Crossing the Atlantic in search of new destinations: Contemporary African migration to Latin America

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"Although it is often forgotten, migratory processes are reversible. Countries of immigration can become countries of emigration, and nations that traditionally sent out large numbers of migrants can become net receivers." (Durand & Massey 2010)

Abstract
International migratory systems are subject to constant quantitative and geographic shifts. This paper describes the recent influx of contemporary African migration to Latin America. It furthermore outlines the policy reactions to these inflows by Latin American governments, focusing on Argentina and Mexico. The paper suggests that constant or increasing push-factors out of Africa, the migration constraint of increasingly restrictive European and US-American immigration policies and the combination of the pull-factors of relatively high development levels and permissive immigration policies of some Latin America countries lead to the expansion of African migration to Latin America. Comparing the policy reactions of Argentina and Mexico shows that Latin American governments respond differently to recent African immigration, depending on the characteristics of country-specific inflows, historic socio-political factors and domestic and international political interests. These results are based on existing literature, reports published by the Organization of American States and preliminary questioning of Argentine and Mexican immigration officials.

Key words:
Latin America; Africa; south-south migration; immigration policy; new migration routes

Introduction

On 7 April 2011, 250 irregular immigrants drowned when an overloaded fisher boat shipwrecked off the Italian coast. Against the backdrop of the recent social and political crisis in North Africa, increased numbers of African 'boatpeople' are trying to reach Europe's southern shores. Since Tunisia's January revolution until the beginning of April, Italy witnessed an influx of approx. 20,000 – 25,00 migrants from Tunisia, also including Liberians and sub-Saharan migrants (MuB 2011). Most are believed to be economic migrants taking advantage of recent security loopholes[1] (BBC 2011a; MuB 2011). European governments and the majority of Europe's citizens perceive irregular African immigration as a threat[2], and the influx of African migrants has let to severe tensions among European

[1] Due to the crisis, the Tunisian transitional government temporarily dismissed its responsibility in the cooperation agreements with the European Union on fighting illegal immigration (MuB 2011).
[2] Italy's Interior Minister Roberto Maroni warned that the influx of African migrants could have devastating consequences for all European nations, threatening their "institutional and social structures" (BBC 2011a). Prime Minister Berlusconi polemically declared that Italy could not cope with the 'human tsunami' of African immigrants alone (FAZ 2011a). The German states Bavaria and Hesse reacted with arguing for the reintroduction of German national border controls as a last resort. Some readers of the renown German national newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented on the recent African immigration as an 'evil', a 'plague of biblical proportions', and felt that the 'mass-immigration' of 'pseudo-refugees' would evoke the 'downfall' of Europe, making Europeans a 'minority in their own countries' (FAZ 2011a). Neglecting regional variances, roughly half of the citizens of the mayor European receiving countries (France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, UK) see immigration as more of a problem than an opportunity (Transatlantic Trends 2010).

member states. Some European governments sharply criticized Italy's policy of issuing travel documents for the African immigrants enabling them to move to other Schengen member states, instead of insuring their repatriation back to Tunisia.[3]

The fact that African migrants continue to choose the extremely risky journey across the Mediterranean to reach the European Union, despite European efforts of increased border enforcement, speaks to continuously strong push-factors out of Africa. Taken together, negative public attitudes towards immigration in Europe and recent political developments regarding the arrivals from Tunisia demonstrate the high degree of politicization of irregular African immigration to Europe. African economic migrants are not welcome in the European Union. But where will those Africans who are looking for a better life for themselves and their families go in the future? Is it likely that the increasing political and social closure of Europe will entice them to search for new destinations? Or, is a geographical shift in Africa's migratory system already occurring?

1. Shifting migration systems

Both the public discourse and academic studies of migration are characterized by a south-north bias that suggests constant global flows of people, including Latin American migration to the United States and African migration to Europe. But south-north movements have not, and will not always be the dominant form of international migration. Migration systems are not inherently stable and the status of sending and receiving countries can change. 20th century Latin American and Europe are one example of such a migration transition. Dating from the arrival of the first Europeans after 1492 until the mid twentieth century, Latin America was a region of net immigration. Starting in the 1950s, Latin Americans increasingly left their homes to move towards North America and Europe. Western Europe made the reverse transition and became an immigration region by the 1990s.[4]

Between 2000 and 2010, emigration flows in Latin America and the Caribbean surpassed immigration flows by 11 million people (WMR 2010). Nevertheless, we should be wary of over hastily categorizing the region *exclusively* as a region of *emigration*. There were 7.5 million international migrants in Latin America in 2010 (ibid). Significant differences exist in the distribution of the proportion of the foreign-born population across the Latin American region, and in the past decade intraregional migration patterns shifted; traditional receiving countries experienced a decrease of their immigrant population, while others faced substantial increases of immigrant flows. Recently, Latin American governments are furthermore grappling with a phenomenon they call the 'new extra-continental immigration from Africa and Asia'. Argentina's director of immigration, Fernando Manzanares, polemically states that these flows are *"...a reflection of history. What happened with European immigrants 100 years ago is now happening with African immigrants"* (Reuters 2010).

[3] Italy thereby threatens to violate the rules of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Based on the 1999 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the European state of first entry is responsible for the verification of asylum or residence applications of migrants. A conference of European Ministers of the Interior on 11 April 2011 in Brussels could not reconcile the dispute (FAZ 2011 b).
[4] From 1800 to 1970, approximately 13.8 million immigrants entered Latin America (Lattes 1985), 75 per cent of which originated from Europe (Massey et al. 1998). Reversely, between 1995 and 2003, the registered Latin American immigrant population in Spain alone increased from approx. 92,500 to 500,000 (Pellegrino 2004). According to the UN Global Migration Database, between 1981 and 2008, the total Latin American and Caribbean born population in Spain increased from approx. 160 000 to 2.3 million.

Against the backdrop of increasingly dynamic globalization processes, it is little surprising that the current size and direction of international migration flows are changing. It is less obvious, *which* factors determine *how* they are transforming. Some authors have named increasingly restrictive European migration politics and the extension of the visa systems of some Latin American countries as facilitating new African migration from Africa to Latin America (Zubrzycki & Agnelli 2009; Maffia 2010). Latin American governments furthermore see the economic interests and global connectivity of smuggling networks as a crucial factor in the development of new migration routes (INM 2011; DNM 2011).

Unfortunately, the migration dynamics within and to Latin American and the Caribbean remain notoriously understudied, as most well funded research projects focus on Latin American migration towards the north. Also, the bulk of the academic literature on African migration in recent years has focused on African migration to EU member states (Gubert 2005; De Haas 2006; Kohnert 2007). Although it is true that most *extra-continental* African migrants live in Europe and the United States,[5] it is often forgotten that the majority of African migrants move within the coastal borders of their continent. Increasingly, they are 'searching' for new destinations in Latin America and the Middle East. This paper contributes to filling the gap in the literature on new south-south migration flows and receiving regions that differ culturally, politically and economically from Western Europe and North America.

2. Contemporary African migration to Latin America

In April 2010, the Organization of the Americas (OAS) convened a conference on extra-continental migration in Washington, DC. According to representatives of the national migration departments of seven Latin American countries, as well as representatives of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), African migration to Latin America is 'new and growing' and is made up by mixed migration flows, including economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. These flows are made-up by a substantial element of irregular migration. Some African migrants overstay tourist visas, or enter one country with a valid visa but then travel on to another without the necessary documentation (Zubrzycki & Agnelli 2009; Maffia 2010). Others enter South American ports hidden away on large cargo ships. When detected by immigration officials, many irregular immigrants seek asylum as a strategy to obtain at least temporary documentation and regularization (Reuters 2010; Zubrzycki & Agnelli 2009).

Mixed migratory flows lead to well-known difficulties in measuring their exact numbers (Massey and Capoferro 2004). The data presented at the CEAM workshop offered the following numeric proof of African migration to Latin America[6]: In 2009, Colombia and Ecuador together received 409 African asylum applications from Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali and Nigerian nationals. In Central America, Costa Rica detained 87, Panama 115, and Mexico 765 irregular African immigrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Argentina

[5] According to the IOM (2005) about 4.6 million Africans lived in the EU in 2005, compared to 890,000 African migrants in the United States. African immigration flows to the United States more than quadrupled from 109,733 between 1961 and 1980, to 531,832 between 1981 and 2000 (Takougang 2003).

[6] The numbers provided by countries that responded to the CEAM survey are based on asylum requests, detentions by immigration authorities, and requests for temporary and transitional residence granted to immigrants.

presented 147 residencies granted to immigrants from across Africa in the same year .[7] Compared to similar flows towards Europe and North America, the official numbers of African migrants and asylum seekers to Latin America are obviously relatively small, and to some might even appear insignificant. One should bear in mind that the numbers of African migrants and asylum seekers to former 'new' immigration countries in Southern Europe were similarly small a mere thirty years ago. In 1982, Greece received 59, Spain 105, and Italy 277 African asylum applications. By 2009, 1.949 African asylum applications were issued in Spain, 2.546 in Greece and 10.917 in Italy (UNHCR Online Database). Similar increases are at least theoretically conceivable for African migration to Latin America in the near future.

The mayor countries of origin of African migration to Latin America are Senegal, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Somalia, and the most important countries of destination are Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico (CEAM 2010). One flow of West Africans, mainly Senegalese and Nigerians, to the Southern Cone is made up my individuals who tend to stay in these new countries of destination. With 866 applications, Nigerians and Senegalese made up over 25 per cent of all asylum application in Argentina from 2004-2009 (UNHCR Online Database). A second flow from the Horn of Africa to Central America and Mexico predominantly consists of Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali migrants, reportedly with intentions of reaching the United States (CEAM 2010; INM 2011). In 2009 and 2010, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali migrants made up 94 per cent (1915 out of the 2042) of all Africans detained by Mexican officials.[8] In total, about 2500 extra-continental individuals petitioned asylum in Latin American countries during the 2005-2009 period (UNHCR 2010).

2.1. Hypothesizing about the determinants of African migration to Latin America

The recent political crisis caused by the arrival of Tunisian immigrants on Italian territory demonstrates the increasing closure of Europe towards extra-continental immigration. The European Union's decision to gradually open up to migration from Eastern Europe has been accompanied by a growing closure to potential flows from the south (Society for International Development 2006): 'There has been a progressive reduction of European access opportunities, the product of a structured set of measures which range from the extension of visa requirements (even for short stays) to citizens of all African States to the extraordinary stepping up of immigration controls…' (also see Boswell 2003; Casserino 2010). Both academics (Maffia 2010; Zubrzycki & Agnelli 2009) and Latin American governments (INM 2011; DNM 2011) see increasingly restrictive European immigration policy as a 'migration constraint' to African migration to Europe, and thus, combined with more permissive Latin American immigration policies, as a determinant of the redirection of African flows to Latin America.

Though giving different reasons for African extra-continental immigration, the literature finds that migration pressures out of Africa are likely to persist or even increase. The classic work of Adepoju (1984) finds that economic differences in development levels, job opportunities and the standard of living are one set of reasons that lead to the emigration of

[7] With regards to the inflows of Asian origin, Colombia presented 10 and Costa Rica 58 asylum applications from Bangladesh and Nepal. Mexico reported 370 Asian nationals held in immigrant detention facilities in 2009, with 227 persons originating from China.
[8] These numbers dwindle in comparison to the 126.079 Central American detained in 2009 and 2010. Nevertheless, with only 1.84% Africans made up the second largest group of detainees after Central America (98.23%).

Africans.[9] As another important driver of African out-migration he names political instability, especially related to border conflicts. Hatton & Williamson (2002) see the international wage gap[10], Africa's demographic transition[11] and increasing numbers of 'pioneer' migrants abroad as the determinants of a future 'mass migration' out of Africa. Even optimistic expectations of increased development in Africa correlate with expectations of growing outflows.[12]

In the context of international migratory systems the relative position of a country in the global hierarchy of opportunity distribution is likely to matter more than absolute development levels predicted by neo-classical migration theory (see De Haas 2010). With growth rates averaging at 6 per cent in 2010 compared to 2.3 per cent in OECD countries (Sangmeister 2011), Latin America's strong economic performance in recent years is likely to be one pull-factor for recent African immigration. Permissive visa systems of some Latin American countries are another likely pull-factor. Ecuador, for example, introduced a no-visa policy in 2008 (with the recent exceptions of China, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia). In the Argentine case, Zubrzycki & Agnelli (2009) show how Senegalese migrants use Brazilian visas as a ticket into Latin America, and then travel on to Buenos Aires. In other words, African migration to Latin America seems to be driven by the search for better economic opportunities and determined by the 'migration constraint' of restrictive European and US-American immigration policy and the pull-factor of permissive Latin American immigration policy.

3. Latin American policy reactions to African immigration

In a time in which most countries formulate restrictive immigration policies in the light of national and 'societal security' (Rudolph 2003), the 'war on terrorism' (Bigo 2001; Guild 2005; Amoore 2006) and the global economic crisis, migration policies and asylum systems of Latin American countries are either lacking altogether, rudimentary (UNHCR 2010), or *surprisingly permissive*.[13] After the region's military dictatorships had pursued restrictive migration policy goals in the 70s and 80s (Durand & Massey 2010), Acosta (2011) describes a liberalization wave of Latin American migration policy in recent years. He sees this policy liberalization as a direct response to increasingly restrictive European migration policy (exemplified by the European Return Directive of 2008).

In contrast to increasingly restrictive European and US-American immigration policies, some Latin American governments were initially surprisingly 'welcoming' towards African newcomers. The increase of extra-continental inflows of migrants and refugees, however, in recent years has led to more restrictive Latin American policy responses on national and regional levels (OAS 2010; UNHCR 2010). Such reactions range from training courses for immigration and security officials, to bilateral and international cooperation, and policy

[9] While sub-Saharan Africa itself grew at 4.7 Per cent in 2010, more people were "finding it very difficult" to live on their present household income in 2010 than in 2007 (Gallup 2011).
[10] "Between 1973 and 1992, GDP per capita in Africa stagnated, while it grew 2% per annum in southern Europe. Thus the relative gap between southern Europe and Africa rose from 5.6 to 8.2." (Hatton & Williamson 2002: 564)
[11] "Africa's population grew at 2.6% per annum between 1950 and 1995, a rate of increase that is historically unprecedented anywhere in the world at any time, even for Asia (2% per annum) and Latin America (2.3%) over the past half century." (Hatton & Williamson 2002: 565, citing Bloom and Sachs 1998: pp 240-7).
[12] Haas (2010) argues that human development leads to migration transitions characterized by initially increasing emigration, before such out-movements stagnate and finally decrease.
[13] Apart from Puerto Rico (that falls under the jurisdiction of the United States), Costa Rica and Mexico are the only two countries in the region pursuing restrictive immigration policies (Durand & Massey 2010).

reform. Argentina, Costa Rica, Chile and Guatemala reviewed their asylum-granting processes, Ecuador passed a new migration law, and Mexico introduced a new regularization program. Readmission agreements and procedures are now in place between Colombia and Panama, and El Salvador and Ecuador respectively (UNHCR 2010).

3.1. Extra-regional immigration: a regional headache

When comparing the data of extra-continental immigration presented at the OAS conference in April 2010 with intra-regional flows, the heightened interest and restrictive reactions of the regions' governments is somewhat puzzling. The 409 African asylum applications Colombia and Ecuador received appear negligible compared to the 31,222 Colombians seeking asylum in Ecuador in the same year. Costa Rica detained 87, and Mexico 765 irregular African immigrants, while the aggregated detention data of Mexico ranged at 69,033, and Costa Rica turned away 35,934 at their borders in the same year. The 147 residencies granted to African immigrants in Argentina in 2009 compare to an overall immigrant population of 1.4 million. Why do Latin American countries care about the mere 'trickles' of African immigration?

Three themes stand out of this list of preoccupations discussed at the CEAM workshop: *immigration control, security concerns* and *migration in the context of international relations*. 1. With a view to immigration control, Latin American governments see the new irregular inflows from Africa and Asia as problematic because they seem to escape their political control. 2. These flows further raise security concerns because of their connection to criminal smuggling and trafficking networks. 3. Lastly, extra- continental immigration seems to matter in Latin American – US relations, because an important share of immigrants are seen as 'misusing' Latin American refugee systems to eventually reach the United States or Canada. A further challenge mentioned by officials of the Argentine and Mexican migration departments is the difficulty to establish bilateral cooperation or repatriation agreements with countries of origin and transit, given the low levels of diplomatic representation of Latin American countries in Africa and Asia and vice versa.[14]

Apart from the concerns raised by Latin American government officials, the heightened interest of the regions' governments and international organizations in relatively small flows suggests that a) the overall inflows of Africans and Asians lie significantly above the official numbers presented in Washington, and/or b) these flows are expected to increase in the near future and thus pose a potential public policy challenge. Restrictive policy responses to relatively small extra-continental immigration are intriguing because they stand in sharp contrast to the liberalization wave of Latin American migration policy. Latin American countries historically promoted extra-continental immigration from northern Europe, and tried to deter inflows from Asian and African countries of origin. Their concerns about increasing inflows from Africa and Asia raise the question in how far Latin American immigration policy is still tainted by racist ideology today.

Migration policy is often defined by certain contradictions and discrepancies between domestic and international policy interests. An intriguing observation with a view to the discussion of potential policy at the CEAM workshop was the presentation of the Chief of

[14] The lack of Asian and African embassies or consulates complicated the process of issuing identification and traveling documents of irregular migrants for their return / repatriation.

Mission of IOM in Libya on migration management in the Mediterranean context. On a global scale – for example in the context of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) – Latin American countries stand united in the rejection of North American and European restrictive immigration policies, often denouncing human rights violations committed against their nationals abroad. Acosta (2011) sees this rejection of European closure towards external migration as a determinant of permissive immigration policies in the region. The fact that Latin American countries consider the adoption of policy implemented in the controversial context of Mediterranean immigration to Europe reveals the double standard that so often characterizes migration policy making.

The following sections will take a closer look at recent African immigration to Argentina and Mexico and policy responses to these flows. Argentina and Mexico are especially relevant case studies for three reasons. First, the two countries have recently experienced opposite shifts in broader immigration patterns. Argentina, traditionally the most important immigration country in the region, experienced a slight decrease of its immigrant stocks from 2000 to 2010, while Mexico's immigrant population almost doubled in the same period (INM 2011). Second, Argentina and Mexico have implemented very different immigration policies in the past decades. Lastly, the two countries face very different international pressures in the context of immigration policy making.

4. First case study: Senegalese asylum seekers in Argentina

According to the 2001 census, Argentina's immigrant population stood at 4.17 per cent. The final results of the 2010 census will be published in December 2011, but the World Migration Report 2010 (IOM 2010) estimates a decrease of Argentina's migrant population to 3.6 per cent of the total population (from roughly 1,540,000 to 1,449,000 people). After the decline of extra-continental European immigration in the mid 20th century, the inflow from neighboring countries (Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Brazil, and more recently Peru) significantly increased in the latter half of the century. A next wave of 'extra-continental immigration' to Argentina originated from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Republic (initiated through bilateral migration agreements) and Asia (the People's Republic of China, Korea and Japan) (Maffia 2010). In the 1990s African immigration to Argentina increased from Ghana, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali and Senegal amongst others (Zubrzycki & Agnelli 2009).

The 2001 census counted 1883 African-born people living in Argentina, the most important countries of origin being Egypt, Morocco and South Africa. According to Zubrzycki & Agnelli (2009) this data is completely out-dated, especially in the case of Senegalese immigrants. Data on asylum applications from 2004-2009 suggests that the current number of African nationals, including regular and irregular immigrants, presumably lies far above the official census results. In the six-year period, sub-Saharan African immigrants filed 978 out of a total of 3247 (UNHCR Online Database) asylum applications in Argentina. Senegalese immigrants made 80 per cent of these claims. In recent years, the Argentine migration department called for policy action against the abuse of their asylum system by African economic migrants in general, and Senegalese nationals in particular (DNM 2011). In the 2004-2009 period, only 9.4 per cent of the African asylum claims resulted in the granting of

refugee status. The positive outcomes were especially low in the case of the Senegalese (2.57 per cent).

AFRICAN ASYLUM APPLICATIONS 2004-2009:

COUNTRIES	TOTAL ASYLUM APPLICATIONS (2004-2009)	TOTAL REFUEE STATUS GRANTED (2004-2009)	TOTAL APPLICATIONS DENIED (2004-2009)
IVORY COAST	39	22	0
CAMEROON	34	7	9
GHANA	39	20	11
NIGERIA	88	23	18
SENEGAL	778	20	764

Source: DNM 2011

According to the DNM and the study of Senegalese immigrants by Zubrzycki & Agnelli (2009), most of the recent African immigrants and asylum seekers in Argentina are young males who move towards Argentina for economic reasons. Some couldn't find work back home, and others came to improve their, or their family's standard of living. The majority of Senegalese immigrants in Argentina work as street venders and almost all send remittances back home (ibid). The most common migration route is the legal entry with tourist visas into Brazil and then crossing the Argentine border without the obligatory documentation on buses to Buenos Aires. Their entry thus remains undocumented. It is highly unlikely that all Senegalese immigrants claim asylum. The total number of Senegalese must lie significantly above official estimates.[15]

4.1. Argentine policy reactions to recent African immigration

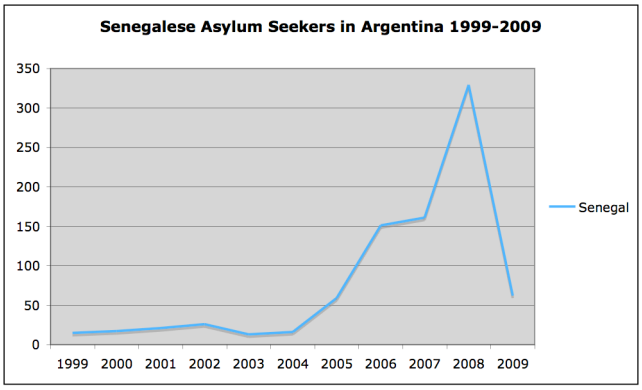
Historically, Argentina tried to keep its immigration European, at times even driving an openly racist agenda.[16] The restrictive migration law that was passed under military dictator Jorge Rafael Videla in 1981 was in place until a surprisingly permissive law, Law 25.871, was introduced under president Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) in 2004.[17] Maffia (2010) and Acosta (2011) argue that the new experience of mass emigration led to the Argentine government reforming their immigration law in order to act as a role-model for the kind of treatment they expect European governments to offer Argentine nationals abroad. Argentina experienced emigration crises after its financial collapse in 2001, when the country documented a net emigration of 80.000 a year, mostly 'loosing' the young and well-educated middle-class (Maffia 2010).

Since 2004, the Argentine government grants all immigrants (including irregular migrants) certain rights, such as the access to education, health care, and the right to claim outstanding wages (Acosta 2011; Nicolao 2008). Law 25.871 furthermore recognizes the "right to migrate as essential and inalienable to all persons and the Republic of Argentina shall

[15] The residential concentration of Senegalese in the neighborhood of *Onze* Buenos Aires has even led to its new nickname 'Le petit Dakar' (Reuters 2010).
[16] The influential positivist thinker and seventh President of the Republic of Argentina, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888), claimed that the racial inferiority of the mixture of Indian, African and Mediterranean people had caused Latin America's lack of development. Progress, so he believed, depended on 'improving' Argentina's racial make-up through immigration from northern Europe. Such racial ideology influenced much of Argentina's later migration policies.
[17] The law was modified by a regulation in 2010.

guarantee it based on principles of equality and universality" (Acosta 2011: 14). Even irregular immigrants can easily obtain temporary work visas shortly after arriving and renew them every three months (Reuters 2009). Officials working in education and health care centers ought to advise irregular migrants how to legalize their status (Acosta 2011).[18] The social integration of irregular African migrants is further facilitated by the growing Argentine civil society and NGO sector. Catholic charities in Buenos Aires offer migrants Spanish lessons (as Christian charities in the United States offer Latino immigrants English lessons).

Notwithstanding the advancement Law 25.871 made with a view to legalizing and integrating migrants into Argentine society, Pacecca & Courtis (2008) argue that the regularization processes comprised in the 2004 law are practically inaccessible to the majority of migrants due to the documentation required and the high costs involved. Regularization benefits are limited to intraregional migrants, not including extra-continental immigrants from Asia and Africa. Immigrants who entered Argentina illegally – which applies to the majority of African immigrants - cannot regularize their situation, unless they can claim family reunification or refugee status (Acosta 2011). With the significant increase of Senegalese irregular immigration and a surge in Senegalese asylum applications in recent years, Argentina now seeks to impede the 'exploitation' of its asylum system by irregular African immigrants.



Data source: UNHCR online database

The above graph shows the sharp rise of Senegalese asylum applications from 2004 to 2008, followed by a steep decline in 2009. Federico Agusti, director of international and social affairs of the Argentine migration department (DNM), claims that the decline in applications mirrored the effectiveness of a more restrictive policy implementation. Such measurements included the prosecution of human smugglers, a better coordination of the activities of the DNM and the Argentine gendarmerie and corps of border guards (*Gendarmería Nacional Argentina*, GNA), better coordination with the UNHCR and the Argentine and Brazilian foreign ministries, and faster processing of asylum applications. However, a decrease in asylum applications does not necessarily imply a decrease in the inflows from Senegal. The reform of the asylum-granting process might have resulted in potential Senegalese asylum seekers remaining in the country as irregular migrants. Senegal has no consulate in Argentina, which makes the repatriation of irregular Senegalese immigrants very difficult.

[18] A complementary regularization program legalized around 12.000 foreigners (75% of which were Chinese citizens) in 2004. The related program 'Patria Grande' furthermore facilitated the regularization of 445.580 migrants from MERCOSUR and its associate states (Acosta 2011).

5. Second case study: African transmigrants in Mexico

In the past decade, Mexico experienced a reverse migration transition. The proportion of Mexico's immigrant population almost doubled from 0.5 per cent in 2000, to 0.9 per cent of the total population in 2010.[19] US-Americans make up the largest immigrant group in Mexico, followed by Guatemalans, who were granted refugee in the 1980s and 90s on a large scale (INM 2009). In the past decade, South American immigration, e.g. from Argentina after the 2001 crisis, has also increased. Mexico is also experiencing a growing inflow of Asians and Africans with the purpose of establishing permanent residence. The numbers of Asians issuing immigrant (FM2) and non-immigrant (FM3) visas en Mexico surpasses the number of African applicants by far (6630 Asian applications versus 314 applications issued by Africans in 2010).

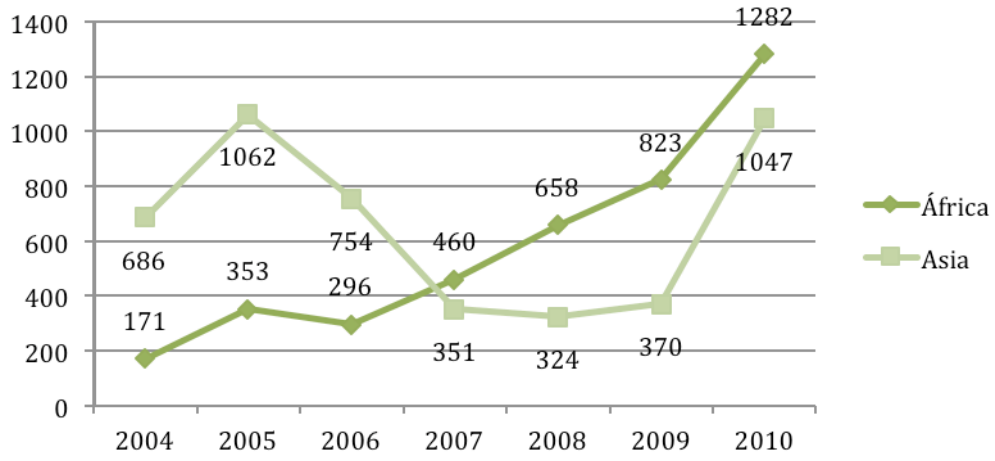
MEXICAN IMMIGRANT POPULATION 1950-2010:

	1950	1970	1990	2000	2010
Immigrant Population	106,015	192,208	340,824	492,617	961,121
Percentage of Total Population	00.4	00.4	00.4	00.5	00.9

Data source: INEGI 2011

Apart from immigration to Mexico with the purpose of temporary or permanent residence, international organizations and NGOs estimate that up to 400,000 irregular immigrants try to cross Mexico each year with the intention of reaching the United States (Melamed 2011). In recent years, the African proportion in these flows has been steadily increasing. The number of Africans detained without the necessary documentation has been steadily growing in recent years and exceeds detentions of Asian nationals since 2007. These figures show that irregular African immigration - most probably transmigration with the purpose of reaching the United States (CEAM 2010; INM 2011) outnumbers regular African immigration by far 314 visa applications versus 1282 detentions in 2010).

AFRICANS AND ASIANS DETAINED BY MEXICAN AUTHORITIES 2004 – 2010:



Fuente: Centro de Estudios Migratorios del Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2011

[19] The World Migration Report (IOM 2010) estimated Mexico's immigrant population at only 726,000 in 2010.

Taken together African and Asian transmigration is still very small compared to similar flows from Central America (64,271 out of 69,903 detentions in Mexico in 2010 were Central American nationals). Nevertheless, the increase of African detentions by more than 650 per cent from 2004 – 2010 clearly speaks to the new and growing phenomenon of African transmigration.

Interviews conducted by the Mexican migration department (INM) indicate that many Africans spent between one and six months to reach Mexico (INM 2011). Many first traveled to Europeby air, sea or land. From there they took flights to the Caribbean or Central America (the INM names Cuba, Brazil and Ecuador as the main ports of entry). They then reached Mexico via land from Guatemala or Belize, most often with the help of human smugglers. These accounts point to different factors. First, irregular African migrants to Mexico are not the 'poorest of the poor'. On the contrary, their lengthy journeys cost them thousands of US $. Second, globally interconnected human smuggling networks are likely to play a similarly important role as in the case of Senegalese migration to Argentina. Lastly, it seems counter-intuitive that irregular migrants would leave Europe once they successfully entered. This suggests that socio-political closure towards African immigrants *within* European countries might be more significant than *external* border enforcement policies.

5.1. Mexican policy reactions to recent African immigration

For the longest time, Mexico's migration policy has been characterized by an apparent contradiction between officially demanding the US government to implement more permissive policies and the regularization of Mexican nationals residing in the United States, and the 'criminalization' of immigrants (Hinojosa 2009) on their own territory. Mexico's restrictive migration policy has been heavily influenced by bilateral cooperation initiatives with the United States such as *'Plan Sur'* (2001) and the *'Mérida Initiative'* (2008) Before the enacting of a new migration law *('Ley de Migración')* in late February 2011, Mexican migration policy was officially regulated by the general population law *('Ley General de Población')*. Irregular immigration was rated as a felony that could be penalized with various years of imprisonment. The Mexican senate claims that the new law de-criminalizes irregular migrants and better guarantees their human rights. Many NGOs, however, claim that the law rather strengthens the rights of the police force in combating irregular immigration (Melamed 2011).

The Mexican immigration department stresses that the detention procedure of African irregular migrants is exactly the same as for any other national entering Mexico without the obligatory documentation. In theory, irregular immigrants are detained in detention centers and offered legal assistance while their regularization or repatriation process is initiated. Similarly to the case of Senegalese immigrants in Argentina, Mexican officials are confronted with the lack of diplomatic missions of African countries, which often impedes successful repatriation. In 2009, Mexican authorities detained 823 African immigrants, but only repatriated 17. In 2010, the ratio of repatriations stood at 22/1282, or 1.7 per cent. As a means of comparison, 69 903 Central Americans were detained in 2010 and 63342 (90 per cent) repatriated.

According to UNHCR standards, refugee status can be granted to nationals of Angola, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and Liberia (INM 2011). The 1282 African detentions in 2010 included 723 Eritreans, 311 Somalis, 1 Sudanese and 4 Liberians. In 2009, there were only 4 Angolans, 4 Eritreans, 2 Somalis and 8 Sudanese refugees living in Mexico (2010 not yet available). The INM (2011) explains this numeric discrepancy with the observation that in many instances irregular African immigrants had no desire to start their regularization process in Mexico, even if they could claim refugee status under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. According to the INM, their declared interest was to reach the United States or Canada. According to Mexican law, irregular migrants cannot be detained for more than 90 days. In cases where neither a repatriation nor regularization process can be initiated, the INM releases African migrants, requesting them to leave the country via a court order. Such procedure enables them to reattempt an illegal border crossing to the United States. This policy is very surprising against the backdrop of previous migration policy that was heavily influenced by US security concerns. [20]

6. Conclusion

Preliminary research suggests that the expansion of African migration to Latin America is determined by a combination of three different types of factors: first, continuous *push-factors* out of Africa, second, the *migration constraint* of increasingly restrictive European and US-American immigration policies and third, *the pull-factors* of a. relatively high levels of development and wages, and b. permissive immigration policies of some Latin America countries. Permissive Latin American immigration policies can function as a pull-factor in at least two ways. In combination with economic opportunities in the country of reception, permissive policies function as a pull-factor for immigration with the objective of more permanent settlement and socio-economic integration. In the context of political migration constraints but strong economic pull-factors of neighboring countries, permissive policies function as a pull-factor for transmigration.

Available data suggests that the introduction of permissive policies in Argentina in 2004 functioned as a pull-factor for Senegalese immigration. Until 2008, many of these migrants filed asylum claims when detected by Argentine authorities. An emerging Senegalese migrant network facilitates their socio-economic integration as street vendors. The data also suggests that more restrictive policies introduced in 2008 to stop the 'misuse' of the Argentine asylum system, have led to the reduction of Senegalese asylum claims. In how far such policies were effective in reducing immigrant *inflows* from Senegal leaves room for future research. Assuming that the liberalization of their immigration policy was influenced by the wish to clearly distinguish their policies from the European political closure towards external immigrants, the legal exclusion of Africans from benefits related to the 2004 law points to the contradictory interests driving migration policy. Given the long history of Argentine immigration policy that was tainted by racist ideology raises the question in how far such thinking still has an - at least covert - influence on migration policy making.

[20] Against the backdrop of the no visa policy of Central American countries towards Mexico, the proposal of issuing special transit visas for Central American transmigrants is currently discussed in the Mexican Senate (INM 2011). With a view to US-Mexican relations, this debate is perhaps even more surprising.

In the case of East African migration to Mexico, relative permissiveness functions as a pull-factor for migrants who do not endeavor to stay in Mexico, but hope to reach the United States. Mexican immigration policy thus functions as a pull-factor in combination with US-American political migration constraints but strong economic pull-factors. Mexico seems to be less concerned with specifically addressing the inflow of new African immigration. This might be due to the fact that very few Africans show intend of settling in Mexico and rather try to reach the United States. Any Mexican policies towards African immigrants have to be viewed in the context of Mexico's recent migration reform and the conflict-laden US-Mexican 'cooperation' on migration. This case study thus points to the importance of understanding the interconnectivity of global migratory systems for any analysis of the 'effectiveness' or impact of national migration policy.

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