

African employment in Iberian construction: a cross-border analysis

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Abstract *International labour immigration into Southern Europe has been highlighted as a main migration trend in Europe since the mid-1980s. Yet little research has been done on specific labour market processes that 'allow' immigrants to find work in the context of high European unemployment. More than 'absolute' labour shortages, it seems that immigrants fill the 'holes' in labour supply that home populations have left. This article explores this issue for the construction sectors in Portugal and Spain. Construction is a key industry for both economies and one that employs substantial numbers of African workers. Yet its structure varies considerably depending on national economic circumstances. This in turn affects African labour outcomes. These outcomes are examined here through the analysis of in-depth interviews with African employees and employers in Girona (Spain), and Algarve and Setúbal (Portugal). The cross-border comparison reveals a different role being played by immigrants in the construction industry on either sides of the border. Construction is thus the main employer of African males in Portugal providing jobs for immigrants throughout their working lives in the country, but it plays a more marginal role for Africans in Spain. The Girona survey clearly shows that construction offers unskilled work on a temporary basis to immigrants, even subjected to local variations in labour demand. Unlike in Spain, Africans in Portugal secure skilled manual jobs in construction. A main reason for this is the unattractiveness of construction for non-immigrant white workers due to low wages and high levels of casual work within the sector. The article concludes that the Portuguese and Spanish construction markets operate in ways that are consistent with segmentation labour market theories. In the case of Spain, segmentation occurs by type of work, with Africans being placed in a clearly-defined niche of unskilled, manual, short-term jobs. In Portugal, the whole construction sector appears to be an immense 'reservoir' of unstable, low-paid work left behind by white native workers.*

KEYWORDS: LABOUR MARKETS; SPAIN; PORTUGAL

International immigration into southern Europe has been highlighted as a main migration trend in Europe since the mid-1980s (e.g. King et al. 1997; Montanari and Cortese 1993; Salt 1992). Interpretative approaches of this trend have generally focused on exploring reasons for international migration turnaround. This has commonly been explained as being a result of a combination of push and pull factors, alongside other circumstances, such as geographical or cultural proximity (e.g. King and Rybaczuck 1993; Pugliese 1993). Recent research has argued that there is demand for immigrant labour in southern Europe owing to labour shortages that are not filled by nationals (e.g. Huntoon 1998, Mendoza 1999a). Labour shortages are, at least, unexpected as there are very substantial reserves of employable labour power, that greatly exceed any short-term demo-

graphic deficiencies (as shown by Coleman 1992). More than 'absolute' labour shortages, it can be argued that immigrants in Europe are now called upon to fill the gaps in labour supply that home populations have left.

Certainly labour shortages vary by country. For instance, whereas labour shortages are frequent in Spanish agriculture (e.g. Avellá Reus 1991; Cruces Roldán and Martín Díaz 1997; Moreno Torregrosa 1993), this is not the case for Portugal where the presence of immigrant workers in farming is almost non-existent (Esteves 1991; Mendoza 1999b). Yet migration literature generally considers southern Europe (i.e. Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain) as a relatively homogeneous European geographical region (or at least one sharing remarkably common features). However differences in the labour markets of these countries are substantial (e.g. unemployment rates, labour market regulations). Whether differences in labour market trends in turn provoke dissimilarities in patterns of labour migration is however an open question. Yet what seems clear is that more detailed research is needed in order to understand the labour market mechanisms that 'allow' immigrants to find work in specific national contexts.

For Portugal and Spain, the literature on immigration is dominated by statistical accounts of immigrant characteristics. Mostly these accounts are based on official sources, such as the census or residential permit data (e.g. Blanco Fernández de Valderrama 1993; Esteves 1991; Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos 1996) or on survey results (e.g. França 1992, Gozálviz Pérez 1995; Mendoza 1997). Yet, with the exception of Spanish farming (e.g. Giménez Romero 1992; Hoggart and Mendoza 1999), little attention has been paid to the role immigrants play in specific economic sectors. This is unfortunate, since the dynamics of an economic sector are linked in different ways to the potential and actual usage of immigrant labour. Even within the same regional economy, the structure of work differs markedly across sectors or even industries. There are, for instance, uneven potentials for the mechanisation of work tasks, with employers often showing more willingness to invest in labour-saving devices in 'troublesome' periods; such as when labourers organise to demand better pay and working conditions (e.g. Guerin-Gonzales and Strikwerda 1998). If immigrant workers are used as 'cheap labour' to circumvent capital investment in productivity improvements, then it is likely to be acting as a deterrent to modernisation (which could create competition problems in the future). Yet such immigrant labour can avoid deflationary effects on the economy and stimulate further economic growth, as occurred in northern and central Europe in the 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. Kindleberger 1967).

That said, it must be noted that immigrant employment in southern European countries generally occurs in a high unemployment context (certainly higher than in the 1960s and early 1970s). The exception to the rule is Portugal whose labour market has stood out as having one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1997). Yet low unemployment rates in Portugal are partly the consequence of the still high (at least in comparative terms with other EU countries) emigration out-flows from the country (e.g. Baganha and Peixoto 1997; Pires 1999). This is especially visible in the construction sector for which labour shortages have been created as result of heavy emigration of Portuguese construction workers into central and northern Europe. Labour shortages in construction firms in Portugal have been filled in turn by African immigrants since the late 1960s (Carreira 1982; Saint Maurice and Pires 1989).

In selecting construction to examine immigrant employment, attention is being drawn to a key industry in both Portugal and Spain. For Portugal, in 1996 the sector was responsible for 32.4 per cent of inward investment, 7.5 per cent of total employment and 5.3 per cent of GDP (Baganha 1998). For Spain, construction accounted for 8.6 per cent of jobs and 7.8 per cent of GDP in the same year (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development 1998a). These figures are amongst the highest in the European Union (see United Nations 1997). One reason for this is that the construction work in Iberia has received a great impulse from EU structural funds, much of it is directed at large infrastructure public works. This temporarily increased the need for labour in the sector (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1998b; Salmon 1995). It is also the case that for Portugal, European integration, particularly after the reunification of Germany, has boosted the construction sector due to its high comparative competitive advantage based on low wages. Thus, within the EU context, Portuguese construction firms have resorted to sending abroad their (formally-hired) workers, when using informal hiring and sub-contracting in Portugal. This strategy has served to drive abroad several thousand Portuguese workers each year, reducing in this way the available domestic labour force in the country (Baganha 1998).

A further dimension that should be taken into account when observing the construction sector is firm size. Indeed, while it is mainly large companies that undertake these infrastructure projects, across Europe as a whole the construction industry is dominated by small- to medium-sized firms (Chapman and Grandjean 1991; Hillebrandt 1985). In this regard it has been calculated that 97 per cent of construction units in the EU have less than 20 employees and 93 per cent less than 10 employees (European Commission 1997). This dominance by smaller firms is important in the context of segmentation theory ideas, for larger, usually more capital-intensive firms have been associated with more regular production and more stable demand for employees than small, less labour-intensive companies (Reich et al. 1973). It follows that capital-intensive firms are more generally associated with jobs in primary labour markets, whereas smaller construction firms more commonly generate jobs in secondary labour markets (Berger and Piore 1980). Linking this divide to immigrant employment experiences in regions as far apart as Spain and California, Mendoza (1999a) and Cornelius (1998) have concluded that immigrants are largely found in secondary labour markets. For Spanish labour markets, Mendoza (1999a) found that immigrants were largely found in small- to medium-sized firms within respectively farming, construction, and the accommodation/restaurant industry. For California, using a similar cross-sectoral analysis, Cornelius (1998) revealed that immigrant-dependent firms were likely to be smaller in size and more labour-intensive than non-immigrant ones. In both cases, even if these small firms were in sound economic shape, wages were notably lower than those offered by larger companies.

From a theoretical point of view, incorporation of immigrants in host labour markets has been analysed from two contrasting perspectives on occupational mobility. According to human capital theory, which is based on neo-classical economic postulates, attainments in labour markets are related to immigrants' prior human capital endowments (e.g. education, job experience), as well as investment in destination-specific human capital improvements (Bauer and Zimmermann 1994; Borjas 1982). By contrast, a segmentation theory perspective

would argue that labour markets are divided, so access to jobs with better pay and working conditions is restricted to workers who are distinguished by class, ethnicity, age or gender (e.g. Burchell and Rubery 1994; Doeringer and Piore 1971; Reich et al 1973). Following this line of thought, immigrants occupy the least desirable, unstable, short-term jobs (Piore 1979; Portes 1981). In this regard, compared with Spain, the longer Portuguese tradition of immigrant labour should provide a more favourable context for immigrant employment. As such, assuming equal positions on entry into Iberia, workers from African-speaking countries (PALOP) in Portugal have had more opportunity to enhance their human capital within local labour market contexts than Moroccans, Senegalese or Gambians in Spain, since labour trajectories in a host country may facilitate job promotion through the acquisition of new job skills. This is at least an assumption shared by neo-classical approaches on labour immigration (e.g. Borjas 1982; Chiswick 1978). The counter-argument to this point is that, if African-born workers are similarly placed in their work contexts, regardless of their initial human capital endowments or the subsequent enhancement of such assets, then the segmentation thesis is applicable to the role of immigrants in labour markets in Iberia.

Yet, rather than pure labour mechanisms arising from a supply-demand balance, the 'need' for immigrants in Iberia also appears to be related to social considerations. Certainly, employment situations have to be seen as socially regulated rather than simply a market relationship (e.g. Granovetter 1985; Portes 1995). Amongst these social considerations, the literature mentions the prominence of 'undesirable' work environments, owing to the dynamism of informal economic activities (e.g. Lobo 1985; Martínez Veiga 1989), the importance of small-scale enterprises (e.g. Vale 1991; Vázquez-Barquero 1992), and higher educational attainment by young people, which has led to a rejection of socially 'unacceptable' types of work on the part of native Spanish workers (e.g. Huntoon 1998; King et al. 1997).

It is also the case that acceptance of new foreign workers (or even the patterns of incorporation of these new workers) in a host labour market is clearly related to political considerations. In this regard, literature commonly recognises that there is a more 'open' attitude toward labour immigration under Portuguese law than is found in most EU countries. It has also been argued that the enforcement of Portuguese immigration laws is dominated by a *laissez faire, laissez passer* principle (e.g. Eaton 1996; Marie 1996). In line with this, comparing Portugal and Spain, Mendoza (2000) has showed that whereas the Portuguese legislative framework puts constraints on entry (through visa requirements), Spanish immigration laws put constraints on both the entry and stay of immigrants. For instance, once visa procedures are overcome, immigrants can move freely in Portuguese labour markets both in terms of geographical and occupational mobility. This does not apply to Spain (Mendoza 2000). Moreover, Eaton (1996) and Baganha et al. (2000a) have argued that expulsion for unlawful stay in Portugal has been numerically insignificant, despite the growing numbers of illegally resident immigrants in the country from the 1980s onwards. This is another main difference with Spain where expulsion has been systematically enforced since the 1985 Foreigners' Act (e.g. Costa-Pau 1995). The more 'relaxed' (at least in comparative terms) Portuguese immigration policies could certainly create a less hostile labour market for immigrant employment.

The Portuguese stance in this respect may be related to the fact that the bulk

of non-EU immigrants came (and still comes) from the ex-Portuguese colonies. In effect labour immigration from African colonies into Portugal started in the late 1960s. Yet inflows from Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) were at their peak in the refugee crisis (*retornados*) that occurred in the aftermath of the independence of the colonies in the period 1974–81 (Carreira 1982; Esteves 1991; Saint Maurice and Pires 1989). Illustrating the relevance of inflows from Africa during and after the de-colonisation process, census data show that 505,079 residents in Portugal in 1981 lived in one of the African ex-colonies in 1973. This constituted 5.1 per cent of the total Portuguese population in 1981 (Pires et al. 1987). As 60 per cent of these half million individuals had been born in Portugal (Pires et al. 1987) (along with the '*jus sanguinis*' rule which is dominant in Portuguese law, Ministério da Administração Interna 1995), it is reasonable to argue that the bulk of these *retornados* never lost their Portuguese nationality. However, alongside this population of Portuguese origin, substantial (yet less numerous) inflows of Africans with no previous family link with Portugal came into the country (Dubois 1994). Members of this last group, as well as African-born immigrants of no Portuguese ancestors who were already residents in Portugal in 1974, were not automatically granted nationality, according to the 1975 Nationality Act.¹ In this way, the 1975 Nationality Act created, with retroactive effect, the largest immigrant community in Portugal (Esteves 1991; Pires 1999). From the 1980s, with the abandonment of any reference to the '*jus soli*' principle in the new 1981 Nationality Act, immigration from PALOP countries into Portugal recovered its original labour flavour of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Baganha and Peixoto 1997; Saint-Maurice and Pires 1989). These three clearly distinctive periods in Portuguese immigration (before 1974, 1974–81 and after 1981) make it difficult to classify all African-born people in a loose category of immigrants. Certainly African-born white descendants of Portuguese extraction would rarely recognise themselves as 'immigrants' in Portugal.

Problems of categorising 'immigrants' in Portugal have often been discussed in literature. Machado (1994) proposed distinguishing immigrants from Portuguese Africans (*lusó-africanos*). According to this author, Portuguese Africans are both the African-born Portuguese nationals who moved into Portugal in the aftermath of the de-colonisation period and PALOP second generations. These two groups share two trends that make them distinct from the immigrants: they are adapted to Portuguese society and Portuguese Africans do not see return migration as a valid future project (Machado 1994). Echoing methodological problems of classifying immigration, the Portuguese report of a recent comparative cross-European study acknowledged difficulties in applying to Portugal the 'immigrant' and 'ethnic minority' categories that were proposed in the European project (Baganha et al. 2000b). Instead, recognising that the term overlaps with immigrants, they defined 'ethnic minorities' as

those groups of people who, owing to their visibility and spatial concentration in run-down suburban areas, are referred to as ethnic minorities in the media, in academic works, and included in a number of public and semi-public programmes aimed at social inclusion. (Baganha et al. 2000b: 54)

Thus defining 'immigrants' or 'ethnic minorities' comes as a clear conceptual problem in immigration or ethnic studies in Portugal.

By contrast Moroccan immigration into Spain remained numerically low until the mid-1980s, with inflows in the 1960s being dominated by Jewish migration

(Colectivo IOÉ 1994). Rather than a final destination, Spain was generally considered a transit country to other Western or Central European nations until the mid-1980s (e.g. Colectivo IOÉ 1987; Izquierdo 1992). In this way it is understandable that official statistics only recorded 4,067 legal Moroccans for the whole of Spain in 1980 (compared to 77,189 in 1996, Instituto Nacional de Estadística annual). Nowadays Moroccans are the main immigrant group, clearly above the British who rank second (see the series of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística annual, Comisión Interministerial de Extranjería annual or Dirección General de Migraciones annual). Unlike Portugal, Spain attracts immigrants from a considerable range of countries, some of them with no previous colonial links with the country (e.g. Gambia, Senegal, India; see King et al. 1997; Solana and Pascual de Sans 1994). In the case of Morocco, it is relevant to notice previous colonial links with the northern part of the country (Rif) which was under Spanish control until Moroccan independence in 1956. Yet the low scale of Moroccan immigration in Spain until the mid-1980s, plus the fact that current streams are diversified in their origin and not restricted to the old Spanish protectorate, point to a scarce influence of old colonial links on patterns of Moroccan immigration into Spain (Mendoza 1998). This is the reason why Moroccans, Senegalese and Gambians (the main African nationalities living in Girona) are included here in the category 'African (or African-born) workers or immigrants'. In this context, generally speaking, the term 'immigrant' is appropriate for Africans working in Spain.

Differences in the character of African inflows into Portugal and Spain brought about difficulties when defining the selected group of study, since the project proposed a comparative research survey on Portugal and Spain. Two surveys were carried out, the first on African-born workers and the second on employers. With respect to the African-born workers, interviews were conducted with 151 immigrants in Spain between July and December 1995. For Portugal, 69 African-born workers were interviewed in Portugal in the period January to June 1996. The sampling procedure used was snowballing. It should be acknowledged that selecting African-born workers in Portugal was a matter of controversy. In this regard, a pilot survey showed that African-born people living in Setúbal run-down areas share similar disadvantages in labour markets and housing, regardless of year of arrival or nationality (plus the fact that occasionally legal status was not clear from information provided by the interviewees). Thus no distinctions were made between Portuguese Africans or PALOP immigrants in the survey (obviously nationality and year of arrival are variables in the questionnaire). Moreover, for the survey as a whole, differences in incorporation of African-born workers in the Portuguese labour market were more related to years of schooling than to years of residence in Portugal or legal status (Mendoza 2000). Not denying the relevance of ethnicity or cultural aspects, this article approaches the incorporation of African-born workers into construction from the labour market perspective.

In Portugal, interviews were conducted in Algarve and the Península de Setúbal region. For Spain, fieldwork was carried out in the Catalan province of Girona.² This started with interviews with key informants in both Portugal and Spain. In all, 15 key informants (from immigrant groups, local social services agencies, trade unions and employers' organisations) provided information in Portugal and 20 in Spain. They provided links to the first African-born worker interviewees (in some cases municipal governments provided lists taken from

local registration information, although others would or could not provide such lists). The interviewees then provided contacts with other African-born workers living nearby. Basically interviews focussed on worker labour trajectories and education, life-cycle considerations as well as residential status in the host country. The semi-open nature of the questionnaire allowed interviewees to explain in detail changes in both occupational and geographical mobility, skill acquisition and educational attainment. Backing immigrant interviews, an employer survey was conducted in Girona, Algarve and Setúbal in July–October 1997. A total of 32 interviews were completed with employers in agriculture, construction and accommodation in Girona (all interviews are relevant for this study, as some farm employers ‘hired-out’ their African employees to construction firms for periods of time). For Portugal, a total of 20 interviews were carried out with employers in the construction and accommodation sectors.

This article is structured in three parts. The first presents an analysis of the survey results of a cross-border comparative exercise. Here main trends in incorporation of African-born workers in Portuguese and Spanish construction are contrasted. A major difference is the fact that, unlike Spain, the bulk of the interviewed African-born workers have only been employed in construction through their work trajectory in Portugal. This is a relevant point since Africans have on average longer periods of stay in Portugal than their counterparts in Spain. The second part focuses specifically on Portugal. Here two representative case studies of African-born construction workers are described. Issues of skill acquisition, promotion and work casualisation are observed by examination of the interviewees’ professional careers which, in turn, are heavily affected by major structural changes in construction. By contrast, inter-mobility is far more frequent in Spanish construction. In the third part, which focuses on Spain, it is argued that uneven patterns of incorporation of immigrants in Girona construction are related to locational effects associated with different employment structures. Due to the unstable patterns of employment within the construction sector, the analysis concentrates on the incorporation of African-born workers from the point of view of employers. This is complemented with information from interviews with African immigrants (rather than selecting case studies). In conclusion, I discuss the relevance of human capital and segmentation theories for explaining African labour outcomes in Iberian construction. Following human capital postulates, the article explores the extent to which construction workers can utilise human capital endowments to move up the occupational ladder. On the other hand, in line with segmentation theory, it is also argued that the (longer-term) labour market experiences of Portuguese Africans are indicative of a ‘rigidly’ segmented labour market structure in the sense that they are found in secondary labour markets, regardless of their year of arrival.

African-born workers in Iberian construction

Even a glimpse of construction sites in the region of Lisbon or Algarve communicates the impression that African-born workers (or their descendants) comprise a significant element in the sector’s labour force. As said before, employment of Africans from the (ex-)Portuguese colonies in construction has been well-documented in the literature, with the first immigrants coming to the country in the late 1960s (Carreira 1982; Saint-Maurice and Pires 1989; Saint-Maurice 1995). At that time, this inflow was comprised of Africans from existing

colonies who were moving to the Portuguese mainland. Yet colonial independence did not stop this inflow. As extensively outlined in the literature, for older and more recent immigrants construction was (and is) the main employer of male immigrants (Baganha and Góis 1999; Corkill 1993; França 1992; Machado 1997). Official statistics also show that PALOP nationals (with the exception of Mozambique nationals) are mainly occupied as manual workers in manufacturing and construction (occupational codes 6/7/8, see Instituto Nacional de Estadística annual). For instance, for the period 1990–7, Baganha et al. (2000a) showed that 80 per cent of Cape Verdeans were employed in either manufacturing or construction as manual workers, compared to only 20 per cent of EU nationals. By contrast, in Spain, official statistics do not show construction to play a similar leading employment role for Africans. Nevertheless it is the third most important immigrant employment sector, after farming and the domestic sector, accounting for 14.7 per cent of the legally-resident African workers in 1996 (Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales annual). This figure is revealing when compared with the 10.2 per cent of the total Spanish working population employed in the construction sector in 1998 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística quarterly). In this regard, Portugal and Spain are similar to many EU countries, in which construction is a major employer of immigrants, although its role varies by country (Lebon 1986).

In line with other research, my Portuguese survey clearly points to construction as the main employer of male Africans in the country (while the domestic sector is the foremost employer of female PALOP immigrants, see also Esteves 1991 or Machado and Perista 1997). Indicative of the relevance of construction, more than half of the interviewed African-born males (18 out of 37) were employed in the sector. Moreover almost half of the remaining 19 declared that they occasionally worked in construction in their 'spare' time (e.g. holidays). Equally notable was the role of construction in the first jobs these workers had in Portugal, for 23 out of the 37 interviewed men were first employed in this sector. Revealing the strength of the sector as an employer of Africans, 10 of the 18 who had a construction job at the time of their interview had never worked in another sector in Portugal. This is a noteworthy finding, for most of these workers were long-term immigrants, with periods of residence in the host country of 10 or more years. Moreover, while two of the 18 were self-employed workers, 10 of the remaining 16 (i.e. the employees) said that African-born workers constituted more than half the workers on their present construction site. This over-representation is not repeated in Girona. Here just 21 out of the 151 interviewees worked in construction. The sector also has a lesser role as a source of first employment. The industry is more open to first immigrant jobs than manufacturing, but it has far fewer entering it than does the farming sector (out of 151 interviewed African workers, 22 declared that their first job was in construction, six in manufacturing and 67 in farming). Furthermore, the survey only found one person out of the 21 who was employed in a firm where immigrants made up more than 50 per cent of employees. Likewise, only one of the 21 who worked in construction when interviewed had spent the whole of his working life in Spain in that sector. That said, 62 of the 151 interviewees had worked in construction at some point while in the country. This is associated with a greater degree of inter-sectoral mobility in Spain, with immigrants hired for limited periods of intensive construction employment. By contrast, African-born immigrants find jobs in the sector throughout their labour force partici-

pation in Portugal. At least at the aggregate level, the cross-border comparison shows contrasting labour outcomes in the two countries.

Yet differences in immigrant labour outcomes across the border are not surprising, given differences in wages, with pay in construction above the Spanish average (see the biannual series of Banco Bilbao Vizcaya), but below the Portuguese one (at 89 per cent of the national average in 1993; Ministério do Emprego e da Segurança Social 1994). This helps put into context the reasons for the sector being more attractive to Spanish workers than to those in Portugal. Differences are even more striking if comparisons are made with wages elsewhere in Europe. Thus, the gross hourly earnings of a Portuguese construction worker was a third of that in France, a fourth of the Luxembourg or Dutch figure and less than a fifth of a West German scale in 1994 (Eurostat annual). Wage differentials are not restricted to construction, but embrace all economic fields. With the competitive position of Portuguese industries solidly grounded in cheap labour (Branco and Mello 1992), the reason why Portugal continues to lose its citizens through emigration becomes comprehensible (Poulain 1996; Simon 1991).

As well as wage differentials, immigrant hiring practices also vary across the border. Taking the number of 'permanent' contracts as an indicator of stable work, the majority of interviewed Africans in Girona had a precarious position in the construction industry. To be specific, 14 out of 21 who were in construction when they were interviewed had a temporary contract (with a further three having no contract, Table 1). This helps prompt inter-sectoral mobility, as workers commonly have to transfer to another sector at the end of their contract. For Portugal, despite stable demand for immigrant employment, the situation is even more precarious. Fully 14 of the 16 employees who were interviewed did not have a contract. This was clearly the rule, rather than the exception (Table 1). This is line with other survey data. For instance, a recent survey on the incorporation of PALOP immigrants in the Portuguese labour market found that

Table 1. *Job type and employment status of interviewed construction workers in Iberia*

Category	Portugal	Spain
Type of job		
Skilled	14	1
Unskilled	4	20
Employment status		
No contract	14	3
Temporary	1	14
Permanent	1	4
Self-employed	2	–
Total	18	21

Note: The unskilled jobs category includes labourers; while that of skilled jobs includes bricklayers, carpenters, locksmiths, plasterers, etc.

Source: Interview surveys.

the percentage of male immigrants working without contracts in the construction sector came to an astonishing 74 per cent (compared to 47 per cent for all male immigrants and 27 per cent for female immigrants, Baganha et al. 2000a).

Yet a closer look at informal work in Portuguese construction shows that amongst the 14 workers working without contracts, five were technically 'self-employed'. Admittedly, these persons were self-employed primarily for social security purposes,³ as they were really employees of a subcontractor (i.e. they were not employed for a specific task, but worked on a more 'permanent' basis for one employer). Only two 'real' self-employed workers were found in the Portuguese survey (i.e. they did not work for an employer, but dealt directly with clients for specific jobs). This is in line with the irregular practices described by Rodrigues (1992) in her analysis of Portuguese labour markets, as well as with a general growth of 'self-employment' in the construction industry (by 563.6 per cent in the period 1974–89; Pinto and Queiroz 1996). This picture helps explain Lobo's (1985) report of construction. This extensively showed that the sector provided occasional (undeclared) work for full-time manufacturing workers. Along the same lines, Baganha (1998) has calculated that undeclared workers constitute 45 per cent of all wage earners who declare that they work in construction.

This pattern of (immigrant) employment is linked to changes in Portuguese construction. In the period 1981–6, the housing sector was de-regulated, with a reduction of public housing construction and decisive support for expansion in private house building using low-interest credit to encourage house purchase (Ferreira 1988; Rodrigues 1984). According to interviewed employers, with some immigrant work histories confirming the change, these policy shifts were associated with a move toward subcontracting, i.e. passing economic risk onto smaller companies and workers (Rainbird 1991). At the time of my employer survey (July–October 1997), the major role of subcontracting in Portuguese construction was easily observable. Many of the construction firms with which I made contact were composed exclusively of administrative and clerical staff who supervised an array of small firms that specialised in part of the building process. Official data confirm the trend toward smaller firms in the sector. In 1980, Portugal had 14,009 firms in an industry that employed 221,000 people. By 1991, the number of employees had grown slightly (247,780), but the number of firms had doubled to 31,406 (United Nations 1997). In this context, it is perhaps no surprise that the Portuguese and Spanish surveys found African-born workers to be most likely to work for small companies. To be specific, 12 of 16 employees interviewed for this project in Portugal (and 18 out of the 21 in Spain) worked for firms with less than 20 workers. Probably because of an increase in subcontracting, at the height of Expo construction works in Lisbon, the media was full of reports about a lack of control over Portuguese construction firms, along with irregularities in hiring practices (e.g. Carvalho 1997; Expresso 1996; Jolliffe 1990). In line with this, employers made clear that many public works (e.g. roads) that are contracted to large construction firms are later subcontracted to a plethora of smaller firms. This practice is against the law (Pinto and Queiroz 1996), and highlights that the state does not even control its 'own' projects. In other words, a key factor in the process of casualisation and informality in construction employment is (poor) control of the Portuguese state over the industry. In line with this, Baganha et al. (2000b) have argued that the state is both tolerant and inefficient regarding control of the informal economy, being itself occasionally an informal employer.

A similar pattern was found in Britain over the 1970s and 1980s, when the de-regulation of the construction sector expanded self-employment and casualisation, alongside the proliferation of small firms and subcontracting (Ball 1978, 1988; Evans 1991). More evidence comes from Germany, where Koch (1991) showed that tight regulation of the sector (e.g. forbidding subcontractor chains) hindered the path toward casualisation. Had there been more rigorous control by the Portuguese state, the fragmentation of the construction industry, and the consequent increase in subcontracting and casualisation, would have been less pronounced. By contrast, the level of subcontracting and self-employment in Spanish construction has risen much less significantly. To be specific, subcontracting moved from accounting for 11 per cent of turnover in the industry in 1970 to 20 per cent in 1989 (Carreras Yáñez 1992), and was almost unchanged at 19 per cent by 1996 (Ministerio de Fomento 1997). As for self-employment, Carreras Yáñez (1992) showed that casual workers in construction rose from 15 per cent of the labour force in 1977 to 29 per cent in 1985, but had dropped to 21 per cent by 1990. Unlike the situation in Portugal, no self-employed immigrant workers were found in the Spanish survey.

Another point of difference was that skilled immigrant workers were scarcely present in Girona (only one construction worker could be classified as having received specific training for working in the sector). This point is even more relevant if we take into account that in this study only construction labourers were considered to be 'unskilled workers', with other jobs in the sector (e.g. bricklayers, plasterers) being classified as skilled. This raises the issue of differences in skills across the border, for the bulk of interviewed workers in Portugal were in skilled manual jobs (14 of the 18 interviewees). Yet the nature of the skills that African-born workers hold ranks low in terms of occupational attainment in the Portuguese industry. For instance, my survey did not find any African-born worker employed in non-manual jobs in Portuguese construction. Even so, the general picture of acquisition of skills by construction immigrant workers in Portugal seems to challenge general messages about segmentation theorists. According to this line of thought, immigrant workers tend to do unskilled, short-term jobs that carry inferior social status and offer few chances of advancement toward better paying or more attractive job opportunities (Piore 1979; Portes 1981). This is not really the case for Portuguese immigrant workers (at least in terms of professional attainment). Moreover, according to employers, Africans are not only employees, but also self-employed workers and subcontractors (even though no examples of this last group were identified in my survey).

At first this more diversified pattern of employment was thought to be related to the long labour trajectories of African-born workers in Portuguese construction, with upward mobility (even if this it is limited to manual jobs) associated with longer labour trajectories. In this regard, almost a third of the 69 interviewees arrived in Portugal before 1974, another third during the chaotic 1974–6 de-colonisation process and the remainder after 1976. It should be noted, though, that year of arrival in Portugal does not correspond with effective entry into labour markets, since a considerable proportion of those interviewed entered Portugal as either political refugees or as under-14 dependants. Readjusting the data in line with this consideration, entry into labour markets is somewhat later, with a third of those interviewed starting work in 1986 (the year of incorporation of the Iberian countries into the EU) and afterwards. Even taking this 'readjust-

ment' into account, this a key difference with Spain, where only a quarter of the sample had entered the country before 1986. Yet, for Portugal, a substantial length of time in the sector does not prevent casualisation (at least in terms of hired practices). Notable in this regard were eight of the 16 casual or self-employed workers who had voluntarily moved from permanent or temporary contractual work to their present informal status. Segmentation theories might suggest that secondary jobs do not result from employee choice but come from the nature of labour markets. From this, it is clear that further attention is needed to analyse relations between casualisation processes in construction and immigrant labour trajectories, with special emphasis on upward mobility, skill acquisition and the employment status of African-born workers in Portuguese construction over time. So far this has been shown through quantitative aggregated analysis of survey data. In order to understand how relevant educational attainment and labour market experiences are for an immigrant's position in the Portuguese construction sector, the next part of the article adopts a more qualitative stance.

The construction industry viewed through the life cycle of two workers in Portugal

It was suggested above that immigrant workers favoured transfer from regulated economy to irregular forms of work practice (e.g. irregular self-employment). Yet reasons for this remain intriguing. Clearly individual worker decisions are shaped by broader circumstances, such as the Portuguese employment context or the particular construction sector situation. Yet experienced immigrant workers may take advantage of their knowledge of labour markets (or of the host country) to move jobs in search of maximum profit for their skills or education (following a neo-classical line of thought). In order to tease out links between labour market structure and worker decision, two representative case studies of African inflows into Portugal are analysed in more detail. The first is that of Mr Moraes, an immigrant who entered the Portuguese labour market in the early 1970s, and has subsequently 'reacted' to changes in the sector. By contrast, Mr Lopes is a younger African-born person who started to work in Portuguese construction in the mid-1980s. As mentioned above, the legislative framework was substantially transformed from 1974 to the mid-1980s, which affected the structure of the construction sector in Portugal. Mr Lopes thus entered a substantially different construction sector from Mr Moraes. This, the year of entry to Portugal, and the moment of incorporation into construction, may well be key variables in terms of explaining differences in the men's labour market experiences. It was suggested above that such factors underlay differences in African labour outcomes between Portugal and Spain. Here this line of reasoning is taken further to explain dissimilarities in immigrant labour outcomes within Portuguese construction. The employment trajectory of an experienced, more established immigrant worker is contrasted with that of a younger construction employee to illustrate the argument.

Mr Moraes was born in what is now the Republic of Cape Verde in 1959. He defined his family as poor (in 1985 an estimated 42 per cent of the Cape Verdean population lived below the official 'poverty line' of \$170 per year, Reynolds 1990). When he was in primary school, he started work as a carpenter's assistant with his father. In the early 1970s, he moved to the Algarve with his father and

one brother. Their migration is not exceptional. As explained before, at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, Cape Verdean workers moved in large numbers to Portugal, especially to the Lisbon area and to the Algarve, where labour shortages resulted from Portuguese emigration to north-central Europe (e.g. Carreira 1982; Saint-Maurice 1995; Saint-Maurice and Pires 1989). Mr Moraes lived in the factory where his father worked for two years. In his first year in Portugal, he finished primary school. In his second year he started work as a construction worker on a hotel project in Algarve. To illustrate the working and living conditions of these workers in the mid-1970s, a spokesman of the Lisbon Construction Workers' Union described the general picture for Cape Verdean workers in the following way:

The Cape Verdean is subjected to exploitation [...]. They live in barracks built only for housing coloured workers, whereas it would be much better if whites and non-whites occupied the same type of accommodation. The employer class plays on this, having been made aware, especially after the 25 of April [the Carnation Revolution], of the risks that might be incurred if the two were closer to one another and could exchange views easily. As a typical example of [...] exploitation [...] when they want to go home they usually give notice that they want their accounts regulated before leaving and meantime book a place on the plane or boat. However, when they are ready to leave and go to see their employer, he replies that he does not have the money and cannot pay them. (Carreira 1982: 93–4)

In 1974 his family decided to move back to Cape Verde. Yet, within a short period, Mr Moraes opted to return to the Algarve on his own. Shortly after returning to Portugal, he took up residence in a shantytown on the Algarve. At the time of the interview he still lived in the same poor housing area. Paradoxically enough, despite the booming construction industry – which was mainly oriented toward new tourist accommodation in the region (e.g. Algarve's accommodation sector offered 6,905 beds in 1970 but 55,139 by 1988, Silva and Silva 1991) – shanty towns are part of the 'landscape' of many Algarve coastal municipalities (e.g. Bairro dos Pescadores on coastal Quarteira, situated close to the luxury resort Vilamoura). During his time in Algarve, Mr Moraes started cohabiting with a female partner. His partner is a Portuguese national from the Azores. He married her in 1996. Although he could obtain Portuguese nationality, as he has spent a long time living in the country, he has no intention of applying for it. He argued that his life would not change at all. They have two sons.

As soon as he returned from Cape Verde, he started work for a large construction firm, first as a labourer, later as a carpenter. He had a permanent contract for 15 years. This point is relevant as it fits a general pattern for African workers, with skilled manual work being obtained after the individual has gained experience in the Portuguese construction industry. Thus, my survey found that 12 out of the 14 skilled workers learned their skills in Portuguese construction, with a further two gaining their construction skills in their country of origin. Skill acquisition is very much oriented towards the host-society (rather than the result of skill transfer across borders). The phenomenon remains a consequence of great labour shortages in the sector that have arisen as a result of major emigration from Portugal. These shortages were noted during interviews by employers, who argued that the Lisbon area in particular had experienced a construction boom due to large building and infrastructure projects (see also *Expresso* 1996 or Associação de Empresas de Construção e Obras Públicas

1997). It is within this context that illegal recruitment of Angolans to meet shortfalls in construction has been reported in the media (Jolliffe 1990). A similar process was evident in Spanish farming. Here it was noticed that persistent abandonment of farm activities by native Spanish workers has caused great labour shortages in the sector. Farmers have thus to some extent been obliged to train immigrants in certain skilled activities (e.g. supervising tasks, Hoggart and Mendoza 1999).

In 1990, Mr Moraes quit his permanent job in a large firm for a casual job with a subcontractor. After two years, he accepted another job under the same working conditions (no contract, no social security), with a different subcontractor. The reason for moving from the formal to the informal economy was that higher wages were offered in the unregulated economy. The first subcontractor actually offered Mr Moraes the chance of being hired on a contract but he rejected the offer. A further seven interviewees emphasised that informal work relationships were preferable, mainly owing to the higher wages they could obtain. Net wages are certainly higher, as employers do not deduct taxes (and taxes are lower for self-employed workers). This is a relevant point since workers actually decide what kind of work practice they want to follow. However it might appear contradictory for workers to move voluntarily to casual patterns of employment. Mr Moraes (and others) threw light on this, holding that it was not difficult to find construction jobs in Portugal.

This pattern contrasts with that of Mr Lopes, who was born in São Tomé in 1968. In 1972, all his family moved from São Tomé to Portugal. After the independence of Portugal's colonies in 1975, Mr Lopes (and his family) took Cape Verdean nationality (his parents were originally from the islands), although he has never visited Cape Verde in his life. Since 1972, the family has lived in Setúbal, where his father's job is located. Mr Lopes did four years of compulsory schooling and started work in the construction sector in 1984 when he was 16. Since then, he has had just one year with a regular employment contract. His 16 years of employment have all been in construction, but for 15 of these years he has worked without a contract; despite frequent job changes from one subcontractor to another. For some subcontractors a condition for giving him employment was that he paid his own social contributions as they wished to declare him to be 'self-employed' (although he really was their employee). In this way, employers avoid legal problems, since workers are covered in case of illness or job casualties (for more information on Portuguese labour market regulations, see for instance Rodrigues 1992). As with Mr Moraes, Mr Lopes learned his skills as a carpenter while working in the industry as a construction labourer. At the time of this interview, he was out of work.

Mr Lopes has had an irregular employment trajectory, which has worked against the possibility of him becoming a Portuguese citizen, as he cannot demonstrate continuous legal work in the country for six years. Indeed, his five-year residence permit had expired at the time he was interviewed, as he could not demonstrate the soundness of his financial resources that was required to renew it (e.g. contracted work). His situation is not exceptional, for four of the 14 interviewed employees in construction were illegal residents at the time of their interview. These four made up more than half of the seven African workers in the Portuguese survey who did not have a residence permit. This suggests that illegal residence is common among construction workers (see also Baganha and

Góis 1999; Corkill 1993; França 1992; Machado 1997). It is certainly the case that the unstable legal situation of Mr Lopes hampered his mobility, since he argued that if he had Portuguese nationality he would leave Portugal for France, as his sister had managed to do. He knew that legal non-EU nationals could not work outside the country in which they have legal residence.

These two examples show the same labour market outcome, namely casual, skilled work with subcontractors and intra-sectoral mobility. This seems the rule for the bulk of the African-born individuals employed in the sector. The difference between these two cases lies in their contrasting personal circumstances. In the first case, Mr Moraes moved voluntarily from formal to informal work, preferring higher wages in the informal economy, and this did not cause any legal complications. Indeed, he believed that jobs in construction were readily open to him. Further, he reckoned that his personal circumstances would not change if he were to apply for Portuguese nationality. By contrast, the younger Mr Lopes who expressed his wish to emigrate elsewhere in Europe could not do so because of his irregular legal status. This irregular status was caused by his casual position in the labour market. In other words, his work status caused legal complications, as well as restrictions on his mobility. This less-experienced younger worker encountered further problems in finding work within the sector. In other words, even in the context of an oversupply of jobs in construction, there is a segment of workers that is pushed to the most unstable, undesirable fringes of the sector. This may suggest that the more diversified options currently available to trained, experienced workers in the Portuguese construction sector may well change if the labour context were to become more restricted.

What is distinctive about the construction sectors in Portugal and Spain is the much earlier availability of construction work for immigrants in Portugal, where such openings existed from the late 1960s as opposed to the mid-1980s in Spain. Immigrants have been able to learn skills in the Portuguese industry and have been encouraged to do so due to shortages in the skilled workforce. This has in turn resulted in especially acute labour shortages within unskilled construction work (Associação de Empresas de Construção e Obras Públicas 1997; Expresso 1996), which has generated an ongoing demand for new immigrant workers (Jolliffe 1990). The shorter employment trajectories of Africans in Spain may be the reason for them being hired mainly for unskilled, transient jobs, but better labour conditions in Spain render the sector more attractive to native workers than is the case in Portugal. One result is that African workers on Spanish building projects are pushed to the most undesirable, fragile fringes of the industry, with inter-sectoral mobility being the rule for Moroccans, Senegalese or Gambians in the Girona construction industry. Even so, it is arguable that there is no competition for construction jobs. As Pugliese (1993) noted, even in secondary labour markets, the presence of an immigrant labour force cannot be interpreted as an indication of an unmet demand for labour. In line with this, and contrary to what is observed for Spanish farming (see Hoggart and Mendoza 1999), construction is not a main employer of immigrants. Neither does it offer stable, regular work. The underlying reasons for African employment in Spanish construction warrants further explanation. It is certainly not the case, as in Portuguese construction, that the sector is not attractive to home nationals. Possible explanations may be found in specific local circumstances that can lead to labour shortages in construction.

African immigrant workers in Girona municipalities

Geographical differences in African labour outcomes are not restricted to cross-national contexts, but also exist within nations. My survey results illustrate local variations in immigrant incorporation in construction better in Spain than in Portugal. This is not to say that local differences do not exist amongst the surveyed localities in Portugal. Certainly, whereas Algarve is a tourist-oriented region, Setúbal offers abundant jobs in manufacturing industries. Having said that, the same fragmented character that is true of the construction sector, and the same over-representation of PALOP workers, became clear in interviews with employers in both Setúbal and Algarve. This suggests that national laws (or lack of enforcement of laws throughout Portugal) are the key elements in shaping the sector (rather than local labour market differences). On the other hand, frequent geographical mobility within the sector (as observed when analysing immigrant labour trajectories in Portuguese construction) points to a more integrated (and flexible) labour market for construction jobs in Portugal than in Spain.

Focusing on Spain, work permit data by municipality that were provided by the Girona office of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security show that legally-resident immigrant workers live in municipalities with contrasting economic structures. Taking this into account, the Girona localities in which African workers live were classified into four categories, following the municipal economic structure provided by the 1991 Census. As a result, four types of places were defined: municipalities with high agricultural employment, manufacturing centres, tourism-oriented centres and places with diversified economy.⁴ In seeking interviews with African workers, the strategy adopted was to ensure a good representation of workers from places with different local employment structures (i.e. from each of these different municipal types). In order to do so, locations of my interviewees' residence and work were contrasted with official residential and work permit statistics.

The survey of African workers in Girona uncovered a landscape of uneven African employment in construction. Out of the 151 interviewed Africans, 13.9 per cent were employed in the Girona construction sector. By comparison, 12.4 per cent of the working population in the province as a whole worked in construction (Table 2). This slight over-representation of Africans in my survey hides significant local disparities in immigrant employment. Table 2 compares African employment with local labour force characteristics by economic sector and shows that African workers in construction are over-represented in all types of municipalities, except for tourism-dominated ones. To be specific, whereas only 8.6 per cent of interviewed Africans in a tourist-oriented municipality worked in construction, this sector accounted for twice this percentage of the labour force as whole. The opposite trend is observed in places where other economic sectors are dominant.

The under-representation of Africans in construction in tourist-dominated municipalities is unexpected, owing to the significance of construction in this type of municipality. Table 2 shows that 19.3 per cent of the working population within the tourist-dominated municipalities that I investigated worked in construction. This is seven points higher than the average for the province. Even so, according to a key official in the Construction Employers' Association [*Unió d'Empresaris de la Construcció de la Província de Girona*], the firms that build large

Table 2. *Employment in Girona by economic sector, and type of municipality of residence*

Economic sector	Type of municipality											
	Agricultural			Manufacturing			Tourism			Services		
	Africans	All workers	All	Africans	All workers	All	Africans	All workers	All	Africans	All workers	All
Farming	52.9	31.3	10.3	4.9	17.2	2.4	23.3	2.2	31.8	5.9	12.4	49.7
Construction	17.6	10.9	13.8	11.0	8.6	19.3	20.0	12.5	13.9	12.4	12.5	12.4
Manufacturing	5.9	17.3	51.7	48.9	10.3	15.0	6.7	25.4	15.2	31.3	25.4	31.3
Services	20.6	39.9	20.7	35.1	56.9	60.7	40.0	59.1	39.1	49.7	59.1	49.7

Note: Columns do not sum to 100%, since primary sector activities other than farming are not presented in the Table. The Census is the only official source which provides data on the structure of the employed population by municipality. The category 'all workers' corresponds to the 1991 Census employed population for the Girona municipalities in which the fieldwork was carried out.
 Source: For Africans, the data come from my Girona survey; for all workers, the data are from the 1991 Census data, provided by the Catalan Institute of Statistics. These data are published by economic sector (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 1993). Published statistics do not disaggregate farming from other primary sector activities by municipality.

accommodation and housing projects (which are largely in tourism centres) are finding their activities threatened by a downturn in tourism expansion, alongside stagnation in second home construction along the coast (see also Salmon 1995). This has led to downsizing, with companies competing now to secure contracts in less tourism-oriented municipalities. As a result, regardless of the location of company headquarters, new workers (immigrant or not) are less likely to find employment in the construction sector in tourism-dominated areas than in other towns.

In contrast with tourism-oriented centres, there is over-representation of African employment in construction in both agricultural and economically-diversified municipalities (in manufacturing centres the representation of African workers is close to the average for the working population). The reasons for the employment of Africans in construction work within diversified municipalities are highly localised. According to key informants in the medium-sized town of Figueres, access to construction jobs in the town are linked with the Moroccan inflows into the city, that date back to the late 1960s. At this time construction was a common point of entry into employment, although Moroccan immigrant inflows were relatively scarce (Colectivo IOÉ 1994). Economic problems led to a contraction of the construction sector in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Salmon 1995). A new, larger Moroccan (and other African) inflow started in mid-1980s, but since then there has been more competition for construction jobs as a consequence of high rates of unemployment and relatively high wages in the industry. That said, the early footing of the Moroccan community in Figueres eased the integration of new immigrants into the local construction sector. A similar process is observed for jobs in accommodation and restaurants within this municipality. Yet, even in Figueres, permanent contracts and long trajectories in construction are an exception, rather than the rule. In other words, the early establishment of the Moroccan community does not prevent the casualisation, unskilled jobs and frequent inter-mobility that are distinctive trends of immigrant employment in the sector, regardless of the type of work prevalent in the locality (Mendoza 1998).

For agricultural municipalities more general patterns can be traced. It became clear during fieldwork that construction is closely interwoven with other economic sectors at a local level. Interviews with construction employers in agricultural-defined localities indicated that their work echoes economic cycles closely in both agriculture and tourism. As a construction employer explained:

The peak season is just before the tourist season. Everybody wants to finish off something. Agricultural employers, restaurant owners, the town council, everybody. The lowest activity peak is summer. It is the highest season for both tourist activities and agriculture, so employers are not doing repairs on their properties.

Another sign of how small construction businesses are deeply rooted in specific municipalities comes from companies relying on the same clients (i.e. farmers, restaurant employers or the town council). Especially in farming-oriented settings, these agents rarely offer work contracts to construction firms from outside the town. 'We're from town, we know each other', characterises the prevailing view. These close associations between clients and firms do appear to have positive consequences for the survival of small businesses. This occurs despite

increasing competition, owing to many larger firms from the coast now seeking inland contracts in small places that were traditionally the 'reserve' of small- and medium-sized firms (even bidding for minor repairs and municipal work). Employers made clear that the main competitive advantage of small-sized firms is price, as larger companies work more quickly. As explained by a construction employer in an agricultural municipality: '[...] we cannot ask the prices of [the city of] Girona, let alone Barcelona. Our major advantage point is precisely our [lower] prices, not the time of finishing the job nor better quality'.

The embeddedness of construction companies in the local economic fabric has implications for African employment. Illustrating this, construction employers explained that when working on farms, farmers would sometimes offer their (African) workforce to assist with the construction work. In a construction employer's words, '[...] sometimes agricultural employers or other clients tell us that an African who is working for them will help as an assistant. They save money [as the work can be done in less time, so the work is less costly] and it makes no difference to us'. This is confirmed by African labour trajectories. Thus, interviews with African farm workers who were on permanent contracts revealed that they regularly do various jobs on the employer's land or property, other than the farm tasks that are written into their contract. As an illustration, the first African (a Moroccan national) whom I interviewed for this project started work in an agricultural town as an agricultural labourer on a temporary and casual basis. After two years of working for the same employer (and legalising his residence), he was undertaking minor works on his employer's properties in town in the off-peak season (e.g. painting), in order to make these dwellings suitable for letting. This work was undertaken alongside his usual agricultural tasks. These examples build a picture of African labour being 'used' interchangeably for different jobs (and even within a number of economic sectors). In local settings, African workers smooth the interaction between employers and businesses by providing an adaptable workforce. Not only do Africans take the least desirable jobs in the sector, but they are also compelled to accept a degree of work flexibility that would probably be rejected by Spanish counterparts.

Rural settings (with agriculturally-oriented municipalities having unemployment rates palpably lower than the average in Girona, Generalitat de Catalunya annual), flexible working conditions imposed upon employees and the sector structure itself combine to provide a 'local' explanation for African access to certain jobs in construction. It may be that, local differences notwithstanding, this is a first step towards the consolidation of an immigrant niche in Girona construction (as seen in Portugal). In this regard, Catalan construction employers (alongside farmers and employers of certain manufacturing branches) have recently declared that their industries need more immigrant workers, since the decline in unemployment rates is causing serious labour shortages (Tobarra 2000). Yet, if this is the case, data from Girona suggest that this immigrant niche will be comprised of the most unstable, disadvantaged fringes of those sectors. Significantly enough, immigrants move in and out of a sector according to labour demand. This context of frequent inter-sectoral mobility that is not seen in Portugal clearly functions as a deterrent to upward occupational mobility for African workers. This raises questions about the niches that are available to immigrants, not only in construction, but also in other economic sectors.

Conclusion

Results from the Girona survey point out that African workers in Spanish construction are employed in transient, unskilled jobs that are not part of a promotion ladder. For African workers, this is a phenomenon not just limited to construction in Spain (Mendoza 1998). Theoretically, the incorporation of African workers into the Girona construction industry fits within a segmentation theory framework. Thus, according to Piore:

[...] jobs [held by immigrants] tend to be unskilled, generally but not always low paying, and to carry or connote inferior social status; they often involve hard or unpleasant working conditions and considerable insecurity; they seldom offer chances of advancement toward better paying, more attractive job opportunities. (1979: 17)

This picture certainly fits the Girona situation. Yet this comment requires some qualification, as it is clear that local circumstances play a crucial role in understanding uneven patterns of African employment. For African workers, obtaining work in the construction sector is very clearly affected by local circumstances. Especially in agrarian municipalities, African workers are found to be engaged in flexible work practices, on lower wages, so the work environment is one that most Spaniards would reject (i.e. working on construction projects for the pay of a farm-worker). The uneven geographical incidence of construction work for Africans provides one indication that the sector as a whole is not undesirable for native Spanish workers. What is undesirable is the occupational niche that is available to African workers.

Evidence from Portugal likewise shows that an immigrant niche has been created in the construction sector. Unlike Spain, this relates to the unattractiveness of the whole sector for non-immigrant white workers. This results from low wages and high levels of casualisation within the industry. Not surprisingly, due to differentials in wages (and working conditions), some workers expressed a desire to be employed in construction elsewhere in Europe (as Mr Lopes stated). Thus, 31.9 per cent of those interviewed in Portugal expressed their intention of moving out of Portugal in the near future (compared to 20.7 per cent of interviewed Moroccans and 20.3 per cent of West Africans in Spain). These figures are especially relevant if we take into account the longer period of residence of interviewed African-born workers in Portugal. Moreover, most Africans in Portugal come from former colonies and have a language in common with the host society, unlike the Gambians and Moroccans who dominated the African population in the Girona survey. Essentially, African-born workers are found in construction because Portuguese-born white workers reject jobs in the industry. Further, African-born workers occupy the jobs that the native Portuguese left vacant because Portuguese nationals prefer to work in construction elsewhere in Europe. This is not only because of employees' preferences, but also related to the very structure of the Portuguese construction sector. As Baganha (1998) has mentioned, a common practice amongst Portuguese firms consists of sending their formally-hired workers to other European countries, while relying on subcontracting and informality at home. Two factors contribute to this process of growing informality. First, there is the growing demand for building projects inside (partly due to EU funds) and outside Portugal (e.g. in Eastern Germany) and the comparative competitive advantage of Portuguese firms because of cheap labour. Second, there are the processes that occur in the sector as a consequence of the de-regulation of the housing market in Portugal.

Certainly connections between emigration and immigration in Portugal have been recognised extensively in literature, with African-born immigrants occupying jobs left behind by Portuguese-born workers. In this emigration–immigration system, Portuguese workers do the jobs in other EU countries that they reject in their country of origin (namely, construction for males and domestic services for females). This type of labour is then done by PALOP workers in Portugal. Set in this context, there is little competition for jobs between the native Portuguese and other workers (see also Baganha et al. 2000b; Malheiros 1997). In this regard, even if the characteristics of the job are substantially different, the situation in Portuguese construction is similar to that found by Waldinger (1994) for New York public services. Here the primary reason why a niche was created for immigrant workers was the abandonment of jobs by locally-born workers.

Taken together, and viewed through the functioning of the construction sector, the Portuguese and Spanish labour markets operate in ways that are consistent with segmentation ideas. However, unlike Spain, in Portugal the majority of interviewed African-born workers do have manual skilled jobs, as a result of their lengthy labour trajectories in the sector. However, although the survey does uncover a degree of occupational mobility in terms of skills, the nature of these skills still ranks low in occupational mobility terms. Thus no administrative jobs were allocated to African-born workers within construction firms, despite long labour trajectories in construction. Access to skilled manual jobs is moreover directly related to extensive labour shortages that arise because the available work is not attractive to native-born workers, who in turn are drawn to construction jobs elsewhere in Europe. In this context Africans are ‘promoted’ into skilled manual work in Portugal.

That said, certain types of job promotion do exist (at least in terms of professional attainment), even if this is not associated with stable employment (which is not sought by some interviewees). Perhaps this appears to lend support to human capital principles, but this is only in a context in which the sector has been largely abandoned to immigrant workers, with the more secure jobs as administrators in contracting-awarding firms remaining in the hands of native Portuguese workers. Construction work in Portugal is clearly of a secondary economic nature (i.e. casual, unstable, fixed-term, low-paid jobs). Experienced African workers like Mr Moraes do not believe that this is a problem, as they can use their skills, experience and labour market knowledge to change jobs easily. But for others, like Mr Lopes, who lack such experience and information, lack of access to formal employment may even put their legal situation in the country at risk. In line with the literature (e.g. França 1992; Machado 1997), my Portuguese survey data suggest that illegal residence seems to be more prevalent for those employed in construction than is the case in the economy as a whole. Even if illegality rarely results in expulsion from Portugal, this ‘relaxed’ attitude is not observed in other EU countries (Eaton 1996; Marie 1995; Mendoza 2000). As a result, emigration to other European countries may cause trouble for African nationals who are not legally resident in Portugal.

As a theoretical concept to explain African labour market outcomes, segmentation theory does fit both the national contexts, albeit in dissimilar ways. In the Spanish case, the theory fits in terms of type of work, with Africans being placed in a clearly-defined niche of unskilled manual, short-term jobs. In the case of immigrants to Portugal, the entire construction sector appears to be an immense ‘reservoir’ of unstable, low-paid work abandoned by white native workers.

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Notes

- 1 Decreto/Lei 308-A (26.04.1975) established that African-born immigrants of non-Portuguese extraction who were resident in Portugal at the time of the independence of their countries of origin needed to have arrived in the country by 25 April 1969 to be eligible for Portuguese nationality (Ramos 1976).
- 2 Girona was selected because its share of African nationals in provincial population and labour force is higher here than in any other Spanish provinces. Statistical sources further reveal that African workers are scattered across all economic sectors (and in municipalities with contrasting economic structures). For Portugal, a region with a similar economic mix was not available. As a result two regions were selected with contrasting economic bases. The Algarve is a region in which immigrant workers are clearly concentrated on tourist-dominated areas, with accommodation, restaurants and construction being the primary sectors utilising immigrant labour. By contrast, in the Península de Setúbal the occupational base is oriented towards manufacturing.
- 3 This practice is known as *recibos verdes* [green receipts, so-called because of the colour of the form]. It is not illegal. What is illegal is that employers pass responsibility for the payment of social security contributions onto employees (Garrido and Vicente 1996). At the time of the employer survey (July–October 1997), debate was taking place about changing the law to make it more difficult for employers to use this practice.
- 4 To make the four-type classification, I first selected agricultural locations. These municipalities stand out in that the proportion of their labour force occupied in farming is up to four times the provincial average. The significance of manufacturing within a given centre delimited a second type of municipality in this classification. Thus, those municipalities with three times the provincial average in terms of the proportion of the labour force engaged in manufacturing fall within the category of manufacturing locations. The share of the labour force engaged in manufacturing, as well as the composition of service industries, were decisive elements in separating tourism-oriented places from more diversified service localities. The former employ a considerable proportion of their labour forces in accommodation and restaurants and have a low manufacturing presence, whereas the latter enjoy a more balanced distribution of services and manufacturing industries in their economic structure.

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