ADITUM
Enrich your Research

The Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Research Article

Borders in an Interconnected World: The Ceuta Humanitarian Crisis, the Limits of Westaphalian Sovereignty and the Unified Science of Peace (USP)

Aliyu Sani Kafinga

Center for Peace and Security Studies, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria Originator, Unified Science of Peace (USP) Founder, General Theory of Translation (GTT) Inventor, Peace Translation Theory (PTT).

Article Information

Received: August 13, 2026
Accepted: October 06, 2026
Published: November 13, 2026

Corresponding author: Aliyu Sani Kafinga, Center for Peace and Security Studies, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria Originator, Unified Science of Peace (USP) Founder, General Theory of Translation (GTT) Inventor, Peace Translation Theory (PTT).

Citation: Kafinga. (2026) "Borders in an Interconnected World: The Ceuta Humanitarian Crisis, the Limits of Westaphalian Sovereignty and the Unified Science of Peace (USP)" The Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 4(2); DOI: 10.61148/3065-6990/JSBS /085.

Copyright: © 2026 Aliyu Sani Kafinga. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract

The contemporary humanitarian crisis in Ceuta has renewed debate concerning migration, territorial sovereignty, border security and the ethical responsibilities of states in an increasingly interconnected world. Although the immediate crisis is commonly framed through the language of irregular migration, transnational security and the protection of national borders, this article argues that such framing is insufficient because it separates contemporary mobility from the historical, structural and relational conditions through which Africa and Europe became deeply interconnected. The article examines the Ceuta crisis as an expression of a widening mismatch between territorially bounded systems of Westphalian sovereignty and the transboundary realities of contemporary human mobility. It introduces the concept of Westphalian Governance Lag (WGL) to explain the growing institutional gap between inherited territorial structures and the interconnected social, economic, historical and humanitarian realities they are expected to govern. The article further advances Relational Sovereignty (RS) as a theoretical reorientation that preserves legitimate state authority while integrating human dignity, historical responsibility, transnational cooperation and shared human security. Drawing on the Unified Science of Peace (USP) as a critical-normative metatheoretical framework, conceptualized through the Metaphysical Peace Theory and Spiritual-Structural Transformation (MPT-SST) framework [1][2][3][4][5], the study proposes Transformative Border Governance as an alternative to the binary opposition between unrestricted mobility and securitised exclusion. The framework aligns consciousness, ethics and structure to support individual protection assessment, non-refoulement, lawful and dignified return where appropriate, safe mobility pathways, regional responsibility-sharing and structural transformation. The article concludes that borders may remain legitimate institutions of political administration, but they cannot remain the primary architecture for governing human realities whose causes, consequences and vulnerabilities are fundamentally transboundary.

Keywords: Ceuta, Westphalian sovereignty, border governance, human mobility, refugee protection, Unified Science of Peace, MPT-SST, relational sovereignty, historical justice

1. Introduction

The contemporary world presents a profound political contradiction. Human societies have become increasingly interconnected through global trade, digital communication, international institutions, transnational production, migration, cultural exchange and shared ecological risks. Yet political authority remains organised predominantly through territorially bounded states whose borders continue to define membership, regulate movement and distinguish between those who belong within a political community and those who remain outside it.

This contradiction becomes particularly visible when large numbers of vulnerable people attempt to cross international borders in search of safety, dignity, opportunity or a more viable future. The recent humanitarian crisis in Ceuta provides a compelling illustration. Ceuta is a Spanish autonomous city located on the northern coast of Africa and constitutes one of the European Union's most visible territorial boundaries with the African continent. Its geographical position makes it a meeting point between unequal economic spaces, historically interconnected societies and competing understandings of sovereignty, mobility and human responsibility.

The scale and human consequences of the recent movement into Ceuta have generated intense political and public reactions [6]. The crisis has been framed by different actors as a violation of sovereignty, a border-security emergency, a failure of migration management, a humanitarian catastrophe and an expression of youth desperation. The movement has also generated historical and sociopolitical interpretations among some African observers who understand contemporary migration through the longer history of colonial expansion, extraction, unequal development and asymmetrical mobility between Africa and Europe.

These interpretations raise difficult questions. European colonial powers entered, occupied and reorganised large parts of Africa through imperial authority, military power, coercive political arrangements and unequal economic relations [7][8]. African people, labour and natural resources were incorporated into wider systems of imperial accumulation. Yet contemporary African movement toward Europe is frequently framed primarily through the language of illegality, security threats and violations of national sovereignty. The contrast does not establish that colonial conquest and contemporary migration are legally identical, nor does historical injustice automatically create an unrestricted right to enter another state. It does, however, complicate the ethical legitimacy of interpreting contemporary African mobility without reference to the historical relationships and structural inequalities through which Africa and Europe became interconnected [9].

The central argument of this article is that the Ceuta crisis reveals a widening mismatch between the territorial logic of Westphalian sovereignty and the historically interconnected, structurally unequal and transboundary realities of contemporary human mobility. This mismatch is conceptualised as Westphalian Governance Lag. The concept refers to the growing gap between territorially bounded institutions of political authority and the increasingly transboundary social, economic, ecological, historical and humanitarian realities those institutions are expected to govern. The article does not argue that states should abandon sovereignty or eliminate borders. States retain legitimate responsibilities to regulate entry, protect public order, maintain institutional capacity and safeguard the security of their populations [10]. However, the continued reliance on deterrence, exclusion and securitised containment as the primary response to transboundary mobility is increasingly inadequate. Border control may regulate movement temporarily, but it cannot independently resolve the conflict, inequality, historical injustice, economic exclusion and human insecurity that generate dangerous mobility [11].

The article therefore advances Relational Sovereignty as a theoretical reorientation and Transformative Border Governance as an institutional pathway. Relational Sovereignty preserves territorial authority while recognising that national security and political legitimacy are inseparable from wider relationships of human dignity, historical responsibility, regional cooperation and shared security. Transformative Border Governance applies this reorientation through the Unified Science of Peace as a critical-normative metatheoretical framework, conceptualised through the Metaphysical Peace Theory and Spiritual-Structural Transformation framework [1][2][3][4][5].

The article addresses the following research question:

To what extent does the Ceuta humanitarian crisis reveal the limitations of Westphalian sovereignty in governing transboundary human mobility, and how can the Unified Science of Peace, conceptualised through MPT-SST, contribute to the development of a more relational and transformative model of border governance?

The article proceeds in seven parts. It first examines the historical and conceptual foundations of Westphalian sovereignty. It then situates the Ceuta crisis within the historical political economy of Africa-Europe relations. The third section examines the legal distinction between refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in irregular situations. The fourth introduces Westphalian Governance Lag and the Interdependence-Sovereignty Tension. The fifth applies the Unified Science of Peace and MPT-SST to border governance. The sixth develops the proposed Transformative Border Governance Architecture. The final section considers policy implications and concludes with a call for the transformation, rather than abolition, of territorial sovereignty.

2. Westphalian Sovereignty and the Territorial Logic of Borders

The Westphalian system is commonly associated with the emergence of a political order centred on territorially bounded states, sovereign authority and the principle of non-interference [10]. Although the historical development of sovereignty was more complex than a single event or treaty, the Westphalian idea has become an influential conceptual framework for understanding the modern international system. It emphasises the authority of states over defined territories and the legal distinction between domestic jurisdiction and external political space.

Within this framework, borders perform several functions. They define the geographical limits of state authority, regulate membership, distinguish citizens from non-citizens and provide institutional mechanisms for the control of movement [12]. Borders are therefore not merely physical lines. They are political and legal institutions through which states organise identity, rights, security and responsibility.

The Westphalian model developed under historical conditions in which political authority was largely understood through territorial control. Contemporary globalisation has complicated this arrangement. Capital, goods, information, technology, cultural influences and economic relationships move across borders with

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

unprecedented speed [13]. International institutions coordinate cooperation across states. Environmental degradation, pandemics, climate change, organised crime and economic instability generate consequences that no single state can manage independently.

Human mobility is also increasingly transboundary. People move in response to conflict, persecution, economic inequality, environmental pressure, education, family relationships and the search for opportunity [14]. Global communication makes inequalities visible across territorial boundaries and provides information about possible destinations. The contemporary world therefore produces increasing interconnectedness while retaining political institutions largely organised around territorial separation.

Critics of the Westphalian model have long argued that territorial sovereignty is historically contingent and inadequately equipped for global challenges. Seyla Benhabib has argued that bounded citizenship creates exclusionary and discriminatory effects that are difficult to justify in a world of cross-border interdependence [15]. Catherine Dauvergne has traced how migration governance has become increasingly securitised, with border controls framed as anti-terrorism measures and human mobility treated as a threat to national stability [16]. Jef Huysmans has shown how the politics of insecurity construct migrants as existential dangers, enabling exceptional measures that would be unacceptable if applied to citizens [17]. Didier Fassin has examined the humanitarian reason that simultaneously saves and disciplines migrants, revealing the moral economy that underpins border governance [18].

These critiques converge on a common diagnosis: the Westphalian system, whatever its historical achievements, is struggling to govern human mobility in ways that are both effective and just. The concept of Westphalian Governance Lag builds on these critiques but adds a specific diagnostic lens: the lag is not merely a failure of policy but a structural mismatch between the scale of contemporary problems and the institutional frameworks available to address them. This formulation aligns with Thomas Nail's argument that migration is not an exception to the political order but a constitutive feature of it—a primary social condition that states are perpetually trying to manage but can never fully contain [19].

Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life offers a cautionary lens for understanding how migrants may be reduced to objects of security management, stripped of political agency and legal personality [20]. However, this article does not declare Ceuta a fully realised zone of exception because such a claim would require careful engagement with the legal and political evidence specific to the enclave. Agamben's framework is therefore treated as a supplementary interpretive resource rather than the article's main analytical frame.

This creates an important structural contradiction:

The world has become socially, economically, technologically and ethically interconnected, while much of its political governance remains territorially fragmented and institutionally defensive.

The contradiction does not mean that territorial sovereignty has become irrelevant. It means that sovereignty may require transformation if it is to remain functionally effective and ethically legitimate under conditions of global interdependence.

3. Ceuta, Historical Interconnectedness and the Politics of Mobility

The Ceuta crisis cannot be understood solely as a contemporary border event. It exists within a longer history of interaction between Africa and Europe. European colonial expansion involved the movement of imperial authority into African societies, the occupation and administration of territories and the reorganisation of political and economic institutions around imperial interests [7][8]. The transatlantic slave trade forcibly removed millions of African people, while colonial economies incorporated African labour and natural resources into wider systems of European accumulation [9].

The effects of these historical processes did not disappear with the formal end of colonial rule. Colonial boundaries, extractive economic structures, unequal trade relationships and institutional legacies continued to shape development trajectories [21]. Contemporary inequalities between parts of Africa and Europe cannot be explained exclusively through colonial history, but colonialism remains an important component of the historical political economy through which global inequalities were produced and reproduced.

The movement of African youth toward Europe is therefore interpreted by some observers through a consciousness of unfinished historical justice. The argument is not merely that young people seek employment or improved living conditions. It is that the wealth, opportunities and institutional capacities associated with Europe cannot be entirely separated from historical relationships in which African people, labour and resources were subjected to unequal systems of extraction and political control [9].

This historical argument requires careful formulation. Colonialism does not create an unrestricted right to enter Europe, nor does it assign collective guilt to present populations. However, colonial extraction, imposed political boundaries and unequal incorporation into the global economy remain relevant to understanding the structural conditions within which contemporary mobility occurs [9][21]. When European states defend their borders against African migrants, they are not defending against a historically unrelated population. They are regulating movement across a space whose current inequalities bear the imprint of centuries of asymmetrical integration.

Border regimes that disregard these historical relationships risk treating structurally produced inequalities as though they emerged independently of the historical processes that shaped them. The question is not whether contemporary states should be punished for past wrongs. It is whether border governance can claim full legitimacy when it protects the accumulated benefits of historical interconnectedness while treating the human consequences of that history primarily as external security threats.

Clarifying note: The argument concerns historically produced institutions and structural relationships, not collective guilt, inherited personal culpability or an automatic right of entry. It is about causation and structural justice, not equivalence or retribution.

The Ceuta crisis therefore represents more than a dispute over border entry. It reveals the tension between historical interconnectedness and contemporary political separation. Europe and Africa are often governed as though they are separate political and economic worlds, yet their histories, institutions, economies and populations remain deeply connected.

3.1 The 2026 Ceuta Crisis: Scale, Drivers and Humanitarian Consequences

The humanitarian crisis in Ceuta that unfolded in late July 2026 involved a significant and rapid surge of arrivals across the land

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

border separating Morocco from the Spanish enclave. Available contemporary reports estimated that approximately 50,000 to 60,000 people attempted or succeeded in crossing into Ceuta during the late-July surge [6]. The scale of the movement was unprecedented, although the number of people who remained in the enclave declined rapidly as large numbers returned to Morocco—with some reports indicating that more than 48,000 people returned within roughly forty-eight hours. Because official figures and media estimates continued to vary, these numbers should be treated as provisional.

The movement was associated with multiple interacting factors:

First, economic hardship played a significant role. Morocco and neighbouring West African countries have experienced elevated youth unemployment, limited formal employment opportunities and economic pressures exacerbated by drought conditions and rising food prices. These structural pressures create populations with strong incentives to seek opportunity elsewhere.

Second, social media misinformation was a critical proximate trigger. Widespread rumours circulated suggesting that Spain would grant residence permits to all arrivals—a claim that Spanish authorities promptly denied [6]. This pattern is not unique to Ceuta; it reflects the broader information ecology of contemporary migration, where digital platforms transmit aspirational narratives that may not correspond to legal reality [22].

Third, legal and judicial developments shaped perceptions of risk. A Spanish Supreme Court ruling had previously determined that the special border-rejection procedure could not be applied to migrants intercepted at sea while attempting to enter Ceuta or Melilla by swimming. The ruling did not create a right to remain in Spain or guarantee asylum. It held that the ordinary legal return procedure remained applicable. The ruling may have been misinterpreted or exploited by misinformation networks and smuggling networks, contributing to the surge [6]. However, the precise causal relationship between the ruling and the movement remains unverified.

Fourth, favourable maritime conditions facilitated the crossing, with calm seas enabling larger numbers to attempt the journey by swimming around the border barriers.

Fifth, political and diplomatic tensions between Spain and Morocco may have influenced the Moroccan government's border management approach. Some observers have alleged that Moroccan border enforcement was deliberately relaxed, though this explanation remains contested and should not be treated as established fact without stronger evidence. The precise relationship between these tensions and the timing of the surge remains uncertain.

The crisis overwhelmed local reception capacity. Ceuta's municipal infrastructure was strained by the sudden arrival of tens of thousands of people, generating significant humanitarian risks including inadequate shelter, limited sanitation and insufficient protection for vulnerable groups [6]. Reports emerged of unaccompanied minors, families with young children and individuals with urgent medical needs, though systematic data on these populations remains incomplete.

The Spanish government deployed additional law enforcement and military personnel, while Moroccan authorities increased patrols on their side of the border. Return procedures were initiated rapidly, raising questions about whether all returnees received adequate access to asylum procedures before removal. However, available evidence does not establish the proportion of returnees who may have had protection claims or whether individual assessments were conducted.

The crisis also involved substantial loss of life, although casualty figures have continued to change as reporting developed. The human cost of the surge, combined with the speed of return, underscores the humanitarian urgency that any governance response must address.

: The available evidence on the Ceuta crisis remains partial and contested. Different actors—Spanish authorities, Moroccan officials, humanitarian organisations and advocacy groups—report different figures and interpretations. The purpose of this section is to establish sufficient empirical grounding for the theoretical analysis that follows, not to provide definitive statistics. Future research should triangulate multiple data sources to develop a more comprehensive account. The analysis distinguishes among: (1) documented factors such as the rapid movement, humanitarian pressure and official response; (2) reported proximate drivers such as misinformation and rumours concerning legal status; (3) structural drivers such as inequality, unemployment and unequal opportunity; and (4) contested political explanations, including allegations of deliberately relaxed border management.

4. Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants in Irregular Situations

The legal and humanitarian status of people entering Ceuta cannot be determined solely by the fact that they crossed without authorisation or outside an official border point. The population may include refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, children, people exposed to exploitation and individuals with other forms of vulnerability [23]. The appropriate legal response therefore requires individual assessment rather than categorical assumptions.

Under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is generally a person who is outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and has a well-founded fear of persecution on recognised grounds, including race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group [24]. The broader African regional definition may also include persons compelled to leave their countries because of external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order [25].

A person does not become a refugee only after receiving official recognition. Refugee recognition generally confirms a protection status that may already exist [26]. However, a claim must still be examined through an appropriate legal process. A person who has requested protection but whose claim has not yet been determined is generally described as an asylum seeker.

Not all people who move across borders are refugees. Many migrate primarily for employment, education, family reunification or improved economic opportunities. Economic hardship alone does not automatically satisfy the legal definition of a refugee [14]. Nevertheless, the distinction between refugee and migrant should not be used to deny the human dignity or fundamental rights of people who do not qualify for refugee status [27].

The term "illegal migrant" is also problematic because it may imply that the person, rather than a particular act or legal status, is illegal. More precise terminology includes "migrant in an irregular situation" or "person who entered irregularly." Irregular entry does not automatically make a person a criminal and does not remove

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

the right to seek asylum [28].

The 1951 Refugee Convention recognises that people fleeing persecution may be unable to obtain travel documents or official permission before leaving. Article 31 provides protection against penalties for certain refugees who enter or remain without authorisation, provided the relevant conditions are met [24]. The Convention also protects refugees against expulsion except under strictly defined circumstances. These provisions reflect the practical reality that people escaping danger may have no safe or lawful route available.

The principle of non-refoulement is central to international refugee and human rights law. It prohibits the return of a person to a territory where that person would face persecution, torture or other serious harm [29][30]. The principle requires states to consider protection risks before carrying out removal.

This does not mean that every person who enters irregularly has an automatic right to permanent residence. States may regulate immigration and may lawfully return people who do not qualify for refugee status or other protection. However, return must not be based solely on the fact of irregular entry. The process must consider individual ircumstances, protection risks, vulnerability and applicable legal guarantees [31].

The moral and legal legitimacy of return therefore depends on how the return is conducted and where the person is returned. A return may be more defensible when it is individually assessed, safe, dignified, informed, subject to due process and accompanied by appropriate reintegration support. Return becomes more problematic when it is collective, indiscriminate, coercive or conducted without meaningful access to protection procedures.

The distinction between return to Morocco and return to a person's country of origin is also important. A person may have entered Ceuta from Morocco without being a Moroccan national. Returning a person to a transit country does not remove the obligation to consider whether the person will be safe, have access to protection or face onward removal to a place of persecution or serious harm.

The Ceuta crisis should therefore be understood as a mixed-migration and protection context. The appropriate response is neither the presumption that all entrants are refugees nor the assumption that all are unlawful migrants who may be returned without assessment.

5. Westphalian Governance Lag and the Interdependence-Sovereignty Tension

The Ceuta crisis illustrates a broader institutional mismatch that this article conceptualises as Westphalian Governance Lag.

Westphalian Governance Lag refers to the widening mismatch between territorially bounded institutions of state sovereignty and the increasingly transboundary social, economic, ecological, historical and humanitarian realities those institutions are expected to govern.

The concept does not suggest that the state has disappeared or that territorial sovereignty has become meaningless. Rather, it identifies a lag between the scale of contemporary problems and the institutional frameworks available to address them [32][11].

Human mobility is generated by multiple interconnected conditions. Conflict, political repression, economic inequality, demographic pressure, environmental degradation, social exclusion and unequal access to opportunity often extend beyond the authority of a single state [14]. Yet border responses frequently focus on the immediate territorial manifestation of these conditions. The border becomes the location where accumulated structural pressures are confronted through deterrence, surveillance, exclusion and return.

This creates a difference between the scale of causation and the scale of response.

The causes of movement may be regional, historical or global, while the response is primarily national and territorial. Border control may therefore manage visible movement without transforming the conditions that produce it. When the underlying pressures remain unresolved, migration routes may change, become more dangerous or generate repeated humanitarian crises [33].

The Ceuta crisis also reveals what may be called the Interdependence-Sovereignty Tension:

The Interdependence-Sovereignty Tension refers to the conflict between the expanding social, economic, technological and ethical interconnectedness of humanity and the continued reliance on territorially bounded sovereignty as the primary framework for political authority, security and the regulation of human mobility.

Globalisation promotes connection. International cooperation recognises shared problems. Human rights norms express universal moral principles. Digital communication creates awareness of opportunities and inequalities beyond national borders. Yet the governance of vulnerable human mobility remains strongly shaped by territorial exclusion.

This produces a structural contradiction:

Global interdependence produces the conditions of connection, while Westphalian sovereignty frequently governs those conditions through separation.

The contradiction is particularly visible in the unequal mobility of people and resources. Capital, technology, information and goods may cross borders relatively easily, while vulnerable human beings encounter increasingly restrictive legal and physical barriers [32].

The result is not simply a migration problem. It is a problem of how global interconnectedness is institutionally governed.

6. The Limits of Securitised Border Governance

Border security is a legitimate concern. States have responsibilities to protect public order, prevent trafficking and organised crime, regulate entry and maintain institutional capacity [12]. A sustainable approach to migration cannot ignore the practical limits of housing, health systems, social services and local governance.

However, the securitisation of migration becomes inadequate when it treats human mobility primarily as a threat rather than as a complex social phenomenon involving protection needs, economic aspirations, historical relationships and structural inequalities [17].

Securitised border governance often produces several limitations.

First, it may displace rather than resolve movement. When one route is closed, people may seek another route. The movement may become more dangerous, more expensive and more dependent on smuggling networks [33].

Second, it may reduce complex human experiences to legal categories. A person may be classified primarily as an irregular migrant even when that person is also a child, a survivor of violence, an asylum seeker or an individual facing serious vulnerability.

Third, it may create humanitarian harm at the point of enforcement. When borders become highly militarised, people may attempt dangerous sea crossings, climb barriers or use increasingly risky

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

routes.

Fourth, it may obscure the structural conditions generating movement. Stronger enforcement may create an appearance of control while leaving conflict, inequality, unemployment and exclusion unaddressed [11].

Fifth, it may intensify social polarisation. Migrants may be represented as invaders or threats, while border authorities may be portrayed as inherently oppressive. These simplified narratives reduce the possibility of constructive dialogue and cooperative governance.

The limits of securitised border governance do not imply that all border regulation is illegitimate. The issue is proportionality and institutional balance. Security must be integrated with protection, due process, human dignity and structural transformation.

The fundamental problem is therefore not the existence of borders. It is the assumption that borders can remain the primary architecture for governing realities whose causes and consequences are fundamentally transboundary.

7. The Unified Science of Peace and MPT-SST as an Analytical Framework

The Unified Science of Peace provides an integrative framework for understanding peace as a dynamic condition emerging from the constructive alignment of consciousness, ethics and structure [2][3][4]. Peace is not understood merely as the absence of violence or the temporary containment of conflict. It involves the transformation of the conditions through which distrust, exclusion, inequality and destructive relationships are reproduced.

The Metaphysical Peace Theory and Spiritual-Structural Transformation framework operationalises this integrative logic by emphasising the relationship between human consciousness, ethical orientation and institutional structure [1][5]. The framework is relevant to border governance because migration crises are not produced by structures alone. They are also shaped by perceptions, narratives, moral assumptions and collective identities.

7.0 Epistemological Position and Scope of the Present Application

In the present article, the Unified Science of Peace (USP) is employed as an integrative critical-normative metatheoretical framework rather than as a completed empirical model. This analysis does not test causal hypotheses, predict migration flows or claim quantitative validation of the consciousness-ethics-structure relationship. Instead, it uses the framework heuristically to examine the interaction among these dimensions and to develop normative propositions for transformative border governance [1][2][3].

This epistemological position defines the status of this particular application, not the permanent or universal status of USP itself. The framework may be amenable to empirical operationalisation in future research, including the development of measurable indicators for consciousness transformation, structural alignment and the effectiveness of relational sovereignty. However, such empirical work lies beyond the scope of this conceptual article. The propositions advanced here are therefore presented as theoretical and normative contributions requiring further scholarly testing, policy deliberation and empirical investigation.

The framework's validity in this context rests on its explanatory power, ethical coherence and practical heuristic utility rather than on predictive accuracy or falsifiability in the positivist sense [4][5]. This is a legitimate mode of social inquiry, particularly when addressing complex, value-laden phenomena that cannot be reduced to quantifiable variables alone.

7.1 Consciousness

At the level of consciousness, border governance is influenced by how migrants and displaced persons are perceived [3].

A threat-centred consciousness may construct migrants primarily as invaders, criminals, demographic dangers or burdens. Such perceptions may intensify fear and support increasingly restrictive policies.

Conversely, a purely historical-retributive consciousness may interpret contemporary migration as a collective right to reclaim wealth or territory from Europe. Although this interpretation may express genuine historical grievance, it risks transforming historical injustice into collective retaliation.

The transformative task is not to deny either fear or grievance. It is to move beyond narratives that reduce human beings to threats or historical instruments.

A transformed consciousness recognises that migrants are human beings with dignity, agency, needs and diverse motivations. It also recognises that receiving communities have legitimate concerns regarding security, institutional capacity and social cohesion.

The objective is therefore not the replacement of one exclusive narrative with another. It is the development of a relational consciousness capable of holding human dignity and legitimate governance responsibilities together [5].

7.2 Ethics

At the ethical level, the Ceuta crisis raises questions concerning the relationship between sovereignty, human dignity, historical responsibility and justice.

A state's legal authority does not eliminate moral responsibility. The exercise of sovereignty must be evaluated according to how it affects vulnerable human beings and whether it respects fundamental rights [28][31].

Historical responsibility is also relevant. This does not require assigning collective guilt to contemporary populations or treating all present-day inequalities as direct consequences of colonialism. It requires recognising that political and economic systems are historically produced and that the benefits and burdens of historical relationships remain unevenly distributed [9][21].

An ethical approach to border governance should therefore include:

- respect for the dignity of every person
- access to protection procedures
- non-refoulement
- individual rather than indiscriminate assessment
- special protection for children and vulnerable persons
- fair responsibility-sharing
- recognition of historical and structural inequality
- lawful and dignified return where protection is not required

Ethical responsibility does not abolish sovereignty. It establishes the conditions under which sovereignty may remain legitimate [5].

7.3 Structure

At the structural level, the crisis demonstrates the limitations of relying on unilateral border enforcement.

The causes of dangerous mobility are distributed across multiple societies and institutions. Effective responses therefore require regional and transnational cooperation [11][33].

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

Structural transformation may include:

- safe and regulated mobility pathways
- fair and efficient asylum procedures
- regional responsibility-sharing
- labour-mobility agreements
- family reunification mechanisms
- conflict prevention
- investment in education and employment
- climate adaptation and resilience
- anti-trafficking cooperation
- reintegration support for lawful return
- institutional mechanisms for addressing historical and structural inequalities

The structural dimension is essential because ethical commitments without institutional support may remain symbolic. Likewise, structural reforms without changes in consciousness may reproduce exclusion within new institutional forms.

The USP framework therefore requires the alignment of all three dimensions [2][4]: Consciousness transformation without ethical accountability may remain subjective. Ethical responsibility without structural reform may remain aspirational. Structural reform without transformed consciousness may reproduce the same exclusion through different institutions.

8. From Westphalian Sovereignty to Relational Sovereignty

The concept of Relational Sovereignty provides the theoretical bridge between the diagnosis of Westphalian Governance Lag and the proposed transformation of border governance.

Relational Sovereignty is a transformed understanding of state authority in which the protection of territorial integrity is balanced with human dignity, historical responsibility, transnational cooperation and the recognition that national security is inseparable from the security and well-being of other human communities.

Relational Sovereignty does not reject the state. It recognises that states remain important institutions for democratic authority, public administration, security and the protection of rights [10]. However, it rejects the assumption that responsibility ends at the territorial border.

Under a purely territorial model, the state's primary responsibility is directed inward. External populations are treated principally as subjects of foreign policy, migration control or security management.

Under a relational model, the state recognises that its security and legitimacy are connected to wider regional and global conditions. Persistent inequality, conflict and human insecurity beyond the border may eventually generate consequences within the state. Cooperative responsibility is therefore not merely altruistic. It is a component of sustainable security [32].

Relational Sovereignty involves four principles.

First, legitimate territorial authority. States retain the right to regulate entry and protect public order.

Second, human dignity. Border authority must be exercised in ways that respect fundamental rights and avoid unnecessary harm [31].

Third, historical responsibility. Contemporary policies should recognise the historical relationships and structural inequalities that shape present mobility [9].

Fourth, cooperative responsibility. States should address transboundary challenges through regional and international cooperation rather than unilateral deterrence alone [33].

Relational Sovereignty therefore transforms the meaning of sovereignty without abolishing it.

Sovereignty remains territorial in jurisdiction but becomes relational in responsibility. This formulation provides a more appropriate framework for an interconnected world.

9. Toward a Transformative Border Governance Architecture

The article proposes a Transformative Border Governance Architecture as the institutional application of Relational Sovereignty through the Unified Science of Peace and MPT-SST.

The architecture is built around the integration of territorial authority, human protection, historical responsibility, structural justice and cooperative governance.

9.1 Humanitarian Protection and Emergency Response

The first responsibility during a mass movement is the protection of life.

Emergency measures should include:

- search and rescue
- emergency shelter
- food and medical care
- protection for children
- family tracing
- trauma-sensitive support
- identification of people exposed to trafficking or exploitation

The protection of life should not depend on migration status. Humanitarian assistance does not determine whether a person will receive asylum or remain permanently. It responds to immediate human vulnerability [28].

9.2 Individualised Protection Assessment

The second stage should involve individual assessment. Authorities should identify:

- possible refugees
- asylum seekers
- unaccompanied and separated children
- survivors of trafficking
- people with urgent medical needs
- persons facing particular vulnerabilities
- migrants who do not have international protection claims

Access to interpreters, legal information and fair procedures is necessary. The objective is to prevent both wrongful return and automatic assumptions of entitlement to residence [26].

9.3 Protection Against Refoulement

No person should be returned without considering whether the return would expose that person to persecution, torture or other serious harm.

The principle of non-refoulement should apply to direct and indirect return. Authorities should consider whether a transit country is safe for the individual and whether onward removal may create protection risks [29][30].

9.4 Lawful and Dignified Return

People who do not qualify for refugee status or another form of protection may be subject to return under national and international law. However, return should be:

- individually assessed
- lawful
- safe
- informed
- dignified
- free from collective punishment

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

· supported by reintegration assistance where appropriate

Dignified return is not equivalent to forced abandonment. It should include measures that reduce the likelihood of repeated dangerous migration.

9.4.1 The Limits of Dignified Return: Legal Permissibility and Structural Sustainability

The framework calls for lawful and dignified return for those who do not qualify for refugee protection. This is a principled position, but it risks obscuring a fundamental problem: in many cases, dignified return is structurally impossible despite being legally permissible.

Consider a person who enters Ceuta not as a refugee but because their region has been affected by drought, their livelihood has collapsed and there are no viable opportunities in their area of origin. Under the 1951 Convention, this person is not a refugee [24].

Return, if conducted safely, is not a violation of non-refoulement [29][30]. Yet the conditions that made migration necessary remain unchanged: drought continues, employment is absent and the structural pressures that produced the movement persist. Dignified return in such cases may mean returning to the same conditions of desperation that drove the person to leave.

This is the central dilemma of mixed migration: many people move for reasons that do not meet the legal threshold for refugee status, but whose situations are nonetheless severe enough to make safe and sustainable return impossible. The framework acknowledges this but offers no easy resolution. The best that can be done is to integrate return with substantial reintegration support, including vocational training, livelihood assistance, social protection and resilience-building measures. However, such support is rarely adequate, and even when provided, it may not address the underlying structural conditions [11].

The framework must therefore be transparent about the limits of return as a governance strategy. In some cases, return without transformation of the conditions that caused movement is not dignity; it is the reproduction of vulnerability. This does not mean return should be permanently suspended—states have legitimate interests in regulating entry—but it does mean that return policies must be accompanied by genuine investment in the structural transformations that make sustainable return possible. Absent such investment, the claim of dignified return is at best aspirational and at worst misleading.

The distinction is therefore between legal return (which may be procedurally correct) and sustainable return (which requires structural conditions that enable people to remain without re-migrating). A governance framework that fails to distinguish between these two concepts risks treating procedural legitimacy as a substitute for substantive justice.

9.5 Safe and Regulated Mobility Pathways

The absence of lawful mobility pathways may contribute to dangerous crossings.

States and regional institutions should expand:

· regulated labour mobility
· educational exchange
· skills partnerships
· family reunification
· humanitarian admission
· resettlement
· temporary protection mechanisms

These pathways should not be understood as unrestricted mobility. They are structured mechanisms for reducing dangerous and irregular movement while responding to genuine social and economic relationships [33].

9.6 Regional Responsibility-Sharing

Ceuta cannot be managed by local authorities alone. Spain, Morocco, the European Union, African states and international organisations require cooperative mechanisms for:

· emergency response
· asylum processing
· child protection
· labour mobility
· return and reintegration
· anti-trafficking action
· development cooperation

Responsibility-sharing must avoid transferring burdens to states with limited resources. Cooperation should be based on capacity, historical responsibility and shared human security.

9.7 Structural Transformation

Long-term transformation requires attention to the conditions that generate dangerous mobility.

Relevant areas include:

· employment and youth opportunity
· education and skills development
· conflict prevention
· accountable governance
· equitable economic relationships
· climate resilience
· social protection
· regional development
· reduction of structural inequality

The objective is not to prevent all movement. Human mobility is a normal feature of human society. The objective is to reduce movement produced by desperation, insecurity and the absence of viable alternatives [11].

9.8 African and Regional Approaches to Mobility Governance

The analysis has focused primarily on Africa-Europe mobility, but African states and regional bodies have developed their own frameworks for managing migration that offer instructive parallels and contrasts. The African Union's Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, adopted in 2018, represents a significant departure from the restrictive visa regimes that characterise Africa-Europe relations [34]. It envisions a continent where African citizens can travel, reside and establish businesses across national borders.

This framework is not without tensions. Implementation has been slow, with a minority of states having ratified the protocol. Concerns about security, labour market pressures and institutional capacity have delayed full adoption. However, the very existence of the protocol signals a different normative orientation: mobility is framed as a developmental asset rather than primarily as a security threat. Regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the East African Community have long maintained visa-free or visa-reduced regimes for citizens of member states, recognising that migration is an integral feature of African social and economic life.

These frameworks demonstrate that mobility governance is not a single, universal model. They reveal that the European approach, treating African migration predominantly as a problem to be

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

managed through externalisation, deterrence and return, is a historically contingent choice rather than an inevitable response. At the same time, African states also impose border restrictions, conduct returns and face serious security and institutional constraints. Migration governance remains contested across the continent.

This comparative perspective enriches the argument for Relational Sovereignty. If African states can conceive of mobility as a right and a developmental resource, the restrictive European model appears not as a universal necessity but as one approach among several. The challenge is not to impose African frameworks on Europe, but to recognise that multiple models exist and that transatlantic cooperation should be a dialogue between governance traditions rather than a one-way transfer of European norms.

Transformative Border Governance requires the constructive alignment of legitimate territorial authority, human dignity, historical responsibility, structural justice and transnational cooperation. Within the MPT-SST framework, consciousness provides recognition, ethics establishes responsibility and structure creates institutional capacity. Sustainable governance depends not on the dominance of any one dimension but on their constructive alignment.

10. Political Resistance and the Limits of Transformative Reform

The Transformative Border Governance Architecture assumes a degree of state goodwill and institutional capacity that cannot be taken for granted. In many Western democracies, border securitisation is not a policy failure; it is an electoral asset [17]. Populist movements have constructed migration as an existential threat to national identity, social cohesion and economic security. Political leaders have won elections by promising stricter border controls, reduced asylum access and expedited returns.

Under these conditions, relational sovereignty faces what may be termed a political lock

-in effect: once a society has invested heavily in securitised border infrastructure, its political economy creates constituencies: border industries, security contractors, enforcement agencies and political entrepreneurs, that benefit from continued exclusion. These actors acquire material interests in the status quo and are likely to resist transformative reform.

The framework must therefore confront the question: How does transformation occur when powerful actors actively resist it?

Several pathways are possible.

Humanitarian crises may generate sufficient public empathy to temporarily override exclusionary politics, though such effects are often short-lived.

Economic interdependence may create incentives for cooperation: labour shortages, demographic decline and regional stability may make relational approaches more attractive than unilateral deterrence.

International legal mechanisms: courts, treaty bodies and regional human rights systems, may constrain the most extreme forms of exclusion, though their enforcement capacity is limited [31].

Civil society pressure and transnational advocacy networks may shift public consciousness over time, though such change is slow and contested.

Crisis spillover effects—when securitised exclusion simply displaces migration to more dangerous routes—may eventually force states to reconsider the effectiveness of deterrence-only approaches.

None of these pathways is guaranteed, and none is rapid. The framework must therefore distinguish between immediate humanitarian obligations (which are binding regardless of political resistance) and long-term structural transformation (which requires sustained political struggle). This is not a weakness of the framework; it is a recognition that normative transformation is always contested. Relational sovereignty is not a policy recommendation that states can simply adopt. It is a horizon of ethical and institutional possibility toward which advocacy, legal action, public education and political mobilisation must work.

The implication for border governance is that transformative reform requires not only conceptual clarity but also political strategy. It must identify allies, exploit windows of opportunity, build coalitions across states and civil society, and respond to crises in ways that strengthen rather than undermine the case for relational approaches. This is a difficult and uncertain process, but it is the condition under which meaningful institutional change occurs.

11. Discussion

The Ceuta crisis demonstrates that contemporary border governance is increasingly confronted by realities that exceed the traditional parameters of territorial sovereignty.

The first challenge is historical. Africa and Europe are not separate worlds that became connected only through contemporary migration. Their political economies, institutions and social histories were shaped through long periods of interaction, including colonial domination and unequal extraction [7][8][9].

The second challenge is structural. Migration is produced through interconnected conditions that cannot be resolved through border enforcement alone [11][14].

The third challenge is legal. Irregular entry does not automatically eliminate refugee protection, while hardship and irregular movement do not automatically establish refugee status. Individual assessment is therefore essential [26][24].

The fourth challenge is ethical. The legitimacy of sovereignty depends not only on legal authority but also on how authority is exercised toward vulnerable human beings [31].

The fifth challenge is institutional. Local border territories cannot bear the responsibility for transboundary problems without regional cooperation and shared responsibility.

The concept of Westphalian Governance Lag integrates these challenges. It explains why territorial institutions may struggle when the problems they confront are historically interconnected, structurally transboundary and ethically universal.

The concept of Relational Sovereignty provides a theoretical response. It retains the state but expands the meaning of responsibility.

Transformative Border Governance provides the institutional pathway. It integrates border regulation with protection, due process, safe mobility, lawful return and structural transformation.

The article therefore rejects two inadequate extremes.

The first is the claim that all borders are illegitimate and that all people should possess an unrestricted right to enter any territory.

The second is the claim that sovereignty permits the indiscriminate exclusion or return of all people who enter irregularly.

Neither position adequately addresses the complexity of contemporary mobility. The proposed alternative is:

Borders may remain legitimate institutions of political

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

administration, but they must operate within a wider architecture of human dignity, individual protection assessment, historical responsibility, structural justice and cooperative governance.

12. Policy Implications

The proposed framework has several implications.

First, migration policy should move from categorical classification toward individualised assessment. People should not be treated as identical merely because they crossed the same border.

Second, humanitarian response should be separated from final migration determination. Emergency protection does not automatically establish a right to permanent residence, but it should never be withheld because of irregular entry.

Third, states should strengthen fair and efficient asylum systems. Delays and inadequate procedures create uncertainty and undermine both protection and public confidence [26].

Fourth, lawful return should be integrated with reintegration and development support. Return without viable opportunities may reproduce the conditions that generated dangerous movement.

Fifth, the European Union and African states should develop more equitable mobility partnerships. These should include labour opportunities, education, skills exchange and family reunification rather than focusing exclusively on enforcement [33].

Sixth, historical responsibility should inform contemporary cooperation. This does not require collective punishment or the rejection of present sovereignty. It requires recognition that global inequalities are historically produced and that responsibility for transformation should be shared [9][21].

Seventh, public narratives should move beyond the binary of migrants as invaders and migrants as historical claimants. Both narratives can intensify conflict. A relational approach recognises human dignity, historical grievance and legitimate governance concerns simultaneously.

13. Limitations and Future Research

This article is conceptual and does not provide an empirical assessment of the individual motivations, legal status or protection needs of all people involved in the Ceuta crisis.

The concept of Westphalian Governance Lag requires further operationalisation. Future research may develop indicators measuring the relationship between transboundary pressures and the capacity of territorial institutions to respond.

Relational Sovereignty also requires comparative analysis. Future studies may examine how the concept applies to other border regions, including the Mediterranean, the United States-Mexico border, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and regions affected by climate displacement.

The Transformative Border Governance Architecture should also be tested through policy simulations, comparative case studies and stakeholder research involving migrants, border communities, government institutions, humanitarian organisations and regional bodies.

The application of USP and MPT-SST to border governance is an emerging theoretical extension [1][2][3][4][5]. Its concepts should therefore be treated as propositions requiring further scholarly evaluation rather than as established empirical laws.

14. Conclusion

The Ceuta humanitarian crisis reveals a fundamental tension within the contemporary global order.

Humanity has become increasingly interconnected, but political authority remains organised largely through territorial separation.

The causes of human mobility are transboundary, while the principal mechanisms used to govern mobility remain national, territorial and defensive.

The crisis therefore cannot be understood solely through the language of irregular migration or border security. It must also be situated within the historical political economy of Africa-Europe relations, the structural inequalities shaping contemporary mobility and the universal human rights obligations that remain relevant regardless of migration status.

The article has introduced Westphalian Governance Lag to explain the widening mismatch between territorially bounded sovereignty and transboundary human realities. It has advanced Relational Sovereignty as a theoretical reorientation and proposed Transformative Border Governance as an institutional pathway.

The central conclusion is not that borders should disappear. Borders may remain necessary institutions of political administration and legitimate state authority. However, they cannot remain the primary architecture for governing human realities whose causes, consequences and vulnerabilities are fundamentally transboundary.

The transformation required is therefore not the abolition of sovereignty but the recalibration of its governing parameters.

From territorial exclusion to relational responsibility.

From deterrence-centred control to transformative border governance. From isolated national security to cooperative human security.

From crisis containment to structural transformation.

The Unified Science of Peace, conceptualised through MPT-SST, provides an integrative framework for this transformation by aligning consciousness, ethics and structure [1][2][3][4][5].

At the level of consciousness, migrants must be recognised as human beings rather than reduced to threats or historical instruments.

At the level of ethics, sovereignty must be balanced with dignity, protection, historical responsibility and justice.

At the level of structure, states must cooperate to create fair protection systems, safe mobility pathways, lawful and dignified return mechanisms and long-term solutions to the conditions producing dangerous movement.

The deepest question raised by Ceuta is therefore not simply who may cross a border. It is whether political structures inherited from a territorially divided world can adequately govern the human realities of an increasingly interconnected one.

The answer proposed by this article is that they can do so only through transformation. Sustainable border governance requires sovereignty to evolve from territorial exclusion toward relational responsibility. Only then can borders protect legitimate political interests without becoming permanent sites of humanitarian rupture.

References

1. Kafinga, A. S. (2026a). The MPT-SST framework (Metaphysical Peace Theory and Spiritual-Structural Transformation) [Pre-registration]. Open Science Framework. https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/DRZSC
2. Kafinga, A. S. (2026b). The Unified Science of Peace: MPT-SST, UPD and CRC as an emerging paradigm for transdisciplinary peace praxis. Journal of Transdisciplinary

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga

Peace Praxis, 8(1), 53. https://jtpp.uk/current-issue-download/
3. Kafinga, A. S. (2026c). Beyond military and structural responses: Applying the MPT-SST consciousness-based framework to youth radicalization in Nigeria. LASU Journal of Peace and Security Studies, 2(1), 259–283.
4. Kafinga, A. S. (2026d). Beyond conflict management: Operationalizing Metaphysical Peace Theory and Spiritual-Structural Transformation (MPT-SST) as a Unified Science of Peace. American Journal of Applied Psychology, 15(4), 84–94.
5. Kafinga, A. S. (2026e). Hyper-structural decoupling and democratic instability: An MPT-SST theoretical analysis of political polarization in Western democracies. Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 9(3), 155–160.
6. [Reuters. (2026, July 31). Social media rumours, economic hardship fuel migrant surge into Ceuta.
7. Mbembe, A. (2001). On the postcolony. University of California Press.
8. Mignolo, W. D. (2011). The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options. Duke University Press.
9. Rodney, W. (1972). How Europe underdeveloped Africa. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
10. Krasner, S. D. (1999). Sovereignty: Organized hypocrisy. Princeton University Press.
11. Betts, A. (2013). Survival migration: Failed governance and the crisis of displacement. Cornell University Press.
12. Zolberg, A. R. (2006). A nation by design: Immigration policy in the fashioning of America. Harvard University Press.
13. Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
14. International Organization for Migration. (2024). World migration report 2024. IOM.
15. Benhabib, S. (2004). The rights of others: Aliens, residents and citizens. Cambridge University Press.
16. Dauvergne, C. (2008). Making people illegal: What globalization means for migration and law. Cambridge University Press.
17. Huysmans, J. (2006). The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU. Routledge.
18. Fassin, D. (2011). Humanitarian reason: A moral history of the present. University of California Press.
19. Nail, T. (2015). The figure of the migrant. Stanford University Press.
20. Agamben, G. (1998). Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life. Stanford University Press.
21. Nkrumah, K. (1965). Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism. Thomas Nelson & Sons.
22. Crawley, H., & Skleparis, D. (2018). Refugees, migrants, neither, both: Categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's "migration crisis." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44(1), 48–64.
23. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2026). The 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR.
24. United Nations. (1951). Convention relating to the status of refugees.
25. African Union. (1969). Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa. Organization of African Unity.
26. Hathaway, J. C. (2005). The rights of refugees under international law. Cambridge University Press.
27. United Nations General Assembly. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
28. European Union. (2012). Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
29. United Nations General Assembly. (1984). Convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
30. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. (2018). The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law.
31. Gammeltoft-Hansen, T., & Hathaway, J. C. (2015). Non-refoulement in a world of cooperative deterrence. Columbia Journal of Transnational Law, 53(2), 235–284.
32. Sassen, S. (1996). Losing control? Sovereignty in an age of globalization. Columbia University Press.
33. United Nations General Assembly. (2018). Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.
34. African Union. (2018). Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment.ress.

Copyright © Aliyu Sani Kafinga