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# **Irregular Migration in the South: Migrating from Nicaragua to Costa Rica**

Lund University  
Master of Science in  
International Development and Management  
August 2014

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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
1.1. Research Purpose.....	6
1.2. Research Questions.....	7
1.3. Outline of Thesis.....	7
<b>2. Situating the Reader in the Context</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1. A History of Migration in Nicaragua.....	8
2.2. ‘The South’ in Migration Literature .....	9
<b>3. Defining the Key Concepts</b> .....	<b>10</b>
3.1. Migration .....	10
3.2. Irregular migration.....	10
3.3. Structures.....	11
3.4. The South.....	12
<b>4. Theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>12</b>
4.1. Theories of Migration .....	13
4.2. Theories of Irregular Migration .....	14
4.2.1. <i>Segmentation of Labour Market</i> .....	14
4.2.2. <i>Social networks and the migration industry</i> .....	15
4.2.3. <i>Transnational Structures in a Local Context</i> .....	16
4.3. Theories of Macro-level Migration Regions .....	17
4.3.1. <i>Migration Transition theory</i> .....	17
<b>5. Methodology</b> .....	<b>19</b>
5.1. Constructing our Research.....	19
5.2. Data Collection .....	20
5.3. Selecting Interviewees .....	23
5.4. Data Analysis.....	24
5.5. On Positionality and Constructing the World.....	25
5.6. Ethical Considerations .....	26
5.7. Limitations.....	27
<b>6. Result &amp; Analysis</b> .....	<b>28</b>
6.1. Irregular Migration in the Nicaraguan - Costa Rican Context.....	28
6.2. Segmentation of Labour Market .....	30
6.3. Social and Migratory Network.....	33
6.4. Transnational Factors .....	35
6.5. The Category of South-South Migration Flows.....	37
<b>7. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Interview guide</b> .....	<b>50</b>

## Abstract

Studies about migration and development consist of a vast field of themes. However, irregular migration between developing countries is to a large extent still an unexplored area. Based on a constructivist approach and a qualitative study, this paper explores the structural explanations of irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and the categorisation of migration flows into 'south' and 'north'.

The thesis concludes that labour segmentation, social and migratory networks as well as contextual transborder issues are the main structural explanations when examining migration flows. These structures are both national and transnational, and therefore the possibility of studying irregular migration from a nation-state perspective is limited.

The thesis also finds that rather than contributing to an in-depth understanding of migration flows, the categories of 'south' and 'north' shows on global power relations. Therefore it concludes that de Haas' theory dividing countries into five groups is a more adequate framework in understanding migration flows.

**Key words:** irregular migration, south-south migration, development, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, migration structures

## **Acknowledgement**

This thesis would not have been possible without valuable contributions of many people. Your support and engagement facilitated our stay in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, gave us friendly advice and guided the research process. We would like to express our many thanks to everyone involved in it.

We are deeply grateful to all of our respondents who shared their time and knowledge with us. Your participation and openness made this study possible. Many of you also provided us with further contacts and shared your network with us, paving the way for additional interviews. We are grateful to Javier and Roger for allowing us to join them on their visit to Medio Queso.

Our fieldwork was carried out during the internship with International Organisation for Migration in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It was thanks to the support of its staff that many doors opened to us. We specially thank Carmen Paola Zepeda, Ricardo Cordero and Pier Rossi-Longhi for your help.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our supervisor Andrea Nardi for helping us focus our research problem and question our conclusions. This process also involved our supervision group and your peer reviews made us go further and deeper into the research issue for this we are thankful.

# 1. Introduction

The migration flow between Nicaragua and Costa Rica represents the second most important intraregional migration flow within Latin America, surpassed only by Colombians migrating to Venezuela (IOM 2012:23). It is estimated that nearly 300 000 Nicaraguan migrants reside in Costa Rica (IOM 2013:38), representing nearly 80 per cent of Costa Rica's immigrants (Voorend et al. 2013:21). However, the figure is estimated to be higher when taking into account that there are dimensions of migration hard to capture in a census, such as irregularity and temporality. This is especially the case when dealing with transborder migration in countries with limited control of their borders (Koser 2010:183pp).

Migration and development are often seen as interdependent processes, where migrants, for instance, are seen as transferring economic and social assets, and there are discussions of including migration in the post-2015 agenda (OHCHR 2012). Irregular migration, as a part of the migratory framework has to be included in these discussions. Understanding irregular migration has indeed become a key policy concern for many countries and it is a widely discussed topic in today's migration politics. Explanations range from increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policies and the segmentation of the labour market to focusing on migrants' decision-making processes (see for instance Cvajner and Sciortino 2010:393, Düvell 2011:293, Koser 2010:188p). We will later define irregular migration more detailed, however the general understanding of it can be said to be a "movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries" (IOM 2011:54). In addition to distinguishing between 'regular' and 'irregular' migration, flows are generally divided into four different categories: south-south, south-north, north-north, and north-south, with migration between Nicaragua and Costa Rica being classified as a south-south flow (UN DESA 2013, UNDP 2013, World Bank 2013a). These divisions are based on how the world is categorised according to wealth and level of development (WMR 2013:36). A south-south flow is understood as migration between two developing countries and it is assumed that there are certain particularities compared to south-north migration. It is often stated that south-south flows are underrepresented in research, thus we found it important to contribute to the debate with a case study on a south-south irregular migration flow. We argue that structural explanations of migration processes have to be separated from individual factors or motivations, often portrayed as better opportunities. Our thesis aims to contribute to the debate by focusing on structural explanations of irregular migration, understood as "any

recurring pattern of social behaviour” (Scott and Marshall 2009: ‘structure’), rather than individual factors. However, researching a social phenomenon in a context new to the researcher involves reflecting on the research being created and the focus of the study. As part of this process we realised that we had pre-conceived ideas about our case by contextualising it as a south-south migration flow and in the end we came to question the usefulness of the categories of ‘north’ and ‘south’ as a cornerstone for understanding irregular migration flows. Therefore at a more abstract level a discussion regarding the categories of ‘south’ and ‘north’ will be included in the thesis.

### **1.1. Research Purpose**

The main purpose of our research is to contribute to the debate of irregular migration through a qualitative study of an irregular migration flow. Migration processes are to a significant extent determined by contextual factors. Therefore we have looked at structural explanations to understand the irregular migration process from Nicaragua to Costa Rica.

In employing the category of south-south in our research we noticed that research on these flows are under-represented in academia, imploring us to study the migration flow between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, a well-established route since the 1980’s (IOM 2013:28). However, we began to question whether the category of south-south migration added to our understanding or rather made us look at this flow with preconceived ideas. When trying to go deeper into understanding the category of south-south migration, one thing that stood out was the lack of debate surrounding these categories of ‘south’ and ‘north’, categories that are widely used in migration studies (see World Migration Report 2013). This echoes de Haas’ (2011:7) statement that there is a plethora of research on the impact of migration, but much less on the nature and causes of *migration processes* themselves, defined as the complex set of factors and interactions which lead to international migration (Castles and Miller 2009:21).

There is thus a two-fold purpose with our research: both understanding what structural explanations contributes to the construction of irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and then to discuss how challenging the categorisation of migration flows into ‘south’ and ‘north’ contribute to the understanding of migration flows. We would like to point out that the aim is not to question the division of the world into ‘south’/‘north’ or ‘developed’/‘developing’, but whether this concept adds anything to the understanding of

migration flows. To strengthen our argument we will make use of migration transition theory, which divides the world into five different categories.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

- What structural explanations contribute to the construction of irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica?
- How can challenging the categorisation of migration flows into ‘south’ and ‘north’ contribute to the understanding of migration flows?

The research is based on semi-structured interviews with organisations and government officials in the two countries, observations, and informal conversations carried out in January and February 2014. Prior to starting the field research we both did our internships with International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Björn at the Regional Office in San José, Costa Rica and Åsa at the Country Office in Managua, Nicaragua, which introduced us to migration in the context of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

## **1.3. Outline of Thesis**

This study is divided into seven chapters starting with a historical and geographical context to set the scene. Thereafter follows the definitions of relevant terminology, our theoretical framework and methodology. The sixth chapter combines our results, based on the answers from our interviews and other data, with a general analysis of each component. Thereafter we conclude this study with an in-depth analytical discussion, tying together our different inputs.

## **2. Situating the Reader in the Context**

This section sets the scene of the research and situates the reader both in the context of migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and in terms of the discourse surrounding south-south migration flows in general. Nicaragua and Costa Rica are both middle-income countries according to the World Bank (2014), but Nicaragua is a lower-middle-income country and Costa Rica higher-middle-income. Costa Rica has more than five times as high GNI per capita and ranks higher on the human development index (HDI 2013). Although there is a distinction between the two countries in terms of level of development and income, the focus of this chapter will be on the history of migration as well as previous studies on ‘the south’.

## **2.1. A History of Migration in Nicaragua**

For Nicaraguan migrants Costa Rica is the main destination country, and it is estimated that 287 766 Nicaraguan migrants reside in Costa Rica (IOM 2013:38), representing almost 80 per cent of immigrants in Costa Rica (Voorend et al. 2013:21). This is the biggest emigration flow from Nicaragua and can be compared to 247 593 Nicaraguans in the United States and 17 455 in Spain (IOM 2013:38). However, there is a lack of statistics regarding migration in Nicaragua and to a lesser extent also in Costa Rica, especially in relation to irregular migration, which due to its nature is hard to quantify. Some of our respondents estimated that regular migration constitutes 57 per cent of the migration flow to Costa Rica (NGO Nicaragua 2014), others stated that it is only one third of people crossing the borders (Government Official Nicaragua 2014).

Emigration from Nicaragua started to gain importance in the 1980's and gradually the number of people emigrating surpassed the number of immigrants (IOM 2013:28). Three emigration waves can be distinguished since then. During the first wave emigration was directed towards the United States and it was marked by the political and armed conflicts during the Somoza dictatorships and the civil war that followed (Orozco 2008). The second wave took place during the 1990's and was primarily caused by the implementation of structural adjustment policies, exacerbating poverty and political instability (ibid.). During this decade Costa Rica surpassed the United States as the main destination country (IOM 2013:30). The third wave took place 2000-2011 and was characterised by an intensification of intraregional migration flows. During this time new destination countries arose and Spain started gaining importance as one of them (ibid.:31). The main reasons for migration during this wave were, and still are today, socioeconomic, more specifically the search for (better) employment and to improve the family's economic situation (Orozco 2008). Although unemployment rates in Nicaragua were only 6.3 per cent in 2012, underemployment is high. In 2010 53.7 per cent were found to be underemployed, out of these 45.2 per cent work less than 40 hours/week and the rest are underemployed because they earn less than legal minimum wage (ibid.:81). There is also a large difference in salaries between the two countries. In Costa Rica a daily wage for agricultural work is US\$ 8, whereas in Nicaragua it is between US\$ 2-3 (Baumeister, Fernández and Acuña 2008:17). According to the 2005 Census, 42 per cent of the Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica worked in agricultural sector, 20 per cent in construction, 15 per cent in domestic services and the remaining 23 per cent in various other activities (Baumeister, Fernández and Acuña 2008:26).



## **2.2. 'The South' in Migration Literature**

Much of what has been written on migration referred to as south-south migration, also in the case of Nicaragua and Costa Rica, has to do with the impacts on the destination and origin countries, and much of the literature comes back to the issue of remittances and development (see for instance Hujo and Piper 2007). The ACP Observatory for Migration, researching on migration in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, states that the impact of migration is not limited to income, but also affects well-being, education and health of migrants, issues that are important to study (ACP 2011a:37). In a literature review done by Bakewell (2009:31) four factors stand out as important in shaping south-south migration - livelihoods, the political context, social and cultural factors, and the environment. Livelihoods referring to migration as a strategy for people to improve their living conditions, the political context including factors related to change and crisis, social and cultural factors discussing education and marriage as reasons to move, and finally, environmental factors linking migration to deteriorating environmental conditions (ibid.:31pp).

One of the studies most often referred to in relation to south-south migration flows is a working paper for the World Bank where Ratha and Shaw (2007:15) found that there are three determinants that are particular for south-south migration - income, proximity and networks. 80 per cent of all identified south-south migration takes place between countries with continuous borders. The main reason being that the associated cost is lower (financial, social and cultural) compared to migrating further away. In addition, family, ethnic and religious communities might be separated by subjectively implemented borders during colonial times. These ties across borders, and social networks arising from previous migration to a place, facilitate further migration (ibid:17). The third determinant - income - is, in line with available data, found to play a proportionally smaller role in driving south-south migration because income differentials are smaller between two developing countries (Ratha and Shaw 2007:18). Ratha and Shaw (2007:18) estimate that two-thirds of south-south migration is from low-income countries to other low-income countries, and the corresponding figure for middle-income countries is 93 per cent. Other motivations discussed that might be larger for south-south migration are seasonal migration, flight from ecological disaster or civil conflict, transit to the North, and petty trade (ibid.). Ratha and Shaw (2007:7) also state that according to available data migrants from the south are as likely to migrate to other developing countries as to the richer countries in the north. In addition, there is an

underreporting of irregular migrants due to difficulties in capturing these flows in a census and other statistics (Koser 2010:183). An issue with this study is that it implicitly assumes that the category of south-south migration is relevant. This might obscure variations within the south, which is geographically a large area, including all of Africa, South America, most of Asia and Middle East and sometimes Russia (UN DESA 2013, UNDP 2013, World Bank 2013).

### **3. Defining the Key Concepts**

In this chapter the key concepts will be defined in order for the reader to have a better understanding of what we mean when referring to these concepts in the theoretical chapter. This chapter is placed before the theoretical framework to ensure that the reader understands the difference between irregular and regular migration, what we mean when referring to structures, and what the category of ‘the south’ entails.

#### **3.1. Migration**

Although there is no universally accepted definition, the term migrant is usually understood to cover all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of “personal convenience” (IOM 2011:61). This can of course be discussed in relation to irregular migration, however although the decision to migrate might be severely constrained by contextual and structural factors, it can still be considered a “free” choice. International migration, which is what this study is referring to when writing about migration, is defined as the “movement of persons who leave their country of origin, or the country of habitual residence, to establish themselves either permanently or temporarily in another country” (ibid.:52). Thus including the crossing of an international border in its definition, but excluding tourism as it does not have as its goal to “establish themselves”.

#### **3.2. Irregular migration**

Irregular migration as a concept is constructed through the existence of a policy framework and exists in relation to regular migration and immigration laws (Düvall 2011:275). This signifies that without a policy framework defining immigration and regular migration, irregular migration would not exist. There is no universally accepted definition of migration that takes place outside of a country’s immigration laws and policies, and there are variety of

words used to describe the phenomenon and the people - undocumented, clandestine, illegal, irregular - to name the most common ones. This is not merely a terminological matter, but one that has political and ethical implications, putting people into specific categories where they are entitled to less rights than others solely based on this category (Thomsen 2012:103, Clandestino 2013). De Genova (2002:420) suggest using 'undocumented' as a way to avoid using words that "criminalises" migrants, such as 'illegal', or using words that are mere proxies to 'illegal'. However, concepts (and terminology) serve a number of important functions in social research, being the foundation of communication in research, and is used to convey information and introducing a certain way of looking at a subject (Thomsen 2012:103). It is therefore useful to use terminology that others can relate and respond to, which is why this thesis will use the terms irregular migrant and irregular migration. These are the terms most often used in the academic field, and ones that could (arguably) be said to avoid criminalising people through terminology, while still fitting the context.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2011:54) defines an irregular migrant as "a person who, owing to illegal entry or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country" and irregular migration as "movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries". In practice irregular migration covers a wide range of situations and it includes people who have overstayed their visa, violated the conditions of their visa by working, asylum seekers denied refugee status who continue to stay in the country without papers, and those smuggled across a border (ICHR 2010:17). The boundaries between 'legal' and 'illegal' are also blurred because people move in and out of legal status depending on changes in policies or in their life situation, such as finding work on a tourist visa (Thomsen 2012:105). This makes irregular migration difficult to study as a separate flow, because many may cross with a tourist visa but later become 'irregularised' by working without proper documentation.

### **3.3. Structures**

Defining 'structures' a complex as its meaning differs between various scholars and theoretical standpoints. In migration studies, as in other literature, the concept of structure is rarely defined (Bakewell 2010:1694). In this thesis structures refers to "supra-individual phenomena that need to be considered when examining the behaviour of individuals and attempts to understand the operations of communities and wider society" (Connor 2011:ii102). It is "any recurring pattern of social behaviour" (Scott and Marshall 2009:

‘structure’). Although discussing the term structure also to some extent entails engaging in the debate of structure versus agency, we will not go deeper into this debate. Suffice to say is that structure and agency should remain analytically distinct categories, since they are two different entities, although they are related and interact (Conner 2011:ii105).

### **3.4. The South**

Migration flows are often divided into four categories; south-south, north-south, south-north, and north-north. These divisions are based on how the world is divided into ‘north’ and ‘south’ according to wealth and level of development (WMR 2013:36). However there is no agreement on how to categorise countries in accordance with the north-south dichotomy since they are artificial constructs that do not correspond to actual geographical locations (WMR 2013:41). This means that figures might differ between various sources. For instance according to the World Bank south-north migration represents 45 per cent of total migration, and south-south migration 35 per cent, while UNDP finds that the flows are of equal size, 41 per cent respectively (ibid.:55). This figures drops to 32 per cent if migrants from the former Soviet Union are excluded, although other estimates puts the figure to 38 per cent (Ratha and Shaw 2007:3). This is likely underestimating the figures though because of difficulties in measuring migration and due to underreporting of irregular migrants, especially in ‘the south’ (WMR 2013:4).

While there are common characteristics within the four pathways, there are also differences between them (ibid.:48), two aspects that may be overlooked when using these categories. Despite these shortcomings this terminology is often used in studies writing about migration and development, and south-south migration is used when referring to migration flows between two developing countries. In addition, irregular migration is often seen as more common between two countries in the ‘south’ due to strict or unclear laws regulating migration in combination with weak enforcement and control (Ratha and Shaw 2007:25).

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

As described global migration is not a homogenous phenomenon and is legally divided into regular and irregular migration (Salt and Stein 1997:469). Within these divisions (irregular and regular) there are also different types of migration that can broadly be divided into circular, temporal and permanent migration. This chapter is divided into three main sections -

theories of migration, theories of irregular migration and theories of macro-level migration regions. The first section is meant to provide the reader with a basic understanding of migration theories, in order to be able to better understand the second section about irregular migration theories, which are often dependent upon and hard to separate from regular migration theories. Finally, the third section delves deeper into the categorisation of countries as 'south' or 'north'.

#### **4.1. Theories of Migration**

There is no single coherent theory of international migration, although attempts to consolidate existing theories have been made (Massey et al. 1993:432). These theories can be divided into two broad perspectives - functional and structural. Neo-classical migration theory is the best-known application of the functionalist approach, and at the macro level it argues that migration is caused by geographical differences in the supply and demand for labour. At the micro level it sees individuals as rational actors that decide to migrate based on a cost-benefit calculation (de Haas 2011:9). Push-pull models are rooted in functionalist theories, which tend to see society as a system - or an aggregate effect of individual decisions that will eventually lead to equilibrium and a decline in motivations to migrate (Goss and Lindquist 1995:318). Although economic differentials are important in understanding migration flows, they are insufficient in grasping the role of states, networks and other factors structuring migration, which strongly constrain individual choice and geographically pattern migration flows (de Haas 2011:9p). In the new economics of migration the decision making unit is shifted from the individual to a collective - typically the family or household, where people not only act to maximise income but also to minimise risk by diversifying the income generating activities for instance by migrating (Massey et al. 1993:436). Other examples of structural perspectives are dependency and world systems theory that tend to see migration as the outflow of the spread of global capitalism and its related marginalisation and uprooting of rural populations (de Haas 2011:11). These latter theories have been criticised for being too deterministic and not attributing hardly any agency to migrants (ibid.). A structure often referred to is the segmentation of labour markets, which will be discussed more in-depth below in relation to irregular migration.

Above theories are mainly focused on the initiation of migration flows. There are also theories that focus on the perpetuation of international movement, often focusing on how already established migration flows continue due to the creation of networks or systems

between countries and migrants. This is where migration networks theory is often placed. The basic argument is that once a flow has been initiated there are factors that allow it to be sustained over time, such as social and migratory networks (Castles and Miller 2009:29).

## **4.2. Theories of Irregular Migration**

A number of frameworks exists for explaining irregular migration, often focusing on increasingly restrictive asylum and immigration policies, segmentation of the labour market, social- and migratory networks and/or migrants' decision-making processes (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010:393, Düvell 2011:293, Koser 2010:188p). There is no universal theory and irregular migration is a complex issue, which is often fitted into the same frameworks as regular migration, making it hard to distinguish between the explanation models.

In the context of migration flows from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, characterised by continuous high levels of irregular migration, there are various approaches to understand the construction of irregular migration. Our focus is on structural factors, as de Haas (2011:11) states; migration processes are to a significant extent determined by contextual factors, and individual choice considerably constrained by them, which is not to say that agency is less important but that people's choices are constrained. Due to the research focus it followed that segmentation of labour market and social- and migratory networks theories arguably are the most suitable to explain irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. In addition restrictive immigration policies can be seen as hindering regular migration opportunities (GCIM 2005:33). Border restrictions and tougher regulations of citizenship have been seen as the main instruments of enforcing sovereignty for policy makers especially in wealthier countries with high levels of low-skilled immigration (Castles 2007:358, de Haas 2011:4). There have been different studies arguing the effectiveness of these policies (de Haas 2011:4). However, these restrictions in combination with a higher supply and demand of immigrant labour have been seen as directly connected to irregular migration (Massey 2004:1075).

### ***4.2.1. Segmentation of Labour Market***

The argument that segmentation of the labour market promotes irregular migration is found in many theories. In short the argument is that globalisation has led to increasing disparities between and within countries, for instance in economic terms and in available work opportunities (Castles 2004:211). It is argued that the demand for unskilled or semi-skilled labour is often unrecognised by states that do not include these workers in its migratory policy

framework, making it difficult for them to obtain work permits (Marfleet and Bluestein 2011:382, Castles 2004:210p). They further state that the internal segmentation of labour markets in higher income countries lead to national workers avoiding certain jobs due to their low status, low pay and little security. These are connected to the term “3D jobs” (Dirty, Dangerous and/or Difficult) and include agriculture, construction and domestic services. These jobs often attract irregular migrants that are willing or forced to work for low wages despite precarious working conditions (Koser 2010:188, Castles 2010:58). This approach also suggests that from an employer’s perspective the main advantage in hiring irregular migrants is their vulnerability and lack of rights, indicating that the employer can abuse and underpay an irregular worker to a degree that would most likely not be accepted by a regular worker (Marfleet and Blustein 2011:383, Castles 2010:55). A tendency in lower income countries is that the exportation of labour migrants has become a necessity, creating a structural dependence on emigration (Castles 2004:210). This is important in order to reduce unemployment, secure skills and receive remittances for the countries of origin. Immigration may also create a structural dependence on these flows in the destination country as it keeps labour costs down for work that nationals are unwilling to do (Castles 2004:210). Thus migration leads to interdependence and new forms of contacts between origin and destination countries (Morales 2002:36).

#### ***4.2.2. Social networks and the migration industry***

For irregular migrants social networks plays an important role in facilitating and encouraging their movement across a border. Social networks are a set of interpersonal ties that connects migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas (Massey et al. 1993:448). Family, friends and community members are crucial in these networks (Castles and Miller 2009:28). These networks typically provide financial, cultural and social capital that can facilitate access to work, accommodation and information on how to cross the border, find work or accommodation and maximise survival chances in the new environment and reduce risks associated with irregular migration (Castle 2010:57, Morales 2002:51). They come in many different shapes, and various forms of social relations may influence the development of irregular migration flows making growth only one possibility of several (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010:222). However, there is little doubt that these networks ensure the survival for many irregular migrants (ibid.:213).

Most migrants use the so-called migration industry, which on the legal side includes banks, travel agencies, overseas employers and so forth (Castles 2010:60). However, international migration often creates an imbalance between those who seek entry into a country and the number of immigrants granted access (Massey et al. 1993:450). This imbalance opens up for a black market for migration (ibid.), where activities that facilitate irregular migration for instance by falsifying documents, giving guidance to an illegal crossing point or transportation away from border controls are provided. Those individuals or groups providing these services profit from the recruitment of irregular migrants and therefore have incentives to facilitate and encourage irregular migration (Koser 2010:188, Castles 2010:60).

Social networks and the migration industry are not two separate entities and often overlap and interact. Krissman (2005) argues for expanding the social network theory to include actors outside of the social sphere, such as those encompassed by the migration industry concept. In that sense including all potential participants and making it more extensive and precise than the social network concept alone. While we agree that an irregular migration flow cannot be understood by looking purely at social networks, we keep the two concepts separate to try and bring clarity to a complex issue. However, to emphasise the connection between the two concepts and since we argue that the term 'industry' gives certain connotations, we will henceforth refer to the migration industry as the migratory network.

#### ***4.2.3. Transnational Structures in a Local Context***

While it remains clear that state policies create irregular migration, by defining who is a regular and irregular migrant, Glick Schiller (2010:111) contends that many scholars approaches the study of social processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states and that they write as if what happens on state territory is a product solely or primarily of state policies. It would be misleading to disregard the continuing importance of states as actors, however there is a need to look at power structures within and across state borders (Castles 2004:212, Glick Schiller 2010:113). From this viewpoint migration cannot solely be studied from a host-country perspective, scholars have to move beyond comparisons between discrete nation-states and understand these processes within a larger framework (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 142). This implies looking beyond high visa costs and a rigid bureaucratic system that although important do not fully explain how irregular migration is constructed.



Morales and Castro (2002:14) point out an important factor to take into account in the construction of irregular migration flows, namely the particularities of local culture, and they bring up the concept of transborder migration. This shows how irregular migration is constructed and lived in the local context and can be used to analyse irregular migration as part of a local context where being irregular is perhaps not the main category a person is defined by. Transborder migration is defined as the migration between neighbouring countries and has in the context of Central America two defining movements; 1) to communities adjacent to the borders, 2) to the major cities (Morales 2004). The flow is facilitated by the demand for work in one of the countries and the porosity of borders (Voorend et al. 2013:16). At the base of the concept is the interdependence between two countries through the construction of social and economic networks and dynamics (Morales 2004).

### **4.3. Theories of Macro-level Migration Regions**

In much of today's literature on migration the categories of 'south' and 'north' are used to understand international migration flows, where Nicaragua and Costa Rica are both considered part of the south. These are overarching "macro-level migration regions", as Skeldon (2012:164) calls them, and are used to understand broader patterns of migration flows. However, there is no agreement on how to categorise countries in accordance with the north-south dichotomy since they are artificial constructs that do not correspond to actual geographical locations (WMR 2013:41).

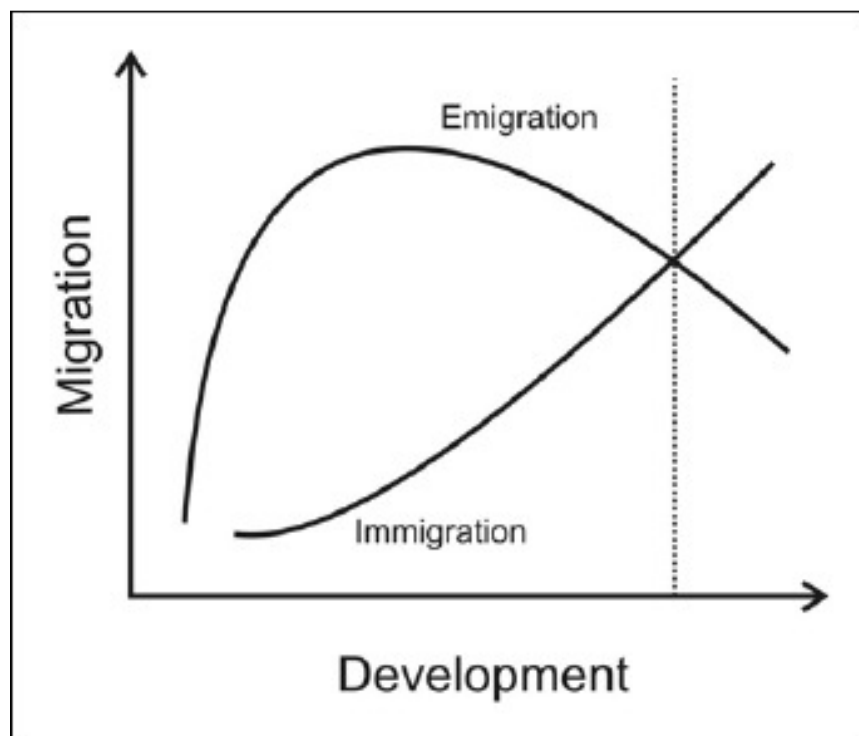
#### ***4.3.1. Migration Transition theory***

De Haas (2010) offers an alternative way of classifying the world, which is conceptually linked to migration transition theory and world systems theory (an idea originally espoused by Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1986, ref. in Skeldon 1997:24) in that it divides the world into five stages or spatial areas on which to base the analysis. However, de Haas (2010:16) argues for a new way on which to base the categorisation of countries into groups.

In short, migration transitions theory refers to the idea that long-term development is associated with initially increasing emigration, followed by diminishing emigration and increasing immigration, with countries eventually becoming ones of net immigration (de Haas and Vezzoli 2013:1043). De Haas (2011) argues that emigration has an inverted U-shaped curve, as shown in Figure 1. This means that at low levels of GDP per capita and human development, measured by the human development index (HDI), there are low levels

of emigration. When human development takes off, so does migration, which means that people in countries with medium levels of human development and income are more prone to migrate. Finally at higher levels of human development and GDP per capita emigration still takes place, but the country becomes one of immigration (de Haas 2010).

**Figure 1: Immigration and Emigration curves (de Haas 2011)**



*Source: de Haas 2010*

The explanation for this is that capabilities to move increases with human development and an improved economic situation, and aspiration to move and awareness of opportunities increase with education and information (de Haas 2011:21). Initially this migration is over short distances, but with increasing human development the distance becomes larger (de Haas 2010:19, Skeldon 1997). Therefore at medium levels of human development emigration is highest because aspirations and capabilities are coinciding at their highest level together. At the highest levels of human development, although capabilities are highest, aspirations are lower because people generally aspire to improve their life situation, and emigration is lowered (de Haas 2010). De Haas (2010:19) also finds that immigration is associated with GDP per capita in a J-shaped curve, meaning that countries with higher levels of GDP per capita attracts more immigrants, and the same goes for human development, although with a less steep curve.

Thus there is interplay between absolute and relative levels of development and GDP per capita. People seek better opportunities, migrating to where it is in relative terms better, but people also need a certain level of absolute human development to be able to act on their aspirations (de Haas 2011:21). De Haas (2010) therefore concludes that emigration and immigration can be divided into five groups based on their level of HDI and GDP per capita.

One issue with de Haas' theory is that it does not take into account the level of inequality, which might be relevant in many countries where migration moves in more than one direction. It could also be possible to discuss his choices of variables, HDI and GDP per capita. However, as a theory looking at macro-level migration regions, we would like to stress the use of it as a way to demonstrate the complexity of migration flows and find alternatives to the categories of 'south' and 'north'.

## **5. Methodology**

Conducting research is not a straightforward process and it is nothing like following a set design in a strict way. Our experience is that it is more like a roller coaster, and with every twist and turn there is a new challenge to be met. As Silverman (2013:14) puts it "doing qualitative research is [...] complex and sometimes downright chaotic". Throughout the research process we have thus had to stop and reconsider our focus, our methods and how to best go about the research. Chamberlain (2012) argues for not using an "off-the-shelf" methodology, stating that trying to find a ready-to-use methodology without engaging with the specific research leads to a lack of connection between the method and the research. In this we agree with Chamberlain and hopefully through our discussions we have managed to engage with the methods used for this research and choose the most appropriate ones for our research questions and purpose. This section will provide an insight into our research process and roller coaster ride.

### **5.1. Constructing our Research**

Exploring an issue - irregular migration - we decided that a qualitative method was best suited. This would allow us to delve into the social phenomenon in a way that allowed for explanations of how irregular migration is constructed between Nicaragua and Costa Rica and thereafter use our findings to question the value of using the category of south-south

migration (Silverman 2013:10). The worldview adopted for the study was a social constructivist one. This means that we agree that the world can only be understood intersubjectively by understanding the world as its different actors construct it. This is well suited for our study because irregular migration and migration flows are constructed concepts and can therefore be understood in different ways by different actors.

The study can be characterised as a case study in that we are aiming to understand a contemporary and complex social phenomenon within its context (Yin 2009:18). We hope to broaden the understanding of irregular migration by looking at a case of a so-called south-south migration flow, by using a wide range of data collection techniques such as semi-structured interviews, observations and documents. We used an inductive approach since a theoretical framework did not guide us. However, interning at an organisation working with migration we entered the field with some previous knowledge about irregular migration and the local context. This approach was of value in order to let the findings in the field control the flow of the research, which ultimately led us to change our research questions along the way.

Our first proposal was to study human smuggling of migrants between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. This idea was born from reading research focusing on how smugglers are viewed by those using their services. After some initial field research we realised that migrants and other local stakeholders did not relate to our topic. Throughout this process we continued reading about irregular migration and focused our interviews on understanding how irregular migration is constructed. While doing so we realized that we had pre-conceived ideas about our case based on the notion that it was a south-south migratory flow and we came to question the categories of ‘north’ and ‘south’ as a cornerstone for understanding irregular migration flows.

## **5.2. Data Collection**

The main data collection method used was semi-structured interviews. This technique was opted for because it allowed for flexibility in the questions and for follow-ups on leads given by the participant, which we found important in order to not get “trapped” by our questions and be open for new perspectives. It also allowed us to cover certain topics in one interview, since due to time constraints both for us and our participants and the location of some of our respondents we only had one chance to meet with each person. We conducted 9 semi-

structured interviews with government officials and 12 interviews with staff working at various organisations directing their work towards migrants and migration issues in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Table 1 presents an overview of these interviews.

**Table 1: Overview of Interviews**

<b>Type of institution:</b>	<b>Costa Rica</b>	<b>Nicaragua</b>
NGO	2	7
Union	3	0
Association	2	0
Government Institution	5	2
<b>Total:</b>	12	9

In the interviews we focused on asking broad questions about migration and irregular migration, and why they thought migrants cross irregularly. We used the same interview guide for all respondents although we asked slightly different questions to government institutions and organisations, since they have differing functions and relations to irregular migration. The purpose of our questions was to get the respondent’s understandings of irregular migration without putting words into their mouth. Our interview guide mainly served as frameworks, letting the respondent’s answers guide our follow-up questions. The interview guide is presented in Appendix 1.

In addition observations, informal conversations and other studies (both in English and Spanish) were used as sources. Since Åsa did her internship in Managua and Björn in San José we could observe the context in each country during 6-8 months. Through the knowledge we acquired during these months we selected the sites for data collection. In conducting the interviews we selected San José and Managua, since most organisations and government institutions have their offices there. We also decided to conduct interviews in the towns of Peñas Blanca, Los Chiles and San Carlos, where all the regular and some of the irregular border crossings take place. To better understand the process of crossing the border we crossed in both directions in San Carlos - Los Chiles and Peñas Blanca, the only official

border crossings between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. At each location we were shown examples of irregular border crossings, and we could see people moving along these routes.

**Map 1: Nicaraguan-Costa Rican border region**



Source: Nations Online Project 2014, modified by authors for this thesis

In addition we decided to visit the main border towns to conduct interviews and observations. We thus spent three weeks in the border regions visiting Rivas and San Carlos in Nicaragua, and Los Chiles, Upala, Medio Queso, Peñas Blanca, and San Carlos in Costa Rica (see Map 1 for an overview of their locations). We had planned to interview people at each location, however in Upala we were faced with difficulties, because the people we had contacted did not have time to meet with us and did not respond to our requests for conducting interviews via Skype. Medio Queso on the other hand is a small town that we had not considered visiting, but because of a contact in San José we were given the opportunity to visit a Nicaraguan *precario* (precarious community).

At times more formalised interviews were not possible, especially when people were in vulnerable or exposed situations. Instead we engaged in informal conversations with various people, getting access to information useful for our understanding of irregular migration that we would otherwise not have been able to obtain. These informal talks took place both in the border region between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, in Managua and San José and it allowed us to talk with migrants, people living there, migration experts and *coyotes*<sup>1</sup>. One example was when we found ourselves being invited for lunch to three pastors in a town in northern Costa Rica. During lunch we talked about life, the situation of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica and the history of migration. After lunch one of the pastors took us to see one of the informal border crossings nearby and explained along the way about other places where migrants cross the border irregularly. We never entered into a formal interview, although we had explained why we were in town, but this information provided us with a deeper understanding of the migration pattern in the region. While taking our pictures in front of their house we also had the opportunity to talk to their neighbour, a Nicaraguan woman who had been living in Costa Rica for 19 years. She told us how she crosses the border irregularly because it is faster than the regular border crossing. Another time we were waiting for the bus and a middle-aged man selling bread started to ask where we were going and who we were. We told him and he then began to talk about where people cross, pointing out where some *talibans*<sup>2</sup> were standing. These chance meetings and informal conversations provided us with a possibility to further construct our understanding of the structures of migratory flows from Nicaragua to Costa Rica and to test our ideas by asking questions to people living in the area. Many times these conversations could confirm or challenge what we had learnt from our interviews.

### **5.3. Selecting Interviewees**

We have in the previous section discussed how we used purposive sampling when selecting the sites for data collection. When selecting participants to our interviews, we did a mix of purposive sampling and snowball sampling, both being restricted by accessibility and time. Through our internships at International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Managua and San José we became familiar with the various organisations and institutions working with issues related to migration and migrants in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Our internships also helped us gain access to government institutions and organisations, since IOM works in close

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<sup>1</sup> Loosely translated into human smuggler or a person facilitating illegal border crossings against a fee

<sup>2</sup> Local slang for coyote, describes a person driving a taxi for migrants to and from the border when they enter or leave Costa Rica at an illegal border crossing

relationship with both governments. However, in contacting possibly respondents we emphasised that we are students and not representing IOM in conducting the interviews.

In order to get as many perspectives as possible we interviewed NGOs, unions and associations both in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, as well as government officials. Prior to starting we did a stakeholder mapping and identified the main organisations to be contacted and government institutions were selected depending on their involvement in the issue. At all but one of these institutions we interviewed the manager, and the one time when the manager was not available he delegated the interview to a supervisor at the office. We interviewed managers because they were the ones who had to approve of the interview being conducted, and therefore in our requests we asked if they or someone in their staff had time for an interview, which nearly always ended up being the managers themselves.

Interviewing government officials in Nicaragua proved difficult and we managed to interview only one government official within the timeframe we had. Possibly with more time we would have been able to interview one or two more. These difficulties were explained to us through the political climate in the country becoming more and more secretive and government officials not daring/wanting to say something that was not sanctioned by higher authorities. It was further stated that even if we did get interviews it was likely that they would not say much. This was confirmed in the interview at the Ministry of Interior in San Carlos, where several questions were avoided and by being the only person declining to be recorded.

Due to the focus of our thesis and difficulties in finding appropriate platforms where to meet Nicaraguan migrants we conducted two interviews with migrants having returned to Nicaragua. Both of these interviews were done at La Casa de Atención a Migrantes in San Carlos, Nicaragua. This is a house (the only one existing in the area) where migrants returning to Nicaragua can sleep and eat before continuing their journey home, and thus a space where it is possible to meet migrants. However, in addition to these interviews, we performed informal and less structured conversations with migrants during our field study.

#### **5.4. Data Analysis**

In analysing our interviews and other data we used a bricolage containing several ad hoc methods. This gave us the possibility of using a range of different techniques such as noting



themes, metaphors and conceptual/theoretical coherence (Kvale 2007). We chose this technique due to our diverse material and to be able to extract and analyse both descriptive and more conceptual contents from our data. While analysing the data we also kept in mind that every organisation and government institution have a certain purpose with their work. There might be conflicting agendas affecting the answer, or lack of answer in some cases, as (irregular) migration in this area is a politicised topic.

### **5.5. On Positionality and Constructing the World**

We argue, along with many others, that our data is constructed by the relationship between us as researchers and the respondents, influenced by our positions to one another and our separate and multiple understandings of the world (see May 2011, Kapoor 2004, Rose 1997). In the first instance we agree with Kapoor (2004:644) that “our narration does not take place in a vacuum: we function in geo-political institutions that circumscribe what and how we narrate”. Thus we have to realise that our construction of the world differs from that of our respondents, because we were brought up in Sweden, a context that is different from that of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Since we did our study in two countries meeting people from various backgrounds we also have to take into account that they are likely to have differing understandings from each other as well.

We entered the field expecting to find a certain process based on the category of south-south migration flows, which impacted our way of approaching the topic. As Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2002:194) states, we found that as researchers we need to open up to these often unconscious processes and emotions to allow for an understanding of this at every stage of the research process. For us it has therefore been important to constantly discuss our findings and rather than to look for agreement, appreciate our different interpretations and trying to understand them. This way of approaching the data hopefully allowed us to provide a more complex understanding of the findings and give the reader a more profound insight into the case.

Still we agree with Rose (1997:306) asking how we would know the impact of our position on the research process. Although we have tried to analyse the data with issues of positionality and reflexivity in mind, it remains doubtful if we have been able to capture all the varied meanings in the answers given to us during interviews, and whether we can really know the impact of our relationships with the respondents on their answers. Nonetheless, we would

argue that by being aware of positionality and reflexivity we can, if not deconstruct these processes, realise that they exist and provide the reader with as much information as possible for them to draw their own conclusions.

In the second instance our appearance likely influenced how other people viewed and responded to us. We are young, white, western researcher coming from a country known to be a donor country conducting research in two aid receiving countries. Although it was not made obvious during the interviews, sometimes when meeting people working with development in Nicaragua they gave us examples of when they had received money from Sweden or some Swedish organisation. To counter this we always emphasised that we were students, to try and ensure that no one expected us to be able to provide funding to their organisation. In one interview with a group of migrants we were at the end of the interview asked for support (implicitly understood as money) to help them get home. Our whiteness or western look had told them that we had money. We could then understand where their answers were coming from and see how we were told one particular experience as to convince us of their need for support. These are two examples of how we had to negotiate our position and understand its impact on the interviews.

## **5.6. Ethical Considerations**

When conducting our field study it was important for us to understand what footprints we might leave. Entering the field we were worried that irregular migration would be a sensitive issue. In most cases we found that our respondents and people we met were open to talk to us about the issue. Since our formal interviews were with government officials and staff at various organisations, we never felt that we were intruding in their lives, as could be the case when talking to migrants. However, there were occasions when we felt it would not be appropriate to ask questions. One such case was when the Costa Rican Migration Office in Peñas Blanca offered to show us around the area (an offer we gratefully accepted). During the tour we were taken to a Border Police Office where three migrants were waiting to be deported. The officials spoke with the migrants for a while, while we were standing on the side listening. The officials then told us we could ask the migrants some questions if we liked, putting us in a difficult position of not wanting to be ungrateful, but feeling like we were intruding on these people's privacy. In the end we did not ask any questions and returned with the officials to the Migration Office.

In each situation when we felt that our questions or presence were in any way intrusive or irrelevant we have discussed with each other on how to proceed, treating each case within its own context. We have tried to be self-reflexive throughout the process, often discussing our findings and how we position ourselves in relation to the respondents, as suggested by Kapoor (2004:644). Having several people around us that have family members that are migrants, both irregular and regular, also gave us the possibility to discuss our doubts, concerns and reflections with people with a different perspective, and our hope is that this allowed us to be more sensitive to the situation.

To ensure that all respondents participated based on an informed free will, everyone was informed about the nature and purpose of the research, either in writing or orally, depending on the circumstances, as suggested by Scheyvens et al. (2003:142pp). For instance border staff was informed via email and then also orally before starting the interviews, whereas we orally informed organisations and other respondents prior to our arrival and then once more before starting the interview. Each person was informed about the confidential nature of our research and that they could end the interview at any time, both recognising that the political climate as well as other possible sensitive topics could affect the interviewee's willingness to speak freely and trying to ensure that no harm was inflicted to our participants from taking part in our research.

## **5.7. Limitations**

In terms of the method chosen there are certain limitations, for instance important topics may be left out and too much flexibility may reduce comparability if wording and sequencing of questions result in substantially different responses from various participants (Mikkelsen 2005:171). We did not find this to be an issue. However, since all our interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is not our mother tongue, the use of language and possible differences in expressions might have impacted the interviews. There might also be slight differences in certain word emphasis or meaning when translated. When analysing our interviews we have kept this in mind in order to include the context rather than only the words literal meaning.

In terms of the research process we were limited in terms of access to Nicaraguan government institutions, partly because they did not respond to our requests for interviews, and partly due to time constraints on our behalf to contact them on time. This is a lack in the research that we

hope can partly be filled by the interview we did get, informal conversations and through our understanding of the political climate in Nicaragua.

## **6. Result and Analysis**

The theoretical framework portrays three aspects to consider when understanding the construction of irregular migration; labour segmentation, social and migratory networks, and transnational factors. The result confirms the existence of both labour segmentation and social- and migratory networks. It also points to various connections between Nicaragua and Costa Rica and structures within each country that are part in facilitating the construction of irregular migration. Following the logic of our research question this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part aims to analyse under what structural circumstances irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is constructed. This will be done using the result from our research and the theoretical framework outlined in previous chapter. Based on the outcome from this analysis we will in the next step analyse whether this construction can justify the categorisation of migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica as a south-south flow.

### **6.1. Irregular Migration in the Nicaraguan - Costa Rican Context**

Irregular migration flows are multifaceted and do not only consists of people moving like a river from A to B. Instead some people cross and return on a daily basis, others stay for 20 years, and many follow the harvest season. Some people cross on a tourist visa, whereas others avoid the official border controls. The estimates on the number of irregular Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica varies between 300 000 to 700 000, based on our respondents answers. This section presents how we, based on our results, understand irregular migration in the context of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

In order to understand the construction of irregular migration, we first have to look at *what* irregularity means in the local context, remembering how concepts serves an important function in social research and influence how we approach a topic. The respondents described two types of irregular migration flows. The most common flow referred to was people crossing into Costa Rica to work in the agricultural sector in the north. These migrants usually know when the harvest seasons are and move back and forth accordingly, a flow also described in a report by ILO on labour migration in the north (Voorend et al. 2013:28). They found that due to the abundant supply of workers, irregular conditions have been normalised in terms of work and salaries (ibid.). This type of flow is often defined as circular or

temporary migration, meaning that migrants move back and forth according to seasonal patterns or in a less structured way. The second flow described were those who move to the cities for more permanent jobs in construction or domestic services for example, which is defined as permanent migration.

In terms of *how* a person becomes an irregular migrant, according to our respondents, the two most common ways are overstaying a tourist visa or using illegal entry points, located especially in connection to border communities where access is facilitated by the existing infrastructure. Thus it became evident that while it is clear that a person that lacks the proper documentation to remain in a country is legally considered irregular, how someone enters into irregularity differs. In the research process we met irregular migrants who lived in Nicaragua but made their living by selling products in Costa Rica crossing the border on a daily basis. At the other end of the spectrum we met people who had been living in Costa Rica for 25 years without papers. Both are defined as irregular migrants, but their realities differ. Thus we found that while the definition is clear and includes all types of irregularity, it does not recognize the wide spectrum of realities existing within this group.

In understanding *why* migrants become irregular the result shows that high costs, lack of information, and bureaucracy are all factors in contributing to strongly limit the gains of and possibilities for crossing the border in a regular way. Since many migrants have scarce resources paying US\$30 for a tourist visa is a lot of money, and the total cost including necessary travel documents and expenses often exceeds US\$200 per person. This becomes even more of an issue when entire families have to cross the border, since sometimes migrants cannot earn enough money on their own but need their family to help them. It also entails having to spend money before being ensured an income and a recurring theme in our interviews was the emphasis on the vulnerable situation of many people both prior to migrating and after crossing the border. This is likely to affect the options available to people. Overall, an important factor of irregular migration is that people already in vulnerable situations are more likely to encounter obstacles, such as lack of information or financial means, when trying to migrate according to established policies (Castles 2010:61).

Another explanation given by the respondents is the time factor as documentation requires travel, and work opportunities sometimes are presented on a short notice, limiting the

possibility to organise a visa. For instance Nicaraguans are required to apply for a visa at the Costa Rican embassy located only in Managua and in the north in Chinandega.

*“...a visa is costing you \$30, 750 Nicaraguan Cordobas, the journey cost 80-100 Cordoba, that means, for example, the person has to work a week without eating, without anything, to get the money...because to get the visa implies for example that you have to move from your place, you have to go to Managua, because the visa is only given in Managua, then you must have the passport, it costs quite a lot. Thinking about the group of people, that they are in extreme poverty, which is the ones that are going, it is quite complicated [...] they don't have nothing for their basic needs, they will never have for a visa.”* - NGO in Nicaragua

That bureaucracy and high costs makes migrants prefer irregularity is supported by the findings by Voorend et al. (2013:82) who also adds that employers do not promote regularisation. The system in Costa Rica is dependent upon the employer being interested in hiring staff with the right documentation, since the employers' cooperation is necessary for migrants to be able to acquire a work permit. Our result indicated a difference between being in northern Costa Rica or in San José in terms of how irregularity is making it easier or harder to find work. It was stated that there are more inspections of workplaces in San José and the type of jobs offered are less seasonal than in the agricultural sector in the north. Although opinions differed on this point, it was noted that in San José it is harder to find work without the proper documentation, whereas in the north paper are of less importance. This could indicate that employers are more likely to hire regulated workers if there are stricter controls.

While Costa Rican law dictates who is an irregular migrant in Costa Rica, and there are factors that limit the gain of migrating in a regular manner, we argue that there are various structures that taken together construct these irregular migration flows. These are the segmentation of labour market, social- and migratory networks, and transnational factors, which are outlined below in a section each.

## **6.2. Segmentation of Labour Market**

This study found that there are two aspects relating to the segmentation of labour market, one is the disparity between Nicaragua and Costa Rica in terms of work opportunities and wage level, the other is the internal segmentation of the labour market in Costa Rica, where national citizens have the possibility to avoid certain jobs that have low pay, low security and low

status, referred to as 3D jobs. This section presents and discusses our findings in relation to these two aspects.

During our interviews the disparity between labour markets in Nicaragua and Costa Rica was a recurring theme. There was a consensus that a lack of income generating activities in Nicaragua and the difference in wage level between the two countries were causes for migration.

*“People come to work, searching for a way to make a living for themselves and their family, improving your life situation.”* - NGO in Costa Rica

When asked about why people migrate the first answer given often related to economic reasons, such as poverty, lack of work in Nicaragua and lack of possibilities to support one's family. It was stated that since 2000, more or less, the main reason for leaving Nicaragua has been economic, an issue that also is related to the global economic crisis. It is not a much higher unemployment rate in Nicaragua that seems to be the main reason for migrating to Costa Rica, rather lower income and productivity making people look for better opportunities to be able to support themselves and their family (Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña 2008:70). This process seems to be facilitated by the fact that the work is often the same in both countries, such as agricultural activities, but in Costa Rica you have the possibility to earn double or triple the amount. Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña showed in 2008 that in Costa Rica a daily wage in agriculture was US\$7-10, whereas in Nicaragua it only amounted to US\$2-3, arguing that it is a reason for Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica (2008:17). However, the higher living costs in Costa Rica should be taken into account when comparing incomes, especially in urban areas.

Since agriculture is seasonally bound many workers are used to move for work in accordance with harvest seasons for different crops, both within Nicaragua and across borders. One interesting point that came up during one of the interviews was that even when there is available work in Nicaragua it is often seasonal, contributing to circular migration, not only in agriculture but also construction and tourism. Increasingly the Nicaraguan labour force in Costa Rica is found to be less permanent (Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña 2008:30) and only 53 per cent of Nicaraguans define their stay in Costa Rica as permanent, with lower figures for those in the agricultural sector, and 28 per cent define their stay as temporary

(Acuña González 2011:79). Emigration has become a way of adjusting the labour market when individuals are left without support (Morales 2004:23). As expressed by one migrant:

*“Life is hard, so the easiest way to overcome is to migrate, because you earn a little bit more than here”* (Migrant recently returned from Costa Rica)

The possibilities that exist in Costa Rica for Nicaraguan migrants are dependent on the internal labour segmentation in Costa Rica. The interviewees expressed that the large agricultural companies prefer to hire Nicaraguans since they can pay them less, because Costa Ricans demand better working conditions and higher wage due to their often higher education levels and the low status connected to these types of jobs. This segmentation is also seen in work sectors in urban areas, such as in construction, security, and domestic services. The Costa Rican labour force is more specialised, giving them more choice in terms of employment, and they are often not interested in these so-called 3D jobs. Instead immigrants fill the gaps in these necessary but unwanted workplaces. Voorend et al. (2013:60) state that work in the agricultural sector in the north is not “attractive” to Costa Rican workers due to its harsh conditions. Despite many referring to low skilled work, one respondent stated that migration is prevalent at all education levels, since medium- and high skilled workers do not find work in Nicaragua either. However, the presence of Nicaraguans in the 3D sectors are higher than for other immigrant groups in Costa Rica (apart from Panamanians), and in relation to their numbers the proportion of skilled Nicaraguan workers is the lowest compared to other immigrant groups (Morales 2008:35).

Labour segmentation is often connected to neoliberal globalisation. In short the argument is that globalisation has led to increasing disparities between and within countries, for instance in economic terms and in available work opportunities (Castles 2004:211). Historically Costa Rica and Nicaragua have had relatively similar agricultural sectors, however in the 1980’s this started to change (Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña 2008:68). During this time Costa Rica managed to increase and diversify their exportation to non-traditional agricultural produce, such as fruits, whereas Nicaragua’s exportation stagnated (ibid.:69pp). Costa Rica’s economic activities expanded into more globalised employment opportunities that generated better paying jobs but at the same time required cheap labour for certain types of activities (Morales and Castro 2002). Thus, in analysing and understanding the Costa Rican labour market the Nicaraguan migrants’ participation has to be taken into account in a global perspective



(Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña 2008:82). The sharp increase in the Nicaraguan population in Costa Rica from 45,918 in 1984 to 226,374 (Morales and Castro 2006) has to be understood in relation to the transformation of the Costa Rican labour market, especially with the agricultural export oriented economy requiring a large workforce (Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña 2008:83). Castles (2004) further argues that while work permits are given in certain work sectors, many states fail to recognise the demand for unskilled workers in agriculture, construction, industry and services, so that these workers have to move through illegal channels.

As this section shows, the disparity between labour markets in Nicaragua and Costa Rica creates an incentive for people to move to Costa Rica in search for better opportunities, creating a supply of available workers. At the same time the internal labour segmentation in Costa Rica is dependent upon unskilled immigrant labour. These two aspects of the labour markets are interrelated and a form of structural dependence is created both in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It is clear that labour segmentation creates *migration*, but it is not sufficient to explain *irregular migration* on its own. Although it appears to be easier to find work in some regions without proper documentation and the informal nature of labour market increase the irregular mobility of migrants.

### **6.3. Social and Migratory Network**

Understanding social networks as those connections that are formed between individuals or groups and migratory networks as those actors that provide services that facilitate irregular migration movements, we found them important in the construction of irregular migration.

A common way the respondents described how migrants receive information about possible work opportunities in Costa Rica was through friends or family, who were in Costa Rica already or had previously worked there. These well-established social networks help in finding work, explain the road and at times provide contact with a *coyote*. While there are scholars arguing that the social network concept fails to explain international migration on its own (Krissman 2005), Vargas and Barquero (2005:132) found that among a number of variables, having access to a social network was one of the main factors encouraging and facilitating migration. Baumeister, Fernandez and Acuña (2008:28) compared it to the situation of Mexicans living in the United States, saying that these social networks work as an attracting mechanism for the population in Nicaragua. Since migration have existed for a long

time between Nicaragua and Costa Rica these networks are characterised as consolidated and stable (Vargas and Barquero 2005).

There are also people that travel for the first time either on their own or with the help of *coyotes*, without any previous knowledge or social connections, making them more exposed to risks. However, social networks are not necessarily limited to close friends and family. There are several more or less known places where people meet and exchange information, for instance Park *La Merced* in San José where Nicaraguans gather each Sunday. These networks stretch across the border, functioning as a way to share information about work, how to enter Costa Rica and to establish social connections. One respondent referred to this type of information exchange as “the word on the street”.

*“You will almost always find in Costa Rica that most Nicaraguans is in the park waiting for people to arrive, either in construction or owners of farms and ranches that come saying ‘so many people are needed for work’. So that’s where they take advantage”* – NGO in Nicaragua

These meeting places are also part of the migratory network as prospective employers directly or indirectly use them to find labour.

There are different views on whether the *coyotes* or *talibans* are mainly Costa Ricans or Nicaraguans, but their role is always described in the same way. They charge migrants for helping them cross the border without documentation. The *coyotes* are sometimes described as being part of larger networks connected to other *coyotes* and/or employers, sometimes through *contratistas*<sup>3</sup>. Several respondents stated that using *coyotes* and *contratistas* almost always involves risks, both economically and security wise, such as being overcharged, traveling with unsecure means or being exposed to human trafficking.

Migratory networks are also highly visible in society, both in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. For instance in Los Chiles everyone knows where the *talibans* are waiting and in San Carlos, Nicaragua it is common knowledge where to take a boat to an illegal crossing. Our first encounter with irregular migrants during the research process was when taking a taxi to see a new bridge being constructed and it turned out to be next to an illegal crossing point. It was a

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<sup>3</sup> A person that recruit migrants for work, especially in agriculture, in order for companies being able to avoid hiring the migrants directly themselves, holding down salaries and attempting to avoid legal issues. They recruit workers both in Nicaragua, taking them across the border, and in Costa Rica on a demand basis.

well-established route and we received full information on how to enter Costa Rica. This visibility seems to facilitate and encourage irregular migration between Nicaragua and Costa Rica and contributes to its normalisation. While the actual border crossing might be done in hiding, irregular migrants are an accepted and visible part of society in Costa Rica. This is reflected upon in a report from 2009, which states that the high presence of migrants in northern Costa Rica have transformed the social and cultural setting in the local perspective (Gomez 2009:57). This strengthens both social and migratory networks and normalises them. Many referred to northern communities in Costa Rica as Nicaraguan in cultural and socioeconomic terms. However, many migrants still lack access to most rights and social benefits in Costa Rica due to their irregular status. As Bakewell (2009:42) states, “it may be easy to cross borders (and impossible to count those who do cross) but it does not mean it is easy to live outside one’s country of citizenship”.

We argue that social and migratory networks should be seen and treated as two sides of one entity, since they are interconnected and dependent upon one another. These networks facilitate and encourage irregular migration. We also argue that due the visible and extensive presence of these networks irregular migration is normalised and legitimised to a certain extent.

#### **6.4. Transnational Factors**

In the two previous sections we have argued for the importance of labour segmentation and social and migratory networks in understanding the construction of irregular migration flows. These structures are not contained within one country, but are interdependent and cross borders. As part of these structures transborder migration is a factor. As shown there are many migrants in the border communities that cross the border every day to work or sell goods. These movements create new spaces with formal and informal transits, transport networks and interconnectedness across the border (Morales 2004:288) and many refers to the northern towns in Costa Rica as Nicaraguan. The agricultural sector has been of great importance for transborder migration, and Morales (2008:35) suggests that agriculture and transborder migration are interconnected in the sense that without agriculture the level of transborder migration would be lower, and transborder migration has provided cheap and flexible labour for exportation of agricultural produce.

Connected to the idea of the nation-state, migration policies are often seen as a way to control migration flows and maintain sovereignty. Although this thesis does not aspire to analyse the Costa Rican policies in themselves, it is important to acknowledge their role in relation to irregular migration. De Haas (2011:25) argues that migration policies have limited control in migration processes, because they do not influence migration determinants. However, we argue that they rather than shaping the volume and trends of migration, migration policies affect the possibility to migrate regularly. In Costa Rica migration policies offer few possibilities for Nicaraguan citizens to receive a working permit prior to entering the country since very few low skilled jobs are contracted beforehand. For most Nicaraguans, the only way to enter Costa Rica in a regulated fashion is on a tourist visa. Therefore we argue that instead of being only a national issue, migration policies also affect *how* people from other countries migrate but not because of them.

There are also other structures both in Costa Rica and Nicaragua that contribute to the construction of irregular migration. As de Haas (2011:24) argues, states affect migration primarily through non-migration policies, such as economic, influencing people's abilities and motivations to migrate. First of all our respondents said that there is a lack of political will to deal with the issue of irregular migration in both countries. In connection to this several interviewees pointed out that xenophobia towards Nicaraguans is a widespread phenomenon and normalised in society, where Nicaraguans are viewed upon as having lower status in society. However, there is no political debate concerning these issues or the presence of immigrants in Costa Rica. At different times Costa Rica has also closed the embassy in Rivas, leaving only two embassies in Nicaragua, making it more time consuming for people to apply for visas. A final issue is that Nicaraguans carrying a tourist visa that allows them to legally stay in the country for 30 days may receive fewer days upon entry.

One NGO referred to this as following:

*"It says here that I got a visa for 30 days but I came and before entering they say, 'No! I give you 3 days and you like it or you get out'. That is the reality! The paper says one thing but when I get there they tell me this. 'I will look for an application to give you a week' but I'm paying for 30 days. That is, there is no marriage between what is said and what is done, the paper says one thing and reality is another."* – NGO Costa Rica

In Nicaragua the lack of political will was expressed by pointing out how lack of resources and/or capacities for instance at the consulates in Costa Rica are hindering regular migration and regularisation. An issue, connected both to political will and culture, is access to documentation for the population in Nicaragua. It is still common that parents do not register the birth of their children, which means that getting an identity card and other documents becomes difficult. One respondent also pointed out that people sometimes have their names misspelled, complicating things. In addition some respondents mentioned that the government in Nicaragua is unwilling to help in the provision of identity cards to those members of society that do not belong to the Sandinistas, the ruling party. As one respondent stated when pointing to the responsibility of the Nicaraguan government:

*“The issue with identification, it is terrible [...] if a person does not have their documents, the Costa Rican policies do not matter”* (NGO Costa Rica).

The frosty relationship between the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican governments due to a border dispute over River San Juan was mentioned as impacting their cooperation, thus affecting how far it is possible to deal with the issue of irregular migration. Although it is doubtful that this has any impact since respondents at local level, both in Costa Rica and Nicaragua stated that they have good relations.

This lack of political will seems to suggest that both countries benefit from this type of migration in some way. For instance, the agricultural and domestic industry in northern Costa Rica receives cheap labour, adding to the economy of the country. At the same time, Nicaragua benefits from lower unemployment rate and high levels of remittances. Each year Nicaragua receives US\$ 1,077 in remittances, representing 9.6 per cent of GDP, and 23.2 per cent of this are from migrants in Costa Rica (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2013, 2014).

## **6.5. The Category of South-South Migration Flows**

Migration between (mainly) developing countries, so called south-south migration flows, represents a significant part of international migration. However, few studies have focused on understanding the migration process of these flows and it is often assumed that there are differences solely based on the categories of ‘south’ and ‘north’. While this is probably the case, the broad spectrum of countries encompassed by ‘south’ obscures differences within this category. A point argued also by Bakewell (2009:1) who questions the assumption that

countries labelled as 'south' have anything more in common with each other, than they might have with countries in 'the north'. Despite this not being a focus of our research initially, during the research process we became aware of how our way of looking at irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica had been shaped by pre-conceived notions of south-south migration flows. Our Western lens made us see 'the south' as a concept rather than a category, with certain characteristics and values attached.

We came to question this categorisation also since several reports point to the wide diversification of migration corridors that have taken place during the last two decades (Benton 2013), suggesting that there is a need to understand these broader categories better in order to have a useful framework to work with when studying migration flows.

At the same time several of our respondents compared the issues connected to migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica with the flow from Mexico to the United States rather than other south-south flows. One respondent compared Costa Rica to countries in the north, such as the United States and Europe in terms of its level of institutionality and development path. Most respondents described the relationship between Nicaragua and Costa Rica as unequal, especially in terms of economic, social and political development. Finally no one saw the possibility of Costa Rica joining the CA-4, a border control agreement between Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala granting free mobility between states (similar to the Schengen agreement in Europe). One interviewee said that it is understandable since Costa Rica has a more developed social security system and they would lose if Nicaraguans could move freely to Costa Rica. Taken together these results added to our questioning of dividing the world into two categories on which to base the understanding of migration flows, because although Costa Rica and Nicaragua are both middle-income countries, Costa Rica has a higher ranking of HDI and GDP, although it is still not at par with for instance the United States (HDI 2013).

Three determinants are particular for south-south migration according to Ratha and Shaw (2007) - income, proximity and networks. Looking at income, there is a difference between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, but not as large as when compared to the United States. There also exists a continuous border, a similar culture between the two countries and networks that facilitate migration. While migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica fulfils the three determinants found by Ratha and Shaw to be particular for south-south migration, theory

formation is about striking a balance between acknowledging complexity while also being able to discern patterns, and migration is a complex social process (de Haas 2011:15). If instead migration flows are divided into five categories, according to de Haas' (2010) u-shaped migration curve based on level of development, a more detailed picture is possible. Costa Rica is placed higher than Nicaragua on both GDP per capita and HDI scales, which would explain migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. It would also explain why Nicaragua is mainly an emigration country.

One aspect that is missing from de Haas' conceptualisation of migration flows is the effect of inequality within countries. There is as mentioned two main flows for Nicaraguan migration, one to Costa Rica and another to the United States. A study conducted by Vargas and Barquero in 2005 found that the level of education is an important indicator for where Nicaraguans migrate. People migrating to Costa Rica tend to have lower levels of education and the work performed is low qualified, when compared to those going to the United States. According to de Haas (2010:19) with increasing human development the distance migrants move becomes larger. One possible explanation could be that migrants move one step higher in the development hierarchy when migrating, which could explain why those with higher education migrate to the United States. United Nations Development Program has introduced the inequality adjusted HDI (IHDI) to address this aspect (WMR 2013:47).

If we instead reverse the question and look at why the categories of 'south' and 'north' are still used when describing migration patterns, even when there are other theories available that provides a more detailed framework, some tentative explanations are possible. The categories 'north' and 'south' describes not only a country's place in the world as 'developing' or 'developed', it also describes a relationship between these categories. There is often an unequal relationship in south-north migration, and it is generally assumed that people from 'the south' migrate to 'the north' to improve their standards of living. By placing countries as 'south' or 'north', migration flows are indirectly characterised accordingly. However, this hides the fact that there are similar structures in some south-south flows, such as between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. In this sense Costa Rica could be characterised as 'north'. This highlights the political construction of these categories (Bakewell 2009:9). We argue that there are power structures upholding the relationship between and within the two categories. Is it for instance possible for a country labelled as part of 'the south' to become part of 'the north', and vice versa? Another example where a country's position is complex is

presented by Campos and Odgers (2012) when comparing mobility between Mexico-US and Guatemala-Mexico, painting a picture of Mexico as being to Guatemalans what the United States is to Mexicans. We would therefore argue that to be able to better understand broader migration patterns there is a need for more than two categories.

## **7. Conclusion**

First we would like to reflect upon the impact of our Western background on the research process. Despite being aware that our way of approaching and understanding the issue is shaped by pre-conceived notions, our result is constructed by us in relation to our own, as well as other people's worldviews.

Issues concerning migration are often complex and difficult to explain with a single hypothesis or theoretical framework. The purpose of this study has been two headed; to find the structural explanations which contributes to the construction of irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica, and to challenge the categorisation of 'south' and 'north' as a basis for understanding migration flows.

Irregular migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is by definition a product of immigration laws in Costa Rica. The law dictates who is a regular and irregular migrant, and the migration policies in Costa Rica offers few possibilities for Nicaraguan citizens to receive a working permit prior to entering the country. Thus they limit the possibilities of migrating in a regulated fashion, but there are other structures that construct irregular migration flows. We found that these structures are a combination of labour segmentation, social and migratory networks in a transnational context, and national structures in both countries. Labour segmentation was found to be a contributing structure, but not sufficient on its own. In a context where immigrant labour is needed and available to fill a void on the labour market, for jobs that national citizens do not find attractive, a structure for irregular migration is created. Since it is easier to take advantage of unregulated workers in terms of rights and wages, employers might prefer to hire irregular migrants, as stated by some of our respondents. However, we argue that even if these conditions are fulfilled it is still possible for states to regulate immigrant workers for these jobs. Thus on its own labour segmentation does not generate irregular migration, but it helps create a context that is conducive to



irregular migration. Adding the structure of social and migratory networks constructs the possibilities and opportunities for people to move in an irregular manner within this context.

During the research we found that social and migratory networks, while two different types of networks, are closely interconnected and well established in the migratory community. These networks provide information and connections to work opportunities, how to remain in Costa Rica without proper documentation and how to cross the border illegally, among other things. They are to a large extent a visible and accepted part of society, which contributes to the normalisation of irregular migratory structures. This is not to say that irregular migrants do not face risk of being deported or maltreated, but we would argue that these networks are an important structure in encouraging and facilitating irregular migration. Transborder migration creates interconnectedness between communities on both sides of the border, which enables social and migratory networks to function across the border. Transborder migration helps in formal and informal transits and alters cultural and social spaces, creating a local context that goes beyond the border.

In analysing the local context in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, we also found that there are national structures that contribute to the construction of irregular migration. In Costa Rica the norm based processing of documentation at the border stations contributes to irregular migration, because it creates an insecure system which might contribute to a lower confidence in the official border management. In Nicaragua an issue that according to our findings contributes to irregular migration is the norm based handling of documents. Although not the main structure in constructing irregular migration it is part in shaping the context where it takes place and should therefore be considered when looking at this specific case. One needs to understand the contexts in both sending and receiving country in order to fully grasp the nature of these flows. It is important to acknowledge that irregular migration is not a national issue but rather a transnational one, which is influenced by global processes as well. As shown, labour segmentation and social and migratory networks are both transnational in character. While it is difficult to find a sufficient explanatory framework for irregular migration, because the theories for irregular migration are to a large extent the same as for regular migration, we agree with several other scholars that labour segmentation and social and migratory networks, if put into the local context, comes a long way in explaining irregular migration.

Many scholars and authors on migration use the classification of 'south' and 'north' to explain broader migration patterns. During our research we found these categorisations to be too broad to serve as an explanatory framework since they obscure differences within each category. Rather than being useful for theory formation, 'south' and 'north' seems to show on global power structures and an asymmetrical relationship between countries in the two categories. Therefore, in order for us to attach our findings to a more complex contextual framework, we looked at de Haas' theoretical framework, which divides countries into five groups based on their GDP per capita and HDI. This clarified why Costa Rica, although considered to be part of 'the south' have contextual and structural differences to Nicaragua in terms of socio-economic wealth.

During this study we came to conclude that the categorisation of 'north' and 'south' mirrors power relations rather than serving as a useful framework for explaining migration flows. In this sense Costa Rica can be defined as 'north' in 'the south'. However, rejecting these categories in the discussion of migration flows, we argue that de Haas' groupings are a more useful framework in order to understand macro-level migration regions. This could contribute to the understanding of migration flows, limiting the influence of theories built upon existing power structures.

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## Appendix 1: Interview guide

- Introduce our research and ourselves
- Inform of confidentiality and the option to end the interview at any time or not answering a question
- Ask if we may record the interview to be used only by us

- Could you tell us about the organisation/institution?
- What is your position and responsibility?
- What are your thoughts/opinions about regular and irregular migration?
- What is the public opinion about regular and irregular migration?
- Could you explain how migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica works?
- What ways are there to cross the border? (*coyote*, on their own)
- Why are people using these ways?
- What are the possibilities to get a visa?
- Do you know if people have had any problems crossing without a visa? (Risks, money, time)
- Why do you think people cross the border without a visa?
- We have been told that there are *contratistas*, how does this work? Do people have contacts already before migrating?
- What solutions do you think there are to avoid that people have to cross without a visa? If it is a problem at all?
- What do you think about the migration policies? Have you seen any changes in the last decade or so?
- Is there something important in relation to migration that you think we should know, that we have not asked about?

### Additional questions to government officials:

- How does the government work with the issue of irregular migration and migration?
- What challenges are there in your work in relation to migration?
- Have the new migration policies had any effect on your work?