higher persistence of depression. Higher levels of social assimilation occur among young, single, Latin American male subjects. Their networks are broader and include more contact with Spaniards.

### Table 3. Toward a general typology of immigrants' personal networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of personal network</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small network with a majority of compatriot friends</td>
<td>4-6 Providers. Primarily fellow immigrants</td>
<td>Most prevalent type among recent immigrants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium-size network of relatives and compatriots</td>
<td>7-10 Providers</td>
<td>Second most prevalent type.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ties that traverse borders**

International migrations put in contact population groups from different countries. Immigrants are links between separate social structures, and the exchanges of population flows bring different geographical areas closer. Therefore, immigration implies in itself a change in relationship patterns that makes the world *smaller*, to the extent that it mediates between different relational communities. From a systemic point of view, countries and population groups become interrelated through such factors as the displacement of individuals, visits, the exchange of goods and services, financial transfers, and communication flows. The same approach can be used regarding personal networks.

The search for support can cross national borders. For example, the family support systems of Caribbean immigrants in the United States have great depth, scope, and frequency, despite international dispersion. In some cases, the phrase “internationalisation of kinship” is even used. This term refers to the geographical dispersion of the members of a family unit, particularly when the closeness of the unit is

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11 This typology of support networks refers to immigrants who have lived in Spain less than 10 years (for a detailed description of the procedure, see Maya Jariego, 2003c). It is based on five studies involving immigrants of Latin American and African origin. Classifications were made using the following criterion variables: (1) size; (2) the presence of relatives, and (3) the presence of Spaniards. Finally, the 17 categories from previous classifications were integrated using the centroids of the three variables mentioned above.
maintained through constant communication, trips, and exchanges of goods and services.

However, in our research we have found that individuals have a limited ability to maintain active transnational bonds. Particularly during the early stages of relocation, the personal network undergoes significant changes regarding its psychological operation. In addition, ties that remain in the country of origin, with whom contact is kept, change the roles they play within support networks. Namely, the contact frequency and the type of support they provide are affected to such an extent that, occasionally, they may become latent ties. This does not mean that we wish to interpret the transformations experienced by immigrants in terms of a deficit or a lack. Our goal is to show the changes brought about by the transition between different socio-geographical realms, a transition that has far-reaching effects on the subject of our study.

International migration leads to changes in social integration, in the structure of the social network, and in the support functions that result from them. Individuals move into a community where they have a weaker structural integration and greater relational mobility. This change is concomitant with a lower availability of help and a higher concentration of the support functions.

The process of psychological adaptation is reflected in the changes occurring in the personal network. Its size, structure, and functional dynamics are reconstructed through time. Support networks grow gradually through the association with compatriots, family regrouping, and contacts with Spaniards. Acculturation alters the composition of the personal network by increasing its heterogeneity, while it also affects the level of structural cohesion, since well-defined groups of players appear more frequently. All of these changes lead to a reorganisation in the distribution of support functions, which recovers a greater balance between the providers involved.

However, when individuals emigrate to another country, the relationships that attended to their needs before their departure do not disappear. Their nature is transformed, and this must have some bearing on the structure of their personal network, for life always leaves its mark.
Bibliography


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