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Brokerage in Cross-Border Migration: From Networks to Social Mechanisms¹

Brokerage is an essential and often mentioned function in social life. In one of the classics in the field of sociology, Georg Simmel called brokers the *tertius gaudens* –literally meaning “the third party who enjoys”, or the third who laughs last (Simmel 1992). *Tertius gaudens* is part of the sociology of the triad which allows for three typical groupings not possible in dyads: the non-partisan (arbitrator)², *tertius gaudens and divide et impera* (divide and rule). It is occasionally difficult to distinguish between the three types in brokerage processes. Nonetheless, the focus of this analysis will be on *tertius gaudens*.

Simmel indicated early on that one of the characteristics of brokerage is the ambiguity of the broker’s role. Brokerage involves issues of connectivity between persons and groups as well as trust. Research on international migration is a prime example of a field in which the importance of brokerage is highlighted in both conceptual and empirical accounts of the causes and dynamics of migration. Yet it is rarely conceptualized systematically. This is an important task, however, because in the broadest sense brokerage acts to reduce transaction costs, that is, the costs necessary to overcome boundaries. Such boundaries are met along the way through the various stages of migration: obtaining a visa to cross national borders, crossing borders without a visa (undocumented border-crossing), adapting to the new country upon arrival – for example by finding housing, work, and child care, and adapting for the longer term – for example by bridging divides between newcomers and established groups in the place of settlement. Yet brokerage is not only of importance in migration processes from A to B but also in processes of return migration, onward movement to yet other destinations, or circular mobility across borders. Studying a mechanism such as brokerage makes sense only in a clearly defined context (Falletti/Lynch 2009). In international migration this context is constituted primarily by the following constellation: there is a right to exit (one’s country of residence) but there is no corresponding right to enter another national state. This means not only that some migrants must use the services of intermediaries such as traffickers or smugglers; potential and willing migrants often simply need information passed on by third parties, for example, how to acquire a visa to enter one of the desired countries of destination (e.g.

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² Arbitrators are those who help parties with partially conflicting interests to find a mutually agreeable bargain

Morawska 2007). Needless to say, brokerage extends beyond the initial stage of cross-border migration and operates in transnational social spaces. A case in point is (former) international students who not only connect persons in places of origin and destination but sometimes act as intermediaries across the globe (Bilecen/Faist 2014).

Conceptually, reference to the ubiquitous “migrant networks” or “social capital” (see, e.g. Massey/Aysa 2005 for a summary) or “migration systems” is not sufficient to account for (or explain) how some of the reciprocal relationships between migrants and others who offer intermediary services function. Mechanistic explanations of these relationships have approached the problem by, for example, breaking down network effects into the three mechanisms of (1) exchange of information, (2) the norm of reciprocity, and (3) collective action of migrants (di Maggio/Garip 2012). These are still very broad general mechanisms which are of importance in accounting for migration dynamics. Cutting across at least the first two of these mechanisms, if not all three, is brokerage. Yet network methodology and its corresponding reflections have not systematically considered the figure of the “third” in processes of observation, translation, mediation, arbitration, rivalry, coalitions, and other elementary configurations of social life. The “third” is so important because it differs from the dyad, and adds an element which is not present if we simply add a “fourth” and a “fifth.” There is a qualitative difference between dyads and triads (e.g. Berger/Luckmann 1966). Analyzing the essence of brokerage is to add to the understanding of the “third” in social life. In other words, brokers as an example of the “third” are not simply nodes in a network which bridge two yet unconnected nodes. Attached to their position are certain relational characteristics which need to be unearthed.

To ask how exactly brokerage works means studying social mechanisms. We move from an initial condition I (e.g. the wish to migrate across borders, or to adapt to social life in a country of destination) to an outcome O (e.g. successful adaptation, such as finding housing, child care, employment) by way of specifying the processes, that is, the mechanism(s) M involved between I and O: I – M – O. By studying brokerage as a social mechanism we contribute a conceptual element which constitutes the “grammar of social life” (Therborn 2006) and we contribute substantially to the understanding of the (re)production of (in)equalities in social life. After all, brokerage may significantly affect the social position and life chances of those agents involved.

This essay sets out to explore three questions: Why does brokerage exist? What kind of social mechanism is brokerage? What types of brokerage are there?

1) *Why is there brokerage?* Brokerage often occurs at the interstices of formal and informal practices through all stages of the migration processes – for example, between migrant groups and state bureaucracies. Whereas bureaucracy acts uniformly toward its clients (for example, “first in first served”), brokerage circumvents or even violates this uniformity by making some people able to go faster through bureaucracies. From this perspective it is particularly useful to study brokerage as a sort of glue of social life. As we know from economic sociology, there is no formal or informal sector as such (Portes 2010), but there are formal practices (e.g. bureaucratic rule application) and informal practices (e.g. brokerage). Moreover, organizations always provide space for informal practices; without such informal practices, (formal) organizations would not be able to function. In short, brokerage serves as a catalyst to ease flows of information and practices; it makes “things” work. Yet brokerage can also occur between groups which are not yet bridged; for example, politically active migrants rallying diverse migrant organizations from different countries of origin, as happened in the mobilization of protest in favour of undocumented migrants in the 2000s in the US (Voss/Bloemraad 2011).

2) *What kind of mechanism is brokerage?* Brokerage constitutes a noteworthy social mechanism because the outcome is ambiguous due to, among other things, the role of the broker. Brokerage could result in dependency and exploitation but also in increased capacities for the beneficiaries. It is the broker’s function which makes for complex relations of dependency and power asymmetries between the parties involved. Other social mechanisms could also be involved, preceding and following brokerage, such as social exclusion/inclusion, exploitation/redistribution, etc., since brokers offer resources which may enable or hinder spatial, eventually social mobility, adaptation to new environments and the exchange of ideas. In a nutshell, brokerage is a cross-cutting mechanism.

3) *What types of brokerage are there?* Heuristically, it is useful to differentiate among various spheres of social organization, such as state, market, civil society, and family, on the one hand, and corresponding types of brokerage, on the other. This is a first step toward a taxonomy of brokerage.

Yet before delving into these three questions, a look at the definition of brokerage is in order.

Brokerage as a Social Mechanism

Although Ludwig Wittgenstein was certainly right to point out that definitions as such do not enlighten the phenomenon in question, it is important to start with a working definition of bro-

kerage. Network methodology is a useful point of departure. By and large, brokerage means that third parties, that is, brokers, bridge “structural holes” (Burt 1992). Such holes exist when there are no direct ties between actors (nodes). Brokers then act as a third party that arranges for the connection – in order to facilitate access to valued resources, such as travel documents, papers to work in another country, civil and social rights, or material resources. Brokerage bridges those who are not directly connected to each other in a situation where the parties are connected to a focal actor – the broker – but not to one another.

Brokerage is a social mechanism – a sort of social master mechanism – along with others, such as exploitation (Marx), opportunity hoarding (Tilly 1998), social closure (Weber 1968), or hierarchization (Therborn 2006) (for an overview, see Diewald/Faist 2011). The term “social mechanism” refers to recurring actions and events, and links identifiable initial conditions with specific results, and is a helpful concept for identifying processes that generate inequalities (McAdam/Tarrow/Tilly 2001, p. 24).

Brokerage is a tool that helps to account for outcomes such as unequal life chances. Services of a smuggler, a trafficker, or labor recruiter across nation-state borders may come at a cost. Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, many Indian and Chinese laborers signed debt contracts, that is, they agreed to repay their transportation costs from wages earned in countries of destination such as the United States. This kind of indenture could result in relatively voluntary, short-term wage labor, but could also cross over into unfree and bonded labor (Bush 2000; see also Tilly 1990). Such divergent outcomes certainly have implications for life chances and thus social inequalities.

Brokerage may involve a chain of brokering processes. Take the example of certain forms of female migration from Nigeria to France. Young women and/or their relatives may consult a “Madame” to provide them with employment in France. The “Madame,” in turn, engages the services of a trafficker in order to transport the women migrants across borders from Nigeria to France. In France, there are other stations in the brokerage chain, such as – for example – relatives of the “Madame” who run prostitution services and set up the Nigerian women for work (de Montvalon 2013).

1) Why is there brokerage?

Brokerage takes place because not all persons are connected via direct links to relevant others. It occurs at the interstices of formal and informal practices, such as acquiring a visa or connecting with traffickers or middlepersons; finding employment, housing, child or elderly

care; accessing social services; entering organizations in the place of destination; accessing channels for return or onward migration. In all of these processes migrants, their significant others, their families, need to be linked to organizations, be they state authorities or those of civil society. For example, some potential migrants in a West African country may be in need of a tourist visa to enter a country in Europe. This may necessitate a contact within the embassy or consulate of one of the potential destination countries, thus linking persons in this state organization to the potential migrant via a middleperson. Brokers are often also involved in official (i.e. institutional) or unofficial recruitment (Spaan 1994).

Such informal processes of brokerage, interestingly, occur because the boundaries between countries and between the formal and the informal are not as clear-cut as they may seem. For example, the receiving state sometimes does not know what to do with certain migrants, such as asylum seekers whose requests have been denied. Often, the latter are not repatriated for humanitarian reasons. This is a particularly interesting example because it offers a glimpse into the inherent contradictions in the receiving state's goals. To illustrate: practices in France in recent years show that, on the one hand, the state is interested in effective migration control and thus limiting the number of those on its territory who have no regular papers; on the other hand, the state has some obligation to observe basic human rights, such as fundamental social rights to housing even for those who have no regular papers, the *sans papiers* (de Wenden 2010). Caught in this dilemma, the state, claiming to exert monopoly of power over a territory and membership and to be the sole legitimate actor in this field, tends to confer authority onto other actors. In this case, state authorities may allow civil society organizations to take care of persons in need and house them in shelters as they see fit. In France, among such shelters we find "social hotels" where homeless persons are housed (Alpes 2013). Since asylum seekers whose request has been denied also face homelessness, they are – under certain conditions (that they be single mothers with small children) – also admitted. Brokerage occurs at two points. First, organizational-level brokerage takes place between state authorities and the civil society organizations accepting and accommodating those persons eligible into "social hotels." The significant brokers here are the social workers who determine the eligibility of asylum seekers for particular kinds of housing. Second, brokerage takes place at the interstices of the hotel management on the one side and the migrants allotted rooms on the other side. Migrants themselves can frequently be found among the employees of the hotel's management. In other states, the situation may be different and not offer as many possibilities for brokerage between state bureaucracies and migrants. In the first decade of this century in Italy, for example, those asylum seekers whose request for full refugee status is denied receive a certain pre-determined type of assistance and some documents. After a pre-determined period they cease being a concern for the

state—hence reports of Somali “full” political refugees living on the street in Rome. However, in the past few years, facing mounting public discussion on restrictive migration control, Italian bureaucracies seem to have been changing their practices toward less clear-cut procedures.³

2) What type of brokerage mechanisms are there?

The problems involved in definition notwithstanding, the concept of brokerage should not be overstretched and used only metaphorically. It should be defined very clearly in order to avoid using it as a “catch all” concept in accounting for network dynamics in migration processes. In essence, there are two fundamental types of brokerage, namely, mediating and catalyst brokerage. Mediating brokerage is a rather simple form compared to *tertius gaudens*. Mediation simply manages flows of information, resources, etc. without creating direct links between the parties on either side. The classical figure is the stock broker. As a result of brokerage in the wake of mediation, there is no direct contact between the two actors who are unconnected and for which the broker bridges the structural hole. In the case of international migration, mediation has definite advantages: information and goods travel much faster and more smoothly via brokers, and the costs involved for migrants may be much lower than through organizational channels proper. Consider the practice of remittances. If a migrant wishes to transfer money from Manchester to a village in northwest Pakistan, the transaction costs of sending it via Western Union or MoneyGram are usually higher than through informal networks, such as *hawala* or *hundi* – the long-standing system of transfer around the Indian Ocean.⁴ The informal transfer involves brokers such as an individual in Manchester, businesspeople in Dubai and intermediaries in Pakistan. Such informal practices, however, can also result in unintended negative consequences for migrants (Passas 1994). By contrast, the two hitherto unconnected actors are brought together in catalyst brokerage. Through brokerage, the two parties on either side of the broker do get to know each other, the two parties strike up a relationship. This type of brokerage is well known from research on social relations in hiring. Mark Granovetter’s (1973) analysis pointed out the importance of “weak ties”, that is, that social ties outside one’s immediate frame of social ties (strong ties) can be more beneficial in opening up job opportunities. Granovetter concluded

³ Personal communication, Djordje Sredanovic.

⁴ See the papers by Roger Ballard on *hawala* and *hundi*: <http://www.casas.org.uk/papers/hawala.html>

that strong ties may be too redundant to bring new/additional information. Of course, the strength of the weak ties phenomenon is predicated on the assumption that resources inherent in strong ties are not sufficient.

It is worthwhile taking a closer look at the position of the broker in both mediation and catalysm. Of crucial importance to brokerage is the broker's social position. When it comes to social positioning and thus social inequalities, Simmel's classic figure of the *tertius gaudens* is of utmost importance. There is already a built-in advantage because the broker benefits from the parties' ongoing conduct. There may be not only information advantages the broker receives from his services but he/she may exploit dependency relationships which are a product of the brokerage process itself. We can distinguish two types of *tertius gaudens*. The first are the intermediaries who act in the function of linking clients and bureaucracies (state power), mentioned above. An example would be the political "fixers" in India (Reddy / Haragopal 1985). Second, in an expansive understanding of brokerage, one may conceive of intermediation as an emergent process of order-making, for example in the field of border-crossings. Biao (2012) argues that the labor recruiters in East Asia, for example, did not act as a bridge between the state and the society (they recruit workers in China for destinations such as Singapore, South Korea, and Japan). Rather, they were simultaneously positioned in the state and in the society and constituted an integral part of a centralized and integrative system of governance. While intermediaries were normally conceptualized as something "between"—between supply and demand, between receiving and sending sides, between society and the state, between de-territorializing economic impetus and territorializing powers—the intermediary trap should be understood as being within a particular process of order-making.

A typical characteristic of the "third who laughs" is the gains he or she may reap, such as monetary rewards, information, access to opportunities, enhanced social status (depending on circumstances, of course), or even monopoly rents, as in the case Biao (see above) describes. Biao's question is how to explain the "intermediary trap," that is, the high cost of legal cross-border labor migration for unskilled Chinese laborers over recent years, at least since the early 2000s. The price charged by "intermediaries" for their services has indeed been rising steadily over the past decade; and they have gained a prominent position as a result of the voluntary interactions between migrants, foreign employers, and government agencies. The intermediaries made money by making themselves indispensable to workers interested in migration and indispensable to states in their quest to assert order over migration. The East Asian states in fact provided very efficient migration control. There were four licensed labor recruitment companies in the beginning of the 1980s – by 2005 the number

had risen to more than 3,000, and it has remained stable ever since. One particularly interesting aspect of this case is that recruitment of workers has occurred along a vertical recruitment chain of intermediaries, at the one end (“upstream”) closer to employers and at the other end (“downstream”) closer to workers/migrants; and the Chinese government regulated both ends. Brokers higher up in the hierarchy ordered certain quotas of workers from those down the ladder. The Chinese state tightly controlled migration by barring state agencies from acting as intermediaries, and allowing private companies to recruit workers on behalf of overseas employers. As a result, a veritable “migration infrastructure industry” developed. Going beyond Biao, I interpret this to mean that the state regulated labor recruitment in a way that gave private intermediaries sole purview of the field. These companies operated under state surveillance but could set prices at liberty. Of particular importance is that the brokers at the end of the chain (upstream) could set the price and pass it on to those closer to the worker (downstream). In the example just mentioned, the brokers at either end of the chain can present themselves as pure market actors involved in the business of labor recruitment. This has not always been the case. One has only to think of what have been called “middleman minorities.” Well-known examples of these middleman minorities are South Asians employed by the British colonial power in East or South Africa as employees in the local administration. Middleman minorities have occupied niches which were not attractive to local entrepreneurs – the Chinese in California, Australia, and Canada in the second half of the nineteenth century who specialized in trades such as laundry shops, tobacco shops and other services, for example. Middleman minorities fulfilled specific functions not only economically (e.g. in unattractive niches in service markets) – for example, between capitalists and workers, but also politically (e.g. in the colonial administration). In this capacity there was always the question of whether they could be trusted (Bonacich 1973). After all, they conceived of themselves not as immigrants but as “sojourners,” that is, temporary residents; and when settlement became more or less permanent, they continued to bear the status of “aliens.” This also meant exclusion from the political system – at the very least from the formal channels of political claims-making and authority. The example of the mass expulsion of persons of Indian descent under the dictatorship of Idi Amin during the 1970s suggests that their (former) intermediary position between the autochthonous groups and the colonial power made them easy targets for scapegoating.

The case of middleman minorities suggests that intermediaries involved in brokerage may occupy a somewhat peculiar status, characterized (simultaneously, in some cases) by high social status and/or social marginality. Why, then, do persons become brokers? First, brokerage does carry relatively high social status. People in senior ranks may be more likely to be accepted as brokers, so they are more likely to take on this role. Status inequalities are

thus a precondition for brokerage, although, as already indicated, high social position is relative. The case of middleman minorities – sojourners and strangers – suggests that the status is higher compared to at least one of the groups of actors to be connected through brokerage. Second, brokers can be persons at the margins of the autochthonous society, that is, those considering themselves to be the society's insiders. Their marginality is both an advantage relative to the weaker parties but also a serious drawback in that they are not considered full members of the society in which they have settled. Middleman minorities certainly did not have high social status and the legitimacy of their activities was constantly questioned. Brokers can also be marginal in their own groups (organized along, for example, ethnic or religious lines). For instance, in a study on mobilization and turnout for the Foreign Citizens' Council elections in Bologna in 2007 it turned out that

there was a strong network involving part of the Pakistani population of the Province of Bologna. Many of these migrants come from the same district of Punjab (Gujrat) and the firstcomers knew each other owing to the fact that most of them shared the experience of living in a specific shelter for migrants (which was exclusively inhabited by Pakistanis) in Bologna in the early '90s. The candidate who was able to mobilize this group came from a different area of Punjab (Lahore) and did not experience the life in the shelter, having arrived as a political refugee. On the other hand he had experience with the administration, having worked in the Bologna municipality in the '90s, knew "community leaders" from other national groups for the same reason, and was a mediator for business activities involving the Pakistan embassy. (Sredanovic 2013a)

Shifting the perspective from the brokers themselves to migrants, it should be noted that the type of brokerage needed by international migrants depends on legal status (Sredanovic 2013b); for example, migrants in the early stages of immigration in a country of destination may need ties to other, pioneer migrants to set them up with the basic necessities of life; later on, once they have adapted somewhat, they may need access to state bureaucracies, for example, to legalize their status; in this second stage, brokers from support organizations in civil society may become essential, e.g. representatives or persons working for unions, churches, or human rights organizations.

The analysis of brokerage must take into account the fact that there is usually a succession of brokers (and thus distinct brokerage relationships). Asylum seekers, for example, who team up with other migrants in search of housing, and who are unsuccessful, may then turn to (official) state agencies, such as SAMI Social in France (Paris), in order to be housed in welfare hotels (Alpes 2013). Once accommodated, they discover there are brokers in these

hotels – above all hotel managers, often migrants themselves – who decide, for example, who may receive visitors and who may not.

Brokerage is a gendered process, needless to say. In the organization of smuggling across the US-Mexican border (Sanchez 2013), women smugglers may specialize in getting other women and children – sometimes pregnant women – across the border. Sanchez argues that women may derive gains different from men, perhaps greater altruistic satisfaction. Whether this is so is an open question. What seems certain is that egotistical-instrumental gains could go hand in hand with altruistic satisfaction.

3) What types of brokerage are there?

To develop a taxonomy of brokerage it is useful to start with a heuristic. Figure 1 provides an overview of ideal types of social organization (vertical) and the corresponding types of brokerage. Here, the state refers to the monopoly of authority; the market to the price-finding/determining mechanism of supply and demand; civil society to the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests; and the family to a small-scale system of solidarity. The correspondence between these four types of social organization and types of brokerage is obviously a point of departure. In reality, needless to say, the types of social organization and the types of brokerage overlap. The ideal-typical correspondence between social organization and brokerage nonetheless gives us initial insights into the general types of brokerage in relation to the overall processes of social organization and social inequalities.

<i>Type of social organization</i>	<i>Type of brokerage</i>	<i>Examples</i>
State	Regulation; redistribution; specific reciprocity	State employees (e.g. social workers) interacting with philanthropic organizations
Market	Exchange; trust	Middleman minorities in (former) colonies; traders
Civil society	Solidarity	Social movement organizations; networks of activists
Family	Generalized reciprocity	Relatives deciding on who is to migrate and who gets access to intermediaries

State:

The tasks of states include providing security for their peoples, regulating markets, and/or redistributing income. With respect to migration, border control and internal boundaries (e.g.

certification in certain trades to be eligible to practice) are functions of states. Since modern states engage in multiple functions, some of these may be at odds with each other – and this is why brokerage becomes so important both for migrants trying to navigate the still unknown seas of the countries of destination, and for states to bridge principles which cannot be reconciled on a practical level. For example, brokerage may arise at the interstices of the state's function of asserting migration control, on the one hand, and its provision of a modicum of social welfare, on the other hand. As outlined above, there is a tension between these two functions in the case of the “social hotels” in Paris. The state, abstaining from the expulsion of asylum seekers whose requests have been denied, but without offering a secure legalization of their status, at the same time needs to provide shelter for those in need. In allowing only single mothers with small children to obtain such accommodation, and requiring them to live separately from their partners, the state's control function becomes apparent in a second way. The state not only controls legal status but also exerts control over social and moral behaviour through the intersection of formal practices (e.g. allotment of rooms) and informal practices (e.g. brokers deciding on who can receive visitors overnight).

Since states claim the monopoly of power in their territory and thus over their borders, it is crucial to understand the conditions in which they criminalize brokerage. After all, states seek to control who is involved in the crossing of boundaries, not only of the nation-state's physical borders but also of membership (legal status) which gives entitlement to rights. It thus tries to criminalize certain types of brokers but not others. Most often it is the traffickers and smugglers who are criminalized, since the state claims to be the sole actor in authorizing border crossings. However, much less criminalization occurs in areas in which brokers are not challenging the monopoly over violence or market regulation, e.g. in social welfare provision. In their effort to de-legitimize certain agents not authorized by the state, state officials and agencies construct the migrant as a vulnerable subject who is the victim of unscrupulous criminal traffickers. Most instrumental in this exercise are not only national states but international organizations, which discovered migration after the end of the Cold War as a field to be regulated. In the search for new fields of activities to legitimize their existence, international organizations have enacted many programs in their fight against traffickers in the context of illegal migration (Hollifield/Martin/Orrenius 2013). Legitimate and legal brokerage activity vs. criminal activity as a binary is only one possibility. If we take seriously the basic proposition that brokerage is likely to occur at the boundaries of formal and informal practices, we are looking at a wide open grey zone. One example is churches who offer “church asylum” to asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected by the respective state authorities. In this case, secular and church law are at odds with each other – but few efforts have been made by state authorities to resolve the situation one-sidedly in their favour.

Market:

In an ideal-typical way, brokerage in markets is built mainly on exchange relations, and we immediately think of brokerage as mediation. In the case of international migration, the state actually sets the rules of the game. States regulate agents who are involved in organizing access to employment. As we know, markets are built in no small degree by states themselves, and exchange relations function in a context set by state authorities, among others (Polanyi 1944). In fact, as the case of the Philippines has demonstrated for many years, the state itself may act as an infrastructure for brokerage (not as a broker itself!). The Philippine state engages in training nurses and care workers to be sent abroad. This active role of the state does not end with job training but extends – in some instances at least – to dealing with legal problems faced by Philippino/a workers in foreign countries (for a critical perspective on the state's role, see Lindio-McGovern 2013).

In the East Asian case discussed above, Chinese state agencies directly structure markets for intermediaries. For example, when the state got out of the business of linking workers and foreign employers it conferred primary agency to intermediaries both upstream and downstream. The result was, among others, a downward allocation of liability, to the individual migrant. Thus, in a group of migrants, all are punished if one misbehaves; then all are threatened with return to China from Japan. The same is true for intermediaries: risks are transferred from Japanese intermediaries to Chinese ones. Such tight social control of migrants necessitates a constant search for new sources in order to avoid networks of migrants who might try to escape the cage (no relatives or friends of those already abroad are hired). When deals went sour, migrants did not seek to litigate against intermediaries at courts (considered corrupt, etc.) but turned to state agencies to seek compensation. Migration brokers benefitted from capitalizing on would-be migrants' instrumentalist agendas and their faith in the central state for ultimate security. The cost for the intermediaries was to experience blame and punishment, rightly or wrongly, whenever the state regarded it as necessary.

Civil society:

At the level of social organization, solidarity functions as the main type of brokerage. This is evidenced, for example, when social movement groups provide space for issues to be deliberated in the public sphere, such as the initiative “No more deaths on the border,” which has been operative in Arizona for the past ten years (Feldman 2013). One may even think of this

initiative as a kind of broker between migrants and the border population on the one hand and the political system on the other. In this way it is not simply a case of advocacy but also – by way of including the border population – a sign of solidarity with migrants.

There are also indirect consequences of the practices of civil society actors which can be classified as brokerage: in the Netherlands, for example, for two decades single and divorced Dutch fathers and EU citizens mobilized human rights law to reunite with their children. Eventually, not only did they benefit by the successful mobilization of European human rights law but so also did single and divorced mothers from outside the EU who did not hold Dutch citizenship (Van Walsum 2009). This case already hints at the observation that brokerage is to be understood not only in the sense of agency – although it is of the agents' making - but also as a structural feature: the gains made by more powerful actors filtered down to less powerful ones via the practices of law.

Family / Kinship Groups:

Since families or kinship groups more generally are based primarily on the mechanism of generalized reciprocity, brokerage is built in to this mechanism. Nonetheless, nuclear families at least cannot really be seen as a brokerage system – close ties tend to yield too much redundant information. Yet wider kinship systems could be a limiting case. An example is the interaction of state visa systems with kinship reciprocities in providing access to visas in Gambia for young men of Soninke ethnic groups (Gaibazzi 2013). There are two crucial parameters involved in providing access to visas. First, there is the family group in which relatives, mostly elderly ones, decide which of the young men are bound head for Europe. The link usually is a relative who is already settled in a European country. Family relations are decisive; for example, solidarity tends to be higher among children of the same father and mother than of the same father and a different mother. Second, relatives usually also facilitate access to intermediaries in the migration cottage industry who help potential migrants obtain legal documents, such as a passport or a birth certificate.

Two caveats are in order by way of concluding this section. First, systematic empirical work needs to be done to delineate the interaction of different types of brokerage, across different principles of social organization. Only then will a mechanistic account of real-world processes be possible. Second, what has been presented here is only a heuristic. Concrete empirical questions, such as the effects of brokerage on the safety of those who cross borders or its consequences for access to social services, should be approached by delineating the type of mechanisms operative, and the place of brokerage as a mechanism within the

context of (a) structural constraints (see above, state control/provision) and (b) other mechanisms.

From the family we come back full circle to the state: The family or better, kinship, is a type of organization in which the “third” is still specific; reciprocity is generalized across many members. The state is a type of social organization in which the “third” is general; reciprocity is thus more specifically geared toward selected realms, e.g. the contract between generations in certain pension systems. What this contrast suggests is that brokerage can be conceptualized at the level of agency – the focus of this analysis – but also as a structural feature built into certain types of social organization. The agency-based and the structural version of brokerage constitute each other in feedback loops and result in the emergence of new social constellations.

Conclusion

By employing brokerage as a social mechanism, we can see that it is a crucial part of the functioning of what are called “migrant” or “migration” networks. Brokerage indeed provides a vision of options and alternatives otherwise unseen. This is not only true for migrants involved in geographical and social mobility but, thinking reflexively, also for social scientists who analyse brokerage. What needs to be fleshed out in future work is how brokerage as a social mechanism operates in different contexts, synchronically (across states or organizations) and diachronically (across historical epochs) – and preferably both. Histories of migration have convincingly shown the different forms long-distance migration has taken over the centuries. Questions arise, such as: how do the Atlantic, Pacific or even Asian/Siberian migration systems of the nineteenth century differ from contemporary movements and what are the consequences for the operation of brokerage? And what are the structural differences across different types of mobility for brokerage – such as student migration, labor migration, forced migration, circular migration?

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