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The Migration Industry in the Mexico-U.S. Migratory System

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Abstract

This article proposes the concept of the migration industry as the ensemble of entrepreneurs, businesses and services which, motivated by the pursuit of financial gain, facilitate and sustain international migration. Although long present and woven into the human mobility literature, the migration industry has remained largely under theorized, excluded from any major research efforts and reduced to its illegal and informal dimensions. This article offers a comprehensive conceptualization of the migration industry, including legal, illegal, formal and informal activities, and their interaction and articulation with relevant actors and structures of the social process of international migration, namely, states, migrants and their networks, and advocacy organizations. As a distinct component of the social process of international migration, the content, dynamics and bounds of the migration industry depend on state immigration policies, the size, composition and geography of population flows and the modes of incorporation of immigrants. The concept is applied to the study of the Mexico-U.S. migratory system and to the rise and consolidation of new destinations of Mexican immigration in the United States.

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Introduction

Research on the social process of international migration has shown in great detail that migrants are linked to each other through social networks that connect origins and destinations, and provide information, contacts and resources to cross borders, and to find housing and employment. These networks are the social infrastructure that sustains the migratory process. They also have the capacity to involve individuals and households with no direct migration experience in this social process. In view of these characteristics, some authors refer to networks, social capital, and individual human capital as the “engines of immigration” (Phillips and Massey 2000).

This article argues that despite the contribution of these analyses, the investigation of international migratory flows requires examination of the increasingly complex infrastructure of entrepreneurial actors and activities that facilitates and sustains population movements between the two or more countries and that constitutes the migration industry. This set of diverse activities and companies may be called the “other” engine of migration. While different studies have analyzed some elements of this ensemble, none have proposed to understand its components as part of an infrastructure of for-profit activities and services vital to contemporary international human mobility. The migration industry comprises activities such as labor recruitment, trafficking, and the provision of legal services for immigrants as well as transportation, communication and remittance services. The content and confines of the migration industry have varied historically according to emigration and immigration policies, labor demand, social and

economic conditions in the sending and receiving countries, and the size of the immigrant population at the destination.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it presents a basic description of the migration industry, conceptual precedents, its principal components, characteristics and fundamental dynamics, and its general impact on the social process of international migration. Second, by means of ethnographic data it shows the role of the migration industry in the Mexico-U.S. migratory system and, specifically, in the formation and consolidation of new Mexican destinations and communities in the United States. To this end, I analyze the case of several informal remittance, parcel, and transportation businesses serving the small city of Dalton, Georgia, and linking it to various points in Mexico.

I pose several questions with respect to these objectives. What are the fundamental features of the migration industry? What are its main components or sectors? How are these sectors or services integrated and how do they compete? What effect do the social, demographic and geographic characteristics of different migratory circuits have on the profile and dynamics of the migration industry and its various sectors? What explains the appearance and disappearance of specific sectors of the migration industry (e.g. trafficking and recruitment)? What is the relationship of the migration industry with other actors in the social process of international migration such as migrants, their networks and the state? Why do emigrants and immigrants require services from this industry? And in the Mexico-U.S. context, what is the relationship between the migration industry and the appearance of new destinations for Mexican migration to the United States over the last twenty years?

The Migration Industry: Theoretical Precedents

Interest in the migration industry is not entirely new to the literature on international population flows. Sociologists, anthropologists, demographers, historians and geographers have analyzed different aspects and components of this phenomenon throughout the 20th century. In the first decades of the 20th century, Henry Fairchild (1925) noted the importance of communication and transportation technologies for sending remittances and to the formation of migratory networks between Europe and the United States. Historian Donna Gabaccia (2000) refers to the padroni, labor agents and recruiters dedicated to enlisting lesser skilled workers for the international labor market, and to the moneylenders who doubled as representatives of transatlantic transportation companies.¹ In turn, Drew Keeling (1999) has analyzed the connection between innovations in steamship technology and improving travel conditions for European migrants in the context of the transatlantic flows of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Geographers John Salt and Jeremy Stein (1997) proposed the concept of international migration as global business with reference to the case of migrant trafficking in Europe. Massey, Durand and their colleagues (1987) have stressed the importance of labor recruiters in western Mexico to the beginning of migratory flows to the U.S., while Spener (2001) and Krissman (2000) have recently studied coyotes (smugglers) and recruiters respectively. Likewise, Kyle and Koslowski's (2001) edited volume is entirely dedicated to the topic of global trafficking in migrants, even as Kyle (2000) refers to service providers for migrants as migration merchants, and Kyle and Liang (2001:2-3) recognize the existence of migrant exporting schemes in which "a

diverse range of people may profit from migration by providing either legal or illegal services”.

Various investigators have attempted to theorize the migration industry. Robert F. Harney's work is perhaps the first attempt to conceptualize the migration industry and to recognize its existence on both ends of transatlantic flows. An historian of Italian migration, Harney (1977) coined the term “the commerce of migration” in reference to the activities of a set of intermediaries who profited by offering services to emigrants in their comings and goings between the peninsula and the multiple destinations of the diaspora. According to Harney, these intermediaries were part of the Italian middle class in Italy and North America that formed part of the “social structure and economy of emigration” (1977:47). He argues that:

it is clear that bureaucrat, notary, lawyer, innkeeper, loan shark, mercante di campagna, runners in the harbour city, agents, even train conductors depended on the emigration trade. On the other side of the ocean the scale of remittances, uninterrupted traffic of emigrant and repatriate, all the auxiliary food trades, (seasonal migrants) and the network of financial and commercial exchange justify treating Southern Italy and Italy overseas as one society and one informal economy... (1977: 47).

However, this theoretical effort contains a fundamental error. Confounded by an international migratory regime that during the height of Italian emigration placed few restrictions on migration, Harney conceives of Italy and its diaspora as a single society and forgets that national states and their borders had not disappeared. This is important because one of the historical functions of the migration industry has been not only to link

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geographically distant places, but to assist migrants in crossing borders that mark the political separation among states. Once hard borders materialize, as in the Mexico-U.S. case, this function becomes self-evident.

Another explanatory effort is put forth by Salt and Stein (1997) who propose the concept of migration as business. They define it as “a system of institutionalized networks with complex profit and loss accounts, including a set of institutions, agents and individuals, each of which stands to make a commercial gain” (1997: 468). However, despite the breadth of the concept, these authors apply it exclusively to illegal trafficking in international migrants.² Similarly, Kyle defines migrant merchants “as anyone profiting, legally or illegally, from the commodification of the international migration process, [forming] a larger system or informal network” (2000: 67). In this and other writings, Kyle applies the term to a relatively broad range of social actors operating in Ecuadorian sending regions. Among these actors are lenders, travel agents and traffickers who profit by their participating in the [commercialization] of international migration (Kyle 2000; Kyle and Liang 2001). The term proposed by Kyle brings to mind Ernesto Galarza’s classic Merchants of Labor (1964), although the latter’s emphasis is on the system of labor migration controlled by governments, contractors and agricultural associations during the period of the Bracero program [between the United States and Mexico].

Finally, the proceedings of a conference organized by the *Migration Policy Institute* make brief but direct mention of the migration industry:

A worldwide migration industry has developed, often with the participation of national governments, to facilitate temporary labor movement. This industry has

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both a legal and a black market component. Despite the fact that the clandestine immigration industry is largely controlled by well-organized criminal cartels, many enterprises that facilitate illegal immigration are small family businesses (O'Neil 2003: 4).

This brief reference, like others, mentions a single dimension of what is a broader and ubiquitous phenomenon, linking it in this instance to temporary migration flows. As recognized by a recent state of the art of international migration theories (Massey et al. 1998), previous attempts to systematically analyze one or multiple dimensions of the migration industry do not appear to have created a long term research agenda about the phenomenon or generated a lasting interest in theorizing its role in the social process of international migration. It is a topic woven into migration studies, but has not taken root either as part of a theory or as a concept integrating a broader theoretical framework. Moreover, studies on the migration industry and its components often reflect the interests of sending and receiving country governments. On the one hand, a significant number of studies have concentrated on the immigrant trafficking thus echoing receiving states' efforts to control immigration, particularly if undocumented. On the other hand, an increasingly prolific vein of inquiry examines the means by which remittances are sent, reflecting sending states' interest in capturing and utilizing this growing source of foreign currency (Orozco 2002). These two privileged topics – trafficking of people in one direction and remittance flows in the other – do not account for the sophistication of the migration industry, its structure and its participation in different stages of the social process of international migration.

Characteristics and functions of the migration industry

The migration industry consists of private and specialized services offered at specific costs that facilitate people's international mobility. These services are rendered by migration entrepreneurs whose main objective is to turn a profit. In this sense, their participation in the social process of migration is different from that of other actors such as governments, nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), emigrants themselves and their networks. The relationship between the migration industry and each of these actors is analyzed below. Activities and services constituting the migration industry include trafficking and labor recruitment, the lending of funds to finance migration, passenger transportation and travel agencies, the sending of monetary and in-kind remittances, application for and production of authentic and counterfeit documents, legal counseling, and telecommunications services for emigrants and their home communities. In specific instances, the advertising of immigration destinations and the firms that market housing and real estate investments among potential migrants can also be considered part of the migration industry.³

In contrast to approaches that link the migration industry primarily to temporary flows, I argue that, in some form, it is present in all types of migratory movement (permanent, cyclical, recurrent, temporary, occasional and return migrations), and that it plays such vital roles as initiating migration, facilitating mobility, promoting the incorporation of immigrants to the labor and other markets, and "greasing" the system's engines. That is, it eases communication among migrants and their country of origin as well as the achievement of objectives by people and key actors in the social process of international migration (e.g. building a home). While it is not the goal of this article to

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analyze in detail each of the activities described, it is important to underscore that the components of the migration industry are differentiated and articulated with each other depending on several factors: the phase of the migratory process in which they intervene, their specialization or close articulation with other services, different combinations of legality-illegality and formality-informality of businesses, capital, equipment and technical knowledge required to undertake specific activities, and the importance of trust and interpersonal interactions between customers and service providers.

What is the relationship between the migration industry and other relevant actors in the social process of migration such as the state, migrants and their social networks and institutions, and NGOs concerned with migratory issues? To answer this question requires an examination of distinct relationships according to the actors involved.

The nexus between the migration industry and the nation-state is of fundamental importance since this ensemble of entrepreneurs, their businesses and the services they provide is an integral part of the eminently sociopolitical process of international migration. In essence, this process implies crossing international borders that signal “the geopolitical discontinuity” of nation-states (Foucher 1991: 38). The components and the historical dynamics of the migration industry depend on the policies and restrictions that states impose on different types of international migration flows (temporary or permanent, skilled or unskilled immigrants) at different times. This does not mean that states and their governments have absolute control over the phenomenon under study, but rather that state policies and their intended and unanticipated consequences are an important reference point in efforts to understand the presence or disappearance of social actors and activities constituting the migration industry.

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The implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 illustrates some of the unexpected consequences of receiving country immigration policies that shape the migration industry. As a result of the introduction of employer sanctions imposing penalties on those who knowingly hired undocumented workers, the old Mexico-U.S. labor recruitment system was renewed and expanded, but with a new twist: it allowed employers to avoid legal responsibility and transfer such liability to contractors. Thus, the system of contracting or subcontracting undocumented labor through middlemen expanded from agriculture, its historic niche, to urban jobs in sectors such as construction and food processing. At the same time, by requiring that employers demand citizenship or legal residence papers of their employees, IRCA also fostered the industry of counterfeit documents in the United States. The growth of this migration industry sector is an unexpected outcome of the interaction of two factors: the Act's failure to require document authentication checks and labor-deprived employers treating counterfeit papers as authentic. Despite official vigilance, the production and commerce in fake papers constitute a central component of the migration industry in the United States (Alegría 2004; Bach and Brill 1991).

Comparing two historical periods of Mexico-U.S. migration yields another example. At the turn of the last century, the policy of few restrictions or "open borders" to immigration did not require the services of coyotes (smugglers); rather there were recruiters who while trafficking in labor did not deal in illegal or undocumented workers. In contrast, current day coyotes provide a fundamental service to emigrants: getting them into U.S. territory in a political context of significant restrictions to immigration (a context of "closed borders").

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Previous efforts to conceptualize the migration industry have implicitly and explicitly recognized the importance of the state. This leads Salt and Stein (1997) to distinguish between legal and illegal activities and services and to identify businesses and practices with components that fall on both sides of the legal spectrum. On the clandestine end of the spectrum are trafficking (coyotaje) and the sale and “leasing” of counterfeit and authentic migration documents. On the legal end are many remittance transfer and passenger transport services. An alternative classification/typology that also uses the state as a reference point distinguishes between formal and informal businesses. Examples of the latter include small businesses that offer passenger, parcel and remittance transfer services specializing in particular migratory routes such as the cases examined in this article. There are many instances of formal businesses (i.e. those that operate within the state’s normative framework): banks and large companies that specialize in remittances, communication businesses, and travel agencies that serve immigrant populations, among others. Alternatively, small van courier businesses such as those examined here exemplify enterprises that move between formality and informality depending on the context.

In this area, it is noteworthy the active role of a handful of national governments in fostering the emigration and placement of citizens in international labor markets to produce remittance flows to the country of origin. The prominent role of governments like that of the Philippines in this respect shows how in some instances state institutions can assume activities normally associated with the migration industry and its services (Blanc 1996). However, states generally do not seek to profit directly from migration

although they may benefit indirectly from the economic and political stability derived from the impact of remittances on financial markets (Guarnizo 2003).

The relationship between the migration industry and migrant networks is extremely complex since, as the previous arguments suggest, it is partly mediated by the state. To reiterate the point, migration policies create conditions that stimulate or inhibit demand for certain services and the supply of others. For instance, the increase in migration controls along the Mexico-U.S. border over the last 10 years has forced people to use the services of coyotes (smugglers) who have raised prices according to demand (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). For its part, the Mexican government has recently intervened and negotiated with U.S. banks so that these financial institutions will allow the undocumented to open personal accounts and to use remittance transfer services (Diaz 2004).

Is the relationship between the migration industry and migrant networks one of replacement or one of complementarity? The contemporary literature on international migration in general and on the Mexico-U.S. stream in particular chiefly argues that such relationship is one of complementarity. This literature describes migrant networks as the social infrastructure that sustains migratory flows by acting as conduits that carry information crucial to the success of the migration experience. Individuals exchange information and favors following a logic of reciprocity and motivated by feelings of solidarity based on common origins and a common experience of foreignness (Massey et al 1987; Flores 2001). From this it is deduced that the migration industry plays a complementary role in relation to migrant networks by offering services that require specialized knowledge or a sophisticated and costly technical infrastructure.

However, under certain circumstances the migration industry not only complements but may also replace social networks. This happens because, despite the tone that dominates the relevant literature, migrant networks are not infallible. Due to conditions of poverty and social marginality experienced by migrants, to ethnic and gender inequalities, and to abuses by network members (Hagan 1998; Hernández-León 2005; Menjivar 2000, Portes y Sensenbrenner 1993), migrants' social infrastructure does not always deliver the expected social capital. I argue that immigrants face these and similar circumstances more frequently than academic studies generally recognize. The reality and possibility that expectations of trust and reciprocity will be met with opportunistic, abusive and treacherous behaviors lead individuals to seek greater control over social and economic exchanges and transactions. It is in this context that the migration industry's services facilitate greater control.

In-kind remittance services offer an example of this argument. A growing number of department stores with affiliates in the United States offer clients the possibility of purchasing everything from living room sets to computers for delivery to or pick up at branch stores in Mexico and Central America. FAMSA, Elektra and La Curacao are among the companies that have opened branches in the largest Latino neighborhoods of Los Angeles and other U.S. cities. Large Mexican corporations such as Cemex and Telmex have also entered this market. Through the Construmex program, immigrants can purchase building materials at offices in Los Angeles or Chicago for free delivery at any Cemex branch in Mexico. In addition, this cement company offers consulting services for the construction of single family homes (everything from design to project materials

estimates). In turn, Telmex offers telephone installation and payment services in Mexico for clients living in the United States (Delaunay 2002).

Why buy a living room set or 100 bags of cement in the United States when a friend or relative could make the purchase at the point of destination and consumption? I argue that this modality allows migrants greater control and security concerning the use of remittances. In this instance, the migration industry allows them to circumvent the network by resorting to the contractual mechanisms of a commercial transaction, thus avoiding the uncertainty inherent to in-network exchanges.

Another noteworthy nexus between the migration industry and immigrant networks involves the formation of ethnic economies. It could be argued that an important segment of the migration industry is also part of the ethnic and immigrant economy in receiving countries, especially in North America and Western Europe (Harney 1977; Light 2002). This perspective recognizes that a subset of ethnic entrepreneurs specializes in services linked to the migration industry. Because of their ethnic group and network membership, immigrants themselves often possess the cultural and social capital needed to establish businesses in migration industry niches of the ethnic economy (Hernández-León 2001). In Los Angeles, the contemporary “capital” of Mexican immigration in the United States (Durand and Massey 2003), Mexican enclaves such as East L.A. and Huntington Park are home to dozens of ethnic businesses, many of which are migration industry enterprises. Thus, as businesses that are part of the ethnic economy, migration industry firms may be further categorized following Light’s (2004) distinction between those with ethnic owners and those in which ethnic workers control access to jobs. Remittance transfer businesses illustrate this contention. Small and

medium size remittance businesses such as those discussed in the empirical part of this article are often owned by persons who share the same ethnic origin as their clients. In contrast, large remittance companies employ ethnics not only to facilitate service provision but also to effectively compete with other businesses, penetrate markets and acquire new customers.⁴ In both variants, it is possible to observe an instrumental use of ethnicity on behalf of economic self interest, characteristic of the migration industry.

The migration industry also has a set of differentiated relations with NGOs that offer various kinds of assistance to migrants (e.g. churches, migrant homes, immigrant rights associations, hometown associations, and development agencies). Although businesses in the migration industry and NGOs have different objectives, both converge on the same clientele: immigrants. This contact has significant consequences. One of the most obvious is a relationship with varying degrees of animosity between, on the one hand, migration industry actors prone to abusing immigrants' human and legal rights, and on the other, NGOs that defend these very rights. These organizations frequently expose to government authorities and civil society the violations and abuses of polleros (smugglers), recruiters, moneylenders, remittance transfer and transportation businesses, and fraudulent legal services. In a study of the Monterrey, Mexico-Houston, Texas migratory circuit, the author observed how community organization leaders alerted immigrants and law enforcement officials of shortcomings in small van courier services that transport passengers and remittances (in cash and in kind) between the two cities (Hernández-León 1997). These small informal businesses had a high accident rate, transported too many people in each vehicle and did not have commercial insurance to cover passengers (Pope and Dyer 1991).

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However, NGOs and the migration industry are also linked in ways that suggest forms of unanticipated articulation and even cooperation. The work of religious organizations providing assistance to emigrants at transit and concentration points is a case in point. By providing temporary shelter and meals to migrants, these organizations unwittingly facilitate the work of coyotes, recruiters and transporters especially when their tasks require a meeting place for potential clients. Wellmeier's (2000) work on "La Huerta", a meeting place for undocumented Maya on the outskirts of Phoenix, illustrates this point. In reference to the assistance rendered by volunteers associated with several churches, the author points out that "[T]he volunteer services kept it [La Huerta] viable as a transportation hub, a collection point for entering migrants, and a convenience for the coyotes who always knew where to find customers" (Wellmeier 2000:149). Other places where similar linkages occur are the casas de migrantes (migrant shelters) along the Mexico-U.S. border. These shelters are often used by smugglers as client depositories with full knowledge that migrants will receive room and board while the polleros make arrangements for a border crossing. Not surprisingly, this unwitting coordination has triggered conflicts between representatives of the Mexican National Migration Institute and migrant shelter leaders who are accused by the former of being an involuntary yet factual resource for pollero gangs (reference).

The examples cited are not the only instances of articulation between the migration industry and the infrastructure of migrant assistance organizations. Immigrant support organizations also serve as a starting point for migration-related entrepreneurial activities. This is because certain individuals may become familiar with the needs of immigrant communities through service in nonprofit organizations and they use the

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accrued knowledge to start businesses offering services linked to the migration industry. This is significant because it suggests that networks and ethnic membership are not the only point of entry to the migration industry. My observations in the case of a man of European ancestry who established a videoconferencing service connecting a city in Southern California, and two locations in Oaxaca, Mexico, illustrates this point. Despite not having ethnic ties to these communities, this entrepreneur was able to identify a business opportunity meeting the communications needs of Oaxacan natives thanks to his activities in organizations that advocated for adequate housing for agricultural workers. Moreover, it is probable that the articulation and coordination that I refer to here also work in an inverse sense: that is, successful business people moving into leadership positions in nonprofit organizations dedicated to provide social services and development of immigrant communities.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that hometown organizations are entering relationships with particular migration industry actors, especially with medium and large remittance transfer companies. These organizations have negotiated agreements to lower the cost of transfers as well as investment by these companies in community development projects in their hometowns. Although this is the outcome of different processes, it is ultimately possible due to the convergence of the migration industry and NGOs on the same migrant client base (Orozco 2002).

Articulation and Competition in the Migration Industry

Although services constituting the migration industry are clearly differentiated and compete with each other over potential customers, in practice and depending on the context, it is possible to see significant levels of articulation in certain types of activity. In

some instances, this articulation of activities is the norm. So, for example in the Mexican case, coyotes in regions with a long migratory tradition are linked to farm labor contractors who in turn provide transportation to work sites (Krissman 2000). In Ecuador, Kyle (2000) observes a link between travel agencies and moneylenders who advance funds needed for migration. Not only do the latter make travel arrangements, but in turn they procure counterfeit migration documents. Historians specializing in Italian migrations of the turn of the last century also note the articulation of transatlantic transportation companies, notaries, moneylenders, and labor recruiters (Harney 1977; Gabaccia 2000).

Little is known about the competitive dynamics among businesses concentrated in sectors of the migration industry (e.g. the role of comparative advantages). The study of Monterrey-Houston migratory circuit cited above observed competition in the passenger transportation and remittances market between bus and van courier services. The latter survive due to their informality, specializing in distinct migrant networks and using unpaid family labor. However, these small informal family businesses tend to disappear more rapidly than large bus companies because they are more vulnerable to state control at the borders and to conflicts within the networks and kinship units that sustain them (Hernández-León 1997; 2005).

The Migration Industry and New Destinations for Mexican Migration to the United States

How does the migration industry affect the formation and consolidation of immigrant destinations and communities? The second part of this article relies on a case study a new Mexican immigrant settlement in the U.S. Southeast to argue that the

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emergence and formation of migratory destinations does not depend exclusively on social networks or the supply and demand of labor, rather it is also mediated by the entrepreneurs, businesses and services that constitute the migration industry. Other scholars have shown how in the early phase of international flows, the migration industry plays a central role in beginning and maintaining human mobility between origins and destinations (Krissman 2000; Kyle 2000). Still devoid of human and social capital, emigrants depend on traffickers, recruiters, moneylenders, travel agents, transporters and other intermediaries to identify labor markets and migratory routes as well as to negotiate a minimal economic and social incorporation to the host country. Sociological and historical research on migration from Mexico to the United States has established the fundamental role played by specific sectors of the migration industry in starting population flows between the two countries (Durand 1994; Garcia 1981; Massey et al. 1987).

Durand (1994) has demonstrated the prominent role played by recruiters at the end of the 19th century in sparking migration from central western Mexico to the United States. They did this by connecting the workforce of communities in that region with industries that needed labor in the American southwest. It is worth underscoring that recruitment (known in Mexico as el enganche and also la cuerda) was also active in the provision of labor to areas of high economic growth within Mexico, a process that served as a platform for the enlistment of workers who would later find employment across the border (Durand 1994).⁵ In terms of the formation of new migratory destinations, the relevance of recruitment resides in the knowledge possessed by contractors, but not available to workers, of routes, arrival points and labor markets. Absent this knowledge

and the resources mobilized by recruiters in the exercise of their trade, it is unlikely that the migration process would have moved on to stages where flows tend to reproduce thanks to the social and human capital accrued by immigrants in their sojourning.

Of course, labor recruiters had at their disposal an important tool to mobilize workers from one country to another: the railroads. The railway infrastructure played a dual role during this period. As part of the migration industry, it facilitated the transportation of emigrants but also employed these workers. This dual role had profound consequences because in addition to being the primary means of transportation to mining and agricultural regions requiring their labor, railroads employed Mexicans for track maintenance, taking them to the most diverse corners of the United States. Subsequently, as workers found opportunities in other industries such as ironworks and meat production in states such as Nebraska, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania and New York, Mexican settlements emerged in those new destinations (Durand 1994; Driscoll 1996).

As a component of the migration industry, the railroad also impacted other dimensions of human mobility processes between Mexico and the United States. In his work on railroads during the Porfirian era, Coatsworth (1981: 74-75) points out that:

“Rail travel may not have been cheap enough to reduce the economic costs of traveling, but its greater speed dramatically reduced the psychic costs of separation from home and family. A journey to distant opportunity, accomplished in a matter of hours by rail, would have required days of wearying travel on foot. The railroad made it possible to migrate without losing touch, without irrevocably breaking the ties which bound rural Mexicans to their land and their pueblo.”

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Recruitment companies and systems undoubtedly played a dominant role in this initial phase of massive movements of Mexicans to the United States; one characterized by a strong demand for labor and few restrictions on international migration. However, the migration industry was also a factor in what could be called the institutionalization phase of migratory destinations. Working with Durand's periodization, 1900 marks the beginning of a phase in which migrant workers came to the border relying on their own devices. According to this author, "contractors gradually stopped looking for people in small towns and contracting companies settled in cities served by the Mexican railroads: Ciudad Juárez, Piedras Negras, Nuevo Laredo, and later Nogales, and Matamoros" (Durand 1994:112).

Significantly, not only does the migration industry not disappear, but it plays a central role in the consolidation of migratory destinations. During the stage that Durand refers to as one of "inertia" (1994:112), recruiters and railroads were still present, but had new functions: contractors imported workers en masse to the United States from the border and the railway system transported them to ever more distant places, but now also with their families. Trains also facilitated return migration, even when forced as in the case of the deportations of the 1920s and 1930s (Durand 1994). Clearly, even during this stage of consolidation, the networks, knowledge and contacts accumulated by immigrants did not act alone. In addition, new sectors of the migration industry emerged; in particular, the system of sending remittances via the postal service and telegraphs. Thus, while in the migration startup phase the migration industry was vital to the movement of people from origins to destinations, in subsequent phases it generated opportunities for the circulation of remittances, ideas, information, and for return migration.

A hundred years later, Mexican migration offers an opportunity to examine similar processes although in a different context and with a different set of actors. After a half century of intense concentration in the Southwest and in the greater Chicago metropolitan area, over the last 20 years Mexicans have dispersed to new destinations in the United States (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2000; Durand, Massey and Capoferro 2005). In some cases, these new destinations represent a return to places with an old Mexican presence (e.g. Colorado and Nebraska). In others, Mexican settlement is truly a novel phenomenon as in the case of new communities in the southeastern United States. New settlement locations have replaced old ones which lost their appeal as their urban economies and industries faltered. Currently, Atlanta has substituted the historic transportation and communications hub of Kansas City, while old ironworks industries like that found in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, have been replaced by new manufacturing enclaves like Dalton, Georgia, and a long list of urban centers where Mexicans are the preferred labor force for services, construction and light manufacturing.

Once again, the migration industry is a protagonist in the formation and consolidation of new destinations. The complexity of activities and services that currently constitute this industry is striking. This sophistication is partly a function of a change in the context within which population flows unfold. As mentioned earlier, the current context is one of immigration restriction and rigorous border controls even as migratory streams and the Mexican population resident in the United States have reached massive dimensions. This has fueled demand for coyotes, recruiters for urban and rural labor markets, money lenders, informal “ride givers” (raiteros) and transportation services generally, legal services and remittance sending services. In the remainder of this paper, I

analyze the contribution of in-kind and monetary remittance van courier services, to the consolidation of a new migratory destination in the southeastern United States. Given that destinations and origins are closely linked by what some researchers have called migratory circuits (Durand 1988), the impact of these services is felt as much in places of settlement as in migrant sending communities. In fact, one effect of the migration industry is to link the ends of a migratory circuit on a daily basis.

The migration industry in a new destination: the case of Dalton, Georgia

The small industrial city of Dalton, seat of northwest Georgia's Whitfield County, became a new destination for Mexican migration at the close of the 20th century (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2005). However, pioneers of this migration arrived in the early 1970s after being recruited in Texas and the border to work in the construction of a dam and in a poultry processing plant in Dalton. Recruiters became operative again during the 1980s and 1990s, when carpet companies – the most important industry in the city and the region – enlisted Mexican workers in south Texas (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2005). At the same time, the local poultry processing plant used contractors to attract labor from agricultural areas in Florida (Georgia Project 2003). Clearly, direct and contractor mediated recruitment has been a part of different stages of the formation of Dalton as a migratory destination, although during the most recent period it has attracted fewer migrants than the social networks of Mexican newcomers themselves (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2003).

According to the U.S. Census, in 2000, over 25% of Whitfield County's inhabitants were of Hispanic origin, a proportion that reached over 40% in the city of Dalton (Hernández-León and Zúñiga 2003). As might be expected, this critical

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population mass has given rise to a highly diverse demand for activities and services that make up the migration industry: bus and van transportation companies, travel agencies, communication and remittance businesses, real estate brokerages specializing in the immigrant market, and an underground economy of raiteros (“ride givers”), coyotes, moneylenders, contractors, and paper processors. As mentioned earlier, the role of these services is not only to attract more immigrants to Dalton but also to maintain communications between the Mexican population in this new destination and sending communities and to satisfy needs that result from the migratory process (such as sending remittances).

In addition to well-known electronic money transfer services such as Western Union and MoneyGram, Mexicans in Dalton also use small remittance transfer businesses. These informal operations employ vans to cover various locations in the migratory circuits that join Dalton with multiple Mexican regions and localities. The research for this project included interviews with the managers, employees, and customers of 5 such small informal businesses as well as observations carried out when customers drop off remittances and packages in the period preceding departure to various destinations in Mexico.⁶ For the purposes of this article, the focus is on two of these businesses: one specializing in the Dalton-Juan Aldama, Zacatecas, migratory circuit, and the other linking Dalton with several cities and communities in the Huasteca, Bajío and western Mexico regions,⁷ and specializing in the transportation of in-kind remittances. The routes of these two businesses are charted in Map 1.

[Map 1 about here]

Dalton's Van Couriers and the Sending of Remittances

On Saturday mornings, Belle Street, one of the main thoroughfares of Dalton's Mexican neighborhood, turns into the heart of remittance sending services. All along the avenue, different van services park their vehicles in front of stores and supermarkets. Some rent their own office space. A steady flow of people preparing to send money, packages and even correspondence to various states and localities in Mexico passes by. Some of the vans also offer passenger transportation services. In addition to receiving and organizing remittances (sent to their destinations in dollars), a great deal of the feverish activity on Belle Street revolves around organizing parcels on the overhead grills of vans and in the trailers attached to many of the vehicles. Occasionally, managers and customers negotiate the price of sending a parcel and whether it can be included in the day's shipment. There are five to seven van services connecting Dalton to Mexico that carry out most of their operations on this avenue and adjoining streets. Between noon and early afternoon most vans depart towards border cities and then different destinations in Mexico's interior.

Given the existence of sophisticated and rapid methods of sending remittances, why do some immigrants prefer van services? Small couriers have a series of comparative advantages over larger businesses because they offer several affordable alternatives combining cash and in-kind remittances, correspondence, and passenger transportation services. The small business specializing in the Dalton-Juan Aldama route has approximately 100 regular customers who pay a 5% commission on the value of sent items. Sending a large box of clothes costs \$120, equivalent to a one-way passenger fare to Zacatecas. Customers send shoes, stoves, washers, televisions, stereos and many other

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household items. Sending a stove costs \$200. Vans taking the Dalton-Huasteca-Bajío-Western Mexico route charge a \$10 commission for remittances of up to \$240 and 5% for higher amounts. The cost of sending parcels depends on the size and value of the items in question. Thus, for example, to send a \$500 washing machine costs \$180, a fee comparable to what other van couriers charge.

In addition, vans make home delivery of dollar amounts. This comparative advantage is maintained in urban and rural contexts, but it is accentuated in rural settings due to a scarcity of formal financial institutions and limited communication alternatives. Once in Juan Aldama, vans distribute monies and parcels in ranches and rural communities of the region which includes municipalities in the states of Zacatecas and Durango. Thus, by transporting dollars to towns and villages where there are no banks or money exchange businesses where to receive electronic transfers, van couriers serve as a de facto financial institution for northern Zacatecas and eastern Durango. According to a customer from Simon Bolivar, Durango:

In the first place, where we're from we have to send money with them [van couriers] because we have no banks, exchange places or anything like that. And to exchange currency or to receive [money at] an exchange place...you have to go an hour and a half away where there are banks.

This very customer points out other advantages of sending money by way of vans rather than electronic transfer companies such as not having to pay indirect fees when receiving pesos at an unfavorable exchange rate:

The advantage about it is that...it doesn't take long, they arrive quickly, and it arrives like you sent it: in dollars. That's how it gets there. And if

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you use the companies and you send a hundred dollars they're going to charge you like ten dollars. But over there where they go to get the money, they set the price, how much they'll pay... Let's say I send a hundred dollars from here [Dalton] by Western Union or to the bank they have over there. Right now the dollar's at 9.10 [pesos], but over there they'll pay them 8.80 [pesos]. I lose out!

Home delivery is another clear advantage of van couriers, especially in a rural region where the means of communication are not very developed:

And that's why... since you have the possibility it's better to send it by van. Let's say I'm going to send a hundred or five hundred dollars. I send the money and then I have to call them to go to such and such a place: "I sent you 500 dollars. Go to Torreón, Coahuila, to get the money." So they have to go where there's more movement. And to go there, they have to use some sort of transportation. But with the vans, they just get it. If there's someone around, they take it to the house.

Further, these small informal companies work with the regularity and efficacy of any other business. Although cultural, linguistic and regional influences affect customers' preferences, they can count on vans leaving religiously on the agreed day and time and on deliveries being made in a timely manner. Vans that leave for Zacatecas on Saturday are back in Dalton by Thursday. Regular and effective services are crucial to attracting and retaining customers who may stop patronizing a business if trips are not made or if there are problems with deliveries. Other studies of informal remittance services have noted similar dynamics (Hernández-León 2005; Mahler 1999). Van couriers also facilitate other

types of contacts between Dalton and migrant sending communities. Families in Mexican home communities send bread, tortillas, food and clothes payable cash on delivery. These parcels serve as an expression of gratitude and a means of communication among family members and divided communities, thus facilitating their socio-cultural reproduction (Boruchoff 1999; Hernández-León 2001). This service is not offered by any of the competing remittance businesses.

How do van couriers survive competition with each other and with other remittance mechanisms? The ability of these services to compete in the remittance market is attributable, above all, to their informality and a characteristic bi-national social organization. As part of the informal economy many of these services have no permits and commercial insurance for transporting people and packages. This represents a savings in costs that would otherwise be passed on to customers in the form of higher fees for sending remittances and parcels.⁸ Informality also generates savings on payments of drivers', loaders', and other employees' social security taxes and health benefits. Equally important is the bi-national social organization of the van courier industry which contributes to their economic survival by reducing operation costs and by minimizing competition and conflict among rival businesses. The two businesses examined in this study provide relevant examples.

The Dalton-Huasteca service is able to cover its long journey through towns and cities of the Mexican interior thanks to the owner's use of relatives' and friends' homes as bases of operation where packages may be left for subsequent retrieval by clients. This immigrant entrepreneur has developed a network of contacts along his route that allow him to conduct his business and to solve daily problems such as vehicle breakdowns.

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Contacts are not only located in Mexico, but also in the United States and at strategic points along the border. On his way south, the owner picks up passengers and packages at a friend's restaurant in Marietta, a suburb of Atlanta. On his way back to the United States, the van stops in Matamoros to pickup passengers headed for Georgia. The stop is at his daughter's house in that border city. In brief, the owner and manager of this business takes advantage of his bi-national social networks (consisting of relatives, friends and compatriots) to create bases from where to offer services, cover an extensive geography and thus save on commercial space rental costs.

Another example that offers greater understanding of the social organization of this activity has to do with how delivery routes are determined. The route of the business discussed in the preceding paragraph begins in La Huasteca, the region where the owner-driver's hometown is located and a place where his family still lives. It would be reasonable to assume, then, that this delivery route simply reflects the bi-national geography of his contacts, on the one hand, and of his Dalton/Marietta customers' home states and towns, on the other. However, there is another important and less evident factor. Owners of the two van courier businesses studied here have agreed to follow different routes and thus to avoid direct competition. While the first van service crosses the border at Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, stops in Monterrey and Torreón and then makes deliveries in the area bordered by Zacatecas and Durango, the second enters Mexico through Brownsville-Matamoros, and then traverses La Huasteca, El Bajío, and one location in western Mexico (Morelia) (see Map 1). This arrangement does not preclude these two courier services from competing with others in Dalton, but it does demonstrate the existence of a bi-national social organization of the van industry. The arrangement

also shows that these informal entrepreneurs play a vital and active role in crafting such social organization. It is important to underscore that these two owners are not formally associated. However, thanks to their agreement they exchange advice and information about how to maintain the business and manage their respective risks.

These risks are part and parcel of the informal and bi-national status of these businesses yet assuming them does not always result in a favorable outcome. Being held up is one of these risks. Although this rarely happens, the associated loss of thousands of dollars can cause this type of small business to go bankrupt. The previous owner of the van service that covers the Dalton-Juan Aldama route was the victim of a highway robbery in which he lost both vehicle and remittances. Although the police arrested the robbers and returned the van, cash remittances were lost. The owner had to return monies to each of his customers. A consequence of these events is that clients feared using the courier's services again. After these experiences, the new owner arranged for armed protection for the part of the route immediately before Juan Aldama.

As small informal businesses, these van services face an even greater and ever present threat: state regulation. On the Mexican side this can be solved by bribing customs agents and federal highway police, a strategy that is not viable on the U.S. end. Thus, a latent risk is the seizure of money by U.S. customs officials either because funds were undeclared (if they exceed U\$S 10,000) or because the courier service does not have a permit to carry out this commercial activity. The account of an immigrant from Durango describes such an event:

Approximately one or two years ago, there was another man that had other vans. He would stop there, in front of La Popular [a store]. Around Belle,

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that's where they all stop. This man was taking his van to Mexico, you know. And he was carrying 200,000 dollars in cash from people who were sending it ... The government from here [the United States] took everything away. At the border. They took everything away and the van. And the things [shipped in boxes]. And they threw him in jail. [And customs officials asked him] why was he carrying so much money, a full sack? From where was he carrying so much money?

Although the owner of the operation was able to recover part of the cash, he lost his van and worse yet, his customers' trust (they stopped using this business's services).

According to the interviewee, the owner "never finished paying people the money."

As shown in the preceding paragraphs, van owners and operators respond to risks by socializing "funds of knowledge" (Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 1992) concerning the service, like knowing where to stop in order to avoid robbery, trying not to carry more than \$10,000 in cash to avoid a declaration to U.S. officials, and smoothing relations with Mexican customs officials and federal police along their route by paying small, but regular bribes.

Despite the growing participation of banks and an increasing number of electronic funds transfer companies in the remittance industry, the small businesses examined here are a long way from disappearing as an alternate means of sending remittances. They seem to have the ability to maintain a niche within the migration industry and to expand to new destinations. At the request of customers, the owner of the Dalton-Huasteca route is thinking of expanding services to the neighboring states of North and South Carolina.

In sum, vans and other systems of remittance and transportation contribute to the consolidation of new migratory destinations by linking them in a regular manner to sending communities in Mexico and with neuralgic centers of the Mexican diaspora in U.S. border states. This is how over the last 10 years, the names of both small and large cities in states like Georgia, Florida and North Carolina have gradually appeared on the routes of vans, raiteros, and bus lines that make up the migration industry.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article has been to propose the concept of the migration industry as a social and economic infrastructure consisting of for-profit services and activities that facilitate international migration. Their principal actors are entrepreneurs of different types united by the pursuit of economic gain through efforts to meet migrants' needs to cross borders, move according to socio-political and labor market junctures, settle and integrate in the receiving context, and to send money and maintain contact with home communities. The migration industry also meets the service demands of people who remain in sending areas, but whose economic wellbeing depends on relatives and friends abroad.

Seen less from the perspective of actors and more as a social structure, the migration industry is a part of, promotes, and sustains international migration flows, and it has a historically variable and context driven character. It is affected by states and their migratory policies, the geography of origins and destinations, the patterns, magnitudes, and composition of migration, and the modes of emigrant/immigrant incorporation to both the sending and receiving countries. But it also has a determining character; that is, it is able to influence certain dimensions of migration such as the institutionalization of

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new migratory destinations. The migration industry is present in both sending and receiving countries, bridging and connecting them according to labor demands and international and regional migration regimes. At the same time, it maintains a differentiated relationship with actors in the social process of international migration like states, migrants and their social networks and nonprofit organizations and associations concerned with international migration and immigration.

This study has also demonstrated that while in the beginning recruited migrant pioneers establish new destinations and places of settlement, it is the migration industry, its entrepreneurs and services – and not only migrants and their networks- that are in large part responsible for the institutionalization of these destinations and for their consolidation as part of international migratory circuits.

Endnotes

¹ With respect to the padroni, Gabaccia points out that “their growing importance reminds us that migration, too, had become a big business” (2000: 62).

² A fundamental difference between my approach and that of Salt and Stein is that these researchers theorize migration in its entirety as a business and different actors and institutions as participants in it. In contrast, I characterize the migration industry as a component of the social process of international migration.

³ On the promotion of certain neighborhoods in Los Angeles among Korean and Taiwanese emigrants in their respective countries see the work of Light (2002).

⁴ This is not to suggest that all migration industry businesses are ethnic enterprises.

⁵ In addition to highlighting the importance of this migration industry sector in the articulation of domestic and international flows, Durand also refers to the impact of recruiters on the development of an initial migratory pattern consisting of “men who traveled alone and in their economically active years” (1994:111).

⁶ The names of businesses, their locations, and of the people interviewed are fictitious.

⁷ The route includes Matamoros, Ciudad Victoria and El Mante in the state of Tamaulipas; Río Verde and San Luis Potosí city in the state of San Luis Potosí; Querétaro, Celaya, Salvatierra, and Acámbaro in the state of Guanajuato; and Morelia in Michoacán.

⁸ In some instances, owners buy insurance in the United States but not in Mexico; or they purchase insurance during periods of frequent travel and increased general activity, like the Christmas season.

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