

Networks and beyond: Feedback channels and the diminutive causation of international migration

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This paper draws on the theoretical research and empirical work undertaken within the THEMIS project. The views expressed here are those of the author(s). They are not necessarily those of the THEMIS project or NORFACE. Financial support for THEMIS from the NORFACE research programme on Migration in Europe – Social, Economic, Cultural and Policy Dynamics is acknowledged.













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Paper to be presented at the THEMIS international migration conference 'Examining Migration Dynamics: Networks and Beyond', 24-26 September 2013, Oxford, UK

Abstract

This paper explores a mechanism-based explanation of migration flows. The paper first proposes an analysis of 'migration mechanisms of the middle range'. It subsequently demonstrates the relevance of such an approach by analysing the social mechanism of diminutive causation, as the counterpart of the concept of cumulative causation (Massey 1990; Massey et al. [1998] 2009. Diminutive causation entails a dynamic multi-level explanation with interconnected macro-, meso-, and micro-factors. We analyse the role of migrant networks in reducing immigration from Morocco to the Netherlands in particular. Three aspects are examined: (1) changing beliefs and motivations of migrants in the Netherlands to support prospective migrants (situational mechanism); (2) migration-undermining feedback provided by migrants to prospective migrants (action-formation mechanism); and (3) the changing nature of migration cultures and migratory aspirations in Morocco due to the migration-undermining feedback from settled migrants in the Netherlands (transformational mechanism). This paper furthermore argues that it is crucial to move beyond examinations of migrant networks, not only by taking into account macro institutional factors (labour markets, state policies), but also by analysing the relevance of other feedback channels. Cumulative or diminutive causation works not only through migrant networks but also through new feedback channels provided by the social media. We document the role of the social media in the lives of immigrants and analyse how online media use may influence migration aspirations among prospective migrants in Morocco.

Introduction

In a recent collection of articles on the significance of the work by the American sociologist R.K. Merton, Charles Tilly (2010: 55) argued for mechanism-based explanations of the middle range. In his own words, "(...) mechanistic explanations offer a distinctive, superior grasp of how social processes actually work." Tilly's plea fits in a development in which mechanism-based explanations are increasingly gaining attention. This development is in response to shortcomings in causal explanations, and is also expressive of the conviction that proper explanations should detail the 'cogs and wheels' or the 'nuts and bolts' of the causal process through which the outcomes to be explained are brought about (Elster 1989; Hedström & Ylikoski 2010; Tilly 2005, 2010). Another important factor is the explicit interest in developing a theory of action that combines explanations at the macro-level with explanations at the micro-level (Coleman 1986; 1990).

In this paper I argue that mechanism-based explanations are highly relevant for the field of migration studies. I will illustrate this by means of the migration mechanism of diminutive causation, which can be seen as the counterpart to the notion of cumulative causation as developed by Myrdal and Massey. A second aim of this paper is to show the importance of moving beyond migrant networks to understand how the mechanism of diminutive causation works. I shall do so in two ways: first, by showing how macro-level factors influence the functioning of migrants and their networks (the micro-macro problem), and second, by showing how feedback process also occur through other channels than migrant networks, namely through online (social) media.

This paper draws on qualitative and quantitative data collected by the NORFACE-project 'Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems' (THEMIS). I shall explicate the mechanism of diminutive causation with reference to a case study involving the declining emigration from Morocco to the Netherlands. The data derives from both qualitative in-depth interviews and from surveys conducted in Morocco and the Netherlands.

This article is organised as follows. In the next sections I describe the concept of mechanism-based explanation and introduce the notion of diminutive causation. Next, I describe the data and methodology. After that I analyse the workings of the mechanism of diminutive causation. I will focus in particular on the 'agentic' role of individual migrants and their networks in reducing immigration (Paul 2011: 1844; Bakewell et al. 2013). The paper concludes with a discussion of the main findings and by acknowledging some of the limitations of the research design.

The idea and structure of mechanism-based explanations

In their overview article on causal mechanisms in the social sciences, Hedström & Ylikowski (2010: 50-52) posit four generally shared ideas on what characterises a mechanism:

- 1. A mechanism is identified by the kind of effect or phenomenon it produces.
- 2. A mechanism is an irreducible causal notion.
- 3. A mechanism has a structure: "When a mechanism-based explanation opens the black box, it discloses this structure. It turns the black box into a transparent box and makes visible how the participating entities and their properties, activities, and relations produce the effect of interest." (Ibid. 2010: 51).
- 4. Mechanisms form a hierarchy: "While a mechanism at one level presupposes or takes for granted the existence of certain entities with characteristic properties and entities, it is expected that there are lower-level mechanism that explain them (Ibid. 2010:52)

In elaborating their mechanism-based explanations in sociology, Hedström & Ylikowski mark out two positions. First they point to the necessity of systematically integrating theoretical and empirical work, connecting to Merton's plea for sociological theories of the middle range. These are theories that can explain diverse social phenomena, but that do not pretend to be allencompassing, general theories.¹ As an example they refer to Merton's mechanism of the selffulfilling prophecy, where an incorrect definition of the situation generates collective behaviour, such that the incorrectly defined situation becomes reality. A typical aspect of how self-fulfilling prophecies work is the feedback mechanism. An incorrect definition of the situation (the unjust assumption that a solvent bank is in financial trouble) brings forth certain behaviour (customers pull their money out) which influences other people's beliefs and triggers the same behaviour in them (resulting in a 'run on the bank'). In this way a 'self-reinforcing and belief-centred cycle' is created, and an incorrect situation definition ends up becoming true (the bank actually does go bankrupt) (Hedström & Ylikowski 2010: 62) This mechanism of the self-fulfilling prophecy has been used to explain a range of different types of phenomena (including ethnic and race relations).

The second position marked out by Hedström & Ylikowski is that it is the primary task of sociology to explain *collective* phenomena. For this, and in line with Coleman (Coleman 1986; 1990), they state that it is unsatisfactory to explain macro-phenomena in terms of other macro-phenomena. Their 'macro-micro-macro' model is based on the assumption that a macro-phenomenon is the (unintended) result of the actions of a large number of individuals in micro-situations. Here they note that "explanatory understanding is only achieved by recognising that actions take place in relational structures" (Hedström & Ylikowski 2010: 59). The figure below – also known as the 'Coleman boat' – visualises their approach (see Figure 1). A relationship is assumed to exist between certain social facts, social structures or institutions and certain social

¹ Tilly writes (2010:56): "Mechanism-process accounts reject covering-law regularities for large structures such as international systems and for vast sequences such as democratization. Instead they lend themselves to "local theory" in which the explanatory mechanisms and processes operate quite broadly, but combine locally as a function of initial conditions and adjacent processes to produce distinctive trajectories and outcomes."

phenomena.² Hedström and Ylikoski (2010: 59) use the term 'macro-level associations'. As said they argue that scientific explanations that are restricted to macro-level relations are unsatisfactory, as they do not specify the causal mechanisms by which macro properties are related to each other (cf. Coleman 1990: 6-7). To explain macro-level associations, three analytical steps are required: first, to identify the 'situational mechanism' by which specific macro-factors shape and constrain individuals' desires, beliefs and motivations (macro-to-micro arrow 1). The second step is to establish a relationship between individuals' desires, beliefs and motivations and their individual actions. This is known as the 'action-formation mechanism' (micro-to-micro arrow 2). The third step is to analyse how individual actions interact and interfere with one another, leading to intended and unintended macro-outcomes. This is the 'transformational mechanism' (micro-to-macro arrow 3).

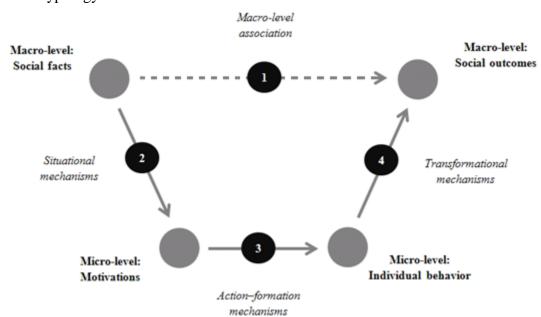


Figure 1. A typology of social mechanisms

Source: Hedström & Swedberg 1998; Hedström & Ylikoski 2010

These insights are relevant for the field of migration studies. This can be illustrated by reference to Massey's theory (1990; [1998] 2009 et al.) on cumulative causation. This is one of the most developed theories in the migration literature, offering an explanation for self-reinforcing processes of Mexican-US migration and other patterns of international migration. It also illustrates the significance of mechanism-based explanations, because of the systematic focus on the influence of political-economic and local factors on individual behaviour, households,

² Coleman's well-known example based on Max Weber is the relationship or *Wahlverwandtschaft* between religious values of Protestantism and the economic organization of a society (capitalism) (see Coleman 1986: 1321-1323; 1990: 6-10).

migrant networks, community structures, and belief formations (migration cultures and the role of migration aspirations).

The mechanism of cumulative causation consists of an hierarchy of interrelated mechanisms. In the study Worlds in Motion, Massey et al. ([1998] 2009) list eight ways through which migration acquires a self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing character.³ A crucial mechanism is the mobilisation of resources from the social networks in which migrants are embedded (accumulation of social capital) (Fusssell & Massey 2004: 152). Ties with migrants increase the likelihood of migration, as they reduce the costs and boost the anticipated benefits of migration. The first pioneering migrants need to find their way in the destination country, and for them the costs are high. They can then help out aspiring and new migrants with jobs, housing and relevant documents, making it easier and hence cheaper for them. In the words of Massey (1990: 8): "(...) expanding networks cause the costs of migration to fall and the probability of migration to rise; these trends feed off one another, and over time migration spreads out to encompass all segments of a society. This feedback occurs because the networks are created by the act of migration itself." Massey will explicate later that the accumulation of social capital is the *primary* mechanism underlying cumulative causation (Fussell & Massey 2004: 152). He strongly emphasises the role of migrant networks as the channel of migration-facilitating feedback.

A second important mechanism is the establishment of a migration culture. As migration becomes increasingly common in a community, the values and cultural perceptions of that community evolve in a way that increases the likelihood of future migration. Migration is increasingly seen as a valuable and habitual ambition (Massey et al.,[1998] 2009; Heering et al., 2004). However, Massey et al. ([1998] 2009: 48) also acknowledge possible 'limits' to cumulative causation. He argues that the mechanism of cumulative causation is especially related to rural contexts, and that at a certain point the migration process reaches "network saturation", so that the process of migration loses its dynamic (Massey 1990; Fussell & Massey 2004). Economic developments (labour shortages and rising local wages) in the sending regions may also reduce the out-movement of migrants.

Massey's work is compatible with Hedström & Ylikowski's conceptual framework. Massey shows (1) how economic factors, migration policy and local relationships influence the desires and aspirations of potential migrants to emigrate (*situational mechanism*); (2) that these wishes lead to actual migration behaviour and to mobilising information, money, housing and jobs, as the resources required for a successful migration (*action-formation mechanism*); and (3) that the aggregated result of these individual actions is the emergence, in both the sending and receiving country, of a migration-facilitating infrastructure, so that migration becomes selfsustaining (*transformational mechanism*).

³ Massey et al. (2009: 46-48) mention the expansion of migrant networks, the distribution of income, the distribution of land, the organization of agriculture, cultural factors, the regional distribution of human capital, the social meaning of work, and the economic structure of production.

The mechanism of diminutive causation

The mechanism of cumulative causation provides a valuable framework to explain the various migrant movements analysed by the THEMIS project. One example is the migration from Morocco to the Netherlands, due to the recruitment of so-called guest workers since the mid-1960s and the subsequent arrival of partners and children since the mid-1970s (Lucassen & Lucassen 2011; De Haas 2005, 2007). However, this process of cumulative causation begins to stagnate after twenty years in the second half of the 1990s, resulting in a steadily declining migration from Morocco to the Netherlands ever since. This is not so much due to network saturation, but is a consequence of a mechanism I classify as 'diminutive causation'. This notion of diminutive causation is already visible in Myrdal's (1957) original formulations of cumulative or circular causation, which were reintroduced and developed further by Massey in his work on international migration. Myrdal showed in his analysis of world poverty that the dynamics of cumulative causation may cause upward spirals of increasing wealth but also downward spirals of increasing poverty. Often, these two processes are interrelated: the upward spiral of an economy may be an important cause of another's downward spiral (see also Myrdal 1970; Rigney 2010).

The theory of cumulative causation describes several mechanisms that lead to *upward* spirals of migration, while the concept of diminutive causation seeks to specify mechanisms leading to downward spirals of migration. However, in both causes positive feedback loops are at work that contribute to self-amplifying processes of increasing or decreasing migration. The conceptual model of Hedström & Ylikowski is helpful for specifying the three social mechanisms that generate the process of diminutive causation. Firstly, three institutional macrolevel phenomena (the restrictive Dutch migration regime, limited job opportunities, and rising anti-immigration sentiments in the Netherlands) negatively influence the beliefs, desires and motivations of settled migrants to support and stimulate potential migrants to come to the Netherlands (situational mechanism). Secondly, this negative 'belief formation' (Hedström & Swedberg 1998: 23) of settled migrants regarding migration from Morocco to the Netherlands results in deliberate actions not to assist potential migrants, or to provide assistance only very selectively (action-formation mechanism). Thirdly, this migration-undermining feedback toward prospective migrants leads to changes in the migration cultures in Morocco in which the potential migrants are embedded (transformational mechanism) (De Haas 2010). As a result of these three mechanisms, a diminutive causal process arises that results in a decline in new migration from Morocco to the Netherlands.

In the discussion of the mechanism of diminutive causation I will also briefly consider to what extent online (social) media have become an important channel of feedback in the form of information exchange. Migrant networks mainly provide for one-to-one communication (e.g. through face-to-face contacts, telephone, Skype, text messages, email, letters or tapes)

(*traditional media*). Online media are (semi-open) online channels that enable many-to-manycommunication (such as social networking, sites, virtual communities, blogs and micro blogs, picture-sharing sites and video-sharing sites, messenger and chat services) (see Dekker & Engbersen 2013). Three models may be introduced to capture the relationship between online media and social networks. The first is that of the 'communicating vessels': well developed social networks go hand in hand with a comparatively frequent use of online media. The second is that of 'innovation', where online media use become more important due to the absence of traditional social networks (cf. Dekker & Engbersen 2013), and the third is that of 'supplementarity' where online and traditional media supplement each other, independent of the nature of the social network.

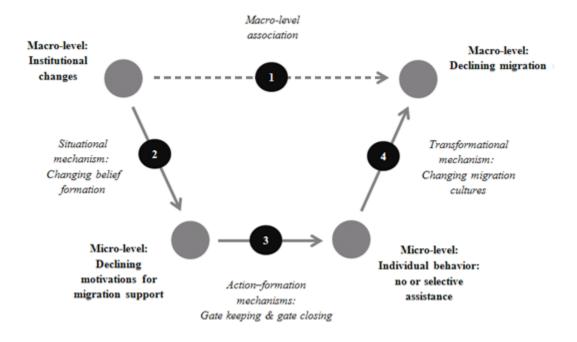


Figure 2. Declining Moroccan immigration as a result of diminutive causation

Data and methodology

To analyse how the mechanism of diminutive causation works, I draw on both qualitative and quantitative data collected within the NORFACE-project, 'Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems' (THEMIS). I particularly make use of the in-depth interviews conducted in the Netherlands and Morocco, and of the results of surveys held in these countries. For this paper I shall mainly draw on the in-depth interviews, complemented with the initial results of the surveys.

Qualitative data

We conducted 30 in-depth interviews with Moroccan migrants residing in the Rotterdam area in the Netherlands and 44 Moroccan respondents in the regions of Rabat and Nador in Morocco (see for an overview Engbersen et al., 2013). These two regions were chosen to portray the diversified migration flow from Morocco to the Netherlands. Between both regions and the Netherlands, significant migratory links exist. The Rotterdam respondents were interviewed between January 2011 and May 2011. We used purposive snowball sampling to locate our respondents while aiming for diversity among them, including interviewing irregular migrants (Black 2003). Of the 30 immigrants we interviewed, 6 respondents arrived in the period 1960-1973, 14 respondents in the period 1974-1991, 6 respondents in the period 1992-2003, and 4 respondents in the period 2004 and later. Further, 16 are male and 14 respondents are female. Our respondents also varied considerably in age (between 27 and 84 years old), and they migrated between the ages of 15 and 43. The respondents originated from different regions in Morocco.

Forty-four interviews were conducted between August 2011 and April 2011 in the urban area of Rabat, and in Nador with its rural surroundings. Interviews were conducted with return migrants, people who had resided in the Netherlands for at least three months, and family members of current migrants in the Netherlands such as parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. We made sure to interview respondents with a relatively close bond to their migrant family member, as part of the interview dealt with their knowledge of the current migrant.

We interviewed 24 return migrants. Of these respondents, only one returned in the 1960-1973 period; 5 respondents returned in the 1974-1991 period; 8 in the period 1992-2003; and 10 respondents returned in the period 2004 and later. The age of the respondents at the time of the interview ranged from 25 to 71. Eight respondents were female and 16 male. Twenty interviews were conducted with family members of migrants (who never migrated away from Morocco). The respondents could have multiple family members abroad or in the Netherlands, but usually the interview focused on one family member in particular. The type of family member ranged from close family members such as parents, siblings and children to uncles, aunts and cousins. The time period in which their migrant family members left Morocco varied greatly, ranging from the 1960s to the 2000s. The education level of the respondents also differed, and 9 respondents were female, 11 were male. Our youngest respondent was aged 19 and the oldest 68. All the respondents have been assigned fictitious Moroccan names for reasons of readability and to demonstrate that we quote different respondents (see also Van Meeteren et al. 2007; Paul 2011, 2013).

Quantitative data

The Rotterdam survey was conducted between April 2012 until October 2012. The respondents were selected by the method of Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS). The RDS methodology was developed to sample hard to reach populations from which the boundaries are unknown

(Heckathorn 1997). It is therefore suited to sampling migrant populations. The assumption behind the RDS methodology is that people are connected through networks, through which a representative sample of the population can be achieved (see Jollivet 2013).

We interviewed somewhat more female respondents (56%) than males (44%) (see Snel et al., 2013). About one third of our respondents (32%) were between 20 and 40 years old (we interviewed respondents older than 20 years), half of them (53%) were between 41 and 60 years, and one in seven respondents (15%) was older than 60 years. On average, our respondents had lived in the Netherlands for 23 years. More than half of them (59%) had lived in the Netherlands for at least twenty years. A small minority of the respondents (10%) had arrived in the Netherlands relatively recently (in the last ten years). These figures imply that many of our respondents belong to the generation of Moroccan guest workers and their spouses who arrived in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s. The large majority of our respondents (73%) were low educated (or lacked any education at all), one in four respondents (25%) had an intermediate educational level, and only 2% were highly educated.

In Morocco, two small surveys were carried out between October 2012 and January 2013 among non-migrants in the regions of Rabat (N=199) and Nador (N=203). These are the same regions in which the in-depth interviews were held. The respondents were selected by the method of Random Walk Sampling. The persons that we interviewed are potential prospective migrants. We interviewed more males (61%) than females (39%). Half of the respondents were younger than 35 years old. The respondents in the origin country surveys were, on average, higher educated than the respondents in the destination country surveys. About one third of the respondents were lower educated, one third had a medium educational level, and one third were highly educated.

Declining immigration from Morocco to the Netherlands and the diminutive causation of migration

Like many other West-European countries, the Netherlands recruited labour migrants ("guest workers") from the Mediterranean. Initially, in the early 1960s, Spain, Italy and Portugal were the main sending countries of guest workers to the Netherlands. Later, large numbers of guest workers arrived from Turkey and Morocco. Although the formal recruitment of guest workers ended with the oil crisis in 1973, many Turkish and Moroccan labour migrants did not return to their home countries but decided to stay (Entzinger 1984). Through the process of family reunion and later family formation, migration from Turkey and Morocco continued after the recruitment stop in 1974. Furthermore, in the 1980s and the 1990s there was a substantial irregular migration flow from Morocco to the Netherlands (Burgers & Engbersen 1996). As a result of this progressive migration, Moroccans now form the fourth-largest migrant category in the Netherlands. In 2012, there were almost 363,000 first and second-generation migrants from

Morocco resident in the Netherlands.⁴ However, since the second half of the 1990s migration from Morocco to the Netherlands has been declining. In the early 1990s, about 9,000 Moroccan migrants arrived in the Netherlands annually. After 2004, the figure was down to less than 3,000 (Jennissen 2012).

This decrease is the result of changing contexts of reception of immigrants in the Netherlands in the 1990s and in particular after 2002: (1) the Dutch migration regime became more selective over the years with respect to labour migration, asylum migration as well as family migration (Engbersen et al. 2007; Leerkes et al. 2011, 2012); (2) the reduced labour market opportunities for Moroccan migrants, partly due to the influx of competing labour migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (Black et al. 2010); and (3) the more hostile societal reception of immigrants in general, but particularly those coming from Muslim countries like Morocco (Dagevos et al. 2003, 2007).⁵ These changes have had a direct effect on the migration from Morocco to the Netherlands. They also have an indirect effect that runs via the migration networks. In the following, I examine how these macro-level developments influence the willingness of migrants living in the Netherlands to support prospective migrants in Morocco. I shall furthermore analyse how this impacts the migration aspirations and preferences of prospective migrants in Morocco.

Situational mechanism: changing beliefs and desires of settled migrants to support prospective migrants

As described above, three important institutional changes have reshaped the context of immigration in the Netherlands: (1) the Dutch migration regime has become increasingly restrictive; (2) job opportunities for migrants have decreased; and (3) an anti-immigration discourse – particularly anti-Muslim – is on the rise in the Netherlands. These changes have negatively affected the beliefs and desires of settled migrants in Rotterdam to assist prospective migrants in Morocco. These changes become clear in the accounts of one elderly respondent who compares the current situation with the welcoming social and economic climate for immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s.

"When I arrived in Utrecht (1965, eds.), I stayed there for one day. The next day I went to the industrial area in Utrecht. And when I arrived there, everyone was waving to me (...) In that time you could find work everywhere. There was more than enough work in the 60s. Everyone was waving to me and telling me 'come to us, come to us'. I went to a

⁴ Moroccans are the fourth-largest migrant group in the Netherlands, after the Turks, Germans and Indonesians: 168,214 were born in Morocco and 194,740 were born in the Netherlands with at least one parent born in Morocco (<u>http://statline.cbs.nl/statweb/</u>). The majority lives in the Randstad area (the urban conglomeration consisting of the four biggest cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht).

⁵ See Portes & Rumbaut (1990) and Portes (1995) for an explanation of the importance of these contexts or levels of reception for the integration of immigrants.

company that was fixing streets. They make tiles and bridges. I went there; they welcomed me and accepted me as employee. They gave me a chair, and put all kind of stuff in front of me to choose from. Different kinds of cigarettes and cigars, cookies... In those days they were really happy with us. They immediately gave me a place to stay in a caravan. And I started to work there." (Youssouf, 70-year-old, retired pioneer migrant)

However, respondents are less positive about migration from Morocco to the Netherlands today. Many settled migrants mention that it has become very difficult for Moroccans to migrate to the Netherlands due to the very selective migration policies. Bouchra, a 48-year-old domestic worker states: "My daughter married a man from Morocco, and I was amazed by the number of criteria that my daughter and her partner had to meet. Not only income criteria, housing criteria, but also criteria on mastering the Dutch language." And Fatima, a 33-year-old house wife, elaborates:

"Today it is difficult to obtain a visa. Also for the request you must have a job and a high income. The immigration policies are also stricter than before. Migrants have to do a lot of tests and have to learn a lot about Dutch culture."

Apart from the growing restrictions on immigration, respondents also explicitly mention that economic opportunities are not as attractive as they used to be. Ilham, a 84-year-old former miner, says: "There is no work here. If they come to Holland they will only get into trouble. In the past there was enough work, but not anymore." Other settled migrants also mention that changing economic circumstances in the Netherlands are making life more difficult and less attractive for Moroccan immigrants. Souhaila, a 64-year-old housewife who spent nearly 40 years in the Netherlands, mentions that: "There is no money to make here. There are no jobs anymore. It's better to stay over there."

Settled migrants furthermore feel that the societal reception in the Netherlands has changed and that immigrants are now treated with prejudice. Many respondents elaborated on their actual negative experiences with native Dutch people and how bad such experiences make them feel. El Ghazi, a young post processor, says: "Eighty percent are racists. One day I entered a café in Rotterdam to support the Dutch soccer team and they didn't want me to enter. Things like that upset me." And Hassan, a 41-year-old skilled worker, says: "Sometimes you get the feeling that people hate you. They hate you for who you are and they hate your presence." Like El Ghazi and Hassan, many respondents indicate that the attitudes of Dutch people towards them have changed over the years. Tarik, a 33-year-old tram driver, says:

"I really like this country in many respects, but there is one thing that I think is very dangerous: the fact that politicians like Geert Wilders are becoming very popular.⁶ For

⁶ Geert Wilders is the political leader of the populist Freedom Party, founded in 2005. Wilders is a very visible actor in the Dutch national parliament and the public debate. Wilders is best known for his anti-Muslim and anti-immigration statements.

Muslims this means that their rights to practice their religion are in danger. I think a lot of European countries – including the Netherlands – are very afraid of Islam, and they are trying to keep this religion outside their borders (....) Muslims are not welcome anymore. That is why I would be cautious with giving Moroccans the advice to come here."

For some settled migrants, these changing societal conditions in the Netherlands have formed an important reason to return to Morocco. Sellam, a medium-skilled worker who returned to Nador in 2007, says:

"I returned to Morocco because I could not bear life in [the Netherlands] any longer. I felt that I was treated as a foreigner because I am not Dutch. I hate racism and wanted to have some peace of mind."

The testimonies of recently returned migrants thus echo those of settled Moroccan migrants in Rotterdam. Together they show that the opinions among migrants and former migrants about migration from Morocco to the Netherlands have changed in a negative way. This contributes to migration-discouraging feedback to prospective migrants in Morocco.

The action-formation mechanism: gate keeping & gate closing

In the literature one can find abundant evidence of how settled migrants do not accurately portray life in the receiving society (Mahler 1995). Even though they have often obtained positions in the lower strata of the receiving society, they send positive images of obtained wealth to the origin country, sometimes even increasing their debts in order to do so. While we have indications that this was the same for Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands in the past, this has certainly changed. Settled migrants now usually paint negative pictures of life in the Netherlands for a Moroccan migrant. In other words, positive migration-facilitating feedback is turning into migration-undermining feedback (De Haas 2010). From the survey held among settled migrants in Rotterdam it emerges that almost 86% say that they do not encourage anyone to come to the Netherlands, and that 39% have actually discouraged someone from coming.

Table 1: Encouragement and discouragement of migration from Morocco to the Netherlands by settled migrants in Rotterdam (N=420)

	Y	Yes		No		Total	
	Ν	%	Ν	%	Ν	%	
Encouraging migration	59	14.1	359	85.9	418	100.0	
Discouraging migration	163	39.2	253	60.8	416	100.0	

Source: THEMIS, 2012, Destination countries data (see also Snel, Faber & Engbersen 2013)

The qualitative interviews yield insight into the process of discouragement. First, migrants try to explain to prospective migrants in Morocco that it is complicated to get into the Netherlands, due to the increasing restrictions on immigration. As Aicha, a 30-year-old domestic worker, says: "When Moroccans want to migrate to the Netherlands, I tell them it is more difficult now because of government rules." Respondents such as Ilham try to warn potential migrants that it is difficult to get the correct papers and that if they do not manage to, they will be illegal in the Netherlands, which can be very difficult: "In the past I didn't tell them to stay in Morocco, but now I do. Holland doesn't let them stay without a reason. Do they want to become an illegal? Do they want to get chased by police? It isn't an option!"

Second, settled Moroccan migrants give prospective migrants realistic information regarding the worsening economic climate in the Netherlands and the scarcity of regular jobs for Moroccan migrants compared to the past. When Yassir, a retired labour migrant, is asked if he advises people in Morocco to come to the Netherlands, he answers: "No! What would he do here? Without work, without papers? What would he do here?" Asma, a 57-year-old housewife, reacts in exactly the same way: "No, I would advise them to stay in Morocco. Holland has changed. Moroccans who live in Holland are now dreaming about a life in Morocco." Settled migrants foresee economic hardship in the lives of future migrants. They indicate that they want to be honest and therefore tell prospective migrants about the restrictive policies on residence, work and study in order to prevent future problems and hardships.

"Every time I go on a holiday to Morocco they ask me to help them. But I tell them that I can't help them. (...) They think that I deny them happiness or a better life. They don't call us anymore. One time they told me that I was able to help them, but that I don't want to help. I told them that Holland wasn't mine. I can't tell the government what to do. I can't open the borders for them. I don't want to get into trouble with police." (Meryem, 76-year-old, housewife)

"I have been asked information. How, what, the procedures, about studying. I have been approached by several people. They asked me how the studies were going. I am very honest and would just tell them how things were going. What one should do, the steps, obstacles, barriers. I never heard that someone decided to come after that." (Najib,47-year-old, labour union manager)

Besides providing information on the unfavourable economic climate and migration policies, they also tell potential migrants about the negative social climate towards immigrants. Kamar, a 41-year-old return migrant, is for example disappointed in the current Dutch social climate and therefore does not even want her daughter – who has the Dutch nationality – to move to the Netherlands:

"I do not like her to live there although she has a Dutch nationality, because the Netherlands of today is not the Netherlands of the past, that beautiful tolerant country; now it is getting cruel and bad. I do not like my daughter to always be or to have 'second choice'."

The same is true for Zohra, a 41-year-old house wife in Rotterdam, who advises prospective migrants not to come to the Netherlands:

"The Dutch people have changed a lot; they are more hostile towards migrants and towards people with a different ethnic background. So no, I would not advise them to migrate [to the Netherlands]. I mean life is also hard in Morocco, but at least in Morocco people don't discriminate you or look down on you. (...) Life is hard; people should be aware of that. It's not like the old days. It's really not."

Many of the 'return migrants' (like Kamar) – some of whom returned to Morocco already a long time ago – are less explicit in either positive or negative migration advice than settled migrants in the Netherlands. One returned migrant even offers positive advice. Nonetheless, 5 respondents offer clear negative advice to (young) Moroccans wishing to emigrate to the Netherlands, and another 5 respondents offer more moderate negative advice, such as Fatima, a 25-year-old return migrants who was born in the Netherlands:

"In Morocco, you just need a job and everything is available. I explained to them: what are you going to do in the Netherlands? There are a lot of restrictions; you have to pay a lot of money, visa constraints. Even marriage is made very difficult on the Dutch part."

The accounts of our respondents show a change in the inclination of migrants to support potential new migrants. Until the mid-1980s, migrant networks primarily functioned as 'bridgeheads' for new migrants (Böcker 1994; Staring 2004). Immigrants were offered assistance. Newcomers – including irregular immigrants – were able to build an independent life in Dutch society. Nowadays, Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands function more and more as 'gate closers' who refuse any support to potential new migrants (Engbersen et al. 2006). The declining inclination to support potential new migrants is very clear in the qualitative interviews with settled Moroccan migrants who live in Rotterdam. While practically all of them (29 out of 30 respondents) received support through migrant networks when they moved to and settled in the Netherlands themselves, only three respondents said they would offer assistance to newcomers today. Most respondents have become 'gate closers' who are unwilling and unable to effectively support prospective migrants in their move to the Netherlands.

These findings are supported by the results of the survey among Moroccans. The Rotterdam respondents were asked about their intention to support prospective migrants in five areas, namely (1) obtaining papers, such as a visa or residence permit, (2) covering travel costs,

(3) finding a job, (4) finding housing, and (5) accommodating someone in one's home. They were also asked whether they received support from others during their migration to the Netherlands in four areas: (1) financing the costs of travelling, (2) obtaining the needed visa or permits, (3) finding a first job and (4) their initial housing in the Netherlands. The results indicate that, today, almost 70% of the respondents have *no* intention of offering support, although almost 85% of the respondents once upon a time received support in 2 or more areas.

	Intention]	Received	
	N	%	Ν	%	
None	290	69.0	15	3.6	
1 domain	45	10.7	46	11.0	
2 domains	46	11.0	193	46.0	
3 domains	15	3.6	146	34.8	
4 domains	14	3.3	20	4.8	
5 domains	10	2.4			

Table 2. The intention to give assistance nowadays to potential migrants by settled Moroccan immigrants in Rotterdam and their received assistance during migration in the past (N=420).

Source: THEMIS, 2012, Destination countries data (see also Snel, Faber & Engbersen 2013)

Table 3 below reveals how many migrants who once received limited support (1 to 2 areas) or extensive support (3 to 4 areas), are not prepared to offer that support today. This result indicates that Moroccan migrants in the Netherlands have taken on the role of 'gate closers' (Engbersen et al. 2006).

Table 3. Cross table with received assistance during migration in the columns and the intention to give
assistance nowadays in the rows, percentages (N=420).

	Received			
Intention	None	1-2 domains	3-4 domains	Total
None	80.0	69.5	67.5	69.0
1-2 domains	20.0	22.2	21.1	21.7
3 – 5 domains	-	8.4	11.4	9.3

Source: THEMIS, 2012, Destination countries data (see also Snel, Faber & Engbersen, 2013)

However, the quantitative and qualitative analyses also reveal that a small group continues to function as selective 'gate keepers', yet only under specific conditions.⁷ Two important conditions are: possession of regular residence documents (for a marriage, study or work), and

⁷ To the survey question whether the respondent would encourage fellow nationals to come to the Netherlands, 8.5% says 'yes' and 11.2% says yes but only under certain conditions. The vast majority (79.3%) says 'no'.

having a level of education adequate to having sufficient job opportunities in the Netherlands. All in all, respondents indicate that migration from Morocco to the Netherlands may still be worthwhile, but only for a small group of people. This group consists of higher skilled migrants and migrants who migrate in a legal manner such as through marriage, for education purposes or through the special programme for the highly skilled.

The transformational mechanism: migration cultures in transition

The third mechanism involves the aggregation of migration-undermining feedback by individuals, which leads to changes in migration cultures. Our analysis reveals that this transformation is indeed taking place. First, we notice a general decline in the motivation to leave Morocco. This decline is to a certain extent the result of the failed migration project of Moroccan migrants and the current obstacles to migration. As a consequence, the migration discourse in Morocco has become less widespread, according to the 19-year-old housewife Soumai who lives in Tawrirt and whose father and uncle left for the Netherlands in the early 1980s.

"I think that most migrants from Tawrirt left Morocco 10 years ago. At the beginning of 2001, everyone talked about migration. Every day I heard about someone from my family or neighbours who had migrated. But people are no longer interested in migration, only a few youths dream of going abroad, especially to Spain or France. They dream of making a lot of money, owning beautiful cars, houses and getting married. The obstacle that stops them is that it is so complicated to get the official documents in order to leave Morocco. The others do not think about migration any more, since they hear about a lot of people who went abroad and came back to Morocco after a failed experience. There are no more jobs available, so then they found themselves without the money they borrowed to migrate, and without work in Europe. Most emigrants travelled 10 years ago. These were the golden years of emigration."

The changed migration aspirations and preferences is also observed in the accounts of the Rotterdam migrants we interviewed. When they go on a holiday to Morocco or when they speak to friends or relatives on the phone, they are not asked about their migration experiences or possible assistance as much as in the past. When asked, in the interview, about his experiences during holidays in Morocco and whether he gets a lot of questions about life in Europe, Hassan, a 41-year-old skilled worker, responds:

"Of course, I know a lot of people, and it always comes up one way or the other. How's life in Holland, how's life in exile, as they call it? But almost every one of them assures me that they have no interest in migrating to Europe. There is nothing left to do in Europe, they say. The mentality has changed. People find something to do and put their thoughts of migration to rest. Years ago everybody was talking about leaving the country.

(...) The young people nowadays ask about Europe out of general interest, but not to actually live there. (...) You used to hear talk of migration all the time, all the time young people scheming in the street, telling each other their plans or giving each other tips on the easiest way to leave the country. Now when you meet someone you have a casual conversation and a coffee together and then they are on their way again, going about their business."

Return migrants make the same point. They mention the increasing opportunities and prosperity in Morocco, in contrast to the declining economic and legal opportunities in Europe.

"Nowadays, people are no longer interested in going abroad since all the conditions of a good living standard exist in Morocco. There are jobs, internet, McDonald's, freedom. Compared to the past, Morocco has become a prosperous place where people can lead a better life." (Hadda, 57-year-old return migrant, bank clerk)

"Migrants used to come with large of sums of money and help others, for example to buy houses, land, etc. Now people from Nador see for themselves that migrants have become very mean and unwilling to spend more money in Morocco. Now when migrants come to my restaurant, they congratulate me for having decided to go back to Morocco for good." (Aziz, 55-year-old, return migrant, restaurant owner)

Nevertheless, one third of the family members we interviewed still intend to migrate to Europe, most of them for work and two respondents for marriage reasons. The majority, however, considers it unwise to migrate to the Netherlands today (or to Europe in general). These negative perceptions are influenced by the migration-undermining feedback received from settled or returned migrants:

"I know that the economic situation in the Netherlands is not that good. Even my cousin who has been in the Netherlands for quite some time said that it is more and more difficult to find a job. He has not even saved up any money to invest in projects here in Morocco. If my cousin who has been in the Netherlands for a long time did not make it, how could a newcomer like me ever achieve something there?" (Miro, 26-year-old, taxi driver)

"The only means through which I know about Holland is from what my cousins tell me. My cousins also told me how they were victims of ethnic profiling. If people there know that you are a Muslim or an Arab they automatically label you as dangerous at best, and as a terrorist at worst. My cousins were victims of this stereotyping. So are veiled women, who are also viewed with suspicion." (Lahcen, 27-year-old student) The interviews with family members of migrants indicate that migration aspirations and the preferred destinations are subject to change. Stricter migration policies, lack of jobs and the anti-Muslim climate are given as reasons why migration to the Netherlands is not a popular option.

"The European authorities are doing this on purpose in order to dissuade and prevent people from immigrating. Even illegal immigration has become very controlled and many Moroccans prefer to stay here rather than risk their lives just to find nothing but unemployment and bad living conditions abroad." (Zaro, 49-year-old teacher of Arabic)

"Nowadays it is really rare to hear of somebody migrating to the Netherlands, because of visa obstacles and the difficulty of getting a job there. I can only think of a few cases of family reunification and of women joining their husbands. Apart from this it is really impossible." (Abdelaziz, 26-year-old, teacher)

Aside from the critical feedback that people in Morocco receive about migration to the Netherlands, there are also general negative messages about migration to the Netherlands or to Europe as a whole, which Moroccans receive through the (social) media.

"Since the late 90s, Moroccans, thanks to the internet and satellite channels, are more exposed to the outside world and are very aware that the economic situation in Europe is not good and their chances of finding good jobs are not big." (Myriam, 58-year old return migrant, civil servant)

"Most people do not want to come nowadays and on TV on Al Jazeera they heard about (...) Wilders. The Netherlands is not a country of flowers and tolerance anymore. That is in the past." (Karim, 44-year old, living illegally in Rotterdam)

In other words: closed systems of migration-undermining feedback through migrant networks are interacting with more open systems of critical and realistic feedback through (social) media (Dekker & Engbersen, forthcoming). It is an interesting question to what extent Moroccans in Morocco are gathering information via other channels than via face-to-face contacts within the migrant networks. The two surveys held in Morocco among non-migrants give an indication: it emerges that 62.3 % of the respondent have at least every month contact with people based in Western Europe, and that 35.6% of them use online media (blogs, online forums, social network sites or websites such as Facebook, written in their native language) in their communication with people in Western Europe. However, there is no significant relation between the use of online media and the number of social ties. Table 4 shows that well-developed social networks do not correspond with a more frequent use of online media (*communicating vessels*). It seems that the use of online media and traditional media are *supplementary* to each other, independent of the number of ties respondents have with people in Western Europa.

	Type of communication		
Transnational ties	Traditional media	Online media	
None	1.1	1.4	
1 – 3	17.5	18.7	
4 - 10	21.3	20.9	
More than 10	60.1	59.0	

Table 4. Cross table with transnational ties of non-migrants in Morocco in the columns and type of communication with people in Western Europe in the rows, percentages (N=322).

Source: THEMIS, 2012, Origin countries data

Those who have strong migration expectations to migrate are more frequent users of online media than those who have no or modest expectations to migrate to Western Europe (see table 5). However, it is a rather small group (7.1% of the non-migrant Moroccan research population).

Table 5. Cross table with self-perceived likeliness of non-migrants in Morocco to migrate in the columns and type of communication with people in Western Europe in the rows, percentages (N=322)

	Type of communication	l
Likeliness to migrate	Traditional media	Online media
No migration aspirations	63.3	36.4
Not likely at all	63.2	36.8
A little likely	52.8	47.2
Likely	51.4	48.6
Almost certain	30.4	69.6
Total	56.8	43.2

Source: THEMIS, 2012, Origin countries data

It seems that online communication mainly serves to enhance the information exchange within existing social networks, rather than to establish new contacts. Table 4 indicates also that few respondents have ties with people they do not personally know (1.1% in the case of traditional media users and 1.4% in the case of online media users).

The migration culture in Morocco thus appears to be changing. There is limited and less interest in migration to the Netherlands and to other parts of (Western) Europe. The in-depth interviews indicate that those who do still want to migrate, the preferred destinations also seem to have changed, with different preferred destinations for low-skilled and highly skilled migrants. For highly skilled migrants, countries like Canada, Australia or the United States are high on the list because of the economic opportunities and the presumed tolerant social climate there: "Well, not so many people want to travel to Holland and as I told you nowadays the most favourite destination for most Moroccans is Canada because it is an open and tolerant country, unlike Europe where the economic situation and the xenophobia are making life very hard for migrants." (Jamal, 49-year-old businessman)

"These days people are interested in emigrating to Canada or Australia. (...) Especially highly educated people are more and more interested in emigrating to these countries because Canadian and Australian people are intelligent and are convinced that only very well-educated people like doctors or managers are capable of bringing economic prosperity to their country." (Miro, 26-year-old, taxi driver)

For low-skilled labourers, countries like Spain and Italy were still mentioned in the interviews despite the economic crisis, since these countries still need workers and have less restrictive rules with respect to family migration. Despite all the restrictions, these countries also offer more opportunities for forms of circular, entrepreneurial migration. Zaro, a 49-year-old Arabic teacher in Rabat, explains:

"Yes, people are still interested in going to Europe and abroad in general but mainly to Spain and Italy because work contracts are still available and migration is still new there, compared to France or the Netherlands. But it has become very difficult because the documentation to collect to do so has become so demanding (...) Many migrants to Spain or Italy have turned into traders in furniture, bicycles or clothes that they bring from Europe into Morocco. They spend the whole year back and forth between Morocco and Europe because they cannot have a stable situation with a permanent job."

In sum, migration cultures in the Rabat and Nador areas in Morocco are in a process of change. There seems to be less interest in migration to the Netherlands or to other European countries. This is partly due to the steady stream of negative images Moroccans receive about migration to the Netherlands through critical feedback from family members who have settled in the Netherlands or from migrants who have returned, and through the media (including online media). Many people are also less interested in migration because the opportunities in Morocco have improved. Those who are still interested in migration are usually not interested in going to the Netherlands. They can be divided into two groups: highly skilled migrants prefer to go to countries like Canada or Australia, and low-skilled migrants want to go to countries like Spain or Italy.

Conclusion and discussion

This paper has argued that mechanism-based explanations are relevant for the field of migration studies. This has been elaborated further with reference to the mechanism of diminutive causation. First, we postulated that institutional changes at macro level (migration policies, labour market opportunities and social reception) have consequences for the motivations of individual migrants to offer support. This was validated by the research findings. The restrictive Dutch migration policy, the declining job opportunities and the hostile social reception of Muslims have reduced the motivation of individual settled migrants to assist potential migrants. These changes have also induced strategies of gate keeping and gate closing (migration-undermining feedback). We further demonstrated that the critical feedback provided by settled migrants to potential migrants induces changes in migration aspirations and migration cultures. The three institutional changes do of course have a direct effect on the drop in migration from Morocco to the Netherlands as well. However, it is the combination of direct effects and the indirect effects that run via networks that explains the sharp decrease.

Diminutive causation is a 'mechanism of the middle range' (Tilly 2010) that can also be used to explain other decreasing migration flows, for instance the decreasing migration from Brazil to Portugal, or the stagnating migration from Morocco to the UK. The THEMIS data show that within these corridors settled migrants give substantial migration-undermining feedback and act as 'gate closers'. We also see the opposite, namely that settled migrants still act as bridgeheads and encourage migrants to come despite declining job opportunities (an example is the corridor Ukraine-Portugal).

It remains important, however, to examine the specific contextual factors involved in each case. For instance, the THEMIS database shows that there are significant differences in the extent to which Brazilians, Ukrainians and Moroccans use online media. Brazilians are most active; for them – despite the clear connection with existing transnational ties – online media seem to form a more important new channel through which feedback occurs in the form of information exchange. There are indications that the most appropriate model of information exchange for Moroccans is that of 'supplementarity', while for Brazilians the model of 'innovation' applies increasingly, with online media helping to create new channels of information exchange (cf. Dekker & Engbersen, forthcoming).

The model presented in this paper obviously has limitations and therefore requires improvement and augmentation. Firstly, regions around Nador and Rabat have a strong immigration history, but now have become areas with a lower emigration rate. They are not representative for all Morocco. Secondly, the mechanisms on which our model focuses operate at the level of migrants and their (online) networks. The effects of macro-economic and political factors in the sending and receiving country are analysed through the effects they have on migrants. Economic and political changes within the origin country have not been taken into account systematically. However, migration has also altered the context in origin countries, for example through investments with remittances. Most of the mechanisms Massey mentions in his theory of cumulative causation involve processes in the origin country and do not necessarily involve migrant networks. The mechanisms elaborated in this paper are therefore unlikely to be the only instigators of the process of diminutive causation and hence responsible for the drop in migration from Morocco to the Netherlands. Moreover, while we have shown that institutional changes in the Netherlands have consequences for the motivation of individual migrants, this is also the case in Morocco. Morocco's current economic development adds an important explanation for the declining interest in migration among certain population groups (cf. Aderghal & Berriane 2012). In spite of these limitations, the model of the process of diminutive causation nevertheless offers relevant insights. Future research will have to determine to what extent our model can be used as a more general paradigm for understanding other declining migration flows.

Finally, it is important to further investigate the feedback mechanisms that ensue from declining migration. The results indicate that, as a result of the restrictive migration policy and decreasing employment opportunities for low-skilled workers, a much more selectively composed group is capable of moving to the Netherlands, namely the higher skilled and those that can meet the strict demands imposed on partner immigration. These groups exhibit a more individualistic lifestyle and feel less loyalty towards established migrant networks. It is also a group that is more sensitive to discrimination and anti-Muslim sentiments. A number of educated respondents refer to this. They are very critical of what is happening in the Netherlands. In this way, processes of migration-undermining feedback can gain traction.

Acknowledgements

This paper draws on the theoretical research and empirical work undertaken within the project 'Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems' (THEMIS). In this research, the department of Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) in the Netherlands is cooperating with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in Norway, the International Migration Institute (IMI) at the University of Oxford in the UK, and the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning at the University of Lisbon (IGOT-UL) in Portugal. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the THEMIS project, but only those of the author. I thank the members of THEMIS for their constructive criticism, and especially Oliver Bakewell for drawing my attention to the 'Coleman boat' and Hein de Haas for formulating challenging research questions on migration-undermining feedback. I also thank Erik Snel and Masja van Meeteren for their suggestions and Sanne van der Pol, Marije Faber and Margrietha 't Hart for their help with the coding and the data analysis.

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