Editorial

On African Migrations...

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Another year has ended. The editorial staff of Ìrínkèrindò: a Journal of African Migration wish you a happy new year. What better way than to share the poem written by Dr. Emman Shehu? Not being a poet, and choosing brevity over verbosity, I’d like to reference the comments of two fine scholars who have expertise in poetry. According to Gabriel Bamgbose, Nigerian writer and critic, as well as publisher of Ijagun Poetry Journal, and PhD student at Rutgers University,

“Migrations” is a powerful poem that evokes the pains of the traumatic experience of migration crisis in a language that struggles with the meaning of this experience itself. I commend the strategy of poetic distancing of the migrating subjects moving in multiple migratory routes, as the plurality of the title aptly suggests, all ending in unimaginable loss. Also, I really appreciate the skillful use of alliterations and structural parallelisms, especially in the poetic moments when three heartrending words, almost sounding absurd in the way they are structured, hit the reader with such an empathetic force.

For Tosin Gbogi, Assistant Professor of English at Marquette University:

“Migrations” takes as its central focus human migrations across temporal and spatial borders. Cast in two parts, the poem considers human peregrinations in search of survival. If it is true that this has always been a part of the human history from antiquity, the particular kind of journey that the poet focuses on is of a contemporary type, particularly scary and violent especially in the ways
that the migrants either end up as victims of their own journeys or arrive at their destinations only to be met with stark hostility. In many ways, the poet reminds us of the new trans-Atlantic Slavery between North Africa and Europe, and in the process calls for intervention.

Nothing can stop human migration. Thus, despite news reports of misery, privation, and even horrors of migration experienced by those who make dangerous crossings through the Sahara, the Mediterranean, and lately, the Southern border of the United States, many migrants choose to be hopeful. Some doggedly choose to believe the rags to riches reports that recall the Horatio Alger myth. There is extensive coverage of the exploits and accomplishments of those African immigrants that have “made good.” The sports and entertainment stars, the business moguls and famous writers, the successful professionals and influencers. Migration is embraced with dogged optimism and hopefulness. This is unsurprising given the depth of youth unemployment and underemployment and the narrowing political space in some countries and the daily existential difficulties. The expectation is that anything is better than the status quo. But is it? Some “make good.” Others don’t make it. Some of them even die from trying. Regardless, migration continues.

I am in favor of open borders. If money and goods can move freely, people also should be able to move. The more restrictive the migration regime, the more the likelihood that people would engage in more dangerous migrations. It doesn’t help that right-wing parties and governments are whipping up anti-immigrant sentiment that encourage xenophobia. It doesn’t help that even countries that need migration as a solution to demographic shortfalls are not more welcoming. It doesn’t help that economic crisis and unemployment caused by global shifts causes those who lose their jobs in destination or transit countries to lash out against immigrants. It doesn’t help that even businesses that benefit from the cheap labor of immigrants hypocritically refuse to support less restrictive
migration regimes. It doesn’t help that the destination countries most favored by immigrants, such as the European Union (EU) countries, and the United States, are also sometimes the most hostile to migration. It doesn’t help that the frontline countries along the coastline of the Mediterranean in the African continent have long succumbed to pressure and financial inducement from the EU to prevent migrants from making the crossing, causing an increase in clandestine and dangerous movement. It doesn’t help that xenophobia is a fact of life in many African countries that are favored by African migrants.

A new year begins. Notwithstanding manifold barriers, extension of securitized borders in novel ways and rising xenophobia, migrations continue. Thus, the ongoing need is clear, for the scholarship produced by this journal.
MIGRATIONS
Emman Usman Shehu

I

They frenetically fly south
fleeing frosty freeze –
definite death declaration –
no passport, no visa,
no accompanying yellow card.
They wing unruly breeze,
elbow cloudy formations

track edges of weather conundrums,
carving fleeting airways
across long distance of hope
to a clime of survival.
It’s an unheralded arrival,
weary touchdown on wetlands –
seasonal tropical sanctuary.

II

Driven by deep desperation
and exaggerated anticipation,
the horde head north
parting with nest eggs
daring a deadly desert,
defying robbers and rapists.

They all head north
towards another cruel crossing,
a constantly depleting band
conditions dripping out of hand,
still imagining streets of gold,
silver or at worst bronze.

They all head north
scammed at every second,
crammed in inadequate boats,
the sea a frothing wrath
of unforgiving undulations
snatching as many as it can.

They all head north
to a turbulent denouement
remnants on a shore of unwelcome,
freezing from a fresh nightmare,
wrecks at a journey’s end.

Emman Usman Shehu coordinates creative writing workshops for the Abuja Writers Forum (AWF) and Creative Spark Foundation (CSF). He is the Director of the International Institute
of Journalism (IIJ), Abuja and the author of three poetry collections *Questions for Big Brother, Open Sesame* and *Icarus Rising*. His articles, short stories and poems have appeared in various journals.