# Chapter 10
# Early-Career Academics' Transnational Moves: The Gendered Role of Vertical Social Ties in Obtaining Academic Positions Abroad

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## 10.1 Introduction

Moving across borders to take up academic positions abroad is one form of occupational mobility (or migration), one that is often presented as constitutive of an academic career. At the same time, academia has become an increasingly transnationalised and competitive marketplace in which recognition of one's academic achievements is a key rule of the game (Münch, 2014) and recruiting procedures involve recommendations from academic referees (Bagilhole & Goode, 2001).

Research has highlighted the importance of social relationships in employment and career processes and the role of networks in the reproduction of gender inequalities. Social-network scholars have shown that even when women occupy positions similar to those of men and have access to comparable networks, their networks are less resourceful than men's (Gray et al., 2007; McDonald, 2011; McGuire, 2002). Occupational and career research has brought to light the interactional mechanisms underlying these differences. In particular, it has shown that gendered representations of men as more competent than women are (re)produced in academia, in interpersonal interactions and workplace practices, and affect the distribution of social resources in different institutional and national contexts (Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). However, there is still a lack of understanding of the gendered mechanisms through which social resources are distributed within early-career academics' transnational social networks.

Drawing on biographical and qualitative egocentric network interviews conducted with early-career academics of different nationalities working in Switzerland or the United States at the time of the interviews, this chapter investigates the distribution of career-related resources provided by higher-ranked academics to

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early-career scholars within a transnationalised occupational field. The research question guiding the analysis is: *When early-career academics are preparing for their upcoming career move abroad, how does gender affect the distribution of academic career-related resources provided by higher-ranked academics in their networks?*

To address this question, I focus on the relationships between early-career scholars and higher-ranked academics, the contexts in which these relationships develop, and the resources that circulate within them. I do so by mobilising the concepts of *tie strength* (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) and *tie direction* (Ryan, 2011, 2016), which I develop further by showing that the strength of vertical ties is underpinned by subtle and hardly visible gendered mechanisms.[1]

The chapter begins with an outline of the theoretical background. It then describes the methodology before discussing the empirical findings. The analysis reveals that subtle gendered practices generate variations in the distribution of academic resources, but also that digitalisation and institutional resources such as fellowships and dual-academic-career support may help counter the influence of vertical ties and their gendered effects.

## 10.2 Theoretical Background: Social Networks, Job Acquisition, and Gender

Network research has demonstrated the importance of social relationships in employment and career processes. Granovetter's (1973) ground-breaking work about the value of weak ties in finding a job led to significant research on how individual action benefits from access to and the use of social networks, in labour markets and beyond. Granovetter (1973) defined tie strength on the basis of the intensity, frequency, intimacy, and reciprocity of contacts, and similarities among the actors involved (see also Ryan, 2016, and Ryan, Eve and Keskiner, introduction to this book). According to Granovetter, weak ties are useful in getting a job if they connect to high-status actors who are "well placed in the occupational structure"(1983: 207). In these conditions, he argues, weak ties are more likely than strong ties to act as "bridges" and provide valuable resources to actors at the other end of the relationship. It follows that weak ties are not all equally valuable (not all weak ties act as bridges), and that strong ties may act as bridges as well, although Granovetter suggests that this is rather unlikely (1983). In her study on Polish migrants in London, however, Ryan (2016) showed that strong ties do indeed act as bridges and provide useful resources for Polish migrants' professional prospects.

[1] Thus, this chapter focuses on the processes underlying the *distribution* of academic social resources within a transnationalised occupational field. It does not address the subsequent *effectiveness* of the resources early-career academics received.

Questioning whether tie strength is an adequate measure to capture the relative positionings of the actors involved in a relationship, Ryan (2011, 2016) has proposed new ways to conceptualise bridging ties based on their direction, namely their verticality – connecting actors differently positioned in a social hierarchy – and their horizontality – connecting actors in similar social locations. Ryan contends that "the most advantageous ties are vertical, bridging substantial distance, connecting an actor to someone who has more resources" (2016: 4). While it is theoretically fruitful to introduce tie direction in order to account for social distance – because it makes it possible to distinguish analytically between relationship quality per se and the relative positioning of the actors involved – Ryan's conceptualisation of tie direction does not adequately address the role of gender dynamics in actors' relative positioning. The first aim of this chapter is thus to contribute to current debates on tie strength and direction by "bringing gender in" (Pessar & Mahler, 2003).

Since the 1980s, social-network scholars have demonstrated the ways in which networks are gendered, uncovering differences between the structure, composition, and effects of men's and women's networks (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982; Moore, 1990). They have shown that interpersonal networks are marked by homogeneity, since actors tend to establish relationships with others who share some similar characteristics. Furthermore, social networks do not merely connect "concrete" actors, but are also "networks of meanings" (White, 1992), because they convey ideas, norms, and values (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994). As a result, gender representations circulate within networks and are (re)produced or transformed by social actors in their interactions.

More recently, network scholars have begun investigating the role of networks in the reproduction of gender (and other social) inequalities in labour markets and career progression. Their research has demonstrated that structural differences between men's and women's networks contribute to gendered career paths (Ibarra, 1997). It has also found that even when women occupy positions similar to those of men and have access to comparable networks, they receive less instrumental support from their colleagues than men do (McGuire, 2002). Drawing on a nation-wide survey of employed individuals in the United States, McDonald (2011) highlighted complex variations in accessing social resources useful in getting a job. He found no difference in the number of unsolicited job leads received by men and women with structurally similar male networks, but observed that male job seekers received more job-finding assistance than their female counterparts, indicating that male network members were more likely to provide this kind of support to men than to women.

These and other studies (e.g. Gray et al., 2007; McDonald & Day, 2010) have found that women's professional networks are less resourceful than men's and indicate persistent gender inequalities in labour markets and workplaces. This phenomenon needs to be studied further. In particular, the aforementioned studies predominantly adopt quantitative methodologies, and there is still a lack of understanding of the gendered mechanisms through which professional resources are distributed within social networks in a transnational context. The second aim of this

chapter is to fill this gap by employing insights from career and organisational theory in a qualitative social-network analysis.

Career theory and organisational research have generated a significant stream of research about the role of social relationships in career processes and their implications in terms of gender inequality (Gersick et al., 2000). In her study on the corporate workplace, Kanter (1977 [1993]) showed that stable and long-term ties with sponsors were crucial to career promotion but excluded women. This work inspired further research, including studies on the academic workplace. Rose (1985, 1989) analyzed the professional networks of assistant professors in the United State. She found no difference in the size of men's and women's networks, but she did find that women's networks were less effective than men's at helping them build a professional reputation. In the UK, Bagilhole and Goode (2001) showed that behind the apparent neutrality of individual merit, academic men benefited from relationships with other men. This social support remained largely invisible, allowing men to appear self-sufficient, whereas women appeared "needy" when they tried to develop their own support networks. In UK universities, Fisher and Kinsey (2014) found evidence of male homosocial bonding, which remained unacknowledged by the actors but contributed to the promotion of male interests. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) demonstrated that networking practices in the recruitment of professors in the Netherlands were underpinned by a masculine model of career success that contributed to the persistence of gender inequalities in academia.

This chapter builds on this research in scrutinising the subtle and often hardly visible gendered mechanisms that frame the ways in which social relationships develop in the workplace and how resources flow through these networks. Focusing on the practices of the actors makes it possible to illuminate gendered mechanisms in social-network processes and how they affect tie strength and tie direction. Adopting a constructivist gender perspective, this chapter does not use g*ender* as a biological characteristic or as a categorical attribute of actors. The term refers to the social construction of the feminine and the masculine, a dichotomous and relational matrix underpinned by further normative assumptions about cisgender identity and heterosexuality. It involves norms and practices through which power is implemented and inequalities are (re)produced.

## 10.3 Methodology

This chapter draws on biographical and qualitative egocentric network interviews conducted with 14 early-career academics at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, and 16 at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the United States. I followed a purposive sampling strategy, including academics who had obtained their PhD no more than 10 years earlier, had moved to a different country at least once after their PhD, and represented maximum variation in terms of sex, academic position, academic discipline, nationality, mobility trajectory, and family situation (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2). I met each interviewee twice. I conducted a

biographical narrative interview (Rosenthal, 2007) in the first meeting and a qualitative network interview (Dahinden, 2005) in the second. The network interviews were intended to capture the *mobility network* of the interviewees (*egos*), namely all persons (*alters*) involved in their mobility decision-making process, as well as those who supported them during their stay abroad and, if applicable, after their return. Concretely, the interviewees were invited to consider all kinds of ties, close or distant, inside or outside academia (e.g. family members, partners, friends, academic peers, supervisors, people from institutional programmes). The interview procedure included a name generator and a name interpreter, through which I sought to trigger narratives about the elicited alters in order to understand their relevance in the different contexts in which they were mentioned, as well as the quality and dynamics of their relationship with the interviewees.

All interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. I reconstructed single case studies – or dual case studies when interviewees were in a relationship with another academic also included in my sample. I wrote detailed notes about the elicited networks, their composition, the nature of the relationships, and the ways in which interviewees were – or were not – able to capitalise on them.[2]

The methodological design of this study avoids methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) by not focusing solely on one national group. Instead, I endeavoured to select a diverse sample of academics with different geographical backgrounds and trajectories. However, academics from the Global North

**Table 10.1** Interviewees' age, year of PhD and discipline

| | | UZH | | UCLA | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Men | Women | Men | Women | |
| N | | 8 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 30 |
| **Age (at time of interview)** | | | | | | |
| | 29–30 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | 31–35 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 14 |
| | 36–40 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 10 |
| | 41–45 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| **Year of PhD** | | | | | | |
| | 2003–2006 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| | 2007–2010 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 10 |
| | 2011–2013 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 12 |
| **Discipline** | | | | | | |
| | Arts and Humanities | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| | Social Sciences | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 9 |
| | Natural Sciences | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 14 |
| | Engineering and Technology | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

[2]The interviews were conducted in English or French. In this chapter, quotations originally in French have been translated into English. People's names are fictitious, and the names of specific institutions and locations have been withheld to ensure interviewees' anonymity.

make up the large majority of my sample (see Table 10.2), as research participants predominantly come from European and North American countries (25 out of 30), and even more of them obtained their PhD in Europe or North America (28 out of 30). The difficulty in finding academics at the University of Zurich or UCLA who had earned their PhD in a Global South country before pursuing their academic career in the Global North reflects global economic and geopolitical inequalities (see e.g. Bauder et al., 2018).

**Table 10.2** Interviewees' countries of origin and PhD

| | | UZH | UCLA | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | | 14 | 16 | 30 |
| **Country where grew up** | | | | |
| *Europe* | Belgium | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | Denmark | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | France | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | Germany | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | Italy | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | Poland | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Sweden | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | Switzerland | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| | UK | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| *North America* | US | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| *Central and South America* | Argentina | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Mexico | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| *Other countries* | India | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Israel | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Russia | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Country of PhD** | | | | |
| *Europe* | Austria | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Belgium | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Denmark | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Finland[a] | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | France[b] | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Germany | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | Italy | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| | Netherlands | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Sweden | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| | Switzerland | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| | UK | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| *North America* | US | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| *Other countries* | Israel | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Mexico | 0 | 1 | 1 |

[a]The interviewee who obtained her PhD in Finland had a previous PhD from Russia (not displayed in table)

[b]Degree awarded jointly by a French and a Swiss institution (Switzerland is not displayed in table)

## 10.4 Vertical Ties Matter, But Not All Are Equally Valuable

The analysis revealed that persons mentioned by the interviewees as having given them academic support in obtaining a position abroad were almost all professors or higher-ranked academics with equivalent positions. These were often interviewees' former or current advisors, mentors, or more distant scholars at the same institution or elsewhere. Relative to the interviewees, they were vertical connections who occupied advantageous locations, in particular in terms of occupational status and reputation.

The role played by these vertical ties in the academics' transnational career moves varied between interviewees. While some interviewees attributed a prominent place to higher-ranked academics in their stories, others portrayed them as discreet members of their network. A deeper analysis revealed that these variations were shaped along gender lines and in combination with other resources to which the interviewees had access.

### *10.4.1 Multiplex Vertical Ties*

This sub-section presents the cases of Enzo and Marc, who were able to rely on multiplex vertical support at the time of their most recent transnational career moves. Their stories echo the experiences of other male interviewees.

After his PhD and a brief postdoc in Italy, Enzo moved to the United States, where he had obtained a tenure-track professorship. During the interviews, Enzo emphasised that he viewed his relationships with several (male) professors in or from the United States as particularly helpful at that stage of his career. At a time when Enzo had felt utterly disillusioned by the Italian academic system, a US professor encouraged him to apply in the United States. He later invited Enzo to present his work in the United States and paid for his travel expenses. Eventually, he gave Enzo personalised advice and feedback at various stages of the application process:

> He looked at my materials, he helped me put together a CV that was more in line with American conventions, and he looked at my writing sample. He really knocked himself out to help me out. (Bio_In)

The two had become acquainted during the professor's earlier visit to Enzo's university in Italy. Throughout his PhD studies, Enzo had multiple occasions to meet US scholars invited by his PhD advisor, who would then ask him to look after these guests during their visit. This is how Enzo met another US professor who later happened to be in Italy once again for a sabbatical precisely when Enzo was applying for positions in the United States. Enzo explained that this other US professor also helped him during this process:

> [He] coached me on how to handle the interview process, on how to prepare for questions that concerned teaching. [… He] had me take mock interviews, and then told me that I had to study syllabi, so I did spend a lot of time studying syllabi that I found online from

> American universities, and tried to adapt, you know, my ideal syllabus to those that I was reading online. (Bio_In)

Before his move to Switzerland, Marc similarly benefitted from multiple and repeated support from higher-ranked academics even though he was not looking for a job at the time. Lin (2008: 53) refers to this process as the informal workings of social capital, in which "ties in social networks [may] provide routine but unsolicited job information, which may eventually become critical in getting a better job, without the actor's actually searching for that or indeed any job". Originally from Belgium, Marc had moved to the United States for his PhD. He then went to the UK for a postdoc, before moving again to take up a more senior (fixed-term) position in Switzerland. Exchanges about Marc between a professor in the UK and another one in Switzerland resulted in Marc's receiving a direct job offer from the Swiss-based professor, which Marc declined. Shortly afterwards, the Swiss-based professor contacted Marc again, informing him about another vacancy at a Swiss university and providing him with additional information, including the composition of the hiring committee. Marc recalled:

> [The Swiss-based professor] told me: "There's this vacancy, you should apply for it; these are the members of the committee". He helped me a little, he gave me some advice. And I know that at this point, I sent my application like any other candidate. But I also knew that I had someone behind [me], following up, and obviously, this increases your chances significantly. So it's not that he made his contacts work for me, he just… I submitted my application and was assessed like everyone else. (Net_In)

While Marc readily acknowledged that being able to set the scene in advance helped him prepare adequately and reduce uncertainty, he did not think it distorted the selection process, but underlined instead that his competence was assessed fairly, the same as for any other applicant. He concluded that, as he said he later observed, the Swiss-based professor was simply "very good at identifying suitable candidates".

Enzo and Marc stated that, except for recommendation letters, they did not receive support from their PhD advisors. Four referees wrote recommendations for Enzo: the two aforementioned US professors, his PhD advisor in Italy, and another former advisor in the United States. According to Enzo, their reputations and connections to US academia played in his favour.

One characteristic of Enzo's and Marc's support networks is that several male professors provided them with a combination of valuable resources throughout the process. Enzo was encouraged by one professor to apply in the United States, which enabled him to embrace career prospects he had not dared to consider. In addition, that same professor invited Enzo to present his work in the United States, giving him the opportunity to gain professional visibility with a new audience and providing financial support to that end. Later, Enzo could count on repeated advice and assistance from this and another professor to adequately prepare and present himself as a valuable candidate. By word of mouth between professors, Marc first received a direct job offer, followed by information about another vacancy and guidance during the application process.

Another crucial characteristic of their support networks is the repeated nature of some professors' support, who provided recurring support during various stages of the process and maintained regular contact with the interviewees. Enzo explicitly stated that he was "constantly in touch" with one professor during the application and hiring processes, and both Enzo and Marc described numerous occasions on which they received encouragement, information, advice, and other resources from vertical ties with male higher-ranked academics.

A third characteristic is the high degree of commitment shown by the professors who supported them. As Enzo said of one of those professors, "He really knocked himself out […]". In both cases, the interviews reveal that the professors not merely possessed resources that were useful to the interviewees, but also were eager to share them.

In sum, these characteristics indicate that vertical ties, in particular if they include higher-ranked academics other than PhD supervisors, provide valuable resources when undertaking a transnational career move. At the time of resource transmission, the relationships between early-career interviewees and supportive professors seem to correspond to what Granovetter (1973, 1983) and other scholars have defined as strong ties, especially when one considers multiplexity (multiple types of support provided by a same alter), time (contact frequency), and commitment (willingness to provide support). Furthermore, these vertical ties are not only upward-oriented (with academics occupying higher positions in the academic hierarchy), but also outward-oriented, insofar as they provide useful resources in finding a position beyond one's current institution.

### *10.4.2 The Uneven Distribution of Vertical Support*

Comparing these stories about strong support from higher-ranked (male) academics with the stories of other interviewees reveals the gendered workings of these vertical relationships.

Reaching the end of her PhD in Finland, Irina attended an international conference at which, she recalled, a (male) professor informed her about an upcoming vacancy at a Swiss university:

> He told me: "The advertisement isn't out yet, but I want to let you know about this opening [in Switzerland]". And I didn't know then that he would actually be part of the selection committee, which he was. And then, after a couple of months […] the advertisement was on [a website…] where all sorts of conference announcements and job advertisements like this get put. (Net_In)

It was not the information given by the professor to Irina that was valuable – shortly afterwards, Irina saw the vacancy advertised online – so much as the personal encouragement that came along with it:

> He was just friendly and encouraging, that was important for me at that moment. […] I was probably just a bit hesitant because the job description was a little bit broad in that they

> didn't mention, for instance, whether they were looking for an assistant or an associate or a full professor. […] But maybe because [he] told me that it was okay for me to apply in the first place, I wasn't hesitant any longer, because I knew they'd consider me anyway. (Net_In)

The incentive effect of this encouragement in the initial steps of Irina's job search echoes Enzo's experience. In both cases, they felt legitimized to apply for the position available. In Irina's case, however, the professor provided her with "one-time" support, whereas the encouragement Enzo received was the first of a series of supportive resources from his vertical connection. Furthermore, although the professor who informed Irina was part of the hiring committee, he did not, in contrast to Marc's vertical connection, provide further guidance on how to prepare for the interview process or tell her who else was on the committee. This is not to say that this professor did not support Irina's candidacy during committee discussions behind closed doors: he might well have. But in their interactions with these younger scholars, and in the amount of resources they provided directly, the professors acted quite differently in Irina's and Marc's cases, albeit in other regards the two situations are rather similar.

Another interviewee, Nadia, also mentioned a useful and opportune resource provided by a professor when she was finishing her PhD in the Netherlands. While she had started looking for a postdoc abroad too late and was approaching the end of her PhD without having landed the next position, a visiting professor at her university offered her to join his laboratory in the United States. She explained:

> The postdoc at [US university] just fell in my lap really, because my then-future postdoc advisor was just spending a year [at my university], and so he said, "Why don't you come with me?" And so I was, "Okay, I'll think about it", and [laughs], but then, you know, there wasn't much thinking to do. […] That was pretty much the only thing available at the time. (Net_In)

This excerpt describes another instance of one-time support from a single professor. While Nadia was able to capitalise on her relationship with the visiting professor, her narrative portrays a very different situation from the ones depicted by Enzo and Marc. Again, the point here is not to assess the effectiveness of the support provided, but to gain insights into what is at play in interactions between early-career academics and higher-ranked scholars who support them.

Luc, from France, provides another example that contrasts with the support received by Enzo and Marc. As he was finishing his PhD in the United States, his (female) PhD supervisor recommended him to a (male) colleague in Switzerland. She had lived in Switzerland herself and had known this colleague for many years. She seized the opportunity of a conference to tell him about Luc, as Luc explained:

> He had just settled and was looking for postdocs, so they started discussing it and [my PhD advisor] told him: "I have this PhD candidate who will graduate soon. Why not set up an interview?" And a few months later, there was a conference in [Canada], which my PhD advisor and this professor were attending, and so I went there too, for an interview, rather informal. […] He contacted me a few weeks later and asked me whether I was interested in the position, and I answered [yes]. (Net_In)

Taken together, these experiences illuminate different ways in which higher-ranked professors may support young academics' career moves, showing more or less commitment, offering single or multiple types of resources, on a one-off basis or repeatedly. These variations in vertical support raise questions about the nature of the relationships between early-career and higher-status academics. To understand why vertical ties provide better returns in some cases than others, I now turn to the contexts in which interviewees established first and subsequent contacts with higher-ranked academics.

### *10.4.3 The Strength of Informal Socialising*

The interviewees who benefited from strong multiplex ties appeared to have numerous opportunities to develop more personal relationships with professors in contexts beyond formal academic ones. Urged by his PhD advisor to look after invited scholars, Enzo was regularly presented with casual occasions to create personal connections with external professors and establish, as he emphasised, "other relationships with them". Marc's encounters with the Swiss- and UK-based professors also took place in informal contexts, outside the confines of the university. Marc had first met the Swiss-based professor at a summer school in the United States and later also by chance in bars and for private celebrations. Marc had also first met the UK-based professor in the United States. Afterwards, while Marc was in the UK, the two kept in touch regularly. Marc visited him on several occasions and once spent a week at his place, during which they discussed common research interests, but also personal concerns, such as Marc's frustration about his position. In brief, Enzo's and Marc's interactions with supportive professors, which took place not only in a formal academic setting, but also in informal settings, including bars and private parties, allowed them to develop more personal relationships.

In contrast, female interviewees had few, if any, opportunities to socialise informally with male professors. Nadia, for instance, met her future postdoc advisor in the department where she was doing her PhD. She did not develop a strong professional connection, let alone a more personal relationship, with him:

> I hadn't worked with him. We worked on related subjects but not directly, you know. I had my PhD project […]. He was a professor in the department, you know, he'd just arrived, or barely, and so…. (Net_In)

Irina explained that she did not personally know the professor who informed her about the vacancy in Switzerland. She made clear that she mostly knew him through his published work, and that the conference was the first time they spoke to each other.

These examples echo the experiences of other female interviewees who, when asked about the contexts in which they interacted with higher-ranked academics, mentioned summer schools, international conferences, and other academic settings such as their university department. In very rare instances, female interviewees

mentioned more informal contexts. This was the case for Nicole, who, approaching the end of her PhD in Austria, met her future US postdoc advisor when he gave a talk at her university. She knew his work, and his visit was an opportunity to meet him in person. Nicole recalled that a senior female colleague in charge of the guest lectures offered her to look after him during his visit:

> She told me: "He comes in three weeks, on such and such a day […]. He'll be all yours, work it out". That's how I met him personally. During that day when I was in charge of him, he met all the students, but I had more opportunities to talk to him. Then there's always a dinner in the evening, to which students are not always invited, but [my colleague] told me: "Come with us!" And that's when we discussed the possibility [of me doing a postdoc in his lab]. (Net_In)

Unlike Enzo, who was regularly extended opportunities to socialise with guest professors, Nicole depicted this opportunity as a special favour that was set up with the explicit purpose of allowing her to meet and discuss postdoctoral prospects with this professor. Nicole further emphasised that thereafter her senior colleague "was always there" for her – but "from a distance", because "she had already done enough" by letting her look after this professor during his visit. Nicole's narrative conveys a quite different sense of entitlement to receiving support from higher-status academics from that expressed by Marc, who, after describing the personalised guidance he received, clarified that this was fair because he was subject to the same selection process as everyone else.

Other interviewees mentioned supportive female advisors. But they did not indicate encounters with female professors other than their advisors. Unsurprisingly, the interviewees' networks comprised fewer female than male professors, reflecting the unequal distribution of professorial positions between men and women throughout academia in general (see e.g. European Commission, 2019). Furthermore, the interviews do not provide examples of informal relationships between (male or female) early-career academics and female professors, or between female early-career academics and male professors.

## 10.5 Transnationalised Job Markets

While most interviewees applied to more than one position when preparing their next career move, some of them applied to as many openings as they could find, and in numerous countries. The interviews reveal that early-career academics in some disciplines could rely on a digitally integrated transnational marketplace, which simplified both information searching and application processes. For example, when Fabio was looking for a postdoc after finishing his PhD in Denmark, he applied to multiple openings in Europe, the United States, Australia, and Japan. He was not sure if he was "good enough" and anxious about his chances of finding a postdoc position. He was thus willing, he said, to "accept just whatever". Fabio applied online, by means of two websites with an international scope that gathered academic openings in his field. Because the online application process was

centralised and convenient, Fabio even applied to positions he would not have considered otherwise:

> You can upload your files, like your application and your CV, and then you check the positions that you want to apply for so that they're able to see your files. It's really easy to apply through this website. You can apply to a lot of places, in that kind of mindless way: you just check [boxes]. (Net_In)

It thus came as a surprise when a renowned university in the United States contacted Fabio. He did not remember having applied there, he said: it was "just some click that you do because you have the possibility of doing it".

Very much like Fabio, other interviewees relied on similar websites with an international scope to apply to many positions in different countries. In Jack's field, such a website encompasses vacancies in academic, industry, and government sectors, and all employers follow the same yearly recruiting schedule. At the end of his PhD, Jack applied to 111 open positions across the world.

Other academics, in contrast, had to invest much more effort to learn about vacancies, which were advertised separately, in different media platforms, and according to different schedules. At the end of his PhD in the UK, William was worried that he would not find an academic position. Like Fabio and Jack, he had a large portfolio of applications:

> I did a PhD, and then I realised that, at some point, I was going to run out of money again [laughs], and so I started applying furiously for postdoctoral [and teaching] positions. I applied to lots of places, I applied to several in the UK, five or six; I applied to five or six jobs in the States, a couple in France, three in Germany, one in the Netherlands, one in Belgium. (Bio_In)

He found the job openings online, but there were no websites that integrated the employment market in his field. The process of finding (and applying to) vacancies was therefore much more complicated and, as another interviewee noted, "less transparent", because one cannot be sure that one has spotted all existing vacancies.

These stories reveal specific characteristics regarding access to resources from academic ties. First, the interviewees did not mention additional professors apart from their current advisors and did not access external social resources in their search for a position. No direct offer "fell in their lap", as it did in Nadia's case. But also, they were not provided with direct social resources to help them enter a specific labour market, in contrast to Enzo, for instance, who benefitted from various resources to gain visibility and recognition in the United States and prepare himself according to US academic specificities. Although the academic marketplace has become increasingly transnationalised, "academic practices continue to be firmly enshrined in national and regional contexts" (Bauder, 2015: 91) and higher-ranked academics are simultaneously located both transnationally and locally. The resources they provide may be highly localised, and the value of those resources may vary across academic labour geographies (Waters, 2009), as Enzo's case demonstrates. He was provided direct resources to help him enter the US academic marketplace, and he may have benefitted from the transnational and US-based reputation of his referees.

Second, interviewees with such large and geographically scattered application portfolios appear to have minimally mobilised their PhD advisors in the process of getting a job abroad. They essentially asked them for letters of recommendation. William emphasised that only after he received an offer for a postdoc in Switzerland did he learn that one of his PhD co-advisors was "a good friend" of the professor in charge of the position. While William's advisor may well have put in a good word for him, he did not provide him with personalised advice about how to "act" with his Swiss friend. This suggests that, apart from subtle gendered mechanisms, other structural features may be at play in framing interpersonal relationships. Differing norms and practices may permeate different academic systems – whether national, institutional, or disciplinary – notably regarding recruitment and promotion. Some systems are potentially more prone to patronage than others, which may in turn affect how higher-status academics interact with young scholars (see also Gray et al., 2007).

Third, these academics engaged in a large-scale, market-oriented and transnational job search with minimal support from higher-ranked academics. But this market-oriented search also seems to have been underpinned by gendered mechanisms. Strikingly, none of the female interviewees engaged in such an "all-out" application process. While several did apply to vacancies in different countries, the geographical scope of their application process was more restricted. These female academics – as well as a number of male interviewees – carefully considered their destinations from the start of the process. As I have shown elsewhere, negotiations between academics and their partners are gendered (Schaer et al., 2017), and women who wish to pursue an academic career face conventionally gendered representations and expectations from their closer and wider social environments, which may create obstacles to their strategies. Nevertheless, it remains entirely possible that male interviewees who applied "all out" would have declined an offer if it were irreconcilable with other aspects of their lives, notably their partners' employment prospects. In other contexts, male interviewees indeed indicated that their partners' career was equally important to theirs and that they would have declined an offer abroad had their partners not also found a job matching their expectations. These observations suggest that gender relations are evolving, as men may find it increasingly difficult to find partners willing to follow them (see also Le Feuvre, 2009). In addition, academic men have been shown to decline academic opportunities, not because of a lack of ambition, but because they found them too costly for their and their partners' well-being (Bataille et al., 2017).

## 10.6 Institutional Resources as Complementary Elements

### *10.6.1 Fellows' Independence*

Fellowships are an important institutional resource that early-career academics may mobilise when preparing the next step in their career. About one-third of the interviewees moved abroad as fellowship recipients, after successfully applying to funding schemes that financed their salary stipend and some other expenses. Funding programmes often require recipients to move to another country for all or part of their fellowship to an institution (and a supervisor) that agrees to host their research stay. The narratives of academics who moved as fellowship recipients depicted a career step essentially centred on fellowship requirements (in particular writing their own project proposal and finding a host abroad) and in which previously established ties with higher-ranked academics played a secondary role.

After his PhD in Switzerland, Florian obtained a fellowship and moved to the United-States for a postdoc. A year earlier, upon his PhD advisor's suggestion, he had travelled to the United States and presented his work at different universities where his advisor had connections, exploring whether he might want to do his postdoc at any of these institutions. Like other male interviewees, Florian was offered the chance to gain visibility at US universities, an opportunity that was financed by his (male) PhD advisor, who put him in contact with (male and female) members of his own (transnational) network. This "tour" allowed Florian to establish preliminary contacts with US-based professors, one of whom he contacted later, and who agreed to host and supervise him.

Florian's partner, Elsa, finished her PhD at about the same time as him and also applied to a fellowship to do a postdoc in the United States. Her description of the support she received in the process contrasts with those of Florian and other male interviewees, for instance when she explained how she found her host professor:

> I went [online] through the departments and looked at each individual professor, and looked at what they were researching, and then I made a list. I had a list of ten people. Then I started contacting these people. There was one guy in [my field], and I contacted him. He didn't reply immediately. And [another] guy in [my field] wrote back that he wasn't interested. (Net_In)

At this point, Elsa turned to her PhD advisor:

> I mentioned that [professor who did not answer], and then he said, "Oh yeah, right, I know him". But he wouldn't contact him especially for me. He just said, "Yeah, just write them again". (Net_In)

The US professor eventually replied that he agreed to host Elsa for her postdoc. Although Elsa portrayed her PhD advisor as generally supportive of her career, he did not appear to provide direct support at this stage. The ways in which Florian and Elsa were able to capitalise on their social relationships with professors reflect gender disparities similar to those previously described. Florian was readily extended encouragement and instrumental (including financial) support by his PhD advisor,

who sent him on a talk tour in the United States. Elsa, in contrast, received quite moderate support from her (male) PhD advisor, who, even when she turned to him because she had difficulty in reaching a professor he knew, did not offer to help.

Yet, finding a host professor abroad did not seem to depend on the interviewees' previously established ties with higher-ranked academics. Ingrid and Nola, another dual-career academic couple in my sample, wanted to move to the United States after finishing their PhDs in Sweden. Ingrid recalled that she did a lot of research online to find appropriate host institutions, professors, and funding schemes, and that her PhD advisor did not help her. Her wife Nola recounted that she too was left on her own in this process:

> I told [my PhD advisor] from the very first time we had a meeting, me and him, when he was my main supervisor, that my goal was to get a postdoc in the US. So he was very aware of that, although he didn't contribute much to me achieving my goal, other than me getting my PhD. […] He never helped me with the applications for grants or anything like that, or contacts.... In that way, he did nothing. (Net_In)

These stories echo those of other fellowship recipients, who also found a host professor on their own. In contrast, when Pierre was preparing his fellowship proposal, he was reluctant to contact potential host professors directly. He really wanted a professor from his network to establish the first connection between him and a professor abroad. To this end, he created a list of US-based professors who potentially knew his current or former supervisors in Europe, whom he then asked if they could put him in contact with these professors. When I asked Pierre what he thought of the possibility of contacting these potential host professors without being introduced by his advisors, he answered:

> "I didn't even try, for any of them. I didn't want to blow my chance, you know, it's really important to be recommended in this profession" (Net_In).

Notwithstanding Pierre's belief that it was important to be "recommended", the interviews suggest that, for fellowship recipients, being able to capitalise on (previously established) relationships with professors does not lead to significantly different results from not being able to do so.

In contrast to academics who applied "all out" and were left with little leeway regarding their destination, fellowship recipients were able to "choose" their destination from early on. Admittedly, this choice was constrained by the need to be hosted by a professor and convince funding institutions that the institution was appropriate for their career. Nevertheless, the narratives of fellowship recipients clearly indicate greater latitude in planning their upcoming career move, including in terms of timing, and including when they were in dual-career academic couples.

### *10.6.2 Spousal Vertical Ties*

Although much rarer, dual-career support is another institutional resource that may be crucial in a transnational career move. It is obtained on a case-by-case basis through hiring negotiations conducted with an institution's representatives.

Dual-career support varies significantly across countries and universities. It is not always formally institutionalised, and transparent procedures are often lacking.[3] Access to dual-career support not only implies institutional resources, but also involves strong ties with high-ranking academics, insofar as it is negotiated through – or jointly with – one's academic spouse. Dual-career support is often presented as intended to overcome the "two-body problem". However, it is not only academics in dual-career relationships who may experience this problem, but also universities, which may be concerned about missing opportunities to recruit "excellent" academics because of their spousal ties. Hence, this support is generally available only when at least one of the partners is hired for a professorial position.

Gary and Linda provide an interesting example. Linda was already a well-established (tenured) professor in a renown US university when she was offered a prestigious research position in Europe. At the time, her husband, Gary, had not yet obtained a position corresponding to his expectations. Together, they discussed how this opportunity for Linda might work for them as a dual-career academic couple. As Gary put it, he would essentially need to "find a job nearby". A Swiss-based professor played an important role in this context. He had been Linda's postdoc advisor years before and had since left the United States and taken up a professorship in Switzerland. Having heard about Gary's situation, he informed Gary about academic vacancies in Switzerland. When Gary was later shortlisted for a professor position, the Swiss-based professor, who was part of the hiring committee, informed him about a few "issues" he saw in his candidacy because of his "dual-body problem". The professor proposed raising this issue during Gary's hiring interview so that he could deal with it frontally. Gary accepted this offer and the professor intervened during his interview:

> [He] asked: "You're married to Linda [last name], who's also [an academic] who has an offer at [university]. How do you foresee handling this if you get this job?" And so I said, "Well, we'd live in [European city] and I'd come here every week, for say three days or something like that". I said this in the interview. […] And it turns out […] nobody liked it. (Net_In)

Pessimistic about his chances of getting the position, he was surprised to receive an offer from the head of the hiring committee:

> [He] called up and said, "Well, it's unanimous that you're the top choice, so we'd like to hire you for this job, but we have one reservation, which is that we want you to live here, and therefore we were wondering if we can test how feasible it would be to try to make your wife an offer too". (Net_In)

Gary and Linda's story demonstrates how dual-career academic couples may capitalise on their relationship and make joint career moves. Their experience shows that established academics also mobilise academic ties when considering a (transnational) career move. The support provided to Gary by the Swiss-based professor played a role in this process. Though Gary referred to this support explicitly, he

[3] But see the programme at the University of Michigan, which is often cited as an example: https://www.provost.umich.edu/programs/dual_career/ (accessed 17.05.2020).

nonetheless emphasised, like Marc, that he did "all the work" himself, making clear that it was his individual merit that counted in his recruitment.

Gary provided a detailed account of his relationship with the Swiss-based professor and the ways in which he intervened to help him. His narrative echoes those of other male interviewees and suggests that (some) men expect and are unabashed about receiving support from higher-status men (see also Bagilhole & Goode, 2001), while women are much more tempered in portraying their vertical ties.

## 10.7 Conclusions

Drawing on the notions of tie strength (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) and tie direction (Ryan, 2011, 2016), this chapter has examined the relationships between early-career scholars and higher-ranked academics and the resources that circulated within these relationships in support of the former's transnational career move. As previous studies have shown, the distribution of social career-related resources is gendered (Fisher & Kinsey, 2014; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014) and women's professional networks are less resourceful than those of men in similar positions (McDonald, 2011; McGuire, 2002; Rose, 1989). My work confirms several of these studies' results while pushing the notions of tie strength and tie direction.

First, this chapter has shown that the strength of vertical ties is gendered. Traces of strong male support networks mark access to network resources when searching for academic positions abroad. Martin (2001) observed that male support is subtle and discreet, and that it remains largely unacknowledged by the actors. My data demonstrate that it remains widespread in academia: it emerged recurrently, in small touches, throughout the data. Both male and female early-career academics have access to vertical ties with higher-ranked academics, and both benefit from these connections, but the vertical ties between men are stronger and provide more resources.

Second, access to strong and multiplex vertical ties is affected by subtle and discreet gendered mechanisms. Having opportunities to socialise informally emerges as one such important mechanism. The analysis has demonstrated that interactions with higher-ranked academics in contexts that extended beyond the workplace made it possible for early-career academics to develop stronger vertical relationships that in turn provided more resources than vertical relationships restricted to formal academic settings. Female (and some male) interviewees appeared to be excluded from such opportunities. These informal boundaries follow "unspoken rules of interactions [that] make gender inequality possible and highly resistant to change" (McGuire, 2002: 303–304) and reproduce heteronormative representations defining the (in)appropriateness of cross-sex interactions. As previous studies have found, informal socialising in the workplace may be a delicate practice for cross-sex actors who may worry about being perceived as having romantic or sexual interests (Gersick et al., 2000). In the present context marked by the #MeToo

movement, men and women may still be far from able to socialise informally within and beyond the workplace without raising suspicion.

Researchers have identified another important gendered mechanism underlying the uneven distribution of career-related resources: higher-ranked actors treat women differently because they do not trust women as having the potential to be successful (McDonald, 2011; McGuire, 2002). These practices relate to social representations of men as more professionally competent than women and are consistent with the gendered character of universities, which have been historically constructed around stable and deeply entrenched representations of male-oriented career models (Le Feuvre, 2009; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). These practices indicate that if same-sex relationships between men in male-dominated contexts provide access to better support than cross-sex relationships, this cannot be reduced to homosociality insofar as men also benefit from being members of the dominant gender group (McDonald, 2011).

This chapter contributes to theoretical debates about the strength of vertical ties. I have attempted to show that the social distance that vertical ties bridge in academic career moves involves (transnational) academic hierarchies. My findings are consistent with Ryan's observation that the willingness of a vertical tie "to take an interest, share resources and invest time and energy" (2016: 15) in the relationship is an important aspect of what make these ties valuable. However, my study shows that only (some) men have access to strong vertical multiplex ties, while women and other men do not. This finding indicates that this willingness is framed by mechanisms beyond relational idiosyncrasies between two isolated individuals and reflects gendered structural barriers.

In parallel, the analysis has demonstrated that vertical ties with higher-ranked academics play a secondary role when early-career academics mobilise other career-related resources. The extent to which the academic marketplace has been digitalised differs across disciplines and countries. Yet, digitalisation not only contributes to the transnationalisation of academia, but is also of utmost importance in the career moves of some early-career academics, allowing them to access information that would otherwise be scattered across websites and national systems, and to maximise their chances of pursuing their academic career. Websites with a global scope may function as a bridge and replace (or compensate for the lack of) vertical social ties.

Fellowships and dual-academic-career arrangements are further institutional resources that complement the strength of vertical ties. Insofar as they enabled some interviewees to move as dual-career academic couples and appear less marked by gender dynamics, these resources may contribute to greater gender equality in academia. Furthermore, these findings suggest that it is important in social-network analysis to account for institutional and wider social contexts in which network practices between actors take place. This observation calls for further network research that includes institutions in the research design and does not focus merely on interpersonal relationships (see also Herz & Altissimo, 2021).

In this paper, I have adopted a gender perspective to interpret the stories and experiences of early-career scholars. Choosing a theoretical approach means

leaving out others, since it is not possible to make sense of all the complexities of social realities at once. The interpretations that I have presented here do not suggest that other categories of social differentiation, such as class, ethnicity or race, are irrelevant in these stories. Bringing those into the analysis requires further research but will undoubtedly provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which different social inequalities are entangled. In particular, my findings suggest that being in a renowned university that attracts well-established visiting scholars is a fruitful way to develop vertical ties that may provide career-related resources later on. This observation implies that global and inter-institutional power hierarchies within academia contribute to the uneven distribution of vertical support. This uneven distribution requires further investigation in order to understand how it intersects with gender (and other social) dynamics.

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