



“You can’t even predict the rain anymore”:

The importance of environmental factors in the migration biographies of Moroccan immigrants in Belgium

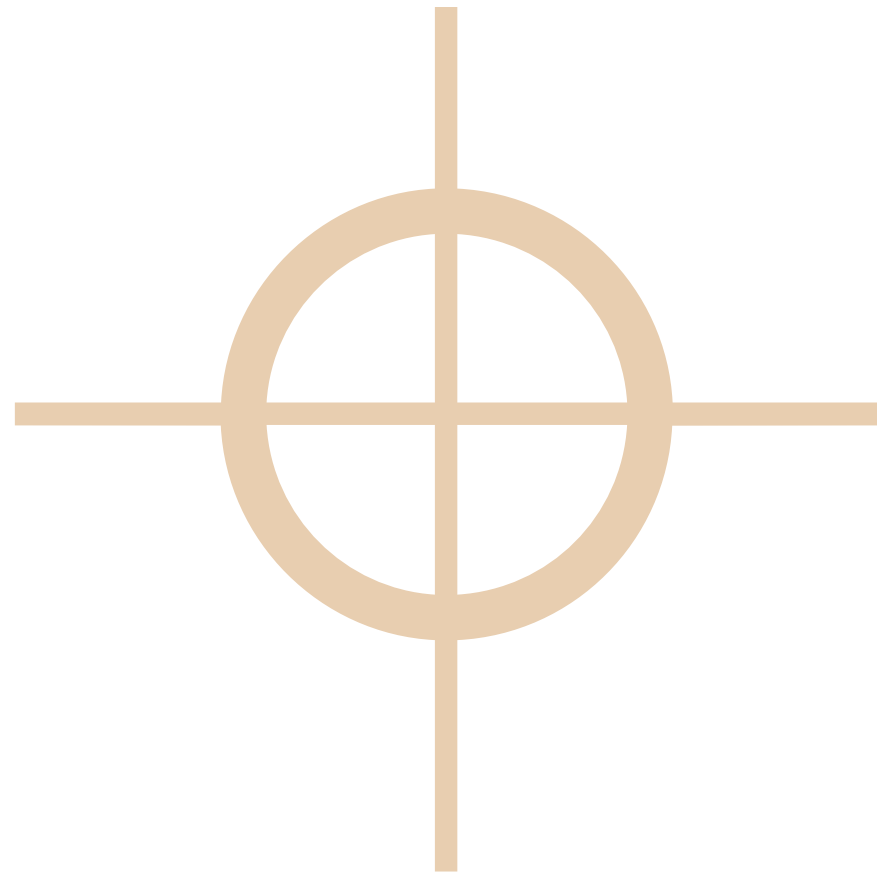
Loubna Ou-Salah

Introduction



- ▶ Environmental change not automatically translates into migration decision making
- ▶ Environmental migration as a multi-stage process
- ▶ Little knowledge of the varied roles environmental change can play in the different stages of the migration process

Research goals



- ▶ How environmental factors play a role in migration decision making during life stages and transition moments
- ▶ How environmental factors become more relevant during a migration trajectory and lifetime
- ▶ How environmental factors interact with other migration drivers.



- Migration can be associated with important stages in the life cycles
- During transitions, people change social roles, acquire new rights and duties, and often need additional resources
- There are several ideas about the periods of transitions

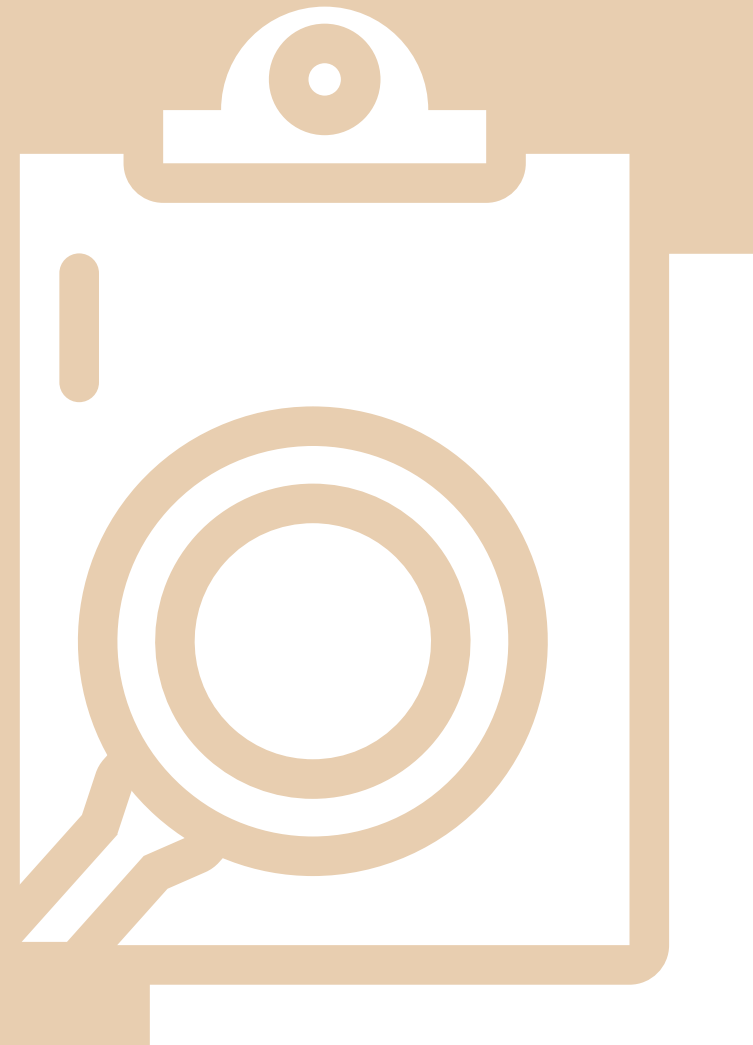


A biographical approach:

- To study the long and fragmentary nature of the migration trajectories
- Referring to clear transition markers in people's lives
- Migration decisions as an important part of long-term biography

Research Sample:

- Three cases
- Migrants whose livelihood can be characterized by farming-based activities in their region of origin
- The regions of origin: Settat, Nador and Azrou



Rachid

- 40-year-old man
- Belgium for six years
- Settat, northeast of Marrakech
- Moved to the big city Casablanca in his twenties
- His parents were dependent on agricultural tasks

Khadija

- 61-year-old woman
- Belgium for five years
- Nador, located in the Rif Mountains
- Widow
- Domestic and agricultural tasks

Fatima

- 40-year-old woman
- Belgium for ten years
- Azrou, the northern part of the Middle Atlas Mountains
- Domestic and agricultural tasks



Results

“It's really dry and even desert-like near us, which makes it even harder”

Rachid's story



Results - Rachid's story

"I wanted to migrate, especially to find work and then also it was time to start a family and because I couldn't do anything at my parents' farm anymore. There used to be a lot of work in the countryside, but not anymore. It's really dry and even desert-like near us, which makes it even harder. You notice that directly on the road when you're driving there. So I had to move to the city because of the economic situation in Morocco. I also longed so much for a stable life and I wanted to do everything to have that, but I knew it was not going to happen in Settat."

Rachid's story

- He felt it was time to start his own family and clearly marks a transition in his life
- A life stage in which stability and the creation of a family were expected
- He couldn't continue their families' business on the family land

Rachid's story

- Being confronted with drought and precipitation patterns made migration more appealing
- Environmental change is more a hidden narrative
- When discussing his migration path, he only refers to marriage and family reunification



Rachid's story

"My aunt already lived here. She had migrated in the 70's because her husband came to work here. She has her children and grandchildren here. I married her daughter myself and so I ended up in Belgium. They themselves have built up a whole network over the years, so now I also have a large network. So I actually migrated on the basis of family reunification, in order to get married. It was quite a process before I could really come over. "



Results

"You can't even predict the rain anymore"

Khadija's story



Khadija's story

"I wasn't thinking about migration. If you don't have money or a network, you can't even think about migrating. No matter how difficult it was, I never thought about moving. My husband had inherited it as well, so it all has a different value. He always saw his father working hard on it and that was just something we accepted and did not want to change. "

Khadija's story

- Migration was something that took place in a later life stage
- Activities in the agricultural sector perceived as her responsibility and goes back generations
- Did not have the means to migrate, making her also immobile



Khadija's story

However, I think that our generation was more aware of the difficulties involved, which made us involve our children less. So I was thinking about migration for my sons because their future could be different. But for me, no, it wasn't realistic and I had the mosque in my street, so I didn't really wait or fight for it myself. that idea lives especially with young people and they do dangerous things for it.

Khadija's story

- Khadija is clearly aware of the lack of predictability of precipitation patterns, resulting in decreases in income and more unemployment
- Consequently, it affects how and whether people involve their children to continue to family business
- Khadija has always encouraged her children to migrate, but did not expect this for herself



Khadija's story

"I migrated to Belgium after the death of my husband. Then I also sold and shared my part of land for the inheritance. I'm also tired of taking care of it and my children didn't want to leave me alone in Morocco and they were able to arrange a residence permit for me and that's how I ended up here. My children especially wanted me to live here because they saw with my husband that the medical sector in Morocco is still very bad. If I get sick, I can call on the hospitals in Belgium."

Khadija's story

- The transition to widowhood changed her reality and provided opportunities for life changes
- she preferred to spend more time with her family who were living in Belgium
- Khadija's case shows how transitions make certain factors stand out more or less



Results

“For us, there has never been any help”

Fatima's story



Fatima's story

I got married at the age of 18, so I had to grow up quickly. I also have three children and from my first I was already pregnant after [a marriage of] 4 months. From the birth of our first child, my husband and I were separated for the biggest part of the year. He always had to look for a job for a few months, for which he stayed in a different city each time. That was difficult but really necessary because we couldn't make ends meet with what we ourselves earned, mainly through selling fruit and vegetables on local markets, to support a child.

Fatima's story

- Fatima lived alone in Morocco for a long time without the company of her husband
- They derived their main source of income from the sale of their fruit and vegetables
- After they had made the transition to parenthood, their livelihoods were not secured



Fatima's story

In the end he was able to come to Belgium via his parents and that was a relief for our family and gave us hope. There were not that many changes for me except that we couldn't see each other for a longer period of time. He also looked for a job in Belgium as soon as possible and that was a big difference in income. This also made it less stressful for me to earn enough by growing fruit, because I had to have this sold at the market twice a week through my sister's son. That was a lot of pressure that also disappeared.[...] Through my marriage to my husband I got a visa and me and our children returned to live with him and my parents-in-law in Antwerp [city in Belgium].

Fatima's story

- Fatima migrated to Belgium based on family reunification procedures
- Environmental factors linked to the agricultural sector made it more difficult to provide for their livelihoods
- Alternative ways to secure their livelihoods were sought which had an influence on migration decisions

Discussion



- ▶ The perceived importance of environmental factors varies during different life transitions
- ▶ Environmental factors do not always remain consistently and strongly present throughout a migration trajectory
- ▶ The effects varies according to economic activities, gender roles and responsibilities within the household.

