

Chapter 2

The Direct and Indirect Role of Migrants' Networks in Accessing Diverse Labour Market Sectors: An Analysis of the Weak/Strong Ties Continuum



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2.1 Introduction

There has long been debate about the different ways in which social networks may be utilised to access labour markets (Portes, 1998; Haug, 2008; Behtoui, 2007; Lancee & Hartung, 2012; Toma, 2016; Keskiner & Crul, 2017). Are networks more relevant for low skilled jobs than for high skilled and professional occupations (Sanders et al., 2002; Harvey, 2008; Gericke et al., 2018)? Are strong ties more useful for certain jobs, while weak ties are more relevant for other kinds of jobs (Granovetter, 1973; Geys & Murdoch, 2010; Patulny, 2015; Ryan, 2011)?

Research on the role of co-ethnic ties in migrants' labour market outcomes has reached 'mixed conclusions' (Toma, 2016: 593). Successful labour market integration can be defined as a permanent, full time job, with pay and conditions commensurate with qualifications (Schmitt 2012 cited by Badwi et al., 2018: 27). With this definition in mind, the extent to which migrant networks are helpful for labour market integration, or merely result in a 'mobility trap', needs to be carefully considered (Kalter & Kogan, 2014). It could be argued that 'inclusion into the ethnic community can stimulate economic integration due to the resources made available through this network' (Lancee & Hartung, 2012: 39). However, there is also the risk of trapping workers in low-quality employment (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Badwi et al., 2018; Qureshi et al., 2013). Over-reliance on ethnic networks can lead to what Portes (1998) has called downward levelling norms.

While much academic research focuses on the networks of disadvantaged groups, there are ongoing debates about the extent to which highly skilled migrants rely on networks for career escalation (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014). There is some evidence that weak ties may be especially relevant for highly skilled migrants accessing professional occupations (Badwi et al., 2018). However, it is also apparent that a mix

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of strong and weak ties may be utilised by migrants in particular professions (Harvey, 2008). Moreover, even for the highly qualified, access to the labour market can be uneven depending upon the employment sector, familiarity with local contexts, immigration restrictions and prevalence of discrimination (Qureshi et al., 2013; Badwi et al., 2018; Gericke et al., 2018). Thus, although the role of networks is well established in the literature, there remain gaps in our understanding of how skills, education level, language proficiency, among other factors, may influence the relationship between employment and network ties. There have been calls for more research to explore ‘the institutional context of the receiving country, the specific immigrant groups involved, and the particular types of jobs’ (Kalter & Kogan, 2014: 1435), and to examine the evolving impact of new online communication technologies (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014).

Additionally, there have been calls to differentiate the direct and indirect roles of networks in employment (Toma, 2016). Does a dyadic tie lead directly to a new job (Smith, 2005)? Or, do networks play indirect roles as sources of general advice, support and encouragement? As discussed later in this chapter, indirect and direct roles may be equally important in enabling migrants’ initial entry into the labour market in the destination society. But this raises the question of whether or not migrants’ reliance upon network ties for direct job opportunities wanes over time as their familiarity with the local labour market increases.

Understanding change over time matters in our analysis of networks (Ryan & D’Angelo, 2018; Lubbers et al., 2020). The strategies that migrants adopt initially to access the labour market in a new and unfamiliar country, may be different from how employment seeking trajectories develop later on as migrants gain familiarity with the local context and accrue relevant work-experience. Adopting a temporal lens reveals the dynamism of social connections. Far from being static, relationships evolve over time but that is not to suggest a linear progression from dependency upon strong ties to gradually accessing beneficial weak ties. Rather than a simple dichotomy of strong versus weak ties, this chapter uses the notion of a continuum of diverse relationships that are constantly interacting and changing through time.

Drawing on case studies of migrants with different levels of qualifications and language proficiency, this chapter focuses on the specific situation of London’s dynamic labour market. Building upon my conceptual framework (Ryan, 2011, 2016), and informed by a temporal lens, the chapter offers new insights into (1) How migrants’ networks operate, directly and indirectly, in job seeking strategies and career development (2) How the role of networks may differ across varied sectors of the labour market, including public and private sectors and (3) How these observations can inform our understanding of weak and strong ties as a continuum of dynamic relationships.

The paper now develops over four sections. I begin by situating my analysis within the relevant literature on migrant social networks in relation to employment; highlighting the gaps that my work aims to address. I then briefly describe my research methods and qualitative datasets. Through four detailed case studies, I then weave my analysis and address the three aims listed above. In the concluding section, I highlight the ways in which the chapter contributes to understanding the

dynamic processes through which migrants utilise networks, both directly and indirectly, to enhance labour market access and career development over time.

2.2 Theorising Social Networks

Putnam's (2007: 143) distinction between *bonding* – 'ties to people who are like me in some important way' – and *bridging* – 'people who are unlike me in some important way' – has been particularly influential among migration researchers (Nannestad et al., 2008; Lancee, 2010). However, within migration research, there is a marked tendency to define 'like' and 'unlike' along ethnic lines. For example: 'We define bridging ties as relations that cut across the ethnic divide and bonding ties as those within the same ethnic group, operationalizing these as inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic friendships, respectively' (Lancee & Hartung, 2012: 41).

Thus, there is often an implied overlap between tie strength (*strong or weak*) and tie content (*intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic*) and direction (*bonding or bridging*). Strong ties are usually defined as intra-ethnic, often to extended family, and generating bonding capital, while weak ties are defined as inter-ethnic, usually with native population and generating bridging capital (Nannestad et al., 2008; Damstra & Tillie, 2016). There is also a tendency to rely on quantitative data, from largescale surveys, to show that ties to 'natives' are beneficial in job searches (Nannestad et al., 2008; Lancee & Hartung, 2012; Kalter & Kogan, 2014).

However, as I have argued at length elsewhere (Ryan, 2011), this conflation of tie strength, content and direction is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it means that the structure of a tie is assumed largely on the basis of its content. So ties to relatives are assumed to be strong, while ties to natives are assumed to be weak. This reductive approach overlooks the complexity and dynamism of inter-personal relationships and simplifies ties into binary categories. Secondly, the resources available within the tie are also assumed. Thus, it is implied that ties to co-ethnics generate a particular set of resources, whereas ties to other ethnic groups, especially the native population, are assumed to generate different, and more valuable, resources. But, I suggest, it is necessary to critically assess and differentiate these ties. Not all ties to natives are the same and neither can they be assumed to offer access to valuable resources (Ryan, 2011). Using German survey data, Kalter and Kogan (2014) acknowledge that the existence of a friendship between actors cannot be seen as evidence of direct causality in finding employment because there may be other, unobserved, factors at play.

As argued elsewhere (Ryan, 2007; Bilecen et al., 2018; and the Introductory chapter to this book), migration researchers can gain deeper insights by utilising the extensive toolbox provided by social network analysis scholarship. For too long, migration studies have tended to use 'network' as a metaphor without paying due attention to the structure, density, content, multiplexity and dynamism of social networks (for a discussion see Ryan & Dahinden, 2021). A narrow application of 'network' is frequently operationalised in surveys to ask migrants about

relationships with individuals from particular ethnic groups (Damstra & Tillie, 2016) or what information sources they use to find jobs (Kalter & Kogan, 2014). However, as I will show later, rich data derived from in-depth interviews enables a more nuanced understanding of the complex, dynamic and multi-layered information and support flowing through diverse social ties. My work has been especially influenced by Mark Granovetter's theorisation of networks and job seeking.

As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, Granovetter distinguished between weak and strong ties on the basis of: 'a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterise the tie' (1973: 1361). Strong ties are associated with high levels of frequency, intensity and intimacy (p. 1362). However, as they move in similar circles, people to whom we are strongly connected are likely to know similar sorts of information about opportunities in a social system, e.g. job vacancies. By contrast, 'those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive' (1973: 1371). Consequently, such ties are important for 'mobility opportunities' (p. 1373). These individuals are likely to be 'only marginally included in [our] current network of contacts' and may include a former colleague or employer with whom we have only 'sporadic contact' (1973: 1371). In later work, Granovetter (1983) acknowledged that not all weak ties were equally valuable. He emphasised that weak ties are most useful when they bridge 'substantial social distance' (1983: 209). In other words, when the person to whom we are tied weakly is well placed in the 'occupational structure' (1983: 209) and has access to relevant and reliable information about opportunities within that structure.

Of course, since Granovetter's era, we need to acknowledge how job searches have developed through new technologies (Janta & Ladkin, 2013). It is suggested that social media require us to 'rethink' international migration and social networks (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014: 405). 'The online environment enables migrants to have better access and be more in control of their choices in the labour market' (Janta & Ladkin, 2013: 242). However, while acknowledging this changing landscape, Dekker and Engbersen note that online networks do not replace, or make redundant, off line social ties; both sources of information tend to be used simultaneously. Indeed, migrants tend to have greater trust in their off line social ties as sources of information especially about jobs (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014: 415). Later in the chapter, I will consider how my participants have incorporated new technology into their job seeking strategies. But first I review my approach to studying migrant networks.

In my body of work (Ryan, 2011, 2016, 2020; Ryan & D'Angelo, 2018), I use qualitative data to explore meanings, dynamism, presentations and interpretations of social ties. Using this method has enabled me to critically interrogate the nature of relationships within networks, the relative social location of the actors and the actual resources flowing through particular ties. Social capital and social networks are not coterminous and we should not confuse potential sources of capital (networks) with actual capital (resources) (Fine, 2010; Bourdieu, 1986). My work has analysed firstly, how migrants access and maintain various kinds of social

relationships, paying due attention to opportunities but also obstacles they may face (Ryan, 2007). Secondly, I have sought to understand different *resources*, not only potentially available (latent) but also willingly shared (realisable) through specific social ties (Ryan et al., 2008). Thirdly, I highlighted the significance of social distance, so that the value of a particular social connection may depend more on the *relative social location* of the actors rather than their ethnic identity (Ryan, 2011). This last observation has led me to develop a distinction between *horizontal and vertical ties*. While horizontal ties connect actors who share a similar social position, vertical ties connect people of different positions on a social hierarchy, or occupational structure, irrespective of their particular migrant or ethnic backgrounds. So, for example, a loose connection to an influential person may be described as a vertical weak tie even if that individual shares the same ethnicity as you (Ryan, 2016).

But that is not to suggest that weak and strong ties can be understood as fixed, distinct categories. Some scholars have suggested that the boundary between strong and weak ties may be blurry (Harvey, 2008; Geys & Murdoch, 2010; Patulny, 2015) and better understood as points along a continuum of social relations (Bagchi, 2001: 37). As I argued elsewhere, adopting a temporal lens to understand the dynamism of social relationships may help us to move beyond simplistic binaries of strong versus weak ties (Ryan, 2011). Fourthly, my recent work has examined the temporal dimensions of social relationships and the dynamics of networks over time (Ryan & D'Angelo, 2018) and through the life course (Erel & Ryan, 2019). The networks that migrants rely upon when they first arrive may differ from the social ties they forge, over time, after years spent in the destination society. However, as discussed later, this is not to imply a simple linear trajectory of network formation.

Building upon my conceptual framework (Ryan, 2011, 2016), summarised above, and informed by a temporal lens, this chapter uses qualitative data from my previous migration studies, to add new insights into remaining gaps in understanding how migrants use networks to access the labour market and build careers over time.

As mentioned earlier, the specificities of context are also relevant to understand how social ties operate in relation to particular employment sectors (Gericke et al., 2018, see also chapters by Behtoui, Lang et al. and Rezaei and Keskiner in this volume). It has been suggested that 'an important limitation' of much migrant network scholarship 'is lack of comparative design' (Toma, 2016: 594). My chapter addresses that limitation by taking a comparative lens across different employment sectors. This enables me to differentiate between how networks may operate across particular areas of the labour market, e.g. public and private sectors. In so doing, this chapter highlights that, rather than a straightforward causality, social ties can operate both directly but also indirectly to support migrants' job searches. Through this analysis I add new insight into weak/strong ties as points along a continuum of dynamic and interacting social relationships. Beyond any assumed simple linearity of migrants' reliance on strong ties being gradually replaced by forging new weak ties over time, the case studies reveal a more complex picture. Before presenting the case studies, I briefly describe my research methods.

2.3 Methods

I have been researching migration, with a particular focus on social networks, for almost two decades. During that time I have accumulated a large corpus of qualitative data with migrants from different countries, with varied skill sets, educational backgrounds and languages. Focusing especially on intra-EU mobility, my work includes participants who arrived in Britain at different times, from both old and new EU states, and in varied ways including young single migrants, couples, family units or through family reunification. Although the data presented in this chapter emanates from separate projects, the research questions and overall aims were often similar and thus allow me to pull together themes from across these datasets. As discussed elsewhere (Erel & Ryan, 2019; Kilkey & Ryan, 2020), revisiting one's datasets, from distinct projects, enables comparative analysis and can generate new insights that were not possible within the constraints of each individual project.

In preparation for this chapter, I revisited three past studies. Between 2010 and 2012, my colleague Jon Mulholland and I worked on a study of French highly skilled migrants in London's financial sector.¹ As part of that study 40 participants were interviewed: 19 men and 21 women, mostly aged between 35 and 44. The majority had arrived in the UK in the 2000s, though some had arrived earlier. 26 were married, five co-habiting and nine single, 28 were parents. Networks were a key focus of that study as we sought to understand the different dimensions of French highly skilled migrants' social networks across business and personal life both locally and transnationally (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014).

The second project, used in this chapter, was a mixed methods study carried out in 2013 using an online questionnaire, in-depth interviews, plus one focus group, commissioned by an Irish migrant organisation – *The Irish in Britain*. A total of 114 participants took part in the study which aimed to explore the expectations and experiences of Irish migrants, working in the teaching profession, who had arrived in Britain since the economic recession in 2008/09 (Ryan & Kurdi, 2015). Qualitative interviews were undertaken to obtain deeper insights into issues such as migration trajectories, career progression and social networks. 24 participants (19 women and 5 men) took part in the qualitative part of the study. Their average age was 28 years and most were single and childless. Most participants had arrived in Britain between 2008 and 2010 (Ryan & Kurdi, 2015).

The third study I draw upon here, formed part of my on-going research with Polish migrants. In 2014, on the tenth anniversary of Polish accession to the EU, I undertook a small study with 20 Polish migrants in London, several of whom had been interviewed as part of previous studies (Ryan, 2016). The majority of the participants (17/20) were women. The average age was 36 years. The mean year of arrival was 2005, with the majority of participants moving to the UK between 2004 and 2007. 13 were married, 5 divorced and 2 were currently single. There was an

¹French Capital: a study of French Highly Skilled Migrants in London's Financial and Business Sectors (2010–2012) was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, RES-000-22-4240.

even split between those with and without children (10/20). The main aim of that study was to understand changing migration strategies, experiences and plans over time as migrants who had initially arrived with rather short-term plans had gradually extended their stay over 10 years. Social networks, employment, family life and issues of identity and belonging were key themes in the interviews.

These combined qualitative datasets generate an enormous wealth of material. To offer deeper insights into the processes of networking and the dynamism of employment trajectories over time, I have decided to use a case study method. The use of individual case studies to explore broader themes in large datasets is an established part of qualitative research (Thomson, 2007). I have chosen four case studies for this chapter, two male and two female, two who entered highly skilled jobs and two who initially entered low skilled jobs, two from the public sector and two from the private sector. As noted elsewhere, through the use of rich case studies 'macro questions concerning social change can be analytically explored through the small-scale and specific' (Stanley, 2015: 838). Although each one is individual and unique, they reflect wider patterns within the datasets. These four were chosen because they illustrate processes and experiences that are relevant to the discussion in this chapter.

2.4 The Case Studies

2.4.1 *Dominik*

Dominik arrived in London from Poland, with his girlfriend, in 2004. The move had been initiated by his girlfriend who had previously worked in the USA and spoke good English.

At that time Dominik was working in a friend's restaurant in his home town in Poland and reckoned that he 'didn't have much to lose' in relocating to London. However, he was concerned about language: 'I didn't speak any English... So that was obviously quite difficult because I knew that I would have to start somewhere at the very bottom of a chain'. He was also mindful that his catering experience in Poland would not be recognised in London: 'what we brought from our country then was worthless... no one really was taking it seriously'. Thus, although as an EU citizen he had free movement rights, his job opportunities in the UK were far from certain. Given his precarious situation, networks were fundamental to Dominik's migration story.

We stayed for a few nights with a girl who my girlfriend had met in America, so we had a place to stay. This girl was working on a market stall, but she was leaving and then she told the guys who owned the stall that she had a friend – my girlfriend – who could replace her. She told them about me and that I did not speak English, but they told me to come anyway. So I did all the heavy lifting and stuff. (Dominik)

So, through this initial contact, the couple not only found accommodation, albeit temporary, but also employment. This story reflects a common pattern (Portes &

Sensenbrenner, 1993; Qureshi et al., 2013; Badwi et al., 2018) as co-ethnic networks provide direct access into low skilled, low paid jobs. However, for Dominik, who did not speak English, it is unlikely he would have gained employment in any way except through such networks. Although not co-ethnics, his new employers were of migrant descent:

... they were born here and educated here, but their parents were from Cyprus, so they understood what it was like to come to another country and not speak the language... I was lucky with those guys (Dominik)

These British-Cypriot employers fulfil Granovetter's notion of 'weak ties' and led directly to a job offer. The employment sector is also relevant here as a casual job offer, within a small private business, was available without the need for a formal recruitment and bureaucratic application process. Moreover, this example also demonstrates that tie strength cannot be assumed simply through ethnic composition. Although of migrant background themselves, the employers can be regarded as 'vertical' weak ties (Ryan, 2011) because as business owners they were higher up the occupational structure and bridged social distance. However, we also need to pay attention to the dynamic nature of the relationship between these ties. Over time, the employers became friends and helped Dominik to build his confidence as he was given more responsible roles in their business. Therefore, these weak ties gradually morphed into strong ties highlighting that the distinction between weak and strong ties may not be clear-cut (Harvey, 2008; Ryan, 2016).

When I met Dominik, in 2014, he had been in London for exactly 10 years and had a job as a project manager for a large chain of restaurants: 'It is amazing, when I look back, it is hard to believe actually. Because now we are used to the comfort we have now, to stop and look back where we were, oh, you know, I can't compare it'. Polish migrants tended to experience de-skilling and under-employment in the UK (Trevena, 2014; Janta & Ladkin, 2013). However, as demonstrated by Dominik's case, this is not necessarily a permanent situation and things can improve over time (Parutis, 2014; Ryan, 2016). Hence, the temporal dimension is important when analysing migrant experiences (Ryan & D'Angelo, 2018).

Networks were fundamental to Dominik's career development in London. Through a personal contact, he found a language course: 'someone from Poland recommended to me and it was a really good college'. As his English improved, a new job opportunity came about. Through his market stall employers he got a job working in a café. Over time, as his language skills, local knowledge and employment experience developed, he was able to seek better paid employment. His next move came about through formal recruitment channels when he successfully applied for an advertised post in a well-known restaurant chain.

But that is not to suggest that social networks became irrelevant to his career development. After some years, Dominik's next employment move came about through a weak tie. At 'a party with the people from my wife's work and I met the owner of the company she worked for... And it was just a conversation we had, you know, *'who you are, what you're doing'*, and so on.' Dominik met that company owner a few more times at social events. Then one evening his wife returned from

work and announced that 'the boss... approached me to ask if you would like to come and join company'. This was a role as production manager. Dominik was delighted: 'it was a step up for me, because it was more technical job... a massive opportunity to have more input...be more creative'. Thus a vertical weak tie, met socially, opened the door for new career opportunity. As argued elsewhere (Ryan, 2011), making influential connections is not simply about meeting people but also about shared interests and motivation for mutual benefit. As Smith (2005) has shown in her work in the USA, we need to understand why a particular social contact is motivated to help someone get a job. Simply meeting a company director at a party is no guarantee of a job offer (see also the chapter by Schaer in this volume). Dominik met this vertical weak tie several times in social settings but also had the advantage of a personal recommendation from his wife who worked for that company. Thus, the job offer came about through the interplay of a strong tie (wife) and a vertical weak tie (company director). Therefore, rather than entirely separate, weak and strong ties may interact, along a continuum of social relationships, to produce job opportunities.

Overall, Dominik's story underlines the importance of applying a temporal lens to migrants' changing job seeking strategies. However, rather than a simple linear development from reliance on networks towards formal recruitment processes, this case study illustrates how networks may continue to play a role in emerging career opportunities over time. While Dominik illustrates the experiences of someone who began in low paid, low skilled jobs, how might the job-seeking experiences of a highly skilled migrant differ?

2.4.2 *Damien*

Originally from France, Damien had been living and working in Luxembourg before relocating to London in 2007. Although he had a permanent job offer in Luxembourg he turned that down: 'as I am working in financial services, and for me it was a logical step to come to London, as it is one of the international capitals of finance'. Damien did not want to migrate until he found the right job within the financial sector. So, from his base in Luxembourg he continued to search for London-based jobs using a range of online sources: 'sending my CV to firms, sending my CV to agents, looking on different websites.' As noted, online resources like LinkedIn and sites that host CVs have transformed job searches for potential migrants (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014). However, relying on these sites to find a job can be slow and unreliable (Janta & Ladkin, 2013: 245). Securing his ideal job took not only time but also financial resources: 'I was in touch with agents, I went to different series of interviews to London from Luxembourg so I needed some budgets – I really needed to come here – to pay for plane tickets, sometimes booking hotels'. Eventually he was offered a job. 'I was contacted by a firm based in London to work on a project'. Although the initial contract was fixed term for 2 months, Damien considered that sufficient to give him a base from which to look for other jobs in London. As an EU

national, he did not need a visa, at that time, so a short term contract was no barrier to migration.

Once in London, Damien began to appreciate the importance of professional networks and so he started to invest time and energy in building business connections ‘to find opportunities’.

Having established a foothold in the financial sector, he was able to make useful connections: ‘they had another client who was looking for somebody with my skills so this is how I managed to get this job’. Hence, insider knowledge and personal contacts were important in Damien’s career progression: ‘I redid a lot from my network here in London more than in Luxembourg, for instance... So I really increased the number of people I knew in my business environment here in London’. He described how networks operate within London’s financial sector:

I’ve noticed here particularly people work on recommendations, it’s very important that people who can back you up and say: “*ok, I know this guy and I worked with him, he always has done a good job there*” and it eases things a lot (Damien).

This quote is revealing and suggests that for highly qualified migrants like Damien, the biggest obstacle to getting a job was the lack of personal connections. Damien was an outsider, people did not know him. Because of his lack of local network ties, he had no personal recommendations from other industry insiders. Thus, despite the use of on-line resources, applying for London-based jobs, whilst still living in Luxembourg, had been a slow and expensive process. But, after moving to London, he got a foot in the door, made new relationships and gained trust, built up recommendations, and so his career began to develop. Thus, despite the salience of online job sites and recruitment agencies, local inter-personal relationships, ‘emplaced capital’ (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014), still matter in accessing employment.

Damien’s experiences prompt a question about the nature of these social contacts; can they be understood as weak ties? The work of Burt (1997) has shown how networks operate in corporate environments. His research demonstrates not only the importance of information flowing through social ties in business networks but also personal recommendations based on trust (Burt, 1997, see also the chapter by Rezaei and Keskiner, in this volume). While Granovetter (1973) has emphasised weak ties as sources of information about new job opportunities, research by Smith (2005) emphasises the importance of trust in making job recommendations. Hence, it is necessary to examine more precisely what is the nature of the relationship between ties and thence the resources being shared (Ryan, 2011). If ties are *too weak* they may lack sufficient trust to lead to job recommendations and offers (Ryan, 2016).

The experience of Damien and Dominik differ in some ways; one worked in finance, the other in catering. Nonetheless, both stories reveal the continued role of networks in career advancement in London, especially in the private sector. Although both had used formal recruitment channels, they also benefited from personal recommendations, knowing the right people in the right places, resulting in new jobs and career escalation. Thus, both stories demonstrate the significance of trust. Although Dominik’s story appears to illustrate a classic, vertically positioned, weak

tie, this individual sought a recommendation from a mutual strong tie (wife/employee). Similarly, Damien needed time to build up new professional networks in London and establish trust so that he could gain recommendations to would-be employers. Therefore, I suggest, rather than looking at individual weak ties (dyads) in isolation we need to see them within wider networks, or as a continuum of relationships.

So far I have focused on the private sector, where it is apparent that networks can lead directly to job opportunities. But does this also hold true in the public sector?

2.4.3 *Sorcha*

Sorcha completed her teacher training in Ireland in 2008–09 during the global financial crisis when the economy experienced a major recession and, consequently, public spending was drastically cut by the Irish government. Public sector jobs, including teaching, were negatively impacted resulting in high levels of unemployment among recently qualified teachers (Ryan & Kurdi, 2015). Sorcha struggled to find employment in Ireland: 'I found it really hard to get a job.... It just wasn't happening. I applied speculatively to hundreds of schools, got very little response'. She was aware that some of her university classmates had migrated: 'some of the other teachers had come to England with recruitment agencies and they kind of recommended it to me'. Thus her networks provided encouragement not only to migrate but also advised her on relevant agencies. Hence, although her entry into the British labour market was arranged through formal teacher recruitment services, the indirect role of wider networks in influencing that process should not be overlooked.

Through the agency, Sorcha got a job in a school in Essex, south-east England. However, she found the teaching 'really difficult': 'teaching here is a whole different ball game than teaching in Ireland. The behaviour in that particular school was really quite difficult at the time and I just was overwhelmed'. As noted elsewhere, migrants' reliance on agencies and online recruitment sites, may carry risks (Qureshi et al., 2013; Janta & Ladkin, 2013). For Sorcha, in the absence of local, context-specific knowledge or pre-existing networks within the school, relying on an agency meant that she inadvertently found herself in a very challenging workplace.

Although she completed the school year, Sorcha began to question her suitability for teaching and decided to pursue a new course of study. She moved to London and completed a diploma in graphic design and then returned to Dublin where she got a job in a graphic design studio. However, she discovered graphic design was not the career for her: 'I just didn't enjoy sitting at desk all day and I realised that, even though teaching was really stressful, I was so much happier being a teacher.' Sorcha knew that in order to pursue her dream of being a teacher she would have to leave Ireland again and return to Britain. She again applied to teacher recruitment agencies. This time, however, she had more local knowledge and was careful about her choice of schools. Deciding to combine her qualifications in teaching and graphic design, she got a job teaching design in a large college in south London. At the time

of our interview she was very happy with the job: ‘It’s so nice to interact with the kids and I feel like I actually can help them to get somewhere in life and you know, give them practical help when they need it.’ She had no plans to return to Ireland.

Sorcha reflected on the different opportunities and career possibilities available to her in both countries. Although teaching jobs were formally advertised in Ireland, Sorcha had the impression that many of these were not ‘genuine’ jobs. In other words, there were favoured candidates who were likely to get the job because they already had some connection with the school, such as being related to a member of staff. In Ireland this kind of nepotism is known as ‘pull’ – i.e. someone who can pull you into a job. Sorcha suspected this had worked against her in many job applications: ‘definitely in Ireland there’s *‘pull’*’. She perceived the British labour market as meritocratic: ‘you probably would get further on your merit here, than you would in Ireland.’

This observation is worthy of further discussion especially as it seems to be contrary to the experiences of Dominik and Damien, described above. Within the private sector, Damien and Dominik found network connections and personal recommendations particularly influential. Teachers in my study suggested that the job application process in Britain was meritocratic with open and transparent appointment processes. Jobs were allocated based on qualifications and experience not on nepotism. Of course, within the public sector, recruitment processes have to conform to equal opportunity procedures. Nonetheless, it would be simplistic to conclude that networks and influential connections did not matter in accessing the teaching profession. Later in the case study of Klaudia, below, we see how networks can play a direct role in facilitating access to a teaching career.

Moreover, based upon my data, there is evidence that networks can also play important indirect roles within the teaching profession. Networks can play a profound role in establishing and maintaining a professional identity (Ibarra & Deshpande, 2007). Like many participants in the teacher study, Sorcha had relatives who were also teachers: ‘my dad was a teacher, my cousin was a teacher so, you know, it just feels right. It feels like I’m doing what I should be doing.’ Furthermore, thinking about her friendship networks, Sorcha remarked that ‘the majority of my friends are teachers.’ This was partly about opportunity. Teachers spend a lot of time training and working together and so have opportunities to form friendships (Ryan, 2015). In addition, as Sorcha also observed, teachers understand and support each other: ‘I think teachers just get it.’ Sorcha was drawn to teacher friends because:

... there’s camaraderie in teaching, there has to be, because sometimes you have a horrendous class, and, you know, they are having the same issues as you. And then also obviously with the holidays, like you’re more inclined to go travelling with other teachers. (Sorcha)

Hence, although in Sorcha’s case, networks did not appear to be directly related to accessing teaching jobs, it is apparent that teacher friendship groups continued to play an important indirect role as sources of bonding capital providing support, advice, information and reinforcing a shared teacher identity (Ryan, 2015). Strong ties, therefore, also have a role to play in migrants’ successful labour market integration, even for the highly skilled. Thus, rather than taking a narrowly instrumental

view of social ties, especially weak ties, as direct sources of jobs, it is important to consider the wider, indirect roles of networks in supporting and enabling migrants to develop their careers. So far all the migrants discussed have been childless and relatively young. But how can family responsibilities impact on migrants' experiences of accessing the labour market and what role might networks play under those circumstances?

2.4.4 *Klaudia*

Like Sorcha, Klaudia was also a teacher. However, Klaudia, a mother of two young boys, had a very different route into the profession and so illustrates the ways in which networks may operate in particular ways for migrants at different stages of the life course (Erel & Ryan, 2019). Klaudia migrated from Poland in 2005, with her young son, to join her husband who was already working in London. Her son took time to adjust to life in London: 'I was a full time mother, and I was trying to settle him down here'. Soon after reuniting, the couple had a second baby. Although she had a Master's degree from Poland and spoke good English, Klaudia felt very distant from the labour market in Britain due to her caring roles. She began to do some education courses: 'e-learning courses to get some experience, in terms of education, so I started that online from home... just to add to my CV'. As her children got a little older she began to think about entering the labour force:

So I started applying for jobs, it wasn't easy because the thing is, that I've got an MA and my expectations were quite high. But I very quickly realised that without experience in UK actually you can have PhD or even more, and that actually means nothing, if you don't have the right experience here (Klaudia).

Eventually Klaudia got a job as a carer for old people: 'I got probably the worst job in the world. I mean the most emotionally really-really challenging and I became a carer.' Although she continued to do that job for about 1 year, it was: 'really-really-really difficult for me.' As note earlier, migrants may experience downward mobility in the UK because of language barriers or because their qualifications are not taken seriously by employers (Qureshi et al., 2013). However, as others have argued (Trevena, 2014; Ryan, 2011; Parutis, 2014), and is apparent in Dominik's case, de-skilling need not be permanent. As researchers in Norway have also observed, networks may be crucial in how highly qualified migrants overcome de-skilling to improve their labour market position (Badwi et al., 2018).

After her son entered full time education, Klaudia began to volunteer in activities at the school. She started by helping out with school events and fund raising activities. As Barry Wellman's (1984) research in Canada has shown, child-based sociality can have particular significance for women's networking (see also the Introductory chapter to this book). Through the school, Klaudia met other parents and began to build up a local network. When an opportunity arose to stand for election to the governing body of the school, Klaudia was encouraged to apply. She was

duly elected and became a parent-governor. This was a turning point for her and reflected the efforts she had made to build up connections and relationships with other parents. Klaudia felt a huge sense of achievement in being elected to this role:

That was a first big step for me. Really! And the fact that people voted was a big... it's a small scale, it's just the local primary school, but in my opinion it felt like a big, big step in terms of where are you within the society (Klaudia).

Through her network at the school, Klaudia began to establish ties to British people and gained a better understanding of British sociality. Like many participants across my studies, Klaudia had initially found it hard to connect with British people. She observed it was difficult to read the 'cultural codes' (see also Cederberg, 2015). Klaudia observed: 'like all this politeness and not saying certain things... I'm looking for a message, for the information they want to tell me, and not always getting it... So that's difficult for me.' But the school network provided an opportunity for getting to know British people on a one-to-one basis. These were the kinds of people that Klaudia would not have the opportunity to meet in her everyday life: 'I met knowledgeable and experienced people, you know, like lawyers, solicitors, these kind of people'. Thus, she was able to stretch her network reach to people who occupied a very different social position from herself. Although these new connections bridged social distance and can be described as vertical weak ties, there is no evidence that they helped Klaudia directly to enhance her labour market position. Nonetheless, they definitely played an indirect role by helping to increase her confidence and understanding of British society.

Through her involvement in the school and her work on the board of governors, Klaudia began to think about pursuing a career in teaching. Unlike Sorcha, who seemed to have been drawn to teaching from a young age through her family connections, Klaudia had not previously considered a teaching career. After 8 years in London, much of it as a full time mother, teaching seemed an opportunity for Klaudia to get a professional occupation. Without formal teaching qualifications, the first step was to get a placement as a class-room assistant: 'So, I signed with an agency, and actually I got a placement with my son's school so that was extremely convenient'. So, here we see a mix of formal agencies and personal networks as Klaudia utilised contacts at her sons' school to obtain her work-placement.

She then completed the Higher Level Teaching Assistant course and, when I first met her in 2014, was working as a teaching assistant. The school encouraged her to gain a full teaching qualification and she had just begun the process by applying to the 'Schools Direct Scheme': 'So I would be an unqualified teacher from September and I've got a year to obtain my qualification.' As a graduate, the Schools Direct programme allowed Klaudia to gain a teaching qualification through a 1 year conversion course. When I re-contacted Klaudia, in 2016, she was working as a teacher in a London school. Although her direct route into a professional job was facilitated through a formal agency, it is apparent that informal networks, especially her voluntary role at her sons' school, played a key role in her trajectory towards a professional career.

Klaudia's experience offers insight into how networks may operate to facilitate access to jobs even within the public sector (see also Lang et al. chapter in this book). Personal connections, reputation and trust, built up through her volunteering, led directly to a placement opportunity in her son's school. This case study suggests some caution in any simplistic dichotomy between how networks may facilitate labour market access in the public versus the private spheres.

2.5 Concluding Discussion

Using rich qualitative data from four case studies, I have built upon my analytical framework (Ryan, 2011, 2016) to examine the content, structure, meaning and dynamism of social ties. Beyond a simple binary of strong versus weak ties, I have explored the relationships within ties, the flow of resources and the relative social location of the actors vertically and horizontally. In so doing I sought to address three key questions: (1) How migrants' networks may operate, directly and indirectly, in job seeking strategies and career development (2) How the role of networks may differ across varied sectors of the labour market, including public and private sectors and (3) How these observations can inform our understanding of weak and strong ties as a continuum of dynamic relationships.

Firstly, my rich qualitative data reveal the diverse roles that networks can play in accessing labour markets. Despite the rise in new technology and the proliferation of online job sites, it is apparent that personal contacts still matter for employment searches in the twenty-first century. For migrants, arriving in a new country and confronting an unfamiliar labour market, network contacts can be valuable as direct routes into employment. Moreover, beyond such direct roles, social ties can also play more indirect roles by providing context-specific information and know-how, as well as personal recommendations and general advice. Personal connections in the destination society can be invaluable in interpreting cultural codes, signposting towards useful agencies or passing on knowledge about training opportunities. While such resources are not the same as direct job offers, nonetheless, they can be extremely valuable as stepping stones towards employment.

Secondly, because of the diversity of my research participants, my analysis reveals varied patterns in how social networks are utilised in different employment sectors. In the private sector, it is apparent that social connections and personal recommendations continue to be highly advantageous whether in the world of financial services and banking or in entry level retail jobs in small businesses. By contrast, within the public sector, such as teaching, formal recruitment processes, with transparent appointment procedures are the norm. Thus, in countries like the UK (see Lang et al., in this volume for the German case), social connections do not appear to be relevant for public sector jobs. However, as the case studies here show, that is not to suggest that social networks are completely irrelevant for those seeking public sector employment. Social ties, including close bonds of friends and colleagues, may be invaluable as sources of emotional support and in fostering a professional

identity that can help to sustain and build a career as well as encouragement to overcome challenges and obstacles. Hence, although networks may not work in precisely the same way in the public and private sectors, that is not to suggest that social ties are irrelevant in accessing public sector jobs.

Thirdly, the case studies discussed in this chapter reveal change over time. Networks are dynamic and the ties that migrants rely upon when they first arrive may change quite markedly as years pass by (Ryan & D'Angelo, 2018; Lubbers et al., 2020). But that does not imply a simple linearity with migrants gradually shifting away from dependency on strong ties to forging new weak ties, or that reliance on networks is replaced by turning to formal recruitment channels. The findings from this chapter suggest a more nuanced picture. The participants discussed here continued to use a mix of social networks including strong and weak ties, playing direct and indirect roles, many years after arriving in London. This finding illustrates the need to avoid a simple binary of strong versus weak ties. Instead, my analysis shows the dynamic interplay between different social connections within wider networks. A single weak tie may lack sufficient trust to lead to a direct job offer. Rather my analysis suggests that weak and strong ties may interact in complex and dynamic ways. Moreover, my data also suggest that some weak ties may develop over time into stronger, friendship ties or enduring employer/employee relationships. Thus, my work provides evidence for the need to see weak and strong ties as points along a dynamic continuum of social ties that evolve and change over time.

Clearly, the qualitative findings in this chapter relate to particular kinds of jobs within the large and dynamic London labour market. I make no claims for generalisability. Nonetheless, the rich case study method presented here offers insights into the complex, varied and dynamic relationship between migrants' networks and employment.

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