MIGRATION SYSTEMS, PIONEER MIGRANTS AND THE ROLE OF AGENCY

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Abstract: The notion of a migration system is often invoked but it is rarely clearly defined or conceptualized. De Haas[4] has recently provided a powerful critique of the current literature highlighting some important flaws that recur through it. In particular, migration systems tend to be identified as fully formed entities, and there is no theorization as to how they come into being and how they break down. The internal dynamics which drive such changes are not examined. Such critiques of migration systems relate to wider critiques of the concept of systems in the broader social science literature, where they are often presented as black

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[4] De Haas 2010.

boxes in which human agency is largely excluded. The challenge is how to theorize system dynamics in which the actions of people at one time contribute to the emergence of systemic linkages at a later time. This paper focuses on the genesis of migration systems and the notion of pioneer migration. It draws attention both to the role of particular individuals, the pioneers, and also the more general activity of pioneering which is undertaken by many migrants. By disentangling different aspects of agency, it is possible to develop hypotheses about how the emergence of migrations systems is related to the nature of the agency exercised by different pioneers or pioneering activities in different contexts.

1. Introduction

This article starts from the observation that the literature on migration systems says very little about their origins. Why is it that with some sets of movements of people between locations, a systemic quality seems to emerge, with migration taking on a patterned form that is sustained and reproduced over time? In contrast, other sets of movements appear to maintain a more random quality. The literature on migration systems often refers to the crucial role of pioneer migrants in starting new migration flows and establishing new patterns, but the concept remains underdeveloped: the pioneers are generally identified simply as those who migrate first. Furthermore, not all those who tread a new migration path start up a new system. The question remains: how can we distinguish between those who blaze a trail for others to follow in growing numbers, and those whose movement has no wider repercussions? What is the relationship between the actions of these first migrants and the establishment of migration systems? The paper starts to address this question by developing the concept of the pioneer migrants and reflecting on the agency of those engaged in pioneering migration systems.

The role of pioneers is of critical importance in the formation of migration systems, as until some people start to migrate, we cannot talk of a migration system. Their initial migration may be subject to enormous structural conditioning including the pressures of wage differentials, migration policies, language barriers and so forth. These will all play their role in determining the duration, direction and timing of migration. However, unlike those who follow once a migration system has been established, the pioneer migrant is not subject to the same influences of the established practices of migration, and it is these patterns that structure subsequent migration that are the hallmarks of a system. The concept of pioneer migration is therefore vital to a more comprehensive understanding of migration system formation. This article focuses on the different aspects of agency that are exercised by

pioneer migrants as they move to new destinations, and how that is related to the potential emergence of a migration system.

While this article focuses on the specific social process of migration, this can be taken as a valuable case to advance social theory in more general terms. This challenge of understanding the genesis of a migration system is closely related to the more general concern about how social entities or structures that comprise the actions and interactions of individuals can come to acquire properties that cannot be reduced to the level of these individuals. The analysis of such emergent properties lie at the heart of critical realist theory[5] and a critical realist ontology has come to underpin our theoretical perspective.[6] Hence, we hope that unpacking the relationship between the agency of pioneer migrants and the emergence of a migration system may offer a useful empirical lens for examining emergence in other contexts.

The paper begins with a review of the theoretical literature that has adopted the systemic lens through which to view migration processes, highlighting its foundations in general systems theory of the 1950s and 1960s. This review demonstrates important shortcomings regarding our understanding of migration system dynamics and the somewhat intuitive definitions of a migration system. The notion of pioneer migrants pervades this literature, as these are seen as the key actors in the genesis of migration systems. However, it is not clear how we might differentiate the pioneers, who may set in train a whole migration system, from those random individuals who happen to migrate between two locations. The paper argues that for empirical enquiry, it is essential to disaggregate the concept of pioneer migrants to consider movements between particular locations at particular times, rather than simply referring to national groups. Moreover, the paper suggests that by refining our understanding of different forms of agency exercised by potential pioneer migrants, we can improve our understanding of why some movements result in the establishment of migration systems, while others do not.

2. *Methodology*

This paper is theoretical in nature: its main aim is to develop a series of hypothesis regarding the relationship between the different types of agency of pioneer migrants and the development of migration systems. This is part of a wider THEMIS project (Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems) that aims to examine the conditions under which migration systems are formed (and therefore, we also ask when they are not formed), how they evolve over time and the conditions under which they decline.

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[5] Sawyer 2005; Elder-Vass 2010; Wan 2011.
[6] Bakewell 2010.

In setting out the theoretical analysis, we draw on the empirical data gathered under the auspices of the THEMIS project. In order to address the relative importance of agential factors in informing the emergence of migration systems we rely on carefully selected case studies stemming from our scoping studies conducted over the course of nine months in 2010. The research informing this paper was conducted in the UK focusing on migration patterns from six origin countries: Ukraine, Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Egypt and Brazil. The rationale for this specific country selection was to obtain a theoretically relevant variation of migration dynamics – having groups that grew rapidly from one country and stagnated from another. Heterogeneity of migration trends and patterns and the size of migrant populations was therefore an important selection criterion. The idea was not to sample on the dependent variable of an established migration system, but to pay attention to less developed or 'declining' groups in order to theorize the migration system dynamics at a more abstract, general level. The aim was to investigate the evolution of migration systems from the longitudinal perspective, hence the selection focused on established countries where it was possible to follow migration patterns over a period of 50 or 60 years.

The studies, encompassing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods,[7] included detailed reviews of available literature on migration processes and analysis of national and local migration statistics. We relied on Census data (1901–2001), International Passenger Surveys, Annual Population Surveys and Labour Force Surveys provided by the Office for National Statistics in the United Kingdom. We also conducted interviews with key stakeholders in given communities: elders, 'pioneer migrants', representatives of migrant organizations. Our mini-ethnographic approach enabled us to gather information from those who are still alive and remember how the relationship between the settled migrants and newcomers has developed over the years, and how the migration processes were perhaps related to the changes in composition of the migrant communities. The empirical material was used to categorize the dynamics of the differentiated stages of development of various migration systems, and to theorize the role pioneer migrants have played in these processes.

3. *Systems in Migration Theory*

Implicitly or explicitly, most authors adopting a migration systems approach draw heavily on the rather broad definition of a migration system offered by Akin L. Mabogunje:

> A system may be defined as a complex of interacting elements, together with their attributes and relationships. One of the major tasks in conceptualizing a phenomenon as a system, therefore, is to identify the basic interacting elements, their attributes, and their relationships. Once this is done, it soon becomes obvious that the system operates

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[7] Iosifides 2011.

> not in a void but in a special environment. … [A] system with its environment constitutes the universe of phenomena which is of interest in a given context.[8]

Borrowing from general systems theory (discussed further below), Mabogunje stressed the importance of the role of feedback mechanisms in shaping migration systems. For example, information about the migrants' reception and progress at the destination is transmitted back to the place of origin.[9] Favourable information then encourages further migration and leads to situations of:

> almost organized migratory flows from particular villages to particular cities. In other words, the existence of information in the system encourages greater deviation from the 'most probable or random state' … [The] state of a system at any given time is not determined so much by its initial conditions as by the nature of the process, or the system parameters … since open systems are basically independent of their initial conditions.[10]

Migration systems link people, families, and communities over space in what today might be called transnational or translocal communities. This results in a geographical structuring and clustering of migration flows, which is far from a 'random state'; migration is recognized as a process with feedback mechanisms that change the future patterns of migration:

> formal and informal subsystems operate to perpetuate and reinforce the systematic nature of international flows by encouraging migration along certain pathways, and discouraging it along others. [11]

This conceptualization has been taken up most comprehensively by Mary M. Kritz, Lin Lean Lim and Hania Zlotnik[12] who extended it to international migration. International migration systems then consist of countries that exchange relatively large numbers of migrants, and are also characterized by feedback mechanisms that connect the movement of people between particular countries, areas, and even cities to the concomitant flows of goods, capital (remittances), ideas, and information.[13] The end result is 'a set of relatively stable exchanges of people between certain nations ... yielding an identifiable geographic structure that persists across space and time'.[14] The implicit assumption is that migration systems are characterized by a significant degree of clustering of migration flows.

Although the term 'migration system' has been widely used since, it is striking that very few attempts have been made to further define and theorize the concept and unravel the

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[8] Mabogunje 1970, 4.
[9] Mabogunje 1970.
[10] Mabogunje 1970,13–4.
[11] Mabogunje 1970, 12.
[12] Kritz, Lean Lim, and Zlotnik 1992.
[13] Fawcett 1989; Gurak and Caces 1992.
[14] Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino,and Taylor (1998, 61).

underlying dynamics that lead to migration system formation. Definitions tend to be vague, loose or absent, while common approaches of migration systems also tend to confound levels of analysis. While Mabogunje's definition focused on the micro and meso level, Kritz et al.[15] have tended to focus on the macro level, in which migration systems are perceived as connecting countries rather than regions or places.

As argued by Hein de Haas,[16] existing studies of migration systems tend to be dogged by three fundamental weaknesses, which highlight gaps in the systems approach to the analysis of migration. First, while systems theory may answer questions about how migration is perpetuated, it assumes that the system is already in place; it cannot explain how and why a system comes into being in the first place. In general, the literature only considers the upward trajectory for the evolution of migration systems. Existing migration systems theory is unable to explain why initial migration moves may not lead to network migration and migration system formation. Second, migration systems are associated primarily with the idea that once a critical number of migrants have settled at the destination, migration becomes self-perpetuating because it creates the social and economic structures – in particular the networks – to sustain the process.[17] Little attention is paid to the 'contextual' impact of migration on the broader sending and receiving contexts that change the initial conditions under which migration takes place.[18] Third, there is little understanding of the internal mechanisms – the drivers of the migration system. In particular, there have been few attempts to conceptualize which feedback mechanisms may act against further migration and thereby explain the endogenous decline of established migration systems.[19]

This recent critique of the way the notion of system is applied to the study of migration echoes discussions in broader social theory that have been continuing for many years, and in which the forerunners have been the critical realists. In particular, the three fundamental flaws outlined above can each be related to wider debates on emergence[20] and agency,[21] which we put forward in the next sections. We do this by elaborating on the roots of the systems approach to the study of migration in general systems theory.

4. *Systems in Social Theory*

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[15] Krits et al. 1992.

[16] De Haas 2010.

[17] Castles and Miller 2009; Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1998.

[18] De Haas 2010.

[19] De Haas 2010.

[20] Sawyer 2001; Sawyer 2005; Wan 2011a.

[21] Archer 1995, 1996; Emirbayer and Mische 1998.

Some of the flaws of the migration systems concept may stem from the fact that Mabogunje (like later authors such as Leo Lucassen and Marcelo -J.Borges)[22] borrowed the concept of a system from general social theory and applied it to migration. Unfortunately, since Mabogunje, no systematic attempts have been made to refine migration systems theory drawing on subsequent advances in general social theory. Therefore, migration systems theory still largely reflects the functionalist social systems theory of the post-war period of 1950s and 1960s.

Systems theory of that time was a bold attempt to comprehend and encompass social reality using the structural and functional approaches, drawing on analogies with biological organisms with a stress on wholeness, mechanization and centralization.[23] In these conceptualizations of a system, the main stress was on structure alone, as ideas were epiphenomenal and agency non-existent: 'the average opinion in every age and country was a function of the social structure in that age and country'.[24] This highly structural approach was continued by Talcott Parsons[25] who argued that the crucial feature of societies, as of biological organisms, is homeostasis (maintaining a stable state), and that their parts can be understood only in terms of their function within the whole.

 This was the context in which Mabogunje wrote his seminal paper on migration systems. To a large extent, he transposed the ideas of general systems theory to the case of rural (African) migration rather directly; this is evident in his use of terminology, which includes notions of 'control sub-subsystems', 'adjustment mechanisms', and positive and negative feedback channels.[26] The analogy with the physical sciences, especially thermodynamics, is made even more apparent when he comes to talk of open and closed systems. It is in this form therefore that the systems approach has found its way into migration studies, denoting large stable international migration flows that acquire a measure of stability and structure over space and time, characterized by relatively intense exchanges of goods, capital, and people between certain countries.[27]

Since their heyday in the 1950s, traditional functionalist approaches have been heavily criticized for the striking absence of agency and power in their explanatory frameworks and their inability to explain social change (e.g. decline, dissolution). While the structural-functionalist roots of systems theory in the social sciences has resulted in many theorists rejecting it completely, Niklas Luhmann[28] set out to rebuild it on constructivist foundations, drawing on the concept of autopoiesis or self-reproduction, borrowed from the natural

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[22] Lucassen and Lucassen 1987; Borges 2000.
[23] Bertalanffy 1950, 143.
[24] Coser 1977, 89-90.
[25] Parsons 1951.
[26] Mabogunje 1970.
[27] see Fawcett 1989.
[28] Luhmann 1995.

sciences. For Luhmann the elements in the social system have no substantive existence outside the system. On the one hand they exist only momentarily and must be constantly reproduced through autopoiesis; on the other hand, system elements have no existence except in as far as they are reproducing the system. In his autopoietic systems there is no place for persons or actions – the basic elements proposed by earlier systems theorists – because this would be incompatible with his 'de-ontologized elements'. As a result, he replaces 'the traditional difference between whole and part with that between system and environment'.[29]

In recent years, Luhmann's domination of social systems theory has been challenged by a growing number of social theorists, in particular realists, who reject his rather abstract and virtual notion of the system.[30] Their main charge is that, by disregarding the distinction between the elements and the whole system, Luhmann ends up with holism, where the whole is more important than the parts.[31] Ironically, despite his constructivist ontology, Luhmann's systems appear to take on an existence beyond the reach of human agency and hence he slips back into reification of the system.

These authors all refer to the need to rehabilitate systems theory. Sylvia Walby notes that even when systems theory was being explicitly rejected, many of its basic ideas were smuggled back in with notions such as 'social relations', 'networks' and other concepts which are concerned with social structures that are not reducible to individuals.[32] Among those calling for a decisive break with earlier systems theory, there are many differences and points of heated debate. Nonetheless, there is sufficient common ground to suggest an overall direction for this re-launched systems theory.[33]

There has been a marked shift towards a realist ontology. A major concern among proponents of new systems theories is to resist the claims of methodological individualists that any explanation of social phenomena can be expressed in terms of the outcome of individuals' actions. For realists, the new systems theory must find a path between this individualism and the holism of earlier systems theory, including that of Luhmann. The response is to argue that 'any system has characteristics that are the result of its structure and environment (emergent properties), which is why we can speak of a system as a separate entity in the first place'.[34] The emergence of distinctive properties of collective entities that cannot be reduced to their constituent parts is fundamental to realist systems theory.[35]

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[29] Luhmann 1995, 6-7.
[30] Bunge 2004; Elder-Vass 2007b; Pickel 2007; Walby 2007; Wan 2011b.
[31] Wan 2001a, 40.
[32] Walby 2007, 455.
[33] Pickel 2007, 394.
[34] Pickel 2007, 400.
[35] Elder-Vass 2010; Sawyer 2005; Wan 2011a.

In order to address these questions of emergence, it is essential to provide an account of the agency of the social actors within the system. After all, it is the absence of agency that is one of the main charges against earlier systems theories. This remains an area of great debate among realists, sometimes represented on the one extreme by Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory[36] and on the other by Giddens' structuration theory.[37] For some these differences are profound,[38] whereas others argue that they can be readily reconciled.[39] Any reformulation of systems theory must include a clearly articulated notion of agency that allows the social scientist to surmise how systems develop, reproduce themselves and dissolve. In the second half of this article we attempt to apply these reflections to migration systems, which have so far remained largely untouched by these advances in sociological theory.

5. *Pioneers Migrants and the Emergence of Migration Systems*

The migration literature[40] tends to draw upon migration network theory in order to explain the emergence of migration systems.[41] This focuses on the extent to which previous migration experience of pioneers and the subsequent settlement of migrants in particular places of destination facilitated or even predicted the arrival of new migrants:[42] social capital embedded within networks of relatives, friends, or even merely co-nationals in the place of destination was known to reduce the costs and risks of migration, and thereby increase the likelihood of setting in motion migration dynamics independent of their initial conditions.[43] Research into the role of migrant networks centred on pioneers has also highlighted the varied forms of migration assistance that can be requested and received, resulting in cumulative causation mechanisms.[44]

With network explanations earning trenchant critiques[45] for failing to explain why some initial moves of pioneer migrants result in rapidly expanding network migration while others tail off and stagnate, the conceptualization of migration system dynamics from the sole perspective of networks seems a little too simplistic. For instance, 'migration assistance' does not automatically happen, as established immigrants do not have unlimited resources

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[36] Archer 1982; 1995.
[37] Giddens 1984.
[38] Elder-Vass 2007a; 2007c.
[39] Mingers 2004; Stones 2001.
[40] Faist 2000; Massey et al. 1993; Massey and Espinosa 1997.
[41] Boyd 1989.
[42] Delechat 2002; Stark and Wang 2002.
[43] Bashi 2007; Curran, Garip, Chung, and Tangchonlatip 2005; Curran and Rivero-Feuntes 2003; Garip 2008; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Palloni, Massey, Ceballos, Espinosa, and Spittel 2001.
[44] Bashi 2007; Böcker 1994; Boyd 1989; Garip 2008; Muanamoha, Maharaj, and Preston-Whyte 2010.
[45] Collyer 2005; Krissman 2005; Paul 2011.

and might not inevitably see the arrival of more immigrants as beneficial. In other words, established migrants can also turn out to be 'gatekeepers' as much as 'bridgeheads'.[46]

In the context of migration systems theory, our focus on pioneer migrants and their role in explaining how migration systems come into being attempts to 'bring back' a balanced focus on agency in order to understand better the role of pioneers in the phases of initiation of migration. While the effects of various structures (e.g. political, economic, demographic, socio-cultural, environmental) in explaining why migration starts or continues are well documented, the agency of migrants themselves, or of a particular group of migrants (here pioneers) in setting in motion migration dynamics remains understudied. People are not passive recipients of the opportunity structures presented to them by the origin and destination countries respectively, but – in making their decision to migrate, or assisting others to follow their footsteps – they exercise a certain degree of agency and choice.[47]

While we focus on the agency of pioneer migrants, we distance ourselves from voluntaristic connotations, bearing in mind that agency is exercised within the conditions created by structures.[48] The structures derived from past historical actions in turn create the context for current agency.[49] Broader structural factors such as warfare, colonialism, immigration policies, labour recruitment, or economic development play a significant role in setting the conditions determining the likelihood of pioneer migration and migration system formation.[50] In other cases it was more the trade contacts, religious missions or military conquests that created imagined pathways along which pioneer migrants could subsequently travel. The extensive literature on the 'root' causes of migration, which examines the necessary conditions for migration to occur, says however little about why it may become self-perpetuating even after those initial root causes – such as the draw of job opportunities, political turmoil, labour recruitment programmes – have been eliminated. While structural factors obviously determine the necessary conditions for large-scale migration to occur between particular places and regions, whether this actually continues may depend to a large extent on the action of pioneer migrants who can play a critical role in facilitating or impeding subsequent migration.

6. Who Are the Pioneer Migrants?

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[46] Bauer, Epstein, and Gang 2002; Böcker 1994; Collyer 2005; Epstein 2008; de Haas 2010.
[47] Glick-Schiller Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995.
[48] Cf. Iosifides 2011.
[49] Archer 1996.
[50] Castles and Miller 2009; Massey et al. 1994.

The definition of a 'pioneer' according to the Oxford Dictionary is 'one of the first people to go to a particular area in order to live and work there'.[51] The traditional approach to pioneer migration sees pioneers as the initial 'movers', who left their country and community of origin (or current dwelling), and went to a different country and joined a different community, where none of the members of their community had been before. This definition already attributes a certain degree of agency to pioneers by seeing them as those who 'pave the way', and hence create the opportunity for other members of their community to follow in their footsteps. Portrayed in the literature as 'innovators',[52] the pioneers are often from relatively well-off households; they are risk-prone and entrepreneurial community members,[53] as early migration often entails high costs and risks.[54]

How far back can we date the identification of pioneers? The written sources on the migratory movements in Europe testify to centuries of large-scale migrations – including Roman conquests, trade trails, mass movements, seasonal migration or colonization of new lands[55] (thereby challenging the myth of the 'immobile peasant').[56] Even if we limit the time frame to the beginning of the twentieth century, and to the era of the colonial empires, the exercise of tracing the conditions under which pioneer migrants moved to Europe will inevitably require a historical approach. Although the role of those very first pioneers in creating transnational linkages and networks is not to be disputed, their migration histories might have become disentangled from the narratives of the present communities or occupy a place in often 'imagined', sometimes 'invented' memory.[57] Moreover, although the quantitative data, tracing the number of migrants based on country of birth or citizenship, produce approximations of community formation and development, a qualitative inquiry reveals that the picture is far more complex, in which 'national groups' can generally be broken down into several sub-groups, periods of arrival, and modes of and reasons for migrating. This once again reveals the danger of 'methodological nationalism' in migration studies.[58] The growth of a particular national origin community can conceal the fact that this group consists of largely or entirely unrelated sub-groups from very distant regions or ethnic or class groups within countries of origin, which might also have arrived at very different periods. Although the first pioneer migrants from India might have come to Britain four hundred years ago,[59] the difference between them and the current Indian migrants does not result only from the different historical era but also from the different migratory conditions triggered by the arrival and settlement of the pioneers and the subsequent movements. This

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[51] Oxford Dictionary Online http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pioneer?rskey=lniikg&result=2.
[52] Hagerstrand 1957; Petersen 1958.
[53] MacDonald and MacDonald 1964.
[54] De Haas 2010.
[55] Hoerder 2002.
[56] Skeldon 1997.
[57] Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.
[58] Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Glick Schiller 2007.
[59] Visram 2002.

enables us therefore to distinguish various 'waves' of migration that took place in conditions different from those prevalent when the preceding migratory movements took place.[60]

We therefore often observe a diversification of migration: from labour, or family migration from a specific locality (following the chain pattern), to migration as part of the livelihood experience of many more groups and from far more diverse localities in the place of origin.[61] This seems to point to the frequent occurrence of a diffusion pattern of migration across space and socio-economic groups, which is not necessarily always diffusion from the relatively wealthy to the relatively deprived, but demonstrates different fissures between migrants from the same country. What are the dominant cleavages? First, migration flows are separated by time so that those who come first may have little or no contact with those who come later – most obviously seen in the case of Ukrainian migrants to the UK from before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[62] Second, migration flows tend to be segmented by class and education; the Brazilian 'pioneers' who arrived in the UK as working professionals move in different circuits from those arriving as low-skilled labour migrants.[63] Third, different groups of migrants can be divided by geography. Perhaps this is not surprising in the case of a country like Brazil, but there are also notable distinctions between migrants arriving in Europe from the Rif region versus those arriving from larger cities in Morocco such as Casablanca, Tangier or Rabat.[64]

While in the past the close-knit migratory groups might have built their identity around the 'imagined' group of pioneer migrants (as in the case of the 1970s–1980s Sylheti community in London and their relationship with Lascars from East Bengal), with present migrations becoming a much more geographically diversified, culturally transnational and socially heterogeneous phenomena,[65] the background and characteristics of pioneer migrants themselves might also have become more diversified. They come from various communities and localities, and represent different social classes. For example, the role of pioneers in the current, expanding economic migration from Brazil to the UK will be attributed to a much lesser extent to the few high-profile political migrants and exiles from Rio de Janeiro, who left Brazil during its times of authoritarian regime in the 1970s, and more to the largely un-named economic migrants who arrived in London from Brazil in the late 1980s.[66] In a similar vein, it would be a stretch to consider the Second World War Polish refugees who settled in

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[60] We would want to distance ourselves from the discourses of 'tidal waves' of migrants 'flooding' Europe. On the contrary, we see a 'wave' of migration as a heuristic and analytical device to challenge the methodologically nationalistic position that immigrants from the same origin country could best be understood as a homogeneous group of foreign-born (Eckstein 2009). By distinguishing 'waves' along different variables such as time of arrival or aim of migration we contribute to nuancing the picture of bilateral migratory movements.

[61] See Boyd 1989.

[62] Kubal et al. 2011a; 2011b; De Haas et al. 2011.

[63] See Fonseca, Pereira, and Esteves 2010.

[64] De Haas et al. 2011.

[65] Vertovec 2006.

[66] Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b.

the UK between 1945 and 1953 as pioneers with regard to the post-2004 EU Enlargement large-scale economic migration. Although the history of Second World War refugees was well-preserved in the national imagination, the actual pioneers of the later wave of migration from Poland could rather be said to be the irregular economic migrants who left Poland in the 1980s and 1990s, developed and sustained links with Poland through visiting and sending remittances, sometimes even through direct recruitment of workers; and created an 'underground' migration industry.[67]

We therefore contend that from an analytical perspective, it might be helpful to distinguish pioneer migrants specific to each wave in the migration history and to each migration (sub)system that can be identified under the 'national' label (see above), due to the complexities, diversification and discontinuities within the migratory movements. The role of pioneers will therefore be conceptualized and contextualized with regard to the specific group, time-frame and locality (of origin, and settlement), and type of migration. As a result, the term 'pioneer', as instrumental for further migration processes, cannot be conceived in absolute historical terms. This theoretical clarification enables greater flexibility (and accuracy) in investigating the role of pioneer migrants in bridging the links between the initiation and continuation of migration.

7. *Theorization of Pioneers' Agency: Iterational, Projective, Practical-Evaluative*

In order to explain the divergent strategies of the pioneer migrants and their role in encouraging or discouraging subsequent migration, it is necessary to further explore the role of agency in migration system formation and breakdown. A summary of the debates about the nature of agency is beyond the scope of this article; we start by noting that it is a relational property.[68] While agency generally refers to micro-level human actors,[69] it can also refer to collectivities that act.[70] Dietz and Burns see human agents as including 'individuals as well as organized groups, organizations and nations'.[71]

This may resonate with the common use of agency in much of the literature, but what it misses is any indication of how an agent may use this ability to transform social relations. Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische[72] provide a more sophisticated account when they distinguish between the different ends to which agency may be applied – to recreate familiar conditions of the past, to project forward to an imagined future, and to respond to the contingencies of the present. They observed that agency – as an analytical

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[67] Garapich 2006; Jordan and Düvell 2002.
[68] Sewell 1992, 20.
[69] Morawska 2001, 2011.
[70] Archer 1996.
[71] Burns 1986; Dietz and Burns 1992.
[72] Emirbayer and Mische 1998.

category in its own right – could be discussed at three levels: iterational (habitual), projective and practical-evaluative.[73] The everyday 'engagement by individuals of different structural environments which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing situations'[74] is called human *agency*.

In the iterational element of agency, past experiences condition present actions through habit and repetition; they allow the sustaining of identities, meanings, and interactions over time. The iterational element of agency manifests itself in actors' abilities to recall, to select, and to appropriately apply the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that they have developed through past interactions.[75] The projective element of agency stems from the standpoint that human actors do not merely repeat past routines, they also invent new possibilities of thought and action. As they respond to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, 'actors are capable of distancing themselves from schemas, habits and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions'.[76] What George Herbert Mead calls 'distance experience'[77] enables actors to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes. The third, practical-evaluative element of agency mediates between these two and contextualizes them to present conditions: 'as even relatively unreflective routine dispositions must be adjusted to the exigencies of changing situations, and newly imagined projects must be brought to earth within real-world circumstances'.[78] These three elements – although analytically distinguished – could be found in any concrete, empirically observed instance of action, yet to varying degrees. Depending on the context, reactivation of past, routine patterns of thought and action might sometimes take precedence over actions oriented towards innovation and change: 'one or another of these three aspects might predominate'.[79]

With regard to migration pioneers, the specific theoretical distinction between iterational, projective and practical-evaluative agency equips us with a useful tool that allows us to hypothesize under which conditions pioneer migration establishes precedents for further migration to follow (leading to emergent properties of the movement), and under which conditions it would not happen. This seems to corroborate the hypothesis put forward by Hein de Haas[80] that there is a relation between the relative dependence on social capital to migrate and the emergence of systemic qualities to migratory processes. The question at

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[73] Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 963.
[74] Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 970, see also Morawska 2011.
[75] Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 975.
[76] Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 984.
[77] Mead 1964.
[78] Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 994.
[79] Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 972.
[80] De Haas 2010.

stake here is the role of pioneer migrants in influencing the origin community and the likelihood of migration system formation.

The dominance of the iterational agency element among pioneer migrants – an orientation towards preserving identities, interactions and institutions over time – would be conducive to sustaining strong links and ties with their origin communities. The prevalence of the habitual agency, past patterns of thought and action among pioneer migrants might therefore result in pioneer migrants actively encouraging their family members to follow their path and join them. Those pioneers, who on their journeys long for the familiarity of 'home', social ties and known arrangements, might also be more prone to orient their actions towards encouraging other members of their community to join them, and – as a result – stimulate further migration. The relatively enduring repertoires and scripts of strategies may emerge out of previous collective experiences and influence subsequent individual and group behaviour, encouraging further migration and the rebuilding of the community in the country of settlement. Their dependence on various forms of social capital, but also their conscious efforts to foster social relations for their own future benefit and interest,[81] motivates the pioneers to assist the migration of non-family community members and friends. Indirectly, therefore, the iterationally oriented agency of pioneer migrants might stimulate further migration even to the point of transforming initial limited chain migration towards a full-blown migration system. This scenario seems plausible *ceteris paribus*.

However, when the iterational element of agency is contextualized within the framework of immediate scope for action, with reference to the currently prevalent, and currently enforced structural conditions – such as, for example, a strict host country's immigration policies, visa quotas, or labour market conditions – the routine dispositions must be adjusted to the exigencies of changing situations. The evaluative element of agency might mediate the habitual experiences with regard to present conditions as encumbering more migration. This might result in limited chain migration of close family and friends, but not large-scale network migration. Emirbayer and Mische see the role of the practical-evaluative dimension of agency as contextualizing social experience to pragmatic and normative exigencies of lived situations.[82] This is not to say that the structural condition of the labour market or immigration policies takes over, but that the practical-evaluative agency is used in a mediating fashion, enabling agents – pioneer migrants – (at least potentially) to pursue their projects under unfavourable conditions, in ways that may nonetheless challenge and transform the situational contexts of action themselves.

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[81] Pathirage and Collyer 2011.
[82] Emirbayer and Mische 1998.

A good illustration of the above mechanism comes from the post-Second World War Ukrainian diaspora in the UK.[83] Ukrainians, who left continental Europe and settled in England, became past-oriented preservers of Ukrainian identity. Migration and displacement enabled the Ukrainian émigrés in the UK to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes[84] – 'to organize ourselves in this land'.[85] The processes of social organization of the Ukrainian community in the UK proceeded at a rapid pace. Initially Ukrainian migrants were accommodated in camps all over the country and worked on local farms. In the camps they established educational programmes, choirs, folk dance groups, drama groups and even orchestras. In 1946 the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain was established; the key principle of the association was mutual support and assistance, as the vast majority of Ukrainian settlers had no family – the community became an extended family for them.[86] As Ukrainians left the camps and settled in industrial towns and cities all over the country, they began to establish churches (e.g. the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Duke Street, London), Ukrainian Saturday schools and community centres (e.g. the Ukrainian Social Club and the Association of Ukrainian Women) so that they could maintain their cultural and religious traditions, and pass these on to their children.[87]

The main role of the established organizations allowed the sustaining of identities and commonly developed meanings and interactions that were familiar to their members and widely practiced when still 'at home':

> We protected all our cultural achievements, and tried to show it all to the Englishman, we tried to find our own place in the English world, a place for us as Ukrainians [I, female, 91, UK].

> Basically their aim was to keep people together, so they don't disappear from the face of the Earth. Or probably in less dramatic terms ... But the main idea was 'your own goes to your own for their own' [O, male, 41, UK].

As a result, the processes of migration of Ukrainians did not come to a complete halt. Although transnational ties with Ukraine were extremely limited, due to the political colouring of Europe, Ukrainian men, who were dominant among the émigrés, invited Ukrainian women from Poland and Yugoslavia to come to the UK with a view to marriage. 'I was lucky to marry a Ukrainian' was a popular confession to make among the diaspora members.[88] In order to preserve the community and maintain Ukrainian identity through identification with language, values and culturally sanctioned behaviours such as in-group

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[83] Kubal and Dekker 2011.
[84] Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 984.
[85] Kubal and Dekker 2011
[86] Kravets 2011.
[87] Kravets 2011.
[88] Kubal and Dekker 2011.

marriage, migration continued until the early 1970s with around 1,500 Ukrainian women joining the diaspora. The specific configuration of iterational and practical-evaluative elements of agency prevalent among the Ukrainians in the UK, and visible through their processes of adaptation, was therefore not only conducive to sustaining identities, meanings and institutions over time but also positively related to further migration movements.[89]

What about the projective (innovative) aspects of agency of pioneer migrants and their influence on the subsequent flows? Here also two possible scenarios spring to mind – depending on a particular configuration of circumstances and their interplay with practical-evaluative aspects of agency.

Those pioneers with a dominant innovative element to their agency, and strong future orientations, might be more oriented towards 'cutting off' the ties with the origin community, also partially as a way of 'escaping' negative social capital, conservative norms and relationships.[90] Pioneers might conceive of their migration as a response to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, and as a way of distancing themselves from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain their social identities (personal development) and prevent change within institutions (scope for action).[91] Migration as 'distance experience'[92] enables the pioneers to reconstruct and innovate upon those traditions in accordance with evolving desires and purposes. This again supports the thesis of the differentiated role of social capital, and particularly the relative dependence on family- and community-based social capital to explain why some migratory movements take off while others tail off and stagnate.[93] The more highly skilled and wealthier pioneers are likely to be less dependent on family and kin to migrate, as well as to settle and feel good in the destination, because of their financial and human as well as cultural capital, which allow them to migrate more independently. As they are less dependent on family networks and ethnic business clusters and more likely to be attracted by job opportunities, they are also less likely to cluster at destinations, thereby lowering the chances for migration system formation.[94]

These strategies were particularly observed during the analyses of the pioneer Egyptian migration to the UK.[95] The highly skilled members of the middle and upper classes who came to the UK in the late 1940s and 1950s to pursue their degrees and continue employment in technical and medical professions treated migration as a solely individual

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[89] Kubal and Dekker 2011.
[90] De Haas 2010.
[91] Emirbayer and Mische 1998, 984.
[92] Mead 1964.
[93] De Haas 2010.
[94] De Haas 2010.
[95] Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; De Haas et al. 2011.

project. The success of their journey did not depend on social capital, nor the ties with family and community members back home. Reflecting back on their beginnings in the country they were also 'not interested' in others following in their footsteps, nor particularly engaged in helping members of their community to come.[96]

This helps us to conclude that the projective dimension of agency, its direction towards future possibilities (e.g. assimilation and acculturation with the host society, economic self-betterment) might result in actions that do not encourage (or even actively discourage) other members of their community to follow their path, apart from limited chain migration of family and close friends. Strong future orientations might restrain actors' responsiveness to pressures from within their community of origin, and conformity with traditional norms and social institutions.

However, the consequences of the innovative element of agency are once again not unitary. When a practical-evaluative element mediates innovative agency, it might be also instrumental in encouraging further flows. The innovative orientation towards the future might also reflect pioneer migrants' interests in facilitating further migration of their group members, so that the new experiences, change and betterment that stem from migration as a livelihood strategy might be shared by more community members and put in motion more intense processes of social change and transformation. This scenario corresponds with the vast literature on chain migration and the creation of ethnic niches,[97] which demonstrated that innovatively oriented migrant-entrepreneurs seized the void they encountered in the host country's labour market and filled it with decisions that encouraged further migration. Within growing ethnic business (ethnic cuisine, restaurants) they sponsored further migration of skilled chefs, waiters, porters, etc. This is one of the interpretations explaining the trajectory of Sylheti (Bangladeshi) community growth in and beyond London's East End.[98]

While the end results of the predominance of one type of agency over the other might look similar – resulting either in limited chain migration or in migration take-off and expansion – the true motives behind pioneers' agency are available to view only via in-depth qualitative analysis.[99] This reveals that actors engage in different structural environments, and through the interplay of habit, imagination and judgment, both reproduce and transform those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.

These three dimensions of agency – iterational, projective and practical-evaluative – are of course analytical constructs, and can simultaneously be part of the migration experience of

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[96] Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; De Haas et al. 2011.
[97] Eckstein 2009; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Zhou 1993.
[98] Kubal et al. 2011a, 2011b; De Haas et al. 2011.
[99] See Iosifides 2011.

pioneers in their strategies to encourage others to follow them. Treated separately, they are almost like Weberian ideal-types, as they never 'exist' alone. It is only together that they become constitutive of human experience. On the other hand, in any given – empirically observed – situation, one or another of these aspects might dominate. These three elements of agency interplay with each other in various configurations. For example: Europe from the 1960s onwards saw large numbers of Moroccan labour migrants.[100] There is ample evidence suggesting that the pioneer Moroccan labour migrants were innovatively oriented individuals[101] looking for economic betterment for themselves and their families. They had an active interest in facilitating other members of their community to follow. This 'help' took the form of ad-hoc establishments and migrant networks, and indeed – as the trajectory of the development of the Moroccan migration system to Europe suggests – the 1960s and early 1970s saw the expansion of Moroccan labour migration.

The 1970s and 1980s saw, however, the emergence of a different type of Moroccan migration, oriented towards family reunification and family formation. Although the pace of expansion was comparable (or even faster), it is rather the iterational element of agency – orientation towards preserving identities, interactions and institutions (like the culturally and religiously sanctioned institution of in-group marriage) – that might have been at stake here. The cultural codes, past habits embedded within social and community life but contextualized to contingencies of the present by the settled Moroccans, made them look for wives and husbands for their children back in their place of origin. It is therefore the predominance of the iterational element of migrants' agency that might be more helpful at explaining the subsequent expansion of Moroccan migration to Europe.

8. Conclusion

The paper served to develop a set of hypotheses regarding the potential role of pioneer migrants' agency in relation to the emergence of migration systems. We attempted to explore the conditions under which initial moves by pioneer migrants to Europe result in the formation of migration systems and the conditions under which this does not happen. The role of pioneers' agency is crucial to the outcome of the above processes, as beyond structural factors it is the 'actors engaged in emergent events [who] find themselves positioned between the old and the new and are thus forced to develop new ways of integrating past and future perspectives, new ways of responding to changing situations'.[102]

We demonstrated how the intersection between the various elements of pioneer migrants' agency and the relative dependence on social capital[103] may lead to the emergence of

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[100] Cherti 2008.
[101] De Haas et al. 2011; Cherti 2008.
[102] Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 1006.
[103] See De Haas 2010.

particular systemic qualities of the migration movements. The conditions conducive to the dominance of the habitual or projective aspects of agency do not occur randomly or ambiguously, but certain types of agency tend to coincide with the prevalence of different forms of social capital.[104] Migrants' agency in interplay with high levels of social capital is more likely to lead to the take-off and sustenance of migration processes oriented either towards past habits and rebuilding the community in the destination; or towards the future: adaptations in the form of ethnic enclaves and migration businesses. The interplay between migrants' agency in conditions of exclusionary, 'negative' social capital also explains why the supposed 'diffusion' of migration within communities can remain largely limited to particular ethnic groups, families or classes that monopolize access to international migration.

Further elaboration of the conditions conducive to dominance of the habitual or projective aspects of agency, and their consequences – at a given time, and with reference to a particular wave of migration – has therefore important theoretical implications and complements the strand of analyses focusing solely on macro-level, contextual and structural factors for explaining the emergence of migration systems.

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[104] De Haas 2010.

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