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**The Effect of Networks on the Selection of Migrants and Destinations: Moroccans
in Galicia (Spain)**

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To classify a migratory movement as “transnational” means there is an open and intense flow of people and communication between origin and destination. Above all, transnational migration is not a unidirectional and permanent movement of people from one country to another. It does not mean a break with a person’s place of origin, but rather quite the opposite. However, the study of the transnational nature of a migratory movement represents an academic perspective, but it does not involve an explicative theory. Our research aims to explain, from a transnational perspective, the way sending areas are articulated with receiving areas. Specifically, we want to identify the causal factors that intervene in the intensity and composition of a migratory movement to secondary and peripheral destinations. In this case, we want to explain the dynamics of the Moroccan migration that comes to Galicia – a relatively undeveloped region of Spain with a very weak labour market and a severely aged population. What are the main pull factors related to Galicia and for whom? Our starting point is the theory of migratory networks, within the broader theoretical setting of the theory of cumulative causation.

We aim to explore the strength of the cumulative causation theory in explaining a recent transnational movement to a residual destination within one major nation of immigration. We believe that local or regional levels of analysis might reveal other aspects about migration determinants that get lost at the national level. Besides, the links between migrant networks and the size of immigration flows should be more evident at the regional level of analysis. The question is whether, in the absence of powerful pull factors, network effects may better explain the observed immigration flows; or whether other underlying factors may show to be more, or equally, relevant. We seek for answers to these questions by comparing statistical data on inflows and

stocks of Moroccan migration at regional and national levels, and by gathering ethnographic evidence that shows how relevant or meaningful are the main concepts and dynamics proposed by network theory.

By “cumulative causation” social scientists refer to the process by which international migration sustains itself, generating the conditions that *perpetuate* international movement across time and space. Among these conditions is the growth and spread of “migrant networks” – or sets of interpersonal ties of kinship, friendship and shared community of origin that connect migrants and nonmigrants in origin and destination. According to this network theory, by lowering the costs and risks of movement and increasing the expected net returns to migration, migrant networks increase the likelihood of international movement and overshadow the effects of other variables such as wage differentials or employment rates. Also, migration flow becomes less selective and more representative of the sending society. That is migration spreads progressively from the middle to the lower segments of the socioeconomic hierarchy. Applying these general arguments to our object of research, our main initial hypothesis was the following: given Galicia’s underdeveloped economy and labour market, Moroccan migration to Galicia responds, on a higher level, to the migration networks already established. In other words, Galicia’s main appeal to migrants is the lower migration costs for those who already have acquaintances living there.

On the other hand, the effectivity or the virtues of social networks in the migratory process were questioned by the same classic writers who pointed out their existence. Perhaps, research on social networks between origin and destination has overemphasized their impact on the migration-potential of migrants’ families. In this way, forgetting that they are social constructions and ignoring the importance of gender and power relations, kinship and family are reified. Instead, literature on transnational families recognizes that they are also “imagined communities” capable of being transformed and adapted according to the needs of the moment, sometimes looking for and generating new links at a distance. Furthermore, the huge physical distance that separates transnational family members makes it especially necessary to hoist a discourse that proclaims the family unit (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002). Researchers should not confuse legitimating discourses with the more complex and hidden dynamics of the real world. In some way, it could be said that there has been a certain

process of “ritualisation” in the functioning of migratory networks by social researchers, as at all times the social networks agency seems to reaffirm and even reify social structure over and above the “natural” events that arise in interpersonal relations. Some historians have reported this weak use of the concept of migration network; which, in itself, has little explanatory power. In relation to the activation of networks and their field of influence, the opportunity character which, at a given time, is inherent in the contacts maintained with a community of neighbors and friends when starting a migratory project, became evident. Overall, it could be inferred from our research that networks are activated once the decision to migrate has been taken as a response to a given socioeconomic and/or family situation. Finally, the most recent efforts to confirm the importance of transnational contacts in migration movements conclude that the context at leaving, the society of origin, is a key factor that does not allow for generalized abstractions (Portes, 2003; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Quoting Levitt and Jaworsky once again, “there is an emerging consensus among scholars that we can no longer study migration solely from a host-country perspective” (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007: 142). We agree to this consensus. Most researchers are certainly limited to working with demographic data produced from a national scale and perspective; but it is possible and recommendable to fight this limitation working with separate data in smaller geographical units and consulting official sources in the countries of origin and in the other nations involved in the migration system under study.