Mediated migration: A literature review of migration intermediaries

WORKING PAPER

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1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is mediated by a range of intermediaries, now more than ever (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014:124). While there is nothing new about them, scholars generally agree that their numbers, reach and influence have increased in the past three decades (Jones et al., 2017). Migrants are also now even more dependent on third parties to migrate. Consequently, the 'middle space' of migration intermediaries is now essential to understanding contemporary patterns and experiences of international migration (Cranston et al., 2018; Deshingkar, 2019; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Lindquist et al., 2012).

Intermediaries are powerful agents in facilitating migration (Harvey et al., 2018; McCollum and Findlay, 2018; McDowell et al., 2008; Žabko et al., 2018). On a practical level, intermediaries conduct a wide variety of different activities aimed at *facilitating* migration, including helping broker visas, arranging birth certificates and passports, booking transportation, guiding, finding jobs and/or accommodation, connecting migrants to healthcare and medical tests and providing training (Agunias, 2009; Ayalew, 2018; Broek et al., 2016; Salt and Stein, 1997; Spaan, 1994). They offer financing and forged documents (Eelens and Speckmann, 1990; Jones and Pardthaisong, 1999; Salt and Stein, 1997) and services related to remittance (Agunias, 2009; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013). They help aspiring migrants navigate complex immigration bureaucracies for which the outcomes are often uncertain (Castles and Miller, 2003; Findlay and Li, 1998). Intermediaries also organise the selection of migrants for jobs and training for those migrating for employment (Findlay and McCollum, 2013; Xiang and Lindquist, 2018).

However, their activities are far from neutral: what intermediaries do and the way in which they do it matters. What they do to facilitate migration and how they do it has *wider societal impacts* beyond simply functional activities to do with the migration *process*. Migration is a social, political and economic phenomenon. Who migrates, why they migrate, to where and under what conditions, matters. Intermediaries are *mediators* and issues of power and inequality are therefore fundamental to any analysis of intermediaries. This makes them an important methodological vantage point from which to study international migration (Lindquist et al., 2012).

This working paper is intended to contribute to the development of the UKRI GCRF South-South Migration, Inequality and Development Hub (MIDEQ) research on migration intermediaries. MIDEQ studies the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between migration and inequalities in the context of 12 countries in the Global South. Utilising an interdisciplinary mixed methods approach, MIDEQ builds

an evidence-based understanding of the relationships between migration, inequality and development. It aims to translate this knowledge into concrete policies and practices which improve the lives of migrants, their families and the communities in which they live. As a starting point for building empirical and theoretical understandings of migration intermediaries, this paper draws on an extensive review of the literature to address how they have been conceptualised by others. A dizzying array of terminology is used to describe migration intermediaries, including brokers, dalals, taikongs, recruiters, placement agencies, migration industry, people smugglers, human traffickers, facilitators, coyotes and immigration consultancies.

So, who and what are they? This review first addresses how intermediaries have been conceptualised in the literature(s) according to *who* they are and *what* they do. Thus far, studies of their activities have tended to splinter between those that approach them as "smugglers" which facilitate irregular migration, including for refugees (e.g.Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012) and those which explore their role as facilitators of labour migration (e.g Deshingkar, 2019; Lindquist et al., 2012). Yet, in many cases their functions are similar. We also review the arguments as to *why* intermediaries have come to feature so strongly in contemporary international migration patterns. We conclude by sketching the future agenda for research on intermediaries within MIDEQ.

2. WHO AND WHAT ARE MIGRATION INTERMEDIARIES?

Research on immigration after the 1970s was dominated by **migrant and social network** analysis which stressed the roles of family, friendship, community and ethnicity in helping people to migrate (Boyd, 1989; Massey et al., 1993). According to this argument, migrants seek to access social networks in order to gain information, to find jobs and to receive assistance with other forms of social capital to help them in the new destination country (Boyd, 1989). Reciprocity and altruism rather than money were assumed to underpin these relationships. Scholars deployed the concept of migrant networks to describe *how* people migrated as well as to explain increases in migration flows where there did not appear to be any other rationale for this (Boyd, 1989; Massey, 1999). In more recent years, this body of literature has been critiqued for focusing too strongly on relationships and activities in migrants' home countries (the "supply side") and ignoring the role of economic demand (the "structure") in driving international migration patterns (Krissman, 2005:6). Others noted that in addition to friends and family members, private sector actors motivated by profit rather than altruism were also involved in facilitating migration (Cohen, 1997; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Krissman, 2005; Spaan, 1994).

In response to these critiques, research on the *commodification* of migrant networks began to emerge, broadly referred to as the '**migration industry literature'** (Bilger et al., 2006; Elrick and Lewandowska, 2008; Hernández-León, 2008; Jones and Pardthaisong, 1999; Krissman, 2000; Pijpers, 2010; Salt and Stein, 1997). Building on the work of Harney (1977) and Salt and Stein (1997), this scholarship conceptualised migration as a business involving institutions, agents and individuals who provided a variety of services facilitating international migration for commercial gain (Bilger et al., 2006; Castles and Miller, 2003; Hernández-León, 2008; Salt and Stein, 1997). They noted that in many parts of the world, especially Asia, increasingly migrants were no longer able to avoid the paid-for intermediaries who controlled access to employers and to information in the international migration process (Spaan, 1994). At the same time, the fact that these actors generated more profit the more people they helped to migrate meant that they had a financial incentive to increase migration flows (Castles and Miller, 2003; Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Spaan, 1994). As a result, intermediaries were for the first time viewed in the context of being responsible for significant increases in numbers of international migrants (Castles, 2004; Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Guevarra, 2010; Hernández-León, 2008; Kyle, 2000; Tyner, 1996).

Early studies of the migration industry focused on empirically documenting *who* the wide variety of migration intermediaries were. Studies documented the roles of actors such as money lenders, recruitment agencies and individual brokers, transportation providers, travel agents, coyotes, contractors, lawyers, legal and advisory firms, formal and informal remittance, courier service owners (Bilger et al., 2006; Castles and Miller, 2003; Hennebry, 2008; Hernandez-Leon, 2005; Hernández-León, 2008; Salt and Stein, 1997; Spener, 2009). Scholars noted that some of these actors were formally – and legally - constituted businesses (for instance, agencies) and others were located in informal economies (for instance, brokers, smugglers, coyotes), with each type facilitating either regular or irregular migration (Salt and Stein, 1997). However, as the list of actors involved grew longer, so did the criticism that the term migration industry was losing any conceptual coherence if indeed it had had any (Spener, 2009). For instance, later studies had noted that various state agencies also directly or indirectly organised migration through recruitment or emigration programmes (Hennebry, 2008). Others noted that actors such as charities and faith groups also sometimes helped individuals facilitate migration on an ad hoc basis although this was not their main purpose (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013). Moreover, the term 'migration industry' came to be associated with other types of businesses whose mode of operation was not to facilitate migration but to *prevent* it on behalf of the state. These businesses included multinational companies managing detention centres or establishing border security (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013).

Most significantly however, in documenting the multitude of different actors involved in facilitating migration, it became rapidly apparent that it was not always possible to distinguish clearly between an altruistic motive in facilitating migration (as in the migration *networks* literature) from a profit motive (as in the migration *industry* literature). Even those who appeared to be motivated by the former might be acting in the expectation of receiving material benefits in the future (Spener, 2009:22). Indeed, migrants often capitalised on their knowledge about migration and their contacts to earn some additional money either on their journey or after arrival (Elrick and Lewandowska, 2008; Garapich, 2008; Goss and Lindquist, 1995). On the other hand, actors such as transport firms or faith groups which might have vastly different reasons for facilitating migration could not in any case be properly be said to be part of a migration industry. With these additional complexities noted, any hope of clearly conceptually distinguishing between who was an altruistically-minded intermediary acting within a migrant network, and a fee-charging intermediary within a migration industry, disappeared. Consequently, David Spener called for scholars to instead focus on what intermediaries do and in relation to whom and what (Spener, 2009).

3. MEDIATING MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES OF MIGRATION

Intermediaries mediate what intermediaries do and how they do it influences individuals' experiences of migration. First and foremost, intermediaries may influence whether or not someone migrates (Cranston et al., 2018; Spaan, 1994; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018; Xiang and Lindquist, 2018). In migrant communities, *brokers*, which operate outside formal and legal frameworks, are usually the point of contact for aspiring migrants. This may be a locally influential person (e.g. village/religious head, schoolteachers), a member of local officialdom or a return migrant with inside knowledge of migration and well-connected network and resources (Deshingkar, 2019; Faist, 2014; Lindquist, 2015; Spaan, 1994). Lindquist (2017:224) describes a broker as:

> *a specific type of middleman, mediator, or intermediary. Most generally, the broker is a human actor who gains something from the mediation of valued resources that he or she does not directly control*.

Brokers mediate within their own (migrant) communities, based on their abilities to access resources, translate and communicate between migrants and others (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015:159; Spaan, 1994:94). They often inspire migrants to migrate by increasing individuals' awareness of overseas employment possibilities while alerting aspiring migrants to the resources and infrastructure that make this possible (Xiang and Lindquist, 2018). Other types of intermediaries may even promote migration as a sales strategy (Fawcett, 1989; Salt and Stein, 1997). For instance, Tseng, in a study of the role of immigration consultants and recruiters who

facilitated the migration of Taiwanese ‘capital owners’, compared their strategy with that of real estate agents. Migration intermediaries, Tseng argued, created an ‘immigration ideology’ (Tseng, 1997:279).

Immigration consultants often create demand by emphasising negative local factors to encourage people to exit. However, more interestingly, they also create demand by removing immigration stereotypes and by offering legitimacy for migration behaviours. (Tseng, 1997:285).

Secondly, intermediaries also mediate prospective migrants’ decisions about *where* to migrate (Cranston et al., 2018; Spaan, 1994; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018). In so doing, they utilise their professional knowledge to direct migrants to one destination over another (Harvey et al., 2018). This service is especially valued by those who have access to significantly less information about overseas jobs (Broek et al., 2016; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018). This may especially be the case when origin and destination states are particularly geographically or culturally distant (Fernandez, 2013:829). However, where there are alternatives in place – such as migrant social networks which provide the same functions as the paid-for intermediaries but on an altruistic basis – there may be no need for migration businesses (Radcliffe, 1990).

Thirdly, in different political circumstances, migration intermediaries can also help people flee dangerous and authoritarian states, persecution and conflict that they would not otherwise be able to do as well as to reach places of safety (Ayalew, 2018; Crawley et al., 2017; Sanchez and Natividad, 2017). For many people, crossing borders, whether to flee conflict, persecution or for economic survival, necessitates assistance from people who act as drivers, as guides, as document dispatchers and who help navigate complicated bureaucracy (Cranston et al., 2018; Fernandez, 2013; McDowell et al., 2008). Fourthly, in addition to organising migration, intermediaries which facilitate labour migration have a further significance: they *mediate employment* (Barrientos, 2013; McCollum and Findlay, 2015; McCollum and Findlay, 2018; McDowell et al., 2008; Pijpers, 2010). In so doing, they influence who is being recruited for what jobs, what they are paid and on what terms and conditions (Jones, 2014;McCollum and Findlay, 2018;Pijpers, 2010). Fifthly, intermediaries can also play important roles post-migration in facilitating the integration of migrants (Garapich, 2008;Groutsis et al., 2015;Salt and Stein, 1997). They may offer accommodations, lend money, or advice on social life in destination countries (Spaan, 1994). Integration may not be intermediaries’ prime focus, but nevertheless in doing what they do, intermediaries can play an active role in helping migrants to adapt (Garapich, 2008).

However, the activities of intermediaries are not always benign or helpful. Intermediaries may control access to information and resources which serves to disadvantage migrants or even set out to deceive them (McDowell et al., 2008; Salt

and Stein, 1997; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018). Migrants may also be extorted out of money by migration intermediaries (Agunias, 2009; Broek et al., 2016; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). This may put migrants into debt and make them vulnerable to abuse (Davidson, 2013; Kemp and Raijman, 2014; Spaan, 1994). In the worst cases, intermediaries have been observed cheating, defrauding, stealing identities, abandoning migrants, deceiving or even killing migrants (Agunias, 2009 ;Fernandez, 2013;Kemp and Raijman, 2014;Salt and Stein, 1997;Spaan, 1994;Spener, 2004;Strauss and McGrath, 2017).

Yet, the roles of intermediaries are more nuanced than many of these accounts allow for. For instance, Awumbila et al. (2019) describe the contradictory roles played by brokers in Ghana who recruited women for domestic work. On the one hand, by placing poor rural migrant women into precarious domestic work with risk of abuse, non-payment and sexual exploitation and shaping them into ideal workers for middle-class and expatriate families in urban Ghana and overseas employment, they are a crucial part of the system that produce precarious work conditions for migrants. On the other hand, brokers are also important source for social support for those rural migrant women, offering material support, helping negotiate better working conditions or switching jobs if they are in a difficult position. Moreover, it is important to note that there is a multitude of intermediaries involved in one single journey who can range from supportive to exploitative and back to supportive (Spaan, 1994).

What intermediaries do goes beyond individualised relationships between migrants and intermediaries; migration facilitation can be viewed as a *collective* experience of migrants, their families and others often in similarly marginalised circumstances (Alpes, 2017; Ayalew, 2018). Intermediaries play significant roles not just in facilitating individuals' experiences of migration, but also *collectively* expanding opportunities for migrants and contributing to the economic development of local communities (Agunias, 2009; Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015). Intermediaries can therefore help people living in poorer nations overcome the inequalities inherent in a world in which mobility is reserved for the rich (Alpes, 2017; Majidi, 2018; Sanchez, 2015; Spener, 2009). As such, intermediaries can help whole communities and classes of people survive (Sanchez and Natividad, 2017), providing a protective function to refugee communities in the absence of available state protection and/or where the state is the aggressor (Ayalew, 2018). Thus, intermediaries can be viewed as a challenge to states' claims to be the only legitimate arbiters of migration (Alpes, 2017).

Intermediaries can also create and perpetuate power asymmetries and social inequalities (Awumbila et al., 2019; Faist, 2014; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018). For instance, through pre-selecting women, particular ethnicities and nationalities and channelling them into certain jobs, intermediaries produce highly gendered and racialised patterns of migration (Awumbila et al., 2019; Deshingkar, 2019;

Deshingkar et al., 2019; Jones, 2014; Liang, 2011; Wee et al., 2019)[1]. What intermediaries do and how they do it is intricately related to their relationship with the state and other multifaceted elements, which is the subject of the next section of this working paper.

4. MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACHES TO MIGRATION INTERMEDIARIES

Migration intermediaries have close relationships with macro structures, institutions and regulations that make clearly distinguishing between state (government) and market (intermediaries) challenging. At the very least, the line between state and market is somewhat ambiguous (Lindquist, 2017). Firstly, the state decides which intermediaries are legal – or illegal – and which forms of migration are legal or irregular (Salt and Stein, 1997). Intermediaries that facilitate migration which are acceptable to the state include travel agencies, recruiting agencies and executive search agencies so long as the migration is deemed to be legal. The state may have financial or regulatory relationships with these organisations, for instance when governments in destination states directly recruit migrant workers through guest worker recruitment programmes (Faist, 2014; Guevarra, 2010; Lindquist, 2010; Xiang and Lindquist, 2018). As an example, Canada's Caregiver Programme facilitates the recruitment of migrant women to work as housekeepers and nannies via the use of recruitment agencies (Pratt, 1999)[2].

In migrant origin countries, the state is also often closely linked to migration intermediaries directly and indirectly. For instance, in countries in south east Asia, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, the state has historically played an extremely important role in the development of commercial intermediaries, including recruiting agencies, travel agencies, medical centres, training centres and private visa offices (Guevarra, 2010; Tyner, 1996). In China, there are deep intertwine between public institutions and private recruiting agencies in the recruitment of migrant workers and managing outmigration (Xiang, 2012; 2017). To some extent, these intermediaries have been viewed as outsourced agents of the state (Xiang and Lindquist, 2018). On the other hand, the state regards intermediaries which *facilitate irregular migration* are deemed to be smugglers or worse, traffickers (Salt and Stein, 1997). These intermediaries are criminalised by the state and subject to sanctions[3].

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[1] These points will be addressed in next working paper on Intermediaries and Inequalities

[2] Other migration intermediaries which prevent or deter migration (for instance security firms, companies which run detention centres, construct and operate militeraised borders) are also deemed acceptable, or are commissioned, by the state (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013). This is however not the subject of MIDEQ research so this aspect is not explored further here.

[3] Under international law (UN Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (2000), a supplementary cooperation agreement to the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime. Art.3 This Protocol also requires state

Intermediaries therefore have close and multidimensional relationships with the state *and* with migrants, as well as with other types of flows, such as of capital, goods, services and knowledge. Authors have attempted to map and visualise these relationships to convey this complexity. James Fawcett described what he referred to as '**migration systems'**, in which he visualised how multiple interconnected flows of people, resources, services and knowledge linked two countries, with migration sensitive to any changes in any of the flows (Fawcett, 1989). In this model, intermediaries both facilitate flows between countries as well as constitute an additional flow through their own relationships. What they did could be influenced by any of the other flows including migrants themselves. Castles and Miller similarly depicted intermediaries as operating within what they referred to as a **meso-structure**, situated between and linking what they referred to as 'micro agency' and 'macro structure' (Castles and Miller, 2003). Structurally, intermediaries are influenced by the political economy of the world market, interstate relationships, the laws and structures by both sending and receiving states. They are also influenced by the networks, practices, and beliefs of the migrants themselves (Castles and Miller, 2003:27).

Intermediaries did not however only link origin and destination states at the governmental or regulatory level: they also generated '**migration channels'** (Findlay and Li, 1998:683). Migration (intermediary) channels could range from large companies which facilitated international transfers of staff within their internal corporate labour markets to informal network of families and friends working on behalf of potential migrants (Findlay and Li, 1998:683). The internal structures, cultures and characteristics of migration channels/organizations impacted on patterns of international migration through multiple everyday decisions made by individuals (gatekeepers), for instance about hiring (Findlay and Garrickf, 1990; Findlay and Li, 1998; Li et al., 1996; Salt,1992; Tzeng, 1995). Migrants also actively evaluated and chose different employment opportunities (Findlay and Garrickf, 1990; Findlay and Li, 1998). However, neither gatekeepers nor migrants acted as entirely autonomous individuals but were subject to constraints and structural influences such as regional and global political economies and various laws and legislations) (Findlay and Garrickf, 1990; Findlay and Li, 1998). In short, this group of scholars situated intermediaries within the context not just as an analytical back-drop but as a fundamental part of the analysis itself. These approaches offered a middle ground of

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signatory parties to take regulatory and enforcement action against intermediaries which facilitate irregular migration (according to that state's laws on immigration)), *smuggling* is defined as facilitation of "*illegal entry* into a State party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident" for which a "financial or material benefit" is received. Trafficking, according to the same international Convention (UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children, Art. 5. Also a supplementary Convention to the above), is defined as "recruitment, transportation, transfer and harbouring or receipt of persons". Rather than facilitation of *irregular migration* being the key defining feature here, intermediaries are defined according to whether they are engaged in *exploiting* the migrants they facilitate and if they have used "threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or position of vulnerability, giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve consent of a person having control over another for the purpose of exploitation.

analysis that linked individual actions with macro- and micro- level socio-political and economic forces (Findlay and Li, 1998:701).

To incorporate analysis of these overlapping transnational institutions, regulations and structures, over time, scholars moved away from Salt and Stein's (1997) notion of 'migration industry' towards the concept **of 'migration infrastructure'** (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Hernández-León, 2008; Lindquist et al., 2012; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). For these authors, migration infrastructure not only included commercial/non-commercial, state/non-state actors, but more importantly, it also stressed the *interlinkage* of technologies, institutions, and various actors that facilitate and condition mobility (Lin et al., 2017; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). As with earlier models described by Fawcett, Castles and Miller, Findlay and Li, this definition derives from a processual perspective which sees all these dimensions as interconnected, rather than operating in "discrete domains" (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014:124). In other words, patterns and experiences of international migration resulted from the specific interplay between different actors, networks, institutions and technologies that informed, facilitated and conditioned the migration process (Lindquist et al., 2012:8). According to Xiang and Lindquist (2014:124), migration infrastructure could be divided into five dimensions: (1) commercial (recruitment intermediaries), (2) regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training and other purposes), (3) technological (communication and transport), (4) humanitarian (NGOs and international organisations) and (5) social (migrant) networks.

In a similar vein, Schapendonk (2018) returned to the analogy of the network, this time as a **'networked entity'** within which various actors, including public, private and civil society, interacted to produce migration. More importantly than documenting all the various actors within the entity – not least as they may shift dramatically from place to place – it was important to recognise that motivations by the different entities were not homogenous. Actors within it may have different objectives, overlapping roles and shifting responsibilities, although in the end they all worked together to make migration possible irrespective of their specific motivations (Schapendonk, 2018).

In summary, intermediaries are critical meso-level (Castles and Miller, 2003) that both link and are linked to multidimensional factors, individuals, regulations, and technologies. They influence patterns of migration as well as migration outcomes. What they do, what they are, and how and why they do what they what they do is highly context-dependent. For this reason, it is necessary to explain why their prevalence in the world has grown. It is this to which the working paper turns next.

5. WHY INTERMEDIARIES?

The first argument posed within the literature is, simply put, that migrants need intermediaries because increasingly they are not able to travel without one. The tightening of immigration controls and militarisation of borders has driven the demand for intermediaries (Ayalew et al., 2018; Feibisch, 2007; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Pijpers, 2010; Schapendonk, 2018; Spener, 2004). For those migrating through regular channels, as the immigration procedures of leading destination states have become more complex, the assistance of an intermediary who can help migrants negotiate processes which are time-consuming, costly and often prone to corruption, has become increasingly essential (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018). Frequent changes in regulations in both destination and origin countries make it difficult for migrants to keep up (Krissman, 2005; Žabko et al., 2018). Intermediaries possess the experience and networks as well as the infrastructure and facilities to efficiently secure the necessary documents (Kern and Müller-Böker, 2015; Lindquist, 2017).

The other side of tougher immigration regulations is that it is now far harder for many migrants to travel through regular channels. Many are reliant on travelling through irregular means to reach a place of safety or a place where they are able to earn a living. Consequently, for migrants not able to access a visa, intermediaries are essential in helping to navigate often militarised borders (Crawley et al., 2017). At the same time, because of militarised borders, migrants' journeys have become successively more dangerous which again necessitates the assistance of intermediaries (Crawley et al., 2017). For instance, between the US and Mexico or in the Mediterranean Sea, migrants are especially in need of intermediaries to help them navigate resulting dangers (Crawley et al., 2017; Spener, 2009; Vogt, 2016). As it is intermediaries who have the expert knowledge about how to travel safely, their use by migrants is therefore a rational and a relational response to risky journeys (Alpes, 2017; Ayalew, 2018).

The second argument posed within the literature is that a market for commercialised migration services, whether formal or informal, is driven by the growing privatisation of functions related to migration management (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013:13). These processes are driven by a dual "rolling out and rolling back" of the state highlighted by theorists of neoliberalism (Lindquist et al., 2012). In this context, migration intermediary services have also been decentralised; not just facilitating greater migration flows but also attracting and mediating migration pathways in ever more interventionist ways, yet less transparent ways (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013). In turn, the resulting subcontracted networks of intermediaries have fragmented, generating more and more opportunities for commercialised migration brokerage (Lindquist, 2017).

Thirdly, a globalised neoliberal economy has driven the remarkable rise of intermediaries, especially the highly institutionalised migrant recruitment industries (Beech, 2018; Cranston et al., 2018; Fernandez, 2013; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Harvey et al., 2018; Lindquist, 2017). This is because a globalized economy has fuelled the structural demand for cheap, flexible labour. According to this argument, employers' demand for increased productivity and profitability is met by hiring migrants for degrading, poorly paid roles (Miles, 1982; Parreñas, 2012; Parreñas et al., 2020; Piore, 1979). Migrants, in comparison to citizens, usually accept lowly paid jobs, are more tolerant of poor employment conditions and are less likely to be unionised (Barrientos, 2013:1062; Beech, 2018:612; Guevarra, 2010:4; Jones, 2014:108; McCollum and Findlay, 2015:439; McDowell et al., 2008:766; Spaan, 1994:93; Spener, 2009:19). These structural factors drive the employers' demand for *intermediaries* who can find and deliver migrant labour (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013:13; Groutsis et al., 2015:1567; Jones, 2014:108; Liang, 2011:1817-8; Wheaton et al., 2010 :116). Drawing upon a wider relational turn in analysing economic drivers which incentivise commercialised intermediaries to find market opportunities (Jones, 2014), Cranston (2018) argues that migration intermediaries should be understand as part of the knowledge economy. In other words, through producing and circulating knowledge about migration, intermediaries reproduce markets for themselves. While immigration controls have driven migrants' need for intermediaries (as referred to above), they have also driven employers' need for intermediaries to find and deliver large numbers of migrants willing to work more cheaply than citizens (Jones, 2014).

Fourth, state regulation and development policy have also contributed to the growth in prevalence of intermediaries in one further way. As advanced industrial states came to rely on migrant labour, they constructed immigration controls and guest worker programmes that facilitated the entry of certain groups of migrants to work in specific sectors of their economies (Harvey et al., 2018:651; Jones, 2012:20; Spaan and Naerssen, 2018:690). These decisions directly contributed to the growth of the migrant intermediary (recruitment) industry which profited from channelling migrants into these sectors (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1995; England and Stiell, 1997; Hennebry, 2008; Pratt, 1999). These processes - a combination of employer demand and immigration policies - have fuelled thriving recruitment sectors in many parts of the globe (Eelens and Speckmann, 1990:319; Jones, 2012:26; Pijpers, 2010:1083; Žabko et al., 2018:582). This includes in migrant origin countries where economic development policies have included "labour export" programmes with the aim of reducing poverty, easing pressure on employment and creating foreign exchange through remittances (Haas, 2018). Consequently, large numbers of intermediaries of various kinds have found opportunities in such movements (Goss and Lindquist, 1995:338-41; Guevarra, 2010:53; Jones and Pardthaisong, 1999:34-5; Lindquist, 2017:214; Lindquist et al., 2012:12).

6. RESEARCHING INTERMEDIARIES WITHIN MIDEQ

Intermediaries are an essential part of the migration infrastructure that facilitates human mobility. MIDEQ aims to advance theoretical consideration of them and their activities. As a starting point, we have reviewed how intermediaries have been addressed in the literature. In devising research, what you choose to look at, how you look and what questions you choose to ask, significantly influences what you see (Crawley and Jones, forthcoming). In researching intermediaries within MIDEQ, we will not uncritically accept state-centric definitions of intermediaries (Alpes, 2017); instead we will explore their role within a broader context of the process of migration (Ayalew, 2018; Sanchez, 2015; Vogt, 2016). For the purposes of MIDEQ and drawing on existing definitions of intermediaries and brokers, we have constructed our own working definition of an intermediary:

> *An intermediary is an actor or institution that fosters, facilitates or sustains human mobility. The mediating or brokerage process is relational and often involves interactions of multiple actors operating within complex local-global, socio-economic, cultural and political environments. The practices of intermediaries often blur the boundaries between commercial and non-commercial, private and public, state and market, formal and informal, legal and illegal due to the complex nature and conditions in which this "middle-space" exists.*

We will research all the different actors involved in facilitating migration, from friends and kin, to brokers, to recruitment agencies, travel agents and others. We follow David Spener (2009) in believing that we should focus on what intermediaries *do* rather than only who they are. We also echo the calls of recent scholarship (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Krissman, 2005; McCollum and Findlay, 2018; Salt and Stein, 1997) for research into the linkages between various actors in the migration system. To date, scholars have failed to systematically investigate the relations between them and how they connect to each other. What are their practices and strategies to establish and cultivate relations with each other? How do they mobilize various resources to facilitate migration? We will always research intermediaries in the context of the broader political, economic social and legal structures in which they are embedded (Castles and Miller, 2003; Fawcett, 1989; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen, 2013; Jones, 2014; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). This includes the study of the relationship between migrant agency and employer demand (Castles and Miller, 2003; Fawcett, 1989; Schapendonk, 2018; Xiang and Lindquist, 2014).

There is a need to further explore how these multiple domains intersect to sustain and constrain migration, and how they shape the outcomes and patterns of migration. In particular we will explore intermediaries' multi-faceted mediation role(s). What does this mean in different contexts and to whom? How and why do they do what they do? What are the outcomes for individuals and beyond (Alpes, 2017; Ayalew, 2018). Some scholarship has touched on issues of inequality and development related to migration and globalization, but the role played in such processes by migration intermediaries is certainly under-researched in the literature. We will address this theme further in our second working paper.

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