

Between the Imagined and the Reality: Threat of African Invasion and Spain's Migration Policy in sub-Saharan Africa

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The paper examines Spain's migration policy aimed at controlling sub-Saharan African immigration. It is based on analysis of policy documents, migration statistics and secondary literature. The paper shows that current migratory trends and statistics do not support the perception that sub-Saharan African migrants are invading Spain. The paper shows that Spain's policy of walling itself off the African continent is borne out of an imaginary threat and Spain's role as a gatekeeper for Western Europe's southern borders. It further argues that Spain's restrictive policies ignore the long-standing inter-dependent trade and other economic networks that exist between Spain, North Africa and West Africa, which predate the European colonization of Africa.

Keywords: sub-Saharan migration, Spain, immigration control, policy

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I trace the strategies adopted by the Spanish government since the 1990s to control ‘unwanted’ migration from sub-Saharan Africa. I show that, these policies are based on a false premise that African migrants are invading Spain and, by extension, Europe. In 2019, the government of Spain launched its third Plan África, a strategic document for the governance of Spanish relations in sub-Saharan Africa. As is the case with the previous Plans, immigration from sub-Saharan Africa proved to be a crucial concern for the Spanish government. The first Plan África which was launched in 2006 had specified that Spain’s geographical proximity to the African continent and the use of some African nations as transit points for drug trafficking or for the establishment of terrorist networks and refuge points in the continent coupled with the issue of immigration constituted a reality that preoccupied public opinion in Spain. For that matter, the document spelled out the strategies to intensify Spain’s border control mechanisms and to plant and extend Spanish influence in Africa through aid, trade and cooperation. The ultimate goal of the first Plan África and subsequent ones was to keep Africans at home and focused pre-eminently on building fortress Spain by barricading borders used by sub-Saharan African youth to enter Spain ‘illegally’ through diplomacy and border controls.

I argue that the volume of African migration to Spain in the last thirty years represents an insignificant fraction of the total immigrant population in Spain and that the policies themselves have rather led to creating unwanted migrants out of the African migrant population in Spain. I indicate that Spain’s policy of walling itself off the African continent is borne out of an imaginary threat and Spain’s role as a gatekeeper for Western Europe’s southern borders. I further argue that there is a long-standing interdependent trade and other economic networks that exist between Spain, North Africa and West Africa predating the European colonization of Africa, which have also contributed to shaping the migration trends.

LITERATURE AND METHODS

Spain’s southern border control strategies have received a lot of scholarly attention in the past three decades. Broadly, these studies can be grouped into two: (i) those that focus on border control methods and strategies, including border externalization and excessive pressure on Morocco and Senegal to crack down on sub-Saharan migration and the human rights implication of these policies; and (ii) those that focus on Spain’s foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Studies that focus on border control mechanisms by Spanish authorities against sub-Saharan African migration have sustained that the surveillance methods used at Spain’s southern sea borders breach international human rights treaties, because by intercepting immigrants at sea before they reach Spanish waters, they prevent potential asylum seekers from receiving protection (Ceriani et al., 2009; Williams, 2018). Some other researches, however, try to examine the effectiveness of the

control methods used at the Spanish southern borders. They include the works of Alscher (2005) Carling (2007) and Carrera (2007) which analyze the impact of the Integrated System of Exterior Surveillance (Sistema Integral de Vigilancia Exterior–SIVE) and the activities of Frontex, the European border and coast guard agency. In a recent work, Williams (2018: 157) argues that this approach “was not effective at stopping current or future migration”.

The literature that examines Spain's foreign policy in sub-Saharan Africa focuses on the legal, political and economic implications of relying on economic aid and diplomacy as means of controlling unwanted migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Spain. They generally fall into two categories: those that have economic, sociological, political and moral character, and those that have legal character. The first group includes the work of Eduardo Romero, which questions the moral base of Spain's migration policies in sub-Saharan Africa (Romero, 2006); and the study by Arango and Martin (2005), which has both economic and political character, and focuses on the migration control methods and bilateral agreements reached between Spain and Morocco. Pérez Graciela (2008) examines the possible conflict of interest between migration control and Spain's development aid programs in sub-Saharan Africa. Wolff and Schout's (2013) work focuses on the identity of Frontex, the legitimacy of its operations and their implications for interstate relations and human rights. The other group of works that are more juridical in nature include the publications by Asunción Asín Cabrera (2008) and Del Castillo Fajardo (2006) that analyze the bilateral agreements signed between Spain and the sub-Saharan African countries and their implication for cooperation. Much of this literature is very critical of the approach adopted and some of them have questioned their implication in regards to race relations, human rights, state autonomy of African countries and the need to respect the interest of African states and migrants (Casas et al., 2011; Jones, 2017; Adam et al., 2020).

The approach of this paper is analytical, focusing on Spain's policy documents and secondary literature relating to sub-Saharan African migration control. I also draw on official statistical data sources of Spain—Instituto Nacional de Estadística data bank—to obtain figures of sub-Saharan African migrant stock in Spain, World Bank data on migrants' remittance flows, as well as the 2020 official report by the Frontex agency and other official sources on migration flows and interception data. Based on this information, I develop tables and figures to enable me to do a comparative analysis of actual migrant flows and stocks, and Spain's migration control policies. The goal is to tease out how the principle of fear of invasion based on the imagined rather than the actual migrant stock and flows, has influenced Spain's migration policy in sub-Saharan Africa.

THEORY AND CONCEPTS

The concept of imagined threat of invasion as used in this paper draws on sociological theories of inter-group relations by Blumer (1958), Blalock (1956, 1957) and Quil-

lian (1995). I also draw on the invasion anxiety concept advanced by Burke (2008) to explain the feeling of imminent threat of invasion on the part of states and state actors, which informs their attitudes, actions and policies towards certain migrant groups. I also rely on more recent works by Herda (2010, 2013, 2018) and Semyonov et al. (2008) to show how in many instances this feeling of threat is borne out of the imagined rather than the actual threat by the migrant population.

Blumer was one of the key proponents of the Chicago sociological school. In his seminal 1958 paper entitled “Race prejudice as a sense of group position”, he argues that during inter-group or race relations, each group develops a position relative to the other in hierarchical terms that influences power relations between them. He indicates that group prejudice develops when the dominant group feels that its position is threatened by a subordinate group. Blumer (1958: 588) identifies four types of feelings that he believed could lead to this situation: “(1) a feeling of superiority, (2) a feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien, (3) a feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage, and (4) a fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race”. For Blumer, group prejudice is a function of perceived rather than actual threat. Arguing along the same line, Blalock (1956; 1957) shows that perceptions of threat by the dominant group towards the subordinate group are influenced by demographic and economic factors. Blalock posits that the size of the subordinate group relative to that of the dominant group as well as precarious economic conditions constitute major sources of threat perceptions by the majority group towards the subordinate group. More recent studies have further showed that the feeling of perceived threat by majority groups with respect to minority groups worsens when the former have to protect their economic interest (Quillian, 1995) or where there are economic and cultural threats at stake (Fietkau and Hansen, 2018).

In some instances, however, the perceived threat posed by migrant groups hinges on national identity issues. This is the position taken by Burke (2008) to explain Australian authorities’ attitudes towards migrants and national migration policies. He argues that the idea of white racial supremacy and the fear of a non-white invasion have had great impact on Australian migration policy and attitudes toward other Asian immigrants over a long period.

In several studies based on national surveys, Herda (2010; 2013, 2018) and Semyonov et al. (2008) have also argued that misconceptions and ignorance about the actual threat posed by immigrants inform a great deal of host nations’ policies and attitudes towards certain migrant groups. They show that migrant exclusion is associated with these misconceptions. In particular, Herda (2013, 2018) found that citizens’ misconception about migrants’ legal status (i.e. conceiving migrants to be undocumented or illegal settlers) or having an inflated perception of their actual population size, is associated with citizens’ tendencies and desires to exclude migrants, halt immigration, restrict migrants’ rights, or support anti-immigrant policies. Hsia (2007) observes that the imagined threat may be the result of media construction and fram-

ing, which in many instances could be far from reality. Other studies have shown that immigrant threat feelings among host populations are sometimes the result of political framing by radical right-wing political parties to improve their popular appeal and electoral fortunes (Doerschler and Jackson, 2018). In the case of Spain, Toasije (2009) maintains that African migration is manipulated by the Spanish political elite as a strategy to please European Union law makers and to Europeanize Spain with the ulterior agenda of weaning the country from its African and complex multi-ethnic identity. In this paper therefore, I examine how the perceived or imagined rather than the actual threat of invasion is manipulated and used by Spain's political actors to manage the socio-political challenges posed by African migration to Spain.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN MIGRATION TO SPAIN

Spain, unlike France, United Kingdom or Portugal, had minimal colonial ties with Africa. Equatorial Guinea, which passed into the hands of Spain in 1827 after seventeen years of British administration, is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that has a direct colonial link with Spain. Resultantly, migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Spain started relatively late and has remained on a very low key.

The early group of sub-Saharan labor migrants in Spain originated from Cape Verde. In 1975 a group of Cape Verdean men from Lisbon settled in the mining towns of Bembire in the area of El Bierzo and Villablino in the Laciana valley in León after their failed trip to the Netherlands (Moldes and González, 2008). Between 1977 and 1978 another community of Cape Verdeans settled in Galizia to work on the construction of the Alúmina-Alumínio metallurgical plant. After the construction of the plant some of the migrant workers were integrated into the local fishing industry while the rest dispersed in the area to find jobs. The men were later joined by Cape Verdean women from Lisbon and the rate of family reunification increased from the second half of the 1980s. In the early 1980s migrants from Gambia, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal settled in the Catalonia region following the restriction imposed by France after the 1973 oil crisis (Sow, 2006). The first group of Senegalese migrants, consisting mainly of people from Pulaar and Soninké ethnic groups, settled in Maresme in Barcelona and from there they moved on to Zaragoza and Valencia. They are currently dispersed all over the country due to their itinerant commercial activity.

By the end of 1992 there were only 12,776 sub-Saharan immigrants in Spain out of which four communities represented three-quarters of the total population. The Senegalese (3,190) represented the largest group at the time and they were uniformly distributed across the country. They were followed by the Gambians (2,952) concentrated in the Catalonian provinces of Barcelona and Gerona where they were largely employed in the agricultural sector. Cape Verdean citizens made up the third largest group (1,939). They lived between León and Madrid. Migrants from Equatorial Guinea (1,569), found mainly in Madrid, were the fourth largest group (Pumares, 1997).

From the late 1990s, the sub-Saharan African population in Spain began to experience a sharp increase. However, despite negative media reportage and criminalization of these movements the rate of growth remained very slow and was much contained over the years. Sub-Saharan Africans in Spain originate principally from West Africa and account for close to 80% of the total sub-Saharan migrants.

STEMMING AFRICAN MIGRATION TO SPAIN

In the past two decades, Spain and the European Union have spent millions of euros to prevent Africans and other nationals entering their territory. Williams (2018) shows that between 2006 and 2015, close to €127 million was budgeted for joint migrant interdiction operations in the central Mediterranean Sea. These operations include: Nautilus, Hermes, Aenas and Triton. Spain's immigration control policy in relation to sub-Saharan immigration is influenced strongly by domestic politics (negative public opinion, interest group politics and political party politics) and is strictly linked to national security matters and foreign aid (Pinyol-Jiménez, 2008; 2012). For that matter, the main political strategy that Spain has adopted to control migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa could be synthesized into two strategies. The first strategy consists of a set of policy measures directed towards intensive border control. These measures are designed and coordinated principally by the Spanish Interior Ministry in collaboration with the EU and the affected African countries. Their main objective is to obstruct and dissuade illegal entry or illegal stay of sub-Saharan immigrants in Spanish territory. The second set of policy measures focuses on development aid, trade and investment to reduce migration pressure in the migrant sending and transit countries. This policy measure is preventative and it is driven mainly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Its objective is to mitigate the root causes of emigration. The roadmap for this approach is contemplated in the Plan Africa (Romero, 2006; Casas et al., 2011).

Even though the two strategies are different, their ultimate goals, however, are to reduce the propensity to migrate from sub-Saharan Africa to Spain and to the European Union, ensure that unwanted African migrants do not arrive in their territory, remove those who enter or stay in Spanish territory without authorization, and encourage voluntary return of those who have legally settled in Spain (Agyeman, 2011; Agyeman and Fernandez Garcia, 2016).

MARITIME BORDER CONTROL SYSTEMS

Alscher (2005) observed that during the period between 2000 and 2004 when Spain's conservative Popular Party (PP) won an absolute majority in parliament, the fight against illegal migration became the central issue of immigration policy. However, it was the socialist government, led by Felipe González and the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) that introduced visa requirements for Moroccan immigrants and began the early construction of a border fence around the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla

(Alscher, 2005). The accession of Spain to the Schengen Treaty required that Spain controlled its southern border, which until the late 1990s was considered the transit route for African migrants heading towards various European destinations.

The first set of measures that Spain adopted to control migration pressure from sub-Saharan Africa included intensifying its maritime border control system through dissuasion, obstruction, apprehension and repatriation of migrants found entering Spain illegally through its southern borders (Carling, 2007). Dissuasion and obstruction are strategies involving putting pressure on Spain's immediate southern neighbors, particularly, Moroccan, Senegalese and Mauritanian authorities to introduce stricter border control and visa regulation in order to crack down on illegal smuggling of Moroccans and sub-Saharans into Spain (González-Enríquez et al., 2018). Other efforts to dissuade 'unwanted immigration' included information campaigns and joint police patrols in Morocco and sub-Saharan countries, particularly Senegal and Mauritania to dissuade prospective immigrants from departing. These efforts are facilitated by opening Migration Information Centres (MICs) in sending countries. For example, as part of the EU-funded Ghana Integrated Migration Management Approach (GIMMA) program, Spain funded the establishment of MICs in Tamale and Sunyani, considered transit and origin zones of Ghanaian youth destined to Spain across the Sahara.

Border surveillance is perhaps the area where Spain has devoted greater resources to the effort to fight 'unwanted' immigration from sub-Saharan Africa. The first step to a stricter border control started in the early 1990s with the construction of an 8.4km fence around Ceuta in 1993 and another around Melilla in 1996. These fences were later fortified and equipped with video and infrared cameras, control towers and motion detectors (Alscher, 2005). In January 1998, the PP government introduced the Plan Sur (Alscher, 2005) to strengthen the border control system. The project introduced more intensive surveillance systems in Spain's air and sea ports, it tightened the deportation procedures and strengthened cooperation with Moroccan and Algerian authorities. Additionally, a special unit of motorized police force was created to search for undocumented immigrants along Spain's coastal cities. Half a year later, the Civil Guard (Guardia Civil), introduced another project named *Frontera Sur* (southern border/frontier) equipped with new vehicles and helicopters from the Spanish Army (Alscher, 2005). In May 1999, the PP government introduced a more intensive border control system labelled Integrated System of Exterior Surveillance (Sistema Integral de Vigilancia Exterior-SIVE). Initial work on the project was financed at a cost of €150 million. It was operated by the Civil Guard (Guardia Civil) and its objectives were to detect and intercept small vessels and pateras (boats) and cayucos (kayaks/canoes) arriving at Spain's southern sea border. The system was equipped with fixed and mobile detection devices including radars, infrared and video cameras that are able to detect a small vessel 10km away and estimate the number of people in the vessel when it is 5km away. When a vessel is detected, information about its course and position is transmitted to a central command, from where in-

terception units including boats, helicopters and cars are dispatched (Carling, 2007). The SIVE was first developed on the coast of Gibraltar and in 2002, was extended to the Canary Islands in the towns of Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria and Lanzarote. It was also extended to cover the entire coast of the Cádiz province in 2004 and the entire coast of the province of Andalucía in 2005. It is noteworthy that the PSOE government continued to develop the SIVE project after it won the 2004 election, although it initially opposed the project when it was in opposition.

In addition to SIVE, in 2005 Spain impressed upon the EU, the need for a European border and coast guard agency, hence the creation of Frontex. This agency was created in 2006 with a Spanish official, Gil Arias, appointed its Executive Director (González-Enríquez et al., 2018). In addition, the General Directorate of International Relations and Alien Affairs and its two sub-directorates were also created in 2006 to enable Spanish authorities to reach agreements for institutional cooperation with officials in the migrant origin or transit countries. This enabled Spanish police officials to collaborate with officials of the Frontex agency and officials of origin or transit countries to organize joint border operations. The European Union's sponsored projects undertaken by Frontex at the Spanish coasts include, Agios (joint operation to identify forged documents in Spain's Mediterranean ports); Hera I (identification and return of unauthorized immigrants); Hera II (patrol of Spanish seas near Senegal and Mauritania) (Commission of the European Community, 2006); and Hera III (surveillance mission by Frontex deployed on the territorial waters of Mauritania and Senegal) (Ceriani et al., 2009).

Greater effort has also been made to improve information exchange between Spain and the African countries. The Spanish police have provided technical and material support and exchanged information with the police and immigration officials in the transit and origin countries to strengthen their internal patrol system (Ministerio de Interior, 2007). Examples include the Seahorse and the Atlantis projects funded by the European Union which formed a network of information exchange among the border police between Spain, Portugal, Mauritania, Senegal, Cape Verde and three other countries which were incorporated in 2009 which also include Morocco, Gambia and Guinea Bissau (González-Enríquez et al., 2018). The joint border surveillance operations have three objectives: to dissuade the immigrants in the origin or transit country before they set out to reach Spanish borders; to intercept and return the immigrants who succeed to depart before they reach Spanish coasts; and, to ensure that those who reach Spanish borders are repatriated within the terms established by law (Ministerio de Interior, 2007). While Spanish officials and some scholars tout this initiative as contributing to stemming unwanted immigration to Spain, Williams (2018) argues that the operations of Frontex are nothing more than search and rescue.

IMMIGRATION CONTROL THROUGH 'MIGRATORY DIPLOMACY'

Since 2000, Spain's development aid to sub-Saharan countries has become a tool to control immigration from these countries to Spain. Their declared goal is to fight poverty and promote economic development and democracy in Africa – factors believed to be the main cause of migration. The main architecture of Spain's foreign diplomacy to control migration pressure from sub-Saharan Africa is the master plan called Plan of Action for sub-Saharan Africa (*El Plan de Acción para África Subsahariana*) or *Plan África* in short. The first plan was developed in 2006 to cover the period between 2006 and 2008. Since then, two other master plans have followed: the 2009-2012 plan and the more recent 2019-2024 plan.

Plan África I set in motion what Pinyol- Jiménez (2008: 61) described as Spain's "migratory diplomacy". The document laid greater emphasis on migration management, commercial links and development cooperation (Casas et al. 2011). The document placed the sub-Saharan countries into three main geographical divisions based on the type of actions that the Spanish government intended to perform in the regions. The first group consists of countries that are considered to respond to the majority of the objectives set out by the plan. The second division is made up of countries considered as strategic for the fight against illegal immigration or for Spain's economic and cultural activities in Africa. The last group consists of countries considered as strategic in the medium term—due to their political situation of being unstable and in conflict-prone areas. However, a critical look at this geographical division shows that two main principles guided the choice of countries, namely, economic interest and the fight against immigration. The document exposed a clear distinction between African countries that are senders, potential senders or transit points of migrants destined to Spain and countries that are strategic for Spanish trade relations with Africa because they host large quantities of raw materials and natural resources essential for Spain's economy.

In anticipation of the master plan, Spain's Foreign Minister visited Ghana, Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger and Mali in 2005 (Moratinos, 2005). After Plan África I was launched, it paved the way for the signing of bilateral and readmission agreements between Spain and sub-Saharan African countries including Gambia (2006), Guinea (2006), Cape Verde (2007), Mali (2008) and Niger (2008) (Cabrera, 2008). Spain's objective for these agreements was to enable it to establish and expand its institutional base and influence in sub-Saharan Africa through the establishment of diplomatic missions, new embassies and consulates, offices for economic cooperation and trade as well as offices for the technical operations of the Spanish Interior and Defense Ministries' missions in sub-Saharan Africa so that its fight against unwanted migration from sub-Saharan Africa could be effective. To this end, Spain established a permanent diplomatic mission in Cape Verde in 2006 and an office for the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation in 2007; in 2006 Spain created a permanent diplomatic mission in Mali; in 2007 Spain created a general consular office in Dakar, Senegal; and in the same year it established offices for the Span-

ish Agency for International Cooperation in both Senegal and Mauritania (Cabrera, 2008: 86).

All the bilateral agreements that were signed, with the partial exception of the one signed with Mali, have almost identical structure and content (Cabrera, 2008). They all have eighteen articles expressed in eight chapters. They begin with an identical preamble and end with an annexure indicating the procedures and guarantees for readmission of persons. Six lines of action are also delineated in the agreements, which include: admission of workers; voluntary return; integration of immigrants; migration and development; cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration and trafficking of persons; and readmission of persons. However, the most controversial aspect of the agreement lay in sections dealing with the readmission of persons, or obliging African nations to prevent the emigration of their own nationals. Contracting African countries were obliged to readmit their citizens apprehended or found living illegally in Spain. This section took inspiration from Article 13 of the Cotonou Accord of 2000, rectified by Spain in 2003 in which the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and EU countries committed themselves to accept their nationals deported from another country party to the contract.

Another issue which the Spanish government pursued was to seek the cooperation of the contracting African countries to fight what Spain termed as the illegal migration or trafficking of African nationals to Spain. Chapter six of the agreement obliged the contracting parties to cooperate in the following areas: (i) exchange of information between the competent authorities on human trafficking; (ii) provision of technical assistance to the sub-Saharan African countries affected in the fight against illegal migration to Spain; (iii) organization of formation courses for consular and immigration personnel; (iv) cooperation for border control enforcement; (v) mutual support to guarantee the security of national identity cards; (vi) strengthened capacities of the fight against illegal migration and human trafficking; (vii) running of campaign programs on the dangers of illegal migration and human trafficking (Cabrera, 2008). In return, Spain promised to open a window for the legal recruitment of African migrant workers and put measures in place to promote temporal migration through the admission of seasonal workers and through the quota system as well as facilitating the travel of highly qualified professionals such as professors, scientists, researchers, managers, as well as artists, sportsmen and women (Cabrera, 2008). However, a more recent study has revealed that these kinds of schemes have not yielded positive results. For example, González-Enríquez et al. (2018), note that a recruitment scheme meant to enable Senegalese women to work in the strawberry sector in the Province of Huelva in Andalusia was not successful and had to be discontinued. This was because there were deficiencies in the selection process and many recruits ended up becoming illegal immigrants in Spain. In spite of the limited legal channels, remittances from sub-Saharan African migrants in Spain far outpace Spain's official development aid to these countries and thus contribute immensely to the wellbeing of families left at home, as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1: Remittance Flow from Spain to Sub-Saharan African Countries per \$ million

Country/Year	2015	2016	2017
Nigeria	690	706	771
Senegal	211	272	302
Mali	40	64	71
Gambia	50	58	60
Ghana	48	51	53
Cape Verde	5	6	6

Source: Author's elaboration from World Bank data

Cassarino (2007) observes that the reciprocity of obligations expressed in the agreements does not mean that both parties benefit equally due to the “significant level of development asymmetry” between the contracting parties and that,

while the interest of the destination country sounds obvious (“unwanted migrants have to be effectively removed”), the interest of the origin country may be less evident, above all when considering that its economy remains dependent on the revenues of its (legal and illegal) expatriates living abroad, or when migration continues to be viewed as a safety valve to relieve pressure on domestic unemployment (Cassarino, 2007: 182).

Therefore, Spain's migration policy, while seeking partnership of African countries to execute, regrettably, focuses on the likely benefits which will accrue to Spain, and not that of the sub-Saharan migrants involved or their nations which Spain has made its (control) partners.

THE IMAGINED THREAT OF AFRICAN INVASION VS REALITY: REVISITING THE STATISTICS

As asserted earlier, Semyonov et al. (2008) comment that the inflated perception of the size of the immigrant population in a country is one of the main causes of anti-immigrant feeling, discrimination and support for exclusionary policies towards migrant groups. We have also discussed studies by Herda (2013, 2018), who observes that misconceptions about the actual population size and the legal status of migrants are more likely to generate exclusionary sentiments towards immigrants. He notes that in most European countries, citizens perceive immigrant numbers to be more than twice the actual size of the immigrant population in their country. He describes this as immigrant population innumeracy (Herda, 2013). The imagined rather than an actual threat of sub-Saharan African migrants invading Spain is the main motivation behind Spain's anti-African immigration policy.

At the end of 2019, there were 235,951 sub-Saharan African immigrants from over forty countries, resident in Spain. This was fewer than the British immigrants in Spain and a little above the Italian nationals resident in Spain. Sub-Saharan African migrants represent 4.75% of the total immigrant population in Spain and only 21% of Africans, as shown in Table 2

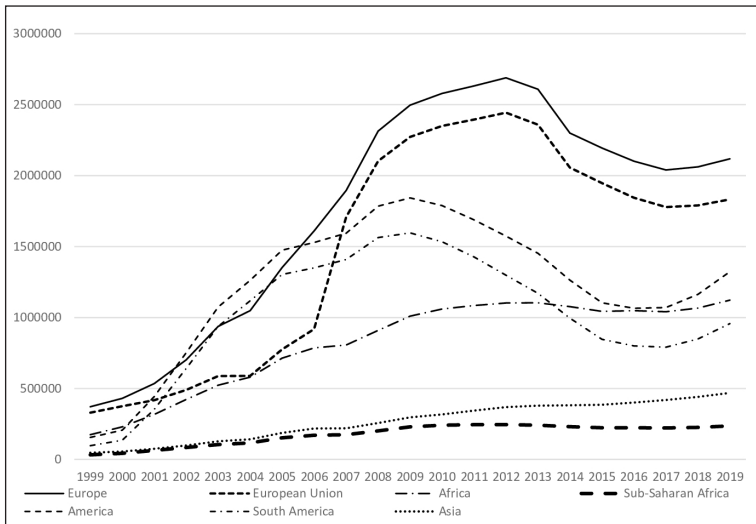
Table 2: Sub-Saharan Africa Immigrants in Spain

Region/Year	1999	%	2004	%	2009	%	2014	%	2019	%
Sub-Saharan Africa	32,302	4.31	115,999	5.14	230,044	4.07	231,373	4.6	235,951	4.68
Africa	174,402	23.28	579,372	19.09	1,009,169	17.86	1,076,164	21.42	1,122,409	22.28
Spain	748,954	100	3,034,326	100	5,648,671	100	5,023,487	100	5,036,878	100

Source: Author’s elaboration from INE data (www.ine.es)

Senegal has the largest sub-Saharan community in Spain (71,020), followed by Nigeria (39,306), Mali (25,011), Gambia (20,387), Ghana (17,669), Equatorial Guinea (13,221), Guinea (10,811), and Mauritania (8,184). It is significant to know that the population of Nigerian immigrants in Spain has seen a substantial decrease consistently since 2012. Several other countries, including Spain’s former colony, Equatorial Guinea, have also seen a marginal decrease in their population. In fact, since the economic crisis and particularly from 2013, the entry of African migrants in Spain has seen a substantial decrease, with the exception of 2017, when the number of irregular entries went up sharply (Consejo Económico Y Social España, 2019).

Figure 1: Growth Rate of Foreign Population in Spain by Continent



Source: Author's elaboration from INE (www.ine.es)

Over the past twenty years, the sub-Saharan Africans have recorded the slowest growth rate in Spain compared to Europeans, South Americans and Asians, as shown in Figure 1. This supports the argument that there is no threat of invasion, as portrayed by Spain's right-wing political parties and the media (Toasije, 2009). This supports Hsia's (2007) findings that the threat of invasion is sometimes the product of media construction and political manipulation.

Moreover, public opinion toward sub-Saharan African migrants in Spain is increasingly positive compared to that of other immigrant groups. In a recent survey, only 2% of Spanish claimed they felt uncomfortable working with a black person, compared to 3% for Asians and Jews and 7% for Roma and Muslims (González-Enríquez, 2017). In the same study, González-Enríquez (2017: 20) notes that, "there is also a significant increase in responses expressing closeness, especially noticeable towards US citizens and sub-Saharan Africans". About 25% of the Spanish who participated in the survey said they felt "quite or very close" towards sub-Saharan Africans whereas only 18% and 15% said they felt the same toward Moroccan and Chinese migrants respectively. This form of public opinion does not support Spain's aggressive control of sub-Saharan immigration.

GENERATING ILLEGALITY THROUGH RESTRICTIVE IMMIGRATION POLICY

From the time Spain became an immigration country, its coastal cities became regular scenes of sub-Saharan, North African and Asian boat-people entering Europe without going through the strict immigration regulations, by using small wooden boats known in Spain as pateras. These scenes raised media interest and almost every week there was news of new entrances and reports of deaths on the boats. The excessive media attention and coverage of African migrants entering the European southern border by boat, dominated policy discourse on illegal migration and increasingly conveyed the image that massive numbers of desperate Africans are fleeing poverty and war and are attempting to enter Europe irregularly. This raised fears of possible invasion and security threats (De Haas, 2007). Since then, a great deal of literature has fueled the perception that economic and demographic pressure persisting in Africa today is driving Africans to invade Europe and the rest of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries in the same way as the European states migrated to America in the half-century before World War I. This perception has strongly influenced public opinion on immigration matters and electoral politics in Spain (Hatton and Williamson, 2003). For example, in July 2018, the leader of Spain's Popular Party claimed that there were over fifty million prospective African migrants ready to invade Spanish territory, a claim which was discredited by Spain's popular newspaper, *El País* (2018). Even though such claims lack an empirical base, these forms of perceptions have greatly influenced Spain's relations with its black African neighbors at their southern borders and have

informed the increasing apprehension, detention and repatriation of sub-Saharan migrants who are legally or illegally resident in Spain. As Burke (2008) observes, the emphasis on security threats posed by immigrants, although based on false pretense, gives legitimacy to restrictive immigration control measures by state authorities.

However, empirical data does not support the media hype of sub-Saharan African invasion of Spain through illegal migration. Since 2000, the annual number of migrants who arrive in Spain or Italy by sea, represents a small fraction of the total number of migrants who enter Spain illegally. Data from the Frontex agency shows that out of 141,846 persons intercepted at border crossing points (BCPs) attempting to enter Europe illegally in 2018, those who originated from the West African route were a meagre 2,718 persons, representing 1.9% of the total. Of these, Moroccan nationals constituted one-third. In 2017, for example, only 25,251 individuals out of 532,482 immigrants who entered Spain that year without following the regular immigration procedures, were Africans (El Pais, 2018). This reduction in numbers is, however, attributed to the aggressive control measures that have been put in place by Spain with European Union backing to stem immigration from sub-Saharan Africa (González-Enríquez et al., 2018).

The asymmetry between the actual figures of sub-Saharan migration flows to Spain and the restrictive state control policies can be properly understood within the sphere of race relations where the perceptions of threat rather than the actual threat, govern policy decisions, attitudes and actions. Following from studies by Blumer (1958), Blalock (1956; 1957), Quillian (1995) and Burke (2008), one can argue that the perceptions of threat to Spain's racial identity and economic position rather than the actual migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa to Spain, have greatly informed Spain's migration control policies in Africa.

LONG-STANDING RELATIONS VS SPAIN'S ROLE AS EUROPEAN UNION'S SOUTHERN BORDER GATEKEEPER

Touching on issues pertaining to identity and economic relations, this paper argues that Spain, by its actions of excessive migration control of sub-Saharan African migration, is ignoring the long-standing relations that have existed between Spain, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, which span across several centuries (Toasiye, 2009). These relations have generated several forms of interdependence within the spheres of economics, politics, culture, family ties and social relations, spanning several centuries. Toasiye (2009: 343) notes that "until the defeat of Grenada in 1492, the western end of the European subcontinent had been the core of European and African struggles, and this has created an ethnically-mixed population" in Spain. Moreover, there is also a long history of migration and trade relations between Spain and the rest of the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan countries. During his visit to Timbuktu in 1352, Ibn Battuta reported that, "In this town is the grave of the illustrious poet Abu Ishaq al-Sahill of Granada, known in his own country as al-Tuwaijin ('the little cooking pan'), and also of Siraj al-Din b. al-Kuwaik, one

of the great merchants among the people of Alexandria” (Gibb and Beckingham, 1994: 969). These interconnections were the subject of the 2019 special edition of the *Journal of North African Studies*, which depicts not only a history of conflict between Spain and Morocco but also a construction of economic, social and cultural relations and interdependence through “ideas, people, texts, and material goods that have circulated across the sea and continue to do so until today” (Stenner, 2019: 8). In his introduction, Stenner (2019: 8), notes that this “focus on connections between Europe and Africa indirectly challenged the notion of the Mediterranean as a frontier separating two worlds, and instead highlighted its role as a shared cultural space”.

González-Enríquez (2017) asserts that the right-wing anti-immigration politics which has a lot of force elsewhere in Europe, has struggled to gain influence in Spain to push the anti-black immigration agenda. This may be due largely to the long-standing relations that Spain has had with Africa over the centuries. However, Spain bears the brunt of anti-black African sentiments held elsewhere in Europe. Spain is therefore forced to implement policies which in many situations are not in its interest and to a large extent run counter to the long-standing relations that it has with the African continent. Toasije (2009) considers this as part of efforts to Europeanize Spain and to deny it of its African and complex multi-ethnic identity. Many European governments assume that uncontrolled sub-Saharan immigration can generate social alarm among the citizenry, challenge the sovereignty of the state and jeopardize the welfare system and the idea of ethnic homogeneity underlying the formation of European states (Toasije, 2009; Ambrosini, 2013). Consequently, there is a subtle criminalization of African migration through the complicity of the European Union, Spain's political elite and the media (Toasije, 2009).

Politics, more than actual migration trends, is the main factor underlying the illegalization and aggressive combatting of sub-Saharan African migration to Spain. This is because, given the trends of African migration to Spain over the past three decades, it is very difficult to imagine that African migrants would flock to Spain and stay there permanently if the borders were open. In fact, open borders would have generated fluidity of human movements across the borders, as it existed before. This is because, for centuries, movements across the Mediterranean Sea has been bidirectional, and as Therrien (2019) observes, there is a growing trend of Spanish migrants moving in the opposite direction to Morocco, to settle there. The sendentation of African migrants in Spain and elsewhere in Europe is borne largely out of restrictive immigration policies and border controls against African migrants (Agyeman, 2011). According to Cachón (2002), immigrants from southern European nations who migrated to northern Europe for reconstruction during the post-World War II period, sought permanent settlement and family reunification when restrictions were imposed after the oil crisis in the 1970s. The increasing proportion of ‘illegal’ or ‘unwanted’ African migration to Spain is borne out of the policies being implemented by the Spanish government.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have shown that Spain's migration policy in sub-Saharan Africa involving intensive border policing, and strategies to dissuade African migrants from entering Spain, is borne out of an imaginary threat of possible African invasion of the Spanish peninsula and Europe. The paper argues that statistics showing the migration trends from sub-Saharan African to Spain, both through legal and illegal means over the last three decades, does not support this perception of invasion. Compared with migration movements originating from other parts of Europe, South America and Asia to Spain, sub-Saharan migration trends are the slowest. However, the African migration figures, although low, are magnified and manipulated to give legitimacy to restrictive control policies.

Based on the above observations, the paper argues that Spain's control of sub-Saharan African migration is an over-reaction and ignores all forms of historical, economic and social relations that exist between Spain and sub-Saharan Africa. It further maintains that there are long-standing cultural, economic and social relations between the two regions that have generated aspects of interdependence which predate European colonization of Africa. However, Spain's role as the European Union's gatekeeper at its southern borders appears to be the main motivation behind Spain's aggressive border control mechanisms.

This paper concludes that Spain, in pursuing its migration policies aimed at restricting African immigration, focuses mainly on its own interests or those of the European Union, and does not factor into the equation the interests of the migrants or the African states that are supposed to be Spain's partners or accomplices in combating African migration. This is because, remittances that families and African states receive from migrants in Spain, whether legal or illegal residents, have a very positive impact on African economies and far outpace Spain's development aid to these countries.

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