

Editorial

Mixed, Perilous and Other Migrations: Do African Lives Matter?

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This is a trying period for anyone that pays attention to African migration. Migrants' gruesome deaths while in transit are given more coverage. Of these, those in the Mediterranean Sea, and to a lesser extent, the Sahara Desert make it more into the news. But there are also deaths in places in-between. Some are reported. Others are not. One only gets glimpses of such deaths when repatriated migrants mention or lament them. There has been more coverage of Libyan "Slave auctions," at least after CNN released taped evidence from such markets (Elbagir, Razek, Platt, & Jones, 2017). The African Union (AU) and selected African states, including Nigeria, (which by dint of its sheer population size in the African continent, has more citizens caught up in the movements of migrants intent on getting out of their countries to realize dreams of social, economic and political security elsewhere), belatedly responded (Ibuot & Okopie, 2017; Daily Nation, 2017; Busari, 2017). Some have not bothered to do so. It is amazing that Nigeria and other African countries have embassies and diplomatic representative in Libya, yet, there was no previous report, awareness, response, nor were any measures whatsoever taken to document, respond to, and correct the abuses of citizens and violation of their human rights. What then is the value and utility of diplomatic representation? How do African governments understand their responsibilities to citizens? What is the function of the media in these countries? What is the duty of the AU?

The European Union (EU), whose fortress-building and fortress-protecting actions force increased use of more dangerous migration routes, has also responded. The lateness of response makes one wonder whether there was no previous awareness of the hardships, horrors, and deaths of migrants, or if these actors felt no need to respond in the absence of embarrassing media scrutiny and public condemnation.

This article was first written for the conference: "African Refugees and Migrants at Europe's Door, on March 7 and 8, 2016, at Duke University. Okome was at the time living in in Gottingen, Germany, where she was a Senior Research Fellow at Max Planck Institute. Being in Europe opened her eyes anew to the plight of refugees in a new and different way, especially since some Germans thought she was a refugee, and she received the kind of treatment believed to be deserving by them. The article was also revised and presented on October 28, 2016, at "Breaching Fortress Europe..." the inception conference for the academic exchange between the University of Ibadan and The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Given the xenophobia experienced while in Germany, (which we must remember, was one of the more welcoming European countries for refugees), it was also odd for Okome to be a Senior Research Fellow at Max Planck--the only reason she was in Germany--and to be treated with the respect that was believed appropriate once she stepped into the Institute. The experiences of her time in Germany, and of crossing borders, from Germany to the UK, the US, and back were also interesting, since her color meant that people assumed she was a refugee in some instances. The American passport was read to mean she was African American by the border authorities, and this probably made her border crossings less onerous than for many others who may have been refugees.

There is heartrending news on African migrants in Europe and along its borders. Okome's article attempts to analyze some of the circumstances that we see unfolding. It also complicates and contextualizes African migration to Europe. One cannot also help noticing growing xenophobia and consequent increased securitization of migration. Living in the US under the Trump administration means reading reports of anti-immigrant policies, increased incidences of xenophobic responses to immigrants, and witnessing increased anxiety among targeted populations. Europe also shows increased evidence of similar trends and tendencies. Two of the articles in this issue focus on African migration in Europe and the other two on African migration in the US.

In "Breaching Fortress Europe: By Any Means Necessary: The Complications of African Migration to Europe," Mojúbàolú Olufúnké Okome focuses on the European aspect of these phenomena. She contends that there has been long-standing centuries-old African migration to Europe that increased during the 1960s, and intensified with the imposition of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s, post-independence political crises and conflicts in the 1990s and 2000s. These migrations from Africa to Europe included skilled and professional Africans whose movement was conceptualized previously as a brain drain, and who secured the few jobs available in areas where destination countries needed their labor, skills and expertise. They also included clergy, artistes, sports stars, and all manner of hopefuls seeking fame, fortune, refuge, human and material security. Many of the migrants are young people. Some of the deaths in the passage show us their photos, some of the post-rescue debriefs tell us their stories. Some engage in mixed migrations, as they involve irregular migrants who are frustrated into moving from their countries of origin due to failure to make any headway and access decent jobs that provide viable

opportunities for survival and upward mobility. Some also want to unite with family who migrated earlier.

The frustration with material conditions at home and desire for family reunification combine with lack of legal options to migrate to make clandestine migration, including seeking out human traffickers, or being susceptible to offers of opportunities that seem too good to be true. More materially comfortable and successful fellow-citizens are often very critical of these migrants, blaming them for leaving their countries in the first place, for paying traffickers to move them, for being gullible dupes, or greedy folks who believe that the streets of the destination country are “paved in gold.” Many such critiques assume that public education that focuses on the horrors of migration would suffice to persuade potential migrants to stay home. However, there is not too much likelihood that those intent on migrating will be so persuaded. What might help is the availability of decent work and hope of a better future.

Despite some Africans’ movement into Europe involving the figurative breaching an impregnable fortress, using any means at the disposal of migrants, there is movement, and the movement includes more invisible regular migration, and visible painful, tortuous and dangerous migrations. Irregular migrants include as a mix of refugees, asylees, documented and undocumented migrants (MHub, 2017). While European economies were thriving in the period before the 2008 World Economic Meltdown, the degree of enforcement of harsh migration regimes was low. Labor was needed for menial as well as skilled, technical and professional jobs. But the meltdown and “the vulnerabilities spawned in consequence, have laid bare politicized, securitized, xenophobic and callous responses, particularly in the frontline states that receive what is increasingly perceived as a “deluge.”” Greece, Spain, Those Europeans who also faced increasingly precarious conditions were resentful of anyone perceived as taking jobs that

should be reserved for Europeans. There was a rise in “xenophobic attitudes, discourses and policies and the increased securitization of migration, seen in the growing strength of right wing and extreme nationalist parties (Erlanger & Smale, 2015; BBC, 2016), the enforcement of restrictive migration laws and the use of measures meant to keep migrants away.

Scholars of migration tell us that nothing can stop migration. People will migrate willy-nilly. Thus, we should expect that when some routes are closed to migrants, they will seek other routes, which may be more dangerous. The deaths in the passages through the Mediterranean and Sahara are then liable to continue. When these routes become unavailable, others will open up that may be even more dangerous than these. For migration to be reduced, the structural reasons that make it seem to be the only viable option for decent material existence must be successfully addressed. This is more difficult than implementing stopgap measures and responding to migrant deaths only when there’s media coverage and public scrutiny. African countries also benefit from migrant remittances. They benefit from the ways in which migration releases pressures for governments at home to come up with policies that reduce inequality through economic redistribution and attention to people’s need for human security.

Despite the 2008 meltdown, European countries stand to benefit from both regular and irregular migration, particularly because European birth rates have declined and there is need for more population. Migration can fill the gap, but a nod must be made to those Europeans who suffer from economic marginalization. Politicians oblige, and while extreme nationalist right wing parties have been most vitriolic, pronouncements by EU officials and those from centrists and even liberals have been troubling. Of course, until the outing of Libya and the exposure of the horrors and excesses that have brutalized migrants there, the face of the migrants and refugees was predominantly Syrian. This in itself should make us wonder if we are getting the

full picture about migration. We should also be concerned enough to stay focused and seek lasting solutions.

The second article that focuses on Europe is Dmitri M. Bondarenko's "African Migrants in Post-Soviet Moscow: Adaptation and Integration in a Time of Radical Socio-Political Transformations." This is a notable contribution to the literature on African migration, as there are few studies on these migrations to Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Post-Soviet Russia's socio-political transformations are akin to the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs in African countries, although Russia received better consideration due to the Washington Consensus-driven desire to prevent a resurgence of communism. As with the rest of Europe, the Soviet Union experienced migration from Africa and her diaspora. Many were communists for whom the Soviet Union offered refuge for a time, from perceived and real injustices from the capitalist system, including racist segregation, class oppression and socio-economic inequality as well as extreme marginalization. The promise of refuge was fulfilled for some time, although Stalinist purges and xenophobia challenged the expectations of blissful refuge (Simmons, 2014; Savvine, 2014).

African students benefitted from offers of free education in the Soviet Union during a period when, for symbolic as well as realpolitik reasons, support for the anti-colonial movement was strong (Goff, 2016). "In 1960, the People's Friendship University of Russia was established to train students from newly independent countries in Africa and Latin America, and more than 60,000 people from 165 countries studied there during the Soviet period" (Chudinovskikh & Denisenko, 2017). Bondarenko considers how African migrants in Russia are negotiating the post-Soviet changes. He shows that some have chosen integration into Russian society while

others are adapting to social realities and are either unwilling or unable to integrate. He enumerates socioeconomic strategies pursued by Africans and their potential.

Being post-Soviet means that Russia has had to deal with migration to and from other post-Soviet states. It has had to update its immigration policies to address contemporary realities, and given that migrants from post-Soviet states are the overwhelming majority, they are the most visible of the populations involved. Bondarenko reminds us that some of the African migrants went to the Soviet Union before its collapse, while others are newer sojourners. The circumstances of entry and length of stay influence strategies pursued. Bondarenko contends that “more privileged” migrants, who went to the Soviet Union to study and work are the privileged, for whom integration is attainable. The newer “economic migrants,” who also were not allowed into the Soviet Union, but have been able to enter post-Soviet Russia, have no such options. They suffer considerable marginalization and social exclusion. They are forced to adapt as best they can in a Russia where paradoxically, xenophobia is on the rise, but there are also increased opportunities for migrants to engage in business, work and organize social and economic institutions that engage the Russian political establishment.

In “Exploring the Migration Experiences of Black Zimbabwean Women in the Greater Cincinnati Area.” Florence Nyemba and Lisa Vaughn (one of the two articles on the United States of America), consider “the migration experiences of Zimbabwean immigrant women living in the Greater Cincinnati, Ohio area.” This article, significant already due to the dearth of studies on African migration, takes on additional importance due to the increased attentiveness to all things Zimbabwe after the sudden dramatic end of the Mugabe administration. The article shows that the Mugabe administration’s policies and their effects on Zimbabweans pushed many to migrate elsewhere in search of refuge, economic and material benefits and other elements of human security that either were not available, or were declining in their

country. Majority of the migrants go the UK, followed by South Africa. Fewer have migrated to the US and settled there (BBC, 2005).

Increasingly, African women are migrating in search of political asylum, better material conditions, and for education, almost in equal numbers with men. Zimbabwe is no exception. However, Nyemba and Vaughn rightly argue that there is little scholarly attention to these economic migrants. Why do they migrate? What are their hopes, dreams and aspirations? Using “a participatory research approach and used a photovoice method for data collection,” Nyemba and Vaughan privilege the subjects voice and their analysis of their satiation, as well as the solutions they fashioned for their problems, in telling this migration story.

The second article that focuses on African migration to the US is Guy-Lucien S. Whembolua, Donaldson Conserve, and Daudet Ilunga Tshiswaka’s “Socio-cultural Factors Influencing the Ebola Virus Disease-related Stigma among African Immigrants in the United States.” Current preoccupation with the Libyan horror story has replaced the horror story of African immigrants’ vilification, dehumanization, denial of access to economic opportunities, marginalization, and abuse during the Ebola epidemic.

Currently, the Ebola epidemic only comes into media accounts with reportage of pending loss of Temporary Protective Status by Africans from affected countries—Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea (Nordwall, 2017; Murriel, 2017). This article reminds us of the stigma and xenophobia faced by African immigrants in the US at the height of the epidemic. It was bad enough that many lives were being lost. It was worse that people were stigmatized and otherized. Using the PEN-3 cultural model, the article does socio-cultural analysis that explain the prevalence and escalation of stigmatization, and recommends public policy and action to address stigma, negative stereotypes and racism experienced by African immigrants due to ignorant and racist responses to EVD.

Altogether, the articles in this issue address significant issues and problems on African migration. They challenge us to be more observant, more critical, more progressive and more involved in studying, documenting, analyzing African migration. They also challenge us to make progressive and humane migration policy that if done well, will transform the existing international migration regime.

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