Some Critical Reflections on the Migration Industry Concept¹

by

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In this paper I conduct a critical review of the varying ways that the concept of migration industry has been defined and used in the literature on international migration. Specifically, I discuss whether we should treat the term as a fully-developed analytical concept or as a useful figure of speech for referring to the collection actors and enterprises that dedicate themselves to facilitating the migration and settlement of others. In doing so, I consider some of the challenges we face in defining the scope of the industry and review some of the potentially undesired connotations the term can imply. In addition, I examine the role that migration entrepreneurs play as mediating the international relationship between capital and labor and discuss the extent to which the social logic governing the relations among migrants is analytically compatible with the economic logic governing the operation of migration enterprises. Throughout the paper, I evaluate various aspects of the migration industry concept in light of the findings from my own research on the practice of coyotaje—the hiring by Mexican migrants of migration facilitators known as coyotes—on the border between South Texas and Northeast Mexico in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

MIGRATION INDUSTRY: DEFINING THE CONCEPT

In the late 1990s the term migration industry was introduced into the scholarly literature on international migration as a way of explaining how migration flows sustained themselves in the face of intensified efforts of states to control movement across their territorial boundaries. A number of authors have contributed to the development and advocated more extensive use of this concept, including several colleagues whose work appears in this volume. Rather than conduct an exhaustive review of the growing literature that makes use of the migration industry concept, here I limit myself to a consideration of a few key books and articles that seem to be having a significant impact on the field of migration studies.
In 1997, British geographers John Salt and Jeremy Stein published an influential article on what they called the *migration business* in the journal *International Migration*, which since has been widely cited, including in some of the papers in this volume (see, for example, Acacio 2009 and Hernández-León 2009). They claimed not only that organizations that could be called migration “businesses” existed, but further that the phenomenon of international migration as a whole could be thought of as “a diverse international business with a vast budget, providing hundreds of thousands of jobs worldwide, and managed by a set of individuals and institutions, each of which has an interest in how the business develops.” This business consisted 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” (Salt and Stein 1997:468). According to the authors, streams of migrants between nations were managed by “a string of intermediate institutions” dedicated to encouraging and facilitating their movement. These institutions included “recruitment and travel agencies, transport operators, legal and advisory firms, and others” (p. 469).

The global migration business, Salt and Stein proposed, was divided into two components, one *legitimate* (legal/regular) and the other *illegitimate* (illegal/irregular) (p. 469). Having established the conceptual contours of the migration business, the authors focused their attention in the remainder of their article on the “illegitimate” end of the business, what they referred to as *human trafficking.* They defined trafficking as “an international business, involving the trading and systematic movement of people as ‘commodities’ by various means and potentially involving a variety of agents, institutions, and intermediaries” (p. 471). It was,

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2 The authors wrote this article prior to the adoption of the U.N protocols on smuggling and trafficking (see Laczko 2002). Although they were aware of the distinction between smuggling and trafficking that later was incorporated into the protocols, they concluded that the distinction was immaterial to their discussion of migration as business and opted to use the term trafficking to refer to both phenomena.
they noted, “a major international problem” that was “well on its way to becoming an established branch of well-organized international gangster syndicates” that perhaps was “as profitable as drug smuggling.” They cited an estimate that found that “trafficking” brought in annual global revenues of U.S. $5 to U.S. $7 billion in 1994 (p. 472).3 They characterized trafficking syndicates, whether large or small, as having a “central management” consisting of a “core group” who oversaw and controlled trafficking operations (p. 478). Regardless of their size, trafficking enterprises had to have “employees en route” and/or had to rely upon the complicity of “bribable” border and immigration officials (p. 482). Motivated by the prospect of “huge profits,” Salt and Stein (1997:480) argued that “traffickers” played an important role in “persuading migrants of the benefits of migration,” so that “sales promotion” was “an integral part of their operations.” Thus, they argued, trafficking as a business played a role not only in sustaining migration in the face of state attempts to curtail it, but also played a role in inducing individuals to migrate who otherwise might not have done so.

Castles and Miller are most-often cited as introducing the precise term migration industry into the scholarly lexicon with publication of the second edition of their book The Age of Migration in 1998.4 According to Castles and Miller (2003:28), the migration industry consisted of “recruitment organizations, lawyers, agents, smugglers, and other intermediaries.” Like Salt and Stein, these authors argued that the participants in this industry have “a strong interest in the continuation of migration” and have “often confounded government efforts to control or stop movements.” Also like Salt and Stein, Castles and Miller found “human smuggling and trafficking” to be a “disturbing and increasingly salient element of the migration industry” (pp.

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4 Interestingly, they credit Nigel Harris’s 1995 book The New Untouchables with inspiring their use of the term, although he did not actually use it in the book but rather described the activities and agents that they said constituted it (see Harris 1995:132-136).
115-117). Castles and Miller (2003:27) located the concept of migration industry in the framework of what they called *migration systems theory*, which focused on the principle that “any migratory movement can be seen as the result of interacting macro- and micro-structures.” In this framework, *macro-structures* referred to “large-scale institutional factors,” including “political economy of the world market, interstate relationships, and the laws, structures, and practices established by the states of sending and receiving countries to control migrant settlement.” *Micro-structures*, in their estimation, consisted of the “networks, practices, and beliefs of the migrants themselves,” especially those “informal social networks” that contributed to “mutual help in economic and social matters.” The migration industry, they proposed, was a meso-structure, i.e., one of a “number of intermediate mechanisms” that related the macro to the micro-structures of migration. This aspect of Castles and Miller’s approach was also consistent with Salt and Stein’s formulation of the migration business as involving the management of migration flows by a “string of intermediate institutions.” Neither set of authors, however, goes into much detail about what, concretely-speaking, is meso or intermediate about the enterprises that compose this industry, a topic to which I will return below in discussing the issue of labor brokerage.

In 2000, David J. Kyle published findings of his study of international migration from Ecuador to the United States and Europe in the book *Transnational Peasants*. This book introduced the concept of migration merchants in to the scholarly literature. Kyle found that the sudden rise of mass emigration from the Andean province of Azuay to the United States owed to “the reemergence of a centuries-old institution in the region—the usurious middleman, in this case the integrated network of tramitadores, or facilitators, who provide the range of legal and illegal services needed to make a clandestine trip to the United States.” These tramitadores
worked “directly or indirectly, for unscrupulous travel agencies, which are themselves participants in larger formal and underground networks of migration merchants.” One of the most important types of migration merchant was the *chulquero*, or informal money-lender, who made it possible for impoverished peasants to raise the U.S. $6,000 to $10,000 needed to pay for the journey in the early 1990s (p. 66). Migration merchants, Kyle argues, profit from “facilitating some aspect of the migration process,” carrying out a brokerage between labor and capital that has become “a multibillion dollar industry worldwide.” The commodities such brokers are exporting, Kyle explains, are Ecuadoran workers. Moreover, he maintains that it is the migration merchants who profit the most in the export process. This “global business of migration,” he emphasizes, is a new and qualitatively different phenomenon than that of the individual coyote helping a Mexican immigrant across the Rio Grande (pp. 203-204). In a subsequent publication, Kyle refers to the activities carried out by migration merchants as *migrant-exporting schemes* (Kyle and Dale 2001:32-33).

More recently, the editor of this volume, Rubén Hernández-León, further refined the migration industry concept and applied it to various aspects of the process of Mexican migration to the United States in his 2008 book *Metropolitan Migrants*. Hernández-León (p. 155) argues that the migration industry “‘greases’ the engines of international human mobility, providing and articulating the expertise and infrastructural resources that facilitate such mobility and the realization of goals intimately tied to the experience of migration.” It is not an industry as we normally use the term, as he clarifies in his contribution to this volume (Hernández-León 2009). Rather, the migration industry consists of an “ensemble of entrepreneurs, who, motivated by the pursuit of financial gain, provide a variety of services facilitating human mobility across international borders” (2008:154). Consistent with the other authors discussed above,
Hernández-León (2008:155) identifies *migration entrepreneurs* as including providers of such above-board services as travel arrangements and transportation, legal services, labor contracting, as well as such clandestine services as smuggling and dispatching of false documents. To this list, he also adds the formal and informal remittance and courier services he encountered in his field work that he also discusses in his paper on *camioneros* in this volume (Hernández-León 2009).

The migration industry, Hernández-León argues, fulfills some vital functions in the Mexican migration process. First, it serves to open the U.S. labor market to Mexicans. Second, it establishes regular connections between Mexican communities of origin and U.S. destinations. And third, it structures opportunities for migrants. The migration industry thereby provides “an effective and efficient means to bridge … the boundaries of nation-states—something that individual migrants and their networks might be incapable of doing on their own” (Hernández-León 2008:193). This bridging becomes ever more important to migrants with intensification of U.S. immigration and border control policies. In this regard, Hernández-León (2008:193) also insists that, even in cases where migration entrepreneurs emerge from the migrant community itself, the fact that they run for-profit businesses structures their relationship to the rest of the community according to a logic that produces social distance and asymmetry between them and other community members. As he notes in his paper on camioneros, established for-profit business operations in the migration industry do not run on trust and reliability alone, even if they began as community services that initially relied heavily on these social resources (Hernández-León 2009). He also seconds Castles and Miller’s (2003:26) characterization of the migration industry as a meso-structure that links macro- and micro-level structures in the migration process. In addition, he “provisionally” endorses Castles’ (2004) position that the
migration industry “not only responds to the demand for services [by migrants] but also plays a role in the organization and even the causation of international migration” (Hernández-León 2009:2).

**MIGRATION INDUSTRY AS FIGURE OF SPEECH**

Clearly there are enterprises, both formal and informal, that contribute meaningfully to the migration process and are worthy of study by scholars. The term scholars have chosen to refer to these enterprises collectively is some variant of migration *industry*. As Hernández-León (2009:1) notes in his paper, the migration industry is “not an industry in the traditional sense of the term” but instead consists of “a matrix of entrepreneurs and businesses” that facilitates and sustains international migration. He is right to say that the migration industry is not an industry as we typically think of one. The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, for example, defines *industry* as “a department or branch of a craft, art business, or manufacture, especially one that employs a large personnel and capital, especially in manufacturing,” while the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a particular form or branch of productive labor; a trade or manufacture.” The migration industry as we are using the term does not typically refer to high-profile enterprises with a large workforce and vast capital at their disposal. Neither does it refer to a particular trade or type of work. Rather, many, if not most of the enterprises we intend to include in the migration industry are small to medium scale, often informal operations that are geographically dispersed and lack a consciousness of one another existing as a group of enterprises sharing common goals and interests. Most of the migration enterprises and entrepreneurs covered by the concept are equally classifiable as working within other, officially-recognized branches of industry, such as transportation, communications, legal services, and finance. It is also worth mentioning that the term *industry* by itself does not seem to have any
special analytical meaning attached to it in the social sciences. Much to my surprise, I found no entries for the term in the following specialized dictionaries I consulted: *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Sociology; Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences*; and *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics Online*. Referring to the set of enterprises and/or actors that facilitate international migration as an industry gives rise to some additional conundrums that have not yet been resolved in the incipient literature on this subject. Two that come to mind immediately have to do with how to establish the conceptual boundaries of the migration industry and what the relevant unit of analysis for determining whether some enterprise/actor is part of the industry or not.

The first question to consider is whether or not an enterprise must dedicate itself fully or primarily to migration facilitation in order to be considered to be a part of the migration industry. With regard to financial services, for example, enterprises and actors that dedicate themselves primarily to satisfying the special needs of international migrants clearly should be regarded as a component of the migration industry. It is less clear how we should regard large U.S. financial institutions, such as Bank of America, that court international migrants as customers, including by requiring no more identification to open an account than a consular *matricula* from undocumented Mexican residents of the United States, but whose overall business serves the general public, not migrants in particular. We could ask similar questions with regard to transportation companies, such as commercial airlines, that have routes that are heavily used by international migrants but that also serve tourists and businesspeople from around the world. Clearly, commercial passenger airlines are business enterprises that facilitate international migration, but they would seem to operate on a dramatically different basis than the specialized bus lines described by Sandoval in his paper in this volume. Similarly, the concept of migration
industry would definitely want to include the companies offering \textit{balikbayan} box services to Filipino migrants in California described by Ocampo (2009), but what of the Chinese containerized shipping companies that \textit{balikbayan} companies contracted to carry their boxes across the Pacific along with thousands of other containers carrying other types of merchandise? Historically, the extension of rail lines from Central Mexico to the border with the United States in the late nineteenth century has been credited as a catalyst for mass migration. Labor recruiters availed themselves of the possibility of transporting workers by rail, but the railroads were not themselves built with the transportation of workers in mind.

The second question is related to the first, but has more to do with the linkages between enterprises and between enterprises and migrants. We can illustrate this by taking the provision of legal services as an example. Migrants have to fulfill a variety of state-imposed requirements in order establish residence and work legally in that state’s territory. Clearly, we would regard an immigration law firm that petitions the state for residence and work permits for migrants as forming part of the migration industry. It is less clear how we might regard an employer or an educational institution that has its own in-house counsel to handle such matters on behalf of its employees or students. I address this issue in more detail below with regard to the phenomenon of migrant labor recruitment by employers.

The foregoing suggests that it is difficult to establish the dimensions of the migration industry in terms of the number and type of enterprises it comprises, much less the revenues it generates. We might do better to focus less on enterprises and entrepreneurs as our object of study and more on the types of services provided to migrants, their families, and their employers, along with the types of relationships that exist among the actors involved. In other words, we would do well to focus less on what the migration industry \textit{is} and more on what it \textit{does}. This
approach would allow us to avoid getting sidetracked into debates about who is in and who is out of the migration industry and could free us up to focus more fruitfully on the social processes involved in the provision of the services that “grease the wheels” of migration. This, of course, also reinforces the notion that our current use of the term “industry” with regard to migration is more a convenient figure of speech used to refer to a heterogeneous collection of migration support services rather than a full-fledged analytical concept with a key role to play in a fully-developed theoretical framework and research program. This is not to say that the migration industry concept will not eventually be more fully developed to achieve such an analytical status, only that we do not yet seem to have arrived at that point. In addition, we need a name for the phenomenon we are studying and migration industry offers a useful shorthand term to guide our inquiry. Nevertheless, figures of speech, as the poststructuralists remind us, play an important role in establishing the contours of any discourse by virtue of the connotations they convey. In subsequent sections of this paper, I will turn my attention to a few of the connotations of “industry” that we might want to consider carefully as we further elaborate our scholarly discourse about international migration.

THE QUESTION OF MIGRANT AGENCY IN RELATION TO THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY CONCEPT

All definitions of the term “industry” relate to the carrying out of a productive activity of some kind. This raises the question of exactly who or what is being “industrious” in the migration process. In other words, when we think of the migration industry, who are we contemplating as being actively involved in the process of “producing” migration? In studying the migration industry, scholars understandably tend to privilege entrepreneurs and enterprises as the protagonists of the migration process. This is not a problem in and of itself, since other
literature privileges migrants as protagonists (see, for example, Adler 2000 and 2004 and Rodriguez 1996), but it can do violence to our understanding of the migration process if it frames migrants as playing an overly passive role in setting their own migratory agendas. In other words, we need to be careful not to frame the migration industry as by definition driving the migration process.

We can take the Salt and Stein (1997) article discussed above as an illustration of this potential problem with the focus on the “industry” half of the term “migration industry.” In their account of “migration as business,” the authors grant no active, participatory role in the migration process to migrants themselves. This is especially odd given that they (rather dubiously) identify nation-state governments as active profit-seekers in the international migration business. In Salt and Stein’s model, migrants appear only in the form of “streams” that are “managed by a string of intermediate institutions” that stand outside the stream and are not recognized as being “of” the migrant community in any meaningful way. With regard to the “illegitimate” component of the migration business, trafficking,⁵ Salt and Stein’s conceptual objectification of migrants is total: For them, migrants are “commodities” that are transported in order to be traded. The closest that these authors come to granting any form of agency whatsoever to migrants themselves is in one brief paragraph of their lengthy article, in whose opening sentence they concede that “migrants sometimes deliberately seek out the services of traffickers” (1997:480).

Such characterizations of migrants’ relationship to the migration industry are problematic for a variety of reasons. First, they fail to seek an adequate account of how migrants and their friends and kin actively seek out the services of migration entrepreneurs as a way of fulfilling their own migratory agendas. Second, they do not expressly contemplate the social process

⁵ Recall that Salt and Stein conflate smuggling and trafficking and refer both using the single term “trafficking.”
through which migrants choose whose services to contract or how they negotiate migration “deals” with the entrepreneurs whose services they contract. In the case of Mexican coyotaje, I have detailed how migrants and their kin are frequently far from passive with regard to these matters. Instead, they rely upon the considerable knowledge of the migration process that has accumulated in their social networks to put them in contact with the providers of the services they desire, negotiate the financing of such services with funds obtained from friends and relatives already in the United States, and exert as much leverage as possible on the service provider to fulfill the terms of the migration “deal” that they have negotiated (Spener 2007, 2008a, and 2009).

The characterization of migrants as “commodities” is doubly problematic. First, it is simply inaccurate insofar as it misidentifies the commodity that is being sold by the migration merchant. Except in those specific cases in which migrants are forced into close approximations of chattel slavery, migration merchants engage in neither the buying nor selling of migrants. Instead of being the commodity traded by merchants, migrants are typically the customers of these merchants and the commodity they purchase is the services the merchants sell them. In the case of Mexican migration to the United States, the incidence of trafficking—in which migrants indeed do become commodities—appears to be quite rare relative to the incidence of smuggling, as defined in the relevant U.N. protocols (see Spener 2008b and 2009). In addition, referring to migrants as being the commodities traded in the migration industry lends undeserved credibility to government officials who routinely describe migrants to credulous reporters as being bought and sold as “loads” of “merchandise” by unscrupulous smugglers/traffickers. This type of characterization then leads to the dissemination of sensationalized accounts of the undocumented
migration process that frame it as a sinister “slave trade” that must be vigorously combated by military and police authorities (see Spener 2008a and 2009).

If it is typically an error to characterize the enterprises and entrepreneurs of the migration industry as trading in migrants as commodities, we might also want to exercise some care about characterizing the commodity being sold by the industry as being migration itself. This issue relates to the extent to which migration entrepreneurs induce migration that would not have taken place without their interventions or sustain it beyond the point in time that it would have otherwise petered out. Again, of the authors whose work I review here, Salt and Stein (1997) make the strongest statements about how migration entrepreneurs induce migration, noting that “sales promotion” is one of “traffickers” most important activities. Clearly, in some contemporary cases entrepreneurs have played a significant role in encouraging emigration, especially in moments of economic and political crisis in sending countries. Kyle (2000), for example, credits migration merchants with launching the exodus from Ecuador to the United States by providing specific services in peasant communities without which migration could not have been undertaken.

Writing about the Mexican case, Hernández-León (2009:2) notes that migration entrepreneurs play a role not only in organizing migration, but even in causing it. In fact, there is ample evidence that labor recruiters known as *enganchadores* and *contratistas* played an indispensable role in launching northward migration to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to satisfy demand for workers in agriculture, railroad construction, and mining. At the same time, the pattern in the Mexican case has been for migration to quickly become self-sustaining once knowledge of job opportunities and how to take advantage of them diffuses in the working population. Thus, the initial successes of labor recruiters have tended to quickly
render their continued services unnecessary (Durand 1994; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Spener 2005). In the contemporary period, however, there is considerable cause for doubt about the extent to which migration entrepreneurs are capable of “causing” Mexican emigration in the same way that “migration merchants” generated new outflows of migrants from Ecuador.

The reasons for this have to do with the unique characteristics of Mexican migration to the United States. The Mexican-origin population of the United States currently numbers over 30 million people, the vast majority of whom are either natives of Mexico or the descendants of Mexican immigrants, who have been arriving from Mexico on a mass scale for over a century. Knowledge about life and work in the United States is widely diffused in Mexican communities and the Mexican population living north of the border serves as a tremendous resource for Mexicans who wish to emigrate. Modern communication technologies are also widely diffused in Mexico, including in rural communities, allowing potential migrants to communicate with and instantaneously receive information from persons already in the United States with considerable ease. Coyotes and enganchadores continue to court potential customers in many parts of Mexico, but they no longer have the unchallenged ability to “dupe” naïve potential migrants about the general advantages and disadvantages of living and working in the United States, though they may successfully mislead them about the particulars of the services they seek to sell them. Today, economic crisis is more likely to push workers north and social network connections are more likely to draw workers north than agents of the migration industry are to induce them to abandon their country. It remains clear, however, that migration entrepreneurs, by offering services that ease Mexicans’ overcoming of ever-greater restriction of their entry into U.S. territory and barriers to their employment and settlement here, sustain migration at a higher level than would otherwise be the case, as increased reliance on coyotes for border-crossing over
the last 15 years has been documented by a variety of studies (see Fuentes et al 2007; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002; Spagat 2006; Spener 2009).

Paradoxically, the ability of migration industry entrepreneurs to direct and shape migration flows may be greater when such flows are legal rather than when they occur outside the laws of the destination country. There are two potential reasons for this. First, obtaining legal migratory status requires a high level of expertise relating to the immigration, residency, and employment laws of the receiving country, as in the case of Filipina nurses going to work for U.S. hospitals described by Acacio (2009) in this volume. Second, while undocumented migrants face no limits on the number of “openings” for new migrants in the receiving country, the number of slots available to legal labor migrants is typically quite limited. Thus, enterprises and entrepreneurs in the migration industry may, to some extent, monopolize access to migration in a way that they are unable to do with regard to undocumented movement. Under these circumstances, they may come closer to being able to sell migration itself as a sort of all or nothing “package deal”.

MIGRATION MERCHANTS AS LABOR MARKET INTERMEDIARIES

As discussed earlier, the migration industry and migration industry entrepreneurs have been identified as intermediate, meso-level structures and/or institutions that carry out various types of brokerage functions in the migration process. The most evident type of brokerage carried out by migration entrepreneurs is that of labor recruitment and supply. Independent entrepreneurs are hired by capitalists to recruit and deliver workers to them, whether legally as part of government-sanctioned guest worker programs or extra-legally in the unregulated sectors of the global labor market. As discussed in the previous section, labor brokerage has played an important role in the history of Mexican migration to the United States and continues to do so in
some key economic sectors, especially in agriculture and poultry-processing (see Krissman 2000 and Griffith 2009). At the same time, it is also the case that, at least with regard to extra-legal migration, the labor recruitment function often quickly renders itself unnecessary as migrant networks themselves begin to take on this responsibility at no cost to the employer, as current employees channel new job openings to their friends and kin in Mexico (Heyman 1998; Rodríguez 2004). Today, migration industry entrepreneurs known as coyotes continue to facilitate a great deal, if not most of Mexican labor migration to the United States. In earlier publications (see, for example, Spener 2001), I argued that coyotes by definition carried out a labor market brokerage function by effectively “importing” Mexican workers needed by U.S. employers. After additional field research and reflection, I am less convinced that the bulk of services provided by coyotes should be characterized in this way.

In my own research, I have identified three distinct types of coyotaje that have played significant roles in the history of Mexican migration to the United States (Spener 2005 and 2009). The relative prevalence of each type has varied with changes in the policy regime governing Mexico-U.S. migration. The first, labor brokerage coyotaje, has already been discussed and consists of coyotes supplying U.S. employers with workers in contravention of U.S. and/or Mexican government policies. The second, bureaucratic evasion coyotaje, consists of coyotes assisting migrants in getting around bureaucratic red tape imposed on them by government agencies either with the complicity of agency officials or by falsely appearing to comply with requirements. The third type, clandestine-crossing coyotaje, consists of coyotes helping migrants get across the U.S.-Mexico border by avoiding inspection by the authorities at the legal ports of entry. Today, the bureaucratic evasion and clandestine-crossing types of coyotaje appear to be considerably more important to the maintenance of the migration flow than
the labor-brokerage type (Spener 2009). Because coyotaje has been identified as one of the key components of the migration industry, this raises the question of what brokerage function, if any, is being carried out by the bureaucratic evasion and clandestine crossing types.

In my study of coyotaje practiced across the Northeast Mexico-South Texas border, the most common arrangement that I found was that of migrants being recommended to coyotes by trusted friends and family members. The decision to migrate was made by the migrants themselves based on knowledge of the opportunities for life and work available to them in the United States relative to their home communities in Mexico and/or invitations to travel north from friends and relatives who already lived in the United States. Migrants’ knowledge of conditions in the United States was obtained either from their own previous experience or information passed to them through their social networks. The same was true for their knowledge about the nature of the clandestine border-crossing process. Coyote fees were typically paid by friends/relatives in Texas upon migrants’ safe arrival in their destination. These same social network members also typically provided arriving migrants with initial accommodations and assistance in finding a job. The most common jobs migrants obtained were in residential construction, landscaping, or the food service sector. Occasionally, if the migrant’s boss were also Mexican and had a close working or affective relationship with the migrant, the boss would also contribute some portion of the fee charged by the coyotes (Spener 2007 and 2009). These arrangements were common whether migrants had pursued a clandestine-crossing or a bureaucratic evasion strategy for crossing the border. Migrants also pursued bureaucratic evasion strategies to obtain documents to present to employers once they were in the United States, but these arrangements were not usually made in concert with

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6 This owed to the fact that my study used a snowball sampling method moving outward from initial contacts in Austin, Houston, and San Antonio to sending communities in Mexico. As a result, relatively few of the migrants I interviewed had worked in agriculture or in meatpacking/poultry-processing in small towns and rural areas.
employers or their hired agents. Thus, coyotes were not engaged in much direct brokering of labor for U.S. employers. Moreover, the employers involved were not typically representative of large-scale, global capital, but rather were most likely to be small to medium-scale enterprises in the local economies of migrants’ U.S. destinations. Some of these employers, especially in construction and landscaping were themselves Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans, an indicator of enterprises that were significantly embedded in co-ethnic relations.

The question of labor recruitment/brokerage also brings us back to the problem of how we establish the conceptual boundaries of the migration industry. As it has been defined by its principal advocates, the concept of migration industry presupposes a set of independent entrepreneurs that “grease the engines” of migration through their business activity. With regard to labor recruitment/brokerage, this suggests that to be considered to be part of the migration industry, the recruiters of workers for employers must not be actual employees of the employers’ businesses. What industry are we talking about when a chitroquero [a construction worker that installs sheet-rock] brings his cousin back with him from his visit to his rancho in Durango, sharing the same coyote, and receives a bonus from his employer for doing so (and/or some in-kind favor from his cousin)? Is this “just” the construction industry doing its own labor recruitment? Is it an example of an employee doubling as a migration entrepreneur in his time off? Or is it mutual aid among migrants? My own field research experience and review of the extant literature on Mexican migration suggests to me that such highly ambiguous “twilight” situations are far from exceptional with regard to how we might conceptualize this aspect of the migration industry. Indeed, as Massey, Durand, and Malone (2002) have argued, one of the principal impacts of the employer sanctions provisions of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was to promote indirect employment through subcontractors in the
construction and other industries. Thus, in my interviews with Mexican migrants in Texas, I found many cases of men who worked for independent contractors specializing in a specific aspect of home construction such as painting, carpentry, or roofing. Their employers were typically fellow Mexicans who had legalized their U.S. residence through IRCA and were sometimes members of their extended family or *paisanos* from their same hometown who had recruited them, arranging for and helping to finance their clandestine border-crossing.

The commodity chains approach to understanding networks of global economic activity (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1993) may offer a complementary way to conceptualize the activities of entrepreneurs and firms that promote labor migration. In the global garment industry, for example, large-scale retail buyers of apparel exert control over a series of independent businesses that are contracted to them directly or indirectly (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000; Ross 2004). Analogous to the role played by *contratistas* of migrant labor, independent “jobbers” in the garment commodity chain locate factories in a variety of countries to sew garments for brand name manufacturers or retailers’ own private labels. Such subcontracting chains are common in lean production, just-in-time networks in the global apparel industry. Whether the jobbing function is hired out or conducted in-house, either by manufacturers or retailers, jobbers are not treated in the literature as being part of any branch of production other than the apparel industry.

Elsewhere, I have written about the potential benefits of exploring the parallels between the networked structure of global industries and of the social networks of their migrant workforce (see Spener, Gereffi and Bair 2002). In this same spirit, here I suggest that some of the insights gained from the commodity chains approach to analyzing global industrial organization might usefully be employed to address some of the unresolved dilemmas encountered in applying a migration industry approach to understanding the mobilization of migrant labor.
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LOGIC IN THE MIGRATION INDUSTRY

All of the conceptualizations of migration industry elaborated by the authors whose work is discussed above coincide in two respects: 1) that the migration industry (or business, or merchant) provides migration-specific services to migrants and/or to their employers; and 2) that migration entrepreneurs (or merchants, or businesses) provide these services in pursuit of financial gain. The first point distinguishes the migration industry from other industries whose products and/or services migrants rely upon by insisting that the entrepreneurs that compose it must direct their activities specifically and intentionally to the promotion, support, and/or furtherance of migration. The second distinguishes the migration industry from the assistance migrants and members of their social networks provide one another and from any assistance migrants might receive gratis from the state and non-governmental organizations. This second point also implies that the logic governing the actions of entrepreneurs and enterprises and their relationship with their customers is qualitatively different from the logic governing mutual aid given within migrant networks.

Here I would like to argue that the question of financial gain as a factor motivating migration entrepreneurs does not unequivocally distinguish the logic governing the migration industry from the logic governing social relations within migrant networks. This is not to say that there is no distinction to be made between “for profit” activities and solidary activities, only that there may be considerable overlap between these spheres both conceptually and empirically and that the logic of financial gain and the logic of reciprocal mutual aid may simultaneously govern the same transactions in the migration industry. Conceptually, there are several reasons for making this argument. With regard to the “formal” sector of the migration industry, many of the organizations that facilitate migration are not-for profit. Contributors to this volume at
various points have included under the migration industry rubric the activities of formal “non-profit” organizations as well as the activities of “for profit” businesses. Religious social service agencies, for example, often provide legal aid to migrants and refugees that accord with our definition of the migration industry in many ways. Similarly, by relaxing the “for profit” constraint, we can treat as part of the migration industry not only the commercial labor recruitment agencies, but the entire collection of state agencies, professional associations, non-profit hospitals, and accreditation agencies that constitute the “organizational field” dedicated to facilitating the migration of Filipina nurses to the United States that Acacio describes in her contribution to this volume.

We should also bear in mind that financial gain remains the principal motivating factor for labor migrations around the world. People move in the first instance for instrumental reasons—to increase their earnings, accumulate savings, and improve their material well-being. The fact that many people subsequently migrate for affective reasons, mainly to reunite with family members working in another country, does not negate the importance of financial gain in driving the initial migration. We also need to recognize that aid given for reasons of reciprocity within migrant networks is also frequently governed by an instrumental logic of expected material benefits in the future, not by altruistic values (Portes 1995). Moreover, the expectation of future material benefits derived from giving aid to a family member or a friend now itself derives from the financial gain expected from migration. In addition, as Heyman (1998:172-173) notes, reciprocal exchanges within migrant networks can create highly exploitative hierarchies of social indebtedness that are masked by the “language of confidentiality and trust,” so that mutual aid is not necessarily more solidary than evidently self-interested economic transactions are. Finally, as the insights of economic sociology and economic anthropology
remind us, commercial transactions even in the most market-oriented situations remain embedded in social relations of one kind or another that are governed by non-economic normative considerations as well as a purely economic logic. As I will argue further below, this is especially the case for transactions occurring in the “informal” sector of the migration industry.

Given that Salt and Stein (1997) define migration as business, it is not surprising that their account of the migration industry gives the most emphasis on the profit-motive as explaining the behavior of those who work in it. For these authors, all the participants in the migration process—firms, governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals—are motivated by the desire for “commercial gain.” With regard to the “trafficking” component of the migration business, they repeatedly emphasize profit-seeking as the explanatory factor in analyzing the behavior of trafficking “syndicates.” Contrary to the approaches to the analysis of economic activity taken by most anthropologists and sociologists, Salt and Stein seem to regard the migration business as being almost completely disembedded from social relations and the norms and values that govern them. With regard to “trafficking” in particular, they describe its practitioners as being motivated by the prospect of “huge” profits to be made from selling migration to individuals with whom they have an exclusively commercial relationship (Salt and Stein 1997:480). To the extent that government officials are complicit in trafficking schemes, they do so after being identified as “bribables” by employees of trafficking syndicates (p. 478).

Kyle (2000:67) also emphasizes profit-making as one of the defining features of migration merchants: “… what I call ‘migration merchants,’ defined here as anyone profiting, legally or illegally, from the commodification of the international migration process …. ”

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7 The research on the cumulative causation of Mexican migration by Massey, Durand, and their various collaborators would seem to imply that, other things being equal, the migration process might actually tend to
Hernández-León (2008:154), on the other hand, does not use the term “profit” in his formal definition of the migration industry, referring instead to entrepreneurs who are “motivated by the pursuit of financial gain” [emphasis added], allowing for the inclusion of small-scale enterprises that realize no formal profits per se but instead provide the self-employed with a source of income other than or in addition to wages. This raises the question of whether either term—profit or financial gain—is being employed in a figurative or analytical sense by its proponents.

In the works reviewed here, and as far as I know throughout the extant literature, the use of the term “profit” seems to have been almost entirely figurative. As I discussed previously with regard to the term “industry”, the use of profit figuratively can do a good job of calling our attention to a key component of migration facilitation. Nevertheless, there are several ways in which we might want to be cautious about how we talk about “profits” in the migration industry.

One of the main problems in talking about profits in the migration industry is that what exactly is meant by profit is never analytically defined, even when the putative estimates of the magnitude of profits in some segment of the industry are being reported. One aspect of this problem is that writers sometimes carelessly conflate revenues with profits. For example, Castles and Miller (2003:116) quoting an article by Martin and Miller (2000:969) to report that “the human trafficking industry may generate profits [emphasis added] of US$5 to 10 billion per year,” when, in fact, Martin and Miller reported a (rather seat-of-the-pants) estimate of the worldwide revenues generated by smuggling.8 Similarly, Cornelius reports that intensification of U.S. border enforcement has produced a windfall for Mexican smugglers: “It has turned a

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8 According to Martin and Miller (2000:969), this estimate of revenues was based on an estimate of one million migrants being smuggled globally per year with each paying between $5,000 and $10,000 to their smugglers. They reported this estimate in a conference report from a meeting between migration scholars and nation-state immigration enforcement officials held in Germany. They did not indicate the source of the data that went into making the revenue estimate.
modestly lucrative business into a fantastically profitable industry” (quoted in Spagat 2006). Although Salt and Stein (1997:468) describe the migration business as consisting of institutionalized networks with “complex profit and loss accounts,” such accounts seem to have been mainly assumed by the migration literature rather than empirically investigated and analyzed.

Returning to my own research on coyotaje as a migration business, profits have no real meaning unless the risks to which coyotes are exposed are included in its cost structure. At the minor end of the spectrum, these risks include eventual arrest, imprisonment, seizure of property and assets, and loss of future income. At the major end of the spectrum, real risks can include injury and violent death at the hands of competitors, criminal gangs engaged in protection rackets, or even law enforcement officials on both sides of the border. They also include death and injury while engaged in leading migrants on ever-more perilous journeys across the border, as well as the long-term effects of stress on coyotes’ minds and bodies.

In the contemporary period, these risks and the stresses associated with them are not merely hypothetical. This calls into question the assumption that rapidly rising coyote fees in response to increased border enforcement automatically translates into rapidly rising “profits.” While it would be true that the revenues received by coyotes rise, that does not necessarily make coyotes “the big winners” as their “industry” goes from merely “lucrative” to “fantastically profitable,” as some have claimed in the press (see Spagat 2006). As I have discussed elsewhere (Spener 2009), the increase in revenues flowing into coyotaje as an activity does not mean that they flow to a fixed group of coyotes in the same measure, as growing numbers of coyotes are arrested, imprisoned, injured, killed, or otherwise abandon the activity as they age.

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9 Here I should note that I myself have engaged in this kind of rhetoric in some earlier publications. In 1998, for example, I characterized the fees charged to migrants by coyotes as being “increasingly exorbitant” in response to beefed-up security along the United States’ border with Mexico. See Spener and Staudt 1998:241.
and weary of the increasing risks they confront. Intensified enforcement, however, certainly does increase the costs of coyotes’ services to migrants as well as the risks to which migrants themselves are exposed.

We should not ignore how the use of the term “profit” with regard to activities such as coyotaje also plays a rhetorical role in the discourse about migration. Coyotes can be portrayed as “profiteers” that illegitimately benefit from state attempts to secure their borders and exploit migrants’ vulnerability and desperation. In the rhetoric of law enforcement authorities that is amplified by the media, profit becomes a key component in a recurring trope that identifies coyotes as being so blinded by greed that they callously disregard the well-being of migrants, whom they treat like “merchandise” or “cargo” and whom they “sell” among themselves by the “load” (see Spener 2009). More broadly, the profit trope also can be used by anti-immigration advocates in a discursive maneuver that serves to deflect accusations of racism, xenophobia, or heartlessness on their part. In this maneuver, immigration restrictionists can claim that they do not really “blame” migrants for breaking immigration laws, taking jobs from “Americans,” or whatever, but rather hold responsible those who promote their migration in order to profit from it, whether these be employers, bankers, wire-transfer service providers, or coyotes. This discursive maneuver echoes the historical debate about the role played by profiteering entrepreneurs in “artificially” stimulating immigration above its “natural” level that Ivan Light (2009) discusses in his paper in this volume.

Assessments of profit are also complicated by the fact that many migration enterprises consist of self-employed individuals with no employees, who pursue their activity as a somewhat more remunerative alternative to un- or underemployment. In the case of informal activities such as coyotaje, the surreptitious transport of migrants is sometimes carried out by a fairly ad-
hoc network of more or less independent contractors, each of whom receives a share of the overall fee paid by migrants. While it certainly makes sense to characterize the portion of the revenue received by each participant as income, it is not so clear that it should be treated as profit. Hernández-León’s (2008) definition of migration industry as consisting of an ensemble of entrepreneurs motivated by “financial gain” allows for a consideration of such ambiguous situations without getting bogged down in questions of whether the money they receive for their services is profit or not. I believe his use of this more inclusive term is well-advised, given the potential pitfalls of emphasizing the question of profit that I have outlined above. This brings us back to the question of how big a difference pursuit of financial gain makes to uniquely distinguishing the migration industry from other components of the infrastructure that supports migration, especially the aid provided to migrants by members of their social networks.

In relating a fascinating and instructive account of the rise and demise of Transportes García, a remittance transportation business operating on the Houston-Monterrey circuit, Hernández-León (2008:168-183) concludes that even when a migration industry business emerges from a mutually-supportive network of social relations within a migrant community, the logic governing its operation and relations with the rest of the community change significantly once it becomes a viable, “going” business concern. Hernández-León (2008:173), insightfully characterizes this change as a shift from a set of relationships governed by a social logic of mutual aid to a set of relationships governed primarily by a commercial logic: “When Jorge García decided to turn his social capital into a launching pad for a business operation, he also changed the terms of his nexus to fellow migrants, which shifted from feelings of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity to the expectations of efficiency and effectiveness that characterize a commercial transaction.” Continuing, he credits the enterprise’s survival to “the efficiency and
This is surely an important observation and one that would seem to make sense as a means to distinguish commercial activities conducted within the migration industry from other non-commercial activities taking place in the rest of the migrant community. At the same time, we might want to consider how clearly we can delimit the boundary between commercial and non-commercial spheres of activity as well as distinguish between economic and non-economic logics. To be sure, Hernández-León recognizes this ambiguity insofar as he does not suggest that Transportes García became completely disembedded from the social relations of the community it served, only that matters of quality of service and price still held great weight in maintaining customer loyalty in a competitive market. Indeed, he notes that when Transportes García went out of business due to failures in its service, it was replaced by other camioneta services offered by entrepreneurs that similarly emerged from the community being served, not by outsiders. He argues that this owed to “the highly embedded nature of this money-making opportunity” (pp. 181-182). Although Hernández-León makes no specific statements in this regard, I read his account of Transportes García as illustrating the combined operation of social and economic logics as determining the fate of such enterprises. Kyle’s (2000) discussion of migration merchants in Ecuador contains similar examples of a mix of economic and social motivations governing their relations with their customers and collaborators.

The issues raised in Hernández-León’s insightful account of the logics governing the camioneta business merit further reflection with regard to defining the contours and dynamics of the migration industry. My reasons for this are at once conceptual and empirical. As the insights of economic anthropology and sociology suggest, economic activity is never “just” economic.
and as sociologists and anthropologists we would do well not to characterize any activity as being governed by a “purely” economic logic (Marx’s reduction of human relations under capitalism to “naked self-interest, callous cash payment”). To illustrate what I mean here, I will refer to Bourdieu’s (1977 and 1986) concepts concerning the “economy of practices” with relation to forms of capital and my own study of coyotaje on the Northeast Mexico-South Texas border.

Bourdieu’s essential insight in propounding his “economic of practices” framework is that the resources individuals and groups draw upon and exchange are social, cultural, and symbolic as well as material and economic. Moreover, individuals and groups constantly accumulate, exchange, and spend these resources as capital, including and especially across the material-economic and symbolic-social divide. Thus, as Smart (1993:391) notes, it is difficult to neatly separate commodified relations involving economic capital from sociocultural relations involving social, cultural, and symbolic capital.10 In his ethnographic study of Hong Kong entrepreneurs’ investments in guanxi (social capital) relations in the People’s Republic of China in the 1980s and early 1990s, Smart (1993:391) makes a cogent observation that may be especially relevant to our study of the migration industry:

I would suggest that fully economic capital is found when there are institutions of private property, and where such property is accorded protection by the state and legal system. In other circumstances, the constitution of economic capital and its separation from other forms of capital is less complete.11

10 As examples of this in the formal economy, Smart refers to the estimating of “goodwill” as a component of a company’s valuation recognized by the accounting profession and to the substantial investments companies make to develop, control, and burnish their brand image, another crucial dimension of the capital they can draw upon as a resource in competitive markets.

11 Smart 1988 and Portes 1994 make similar points with the regard to the importance of social capital and extra-legal forms of normative regulation in the informal economy.
Relatedly, he suggests that “the tendency to distinguish sharply” between the gift-giving associated with social capital and other forms of exchange in the economic realm is “deeply problematic,” insofar as “the distinguishing feature of the gift is found more in the kind of performance involved than in the character of the social relations implicated in the exchange” (Smart 1993:394). I have found Bourdieu’s “economy of practices” framework and Smart’s application of it to his study of business relations in China to be extremely helpful in my analysis of coyotaje. In my study of clandestine-crossing coyotaje practiced across the Texas-Mexico border in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I encountered a considerable variety of strategies, ranging along a continuum from those that were quite ad-hoc, loosely-organized, and incompletely commodified to others that were very well-organized, centrally-managed, and much more thoroughly commodified (Spener 2007; 2008b; and 2009). Two types of strategies I encountered illustrate my point concerning the difficulties in taking an “either/or” approach to characterizing the type of logic governing the relations among its participants.

In the migrant-sending communities I visited in Guanajuato, Nuevo León, and San Luis Potosí, novice migrants frequently relied upon more experienced friends, relatives, and townspeople to guide them on their cross-border treks into Texas. Sometimes the experienced migrants provided this service disinterestedly and altruistically, but more often there was an implicit or explicit exchange involved, sometimes involving cash, and sometimes not. I refer to this coyotaje strategy as *semi-professional migration* (Spener 2007) or *professional migration* (Spener 2007 and 2008a). One self-interested reason for a migrant to guide companions across the border was safety in numbers—it was better not to make the arduous trek alone. Another was to finance his own trip, since cash-strapped migrants in rural Mexico often had a hard time scraping together the funds to pay for a bus ticket to the border, lodging overnight, and food and
other supplies en route. Other migrants charged for their services, but were cheaper and more trusted by other members of their communities than full-time “commercial” coyotes that operated in cites at the border itself. These “professional migration” coyotes might dedicate themselves full-time or seasonally to providing service to members of their communities or only sporadically when they themselves planned to travel north to sojourn at a job there. Although these coyotes derived economic advantages from the services they offered, they remained members of the communities they served. For example, one migrant I interviewed characterized local coyotes as “people like us, only they drive better cars and have nicer houses.” He said they were not getting rich by being coyotes because, in spite of the rising fees they charged, they had to divide up the money they received among other collaborators in the “chain of coyotes” en route (Spener 2009).

As Hernández-León observed in the case of Transportes García, the reliability and quality of service of semi-professional migration and professional migration coyotes remained crucial to their success in addition to the embeddedness of their activities in community relations. If your cousin got you lost hiking in the brush in Texas for days without food or water you would not rely on him again in the future even if he was your cousin and you did not have to pay him. Similarly, if a professional migration coyote in a community subjected his local customers to unnecessary pain, abuse, or injury en route north, members of the community were likely to look for other ways across the border even if they knew the coyote well. On the other hand, they might find themselves obliged to continue to rely on this coyote, albeit more cautiously and skeptically, because they could not afford the higher prices they might have to pay outside the community where their relations with coyotes were not “subsidized” by social capital.
The second coyotaje strategy I would like to discuss here—friendship, not coyotaje—was also ambiguous with regard to the logic governing it (Spener 2008b and 2009). In several interviews in a small town in the altiplano region of San Luis Potosí, migrants told me that they paid “friends” residing in Texas to pick them up along a highway at a point past the last immigration checkpoint in the Rio Grande Valley and then drive them the rest of the way to their destinations in Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, or San Antonio. The amount each migrant would pay the driver was several hundred dollars, so that the driver could potentially make thousands of dollars simply by picking up a handful of people and driving them back home. When I asked these migrants to clarify if these drivers were coyotes with whom they were also friends or just friends, they insisted that they were just friends, not coyotes. For these potosinos, there was no contradiction between the social logic of mutual aid and the economic logic of monetary compensation. Both logics operated simultaneously in this kind of transaction. Without the social connection between the driver and his passengers, the service would not be available. At the same time, the riders recognized that their “friend” deserved compensation, both for the value of the service he was providing them and for the substantial risks he was taking by picking them up. He could be prosecuted and jailed as coyotes, have his vehicle confiscated, and ultimately be deported. As far as the Border Patrol was concerned, pretty much any driver of any group of undocumented Mexicans they pulled over in South Texas was by definition a coyote, even if his companions insisted that he was not.

In a contrasting example, I later interviewed a migrant from a rancho in Guanajuato who told me of trekking with friends from the banks of the Rio Grande to a small Texas town where they knew men lived who would be willing to drive them to the Dallas Fort-Worth area. The last time he had done this in 2003 he had paid the driver $800. With what the potosino migrants had
told me in mind, I asked him if these men were coyotes or just friends/acquaintances of theirs. He replied quite emphatically that they were definitely coyotes, not friends. The contrast here is telling: Although both sets of transactions involved the payment of considerable sums of money, only one of them was regarded by the migrants as a transaction with a migration industry entrepreneur.

Another significant strategy I encountered in my research on clandestine border-crossing was that of commercial transport coyotaje. This type of coyotaje was practiced by organized networks of individuals who provided surreptitious transportation, guidance, and lodging to all comers, on an on-going basis, motivated mainly by financial gain (Spener 2008b and 2009). It is this type that is almost exclusively reported about in the press and discussed by government officials. Even here, however, non-economic forms of capital, especially social and symbolic, could come to play an important role in the business. Such coyotaje enterprises depended heavily on word-of-mouth referrals and the reputations (symbolic capital) they enjoyed among migrants. Moreover, coyotes’ social and symbolic capital could be built up over time as they conducted their business for financial gain, as satisfied customers who had been treated well referred their friends and relatives to the business.12 It was seen as advantageous by migrants to work with recommended coyotes and by coyotes to work with migrants who had been recommended to them as well (Spener 2007 and 2009). Coyotes sometimes offered discounts to recommended and repeat customers or might reduce the time they had to wait before making their crossing. Customers recommended by friends and relatives who had crossed with the same coyotes previously could be good customers from the coyotes’ point of view because a) the migrants knew what to expect and how to act on the trip and b) the coyotes could be more

12 The reverse could also occur: Coyotes’ stores of social and cultural capital could be severely devalued if word about malfeasance and mistreatment of customers began to circulate in the migrant community.
confident that the money to pay them would really be there when the trip was completed. One of the most important things that social capital accomplished in the commercial transport coyotaje business was to permit the use of C.O.D. payment arrangements whereby coyotes effectively made their customers no-interest loans for their trips that were “collateralized” by the coyotes’ faith that the loans would be promptly paid by migrants’ friends and family members in Texas at the end of the trip.  

Thus, the embeddedness of this migration business in the broader set of social relations among migrants and between migrants and coyotes constituted an important form of social capital that financed a considerably larger amount of migration than might otherwise have taken place had migrants needed to raise and invest money capital in advance of their journeys with no guarantee that they would make it to their destinations.

In all three of these examples, I suggest we see illustrated how an archetypical migration “business” involving cash or in-kind payment for services rendered may operate simultaneously according to both the economic logic self interest and the social logic of mutual interest. This then raises an additional question: To what extent do the enterprises in the migration industry “grease the wheels” of migration with social resources in addition to economic ones? Sandoval’s (2008) outline of the types of infrastructure that facilitate the transborder circulation of people and objects might provide a useful framework to guide empirical research that seeks to answer this question. Sandoval’s framework divides this infrastructure into its physical, institutional, and social components. Of particular interest here is the way that he incorporates what we have been calling the migration industry into his framework. He classifies what he calls entrepreneurial infrastructures, meaning established business enterprises in the formal economy, as a subtype of institutional infrastructure (table 1, p. 47). Institutional infrastructures, he argues,

13 Of course, some coyotes attempted to ensure repayment by sequestering migrants under armed guard until payment for their journey was collected. This did not appear to be very common, however, during the period I was in the field between 1998 and 2006. See Spener 2009.
operate according to the logic of formal juridical and administrative relations. They are primarily governed, in other words, by an impersonal, socially disembedded logic, similar to that of the ideal-typical logic of economic interest. He classifies informal activities, meaning those business enterprises that take place in the informal economy, as a subtype of social infrastructure, because, he argues, these types of enterprises operate according to the ideal-typical logic of trust relations in social networks that span the border (p. 48). Using this framework as a guide for formulating research questions and hypotheses leads us to expect that, other things being equal, the social logic of mutuality will play a bigger role in the informal segment of the migration industry than it will in its formal segment. Conversely, we would expect strictly economic logic to play a bigger role in governing relations among actors in the formal segment of the industry than in its informal segment. Of course, it will take further empirical research to confirm or contradict these expectations, or to identify other conceptual approaches to guide our analysis.

CONCLUSION

The term migration industry offers scholars a useful figure of speech for talking about the services provided by a diverse collection of actors and enterprises dedicated to the facilitation of international migration. Understanding migration industry as a figure of speech rather than a fully-developed analytical concept affords us a great deal of flexibility in deciding what types of actors and phenomena can be considered to be a part of it. It also calls our attention to the need to carefully consider the potential metaphorical connotations of our use of the term, both desired and undesired, as we attempt to further develop the concept. The boundaries of the migration industry, as illustrated in a number of papers in this volume, are subject to debate. Rather than get bogged down in trying to settle formalistic questions of industrial organization, I suggest that we focus instead on the types of services we wish to include in the migration industry and the
social processes that are involved in the expression of demand for such services, their provision by suppliers, and the evolving relations among migrants and the providers of migration-related services. While financial gain is a motivating factor in both international migration and the provision of services to facilitate it, I suggest that the motivation of financial gain is a less important definitional characteristic of the industry than is the type of activities undertaken by the individuals and enterprise that participate in it. I make this argument because some important institutional actors in the industry are state agencies and non-profit organizations (as is the case in other industries, such as health care, for example) rather than for-profit businesses and also because a substantial segment of the migration industry is informal. In this informal sector, it is common for migration enterprises to be governed simultaneously by both the economic motivations of financial gain and the social motivations of mutual aid, even and especially when such aid is offered on a self-interested basis. If we maintain a focus on social process and a significant degree of flexibility regarding exactly how to define the contours of the migration industry, additional research and critical reflection should enable us to further develop the concept in such a way as to make it more rigorous and analytically powerful.

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