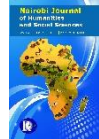




‘Scattered abroad’: The trials of African migrants in Helon Habila’s *Travellers*



Review article



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Abstract

Literary writers at home and in the diaspora have been reacting to the rate at which Africans are leaving the continent for a living in Europe, America and Asian countries. Helon Habila is one of such literary writers who have responded to migration of Africans from their continent with the publication of *Travellers*, (2019). This article, therefore discusses the trials and ordeals of African migrants as portrayed in Habila’s *Traveller*. As the migrants try to make out a meaning from their broken lives and psyches, they become traumatized and disoriented as a result of the environment they find themselves. Using Psychoanalysis as its theoretical bases for analysis, the paper revealed that the dehumanization of migrants has left them confused and in a state of dementia; revealing that migration has brought them more trauma than the better life they envisaged. Each of the characters tell their narratives of vicissitudes they have been through. Through technique, Habila presents a detailed view of the trials and ordeals of the migrants. The article also revealed that the despondency, forlornness, despair and trauma are the fulcrum of Habila’s novelistic experience in this novel. The article concludes that, to curb this exodus, African countries must counter poverty with economic development, as none of the characters in Habila’s *Travellers* has neither economic nor mental reprieve; all of them live a desultory life.

Keywords: Habila, migration, trials, trauma, traveller



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Introduction

Migration has been a common trait of humanity. The story of humanity is fundamentally a story of migration. Adam was forced out of Eden, Moses led his people out of Egypt, Muhammad made the hegira to Mecca (Lalami, 2020, p. 66). In view of this fundamental trait of humanity, African creative writers in recent time have turned their creative energies to the exploration of themes of migration, and its attendant effect on the psyche of migrants, particularly, of African origin. In the interrogation of these themes, they have revealed that many African youths have been attracted to Europe, America and Asian countries; owing to the promise of a better life abroad. While some are emigrating to escape the harsh economic situations at home, others like academics and professionals emigrate to market their intellectual and professional labour. There is the other group, students, who emigrate for educational reasons.

Many opinions and arguments have been advanced on the debate on migration, while the host countries have advanced the argument that migration was having negative effects on their nations and economies, African countries have always decried the effect of brain drain on the continent. African migration has been both legal and illegal. Decrying the tragedies of illegal migration of African youths, the *New African* of November, 2014 reveals that, from the report of the International Office in Migration (IOM), between 2000 and 2014 about 40,000 African migrants lost their lives on the sea and over 30,000 died in the Sahara Desert. There are also reports from the Missing Migrants Project (MMP) that point to the fact that with these tragedies in the sea and desert, there is that urgency to dissuade African youths who may wish to embark on such dangerous and treacherous journeys to have a rethink, because of the dangers of an uncertain future that awaits them.

This paper therefore, is an attempt to explore what motivates these youths to undertake these harzardous journeys. As the narrative of Habila's *Travellers* reveals, in Nigeria, for instance, the insurgency by the terrorist group, Boko Haram, has displaced millions, and left many people orphans and homeless. There is kidnapping for ransom, banditry couple with the harsh economic situation the nation is going through. The poverty level in Nigeria, like most African nations has reached the extreme limit. Democratic expansion has not brought expectant and corresponding gains. No equal opportunity in jobs placement and wealth distribution. The youths have become despondent, they do not know what else to do or what lies ahead of them, as their future is bleak and unknown. Therefore, it is this despondence and the hope for a better life, which makes migration to Europe, America and Asia, the available choice or alternative.

The educational system can no longer produce skilled work-force, as many graduates have become mere victims of certificate-oriented education. The average Nigerian professor earns less than US\$800.00 a month. with this low pricing of intellectual labour, academics and other professionals have also emigrated abroad to market their intellectual labour. This marketing of intellectual labour shows that African migration is intricately connected with labour mobility, and not merely one that is marooned in illegal or undocumented migration.

On the other hand, Brenda Cooper is of the view that migrants, even documented professionals are excluded from their new communities. This exclusion, therefore, has become

dominant motifs in African migrant fiction. From the perspective or angle which they write, they deliver powerful insights into the struggles and dilemmas, politics and transformations that are part of the structures of globalisation and the mobility that comes with it (2013, p. 22). The effect of this is the crisis of a hybrid or hyphenated identity.

Emma Larking argues that the idea of African migration and the universality of human right is a charade and illusion. According to him, this can be attributed to “the failure of International Human Rights Instruments and Migration Frameworks” (2018, p. 67) which make the idea of migrants’ human rights a hoax.

Kabore avers that migration brings about disillusionment, particularly for women who take up jobs that do not reflect the degrees they hold (2016, p. 2). It is these unnerving experiences of dislocation, displacement, alienation which places women on the fringes of life (Ladele & Adesunmbo, 2017, p. 56). Ladele and Adesunbo further their position by arguing that geographical location can no longer be used as the basis for identity formation because it may not be conceptualized in the rigidly fixed terms. According to them, the demography of migration is changing and the paradigmatic shift is on the large scale of international sex trade and this has resulted in altered identities, where women have become sorely objectified (2017, p. 57).

The centrality of migration as an integral part of international discourse has attracted many scholars to join in the conversation—for instance, Feldner argues that migrant writers have two basic concerns to contend with—experiences of migration and diaspora. They invoke a representation of Africa in their writing making the literature to become transnational/transcultural hybridity and national identity (2019, p. 2). In consistence with Feldner’s view, this paper, therefore, is of the opinion that hybridity could lead to fragmented or disoriented identities for migrants. Feldner also opines that migrant literature or literature of migration belongs to the corpus of postcolonial literature, and: “Postcolonial literature is also expected to express an interest in issues pertaining to aspects of mobility, migration and diaspora, which is not surprising, as migration and diaspora present excellent sites for rendering literary discussions of cultural difference and marginality” (2019, p. 27). Feldner’s position is in tandem with earlier views of Wendy Griswold who argues that migrant writers are the chroniclers of their own epochs (2010, p. 11).

Helon Habila

Helon Habila has published four novels—*Waiting for an Angel* (2003), which won the Commonwealth Literature Prize 2003 for the best novel by an African, *Measuring Time* (2007); *Oil on Water* (2010); *Travellers* (2019); and a non-fiction, *Chiboks Girls: Boko Haram kidnapping and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria* (2016). His novels have engaged scholars and critics’ attention both at home and abroad. On October 3, 2013 a boat carrying African migrants sank at the in the Mediterranean and over 360 migrants drowned. In an effort to offer an African perspective to this tragedy, a German newspaper commissioned Habila to write an article on the incidence. The result of that article, birthed Habila’s fourth novel, *Travellers* (Helga, 2020, p. 168).

Migration and Human Dispersal

At the turn of the Twenty-first Century, attention has been shifted from the fixity of borders to their fluidity. The fluidity of borders studies allows for not only the interrogation of the subject as a mere territorial enclave or divide, but also to see borders as social constructs and “these constructs occasion constant bordering, rebordering and debordering..., and the psycho-social experience of maintaining or resisting delimited identity (Okolie, 2019, p. 2). On the other hand, explaining the concept of border, Laila Lalami posits that “whatever form it takes, a border primarily conveys about the Self and the Other” (2020, p. 49). A border according to Lalami, is not just a physical demarcation, but ideological and a means of identity construction. Furthering her position, she argues that: “Nowadays the West is constructing its own version of the Iron Curtain, one based not on political ideology, but on the identity [...] to protect the Self from the various Others” (2020, pp. 59-60). Her argument buttresses the claim that, migrants who cross the border and live with their hosts, even with valid papers, are not real citizens, but conditional citizens

In literary scholarship, the idea of borders has become an agency and a site where writers allow characters to narrate their own stories. In this way, writers have considered the movement through the physical and symbolic divide (Okolie, 2019, p. 11). It is based on this idea that Habila creates his characters who are traversing several borders in search of a new life. However, these border-crossing migrants are restricted along certain border-lines which they must not cross and which tend to redefine them along class and racial lines. The most difficult border for them to cross, becomes the emotional and psychical border. This is in tandem with the position of Patrick Chabal that: “In the new environment that person might in due course change her/his identity by acquiring some/many of the attributes of the host grouping. But (s)he would never be viewed, nor indeed think of her/himself as a freestanding individual, able to move across social spaces at will” (2012, p. 123). Chabal blames this narrowing of borders and its limitation to the menace of globalisation, which to him, means ‘enforced westernisation’ (2012, p. 11). He further argues that enforced westernisation is an attempt by western imperialists to have their dominance on non-west which has been receiving local reactions (2012, p. 11). One of these reactions is the creation of immigrant narrative voice as one sees in Habila’s *Travellers*.

In *Travellers*, Habila presents a group of characters who found themselves in uncharted landscapes of dislocation, with ghosts of past trauma haunting them with absence of cultural dynamics; where they become outsiders on the margin of the individualistic and materialistic cultures of Western societies (Lewis 2019, p. 17). These characters are scattered abroad, traversing, one border, only to be held up by another. Gina, the wife of the nameless protagonist, moves from the United State of America to Berlin while the husband abandons his PhD work and follows her to Berlin. The protagonist in Basel, misses his train and finds himself among migrants being deported. He is deported and later returns to Berlin and finally to USA. Portia’s father, James Kariku is in exile, moving from Zambia to Europe; Karim moves from Somalia to Yemen, Syria, Turkey, Bulgaria and Basel. The fluidity of these European borders as the novels reveals, makes these migrants believe, they are in the same global patrimony and community; they cross one border to another in search of a new life. They are all travelers.

The novel is divided into six sections narrated by different narrators. The central narrator is nameless and his namelessness accounts for the invisibility of African migrants as seen in the eyes of their western hosts. His wife, Gina, is a painter working with other African students. The portraits in her polyptych revealed the sad realities of forced displacement, which form the nucleus of Habila's narrative in *Travellers*. The narrator movement to Berlin becomes a defining moment in the narrative. He has initially rejected the idea of moving to Berlin which according to him, "it was only my immigrant's temperament, hoping for home and permanence in this new world, at the same time fearful of long-term entanglements and always hatching an exit plan" (Habila, p. 11). The protagonist is weary of staying in a new world of Berlin, he has the hope of returning home to Nigeria. His longing for home and return is built around his firm believe that "every departure is a death, every return a rebirth" (Habila, p. 12). These movements across borders leave scars in the lives of the migrants, scars of humiliation, loneliness, abuse, inhuman treatment of constant harassment by immigration officials, scars of memory of loss and death, scars of uncertainty; which put them in the state of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders. The protagonist is almost losing his grip on life, "I was sliding down a precipice, but I was unable to stop [...] Maybe this was what we needed. A break from our breaking-apart life" (Habil, p. 13). His longing for return and permanence foreshadows his forced return towards the end of the novel when he is forcefully deported and the dismay of the mother when he reaches Nigeria.

At the beginning of the narrative, the narrator meets other characters who are protesting their immigrant status--Mark is from Malawi and has a previous identity that does not qualify him to stay in Berlin. He lives with friends in an abandoned church where: "Most of the doors and windows were gone[...] Mark and his friends had inherited this dwelling from another 'alternatives'"(Habila, pp. 14-15). It is these conditions that migrants lived. Mark particularly lives a peripatetic life, from one city to another.

The migrants are often hounded and raided by the police where "they lived an impoverished and makeshift-life" (Habila, pp. 29-30). Marks is arrested and the fear of deportation grips his friends and they work for his release. After his release, he spends two nights with the narrator. While there, he begins to see Berlin as one distant place, "Even in Berlin I miss Berlin" (Habila, p. 42). This shows that migration and exile bring about, alienation, nostalgia, and melancholy and romantization, it also explains how the migrant feel as strangers. Displacement alters their identities, and their identities are no longer define by 'being' but 'becoming' (Mardorossian, p. 17). Berlin, and by extension Europe, has become such a distant place where "A black person's relationship with Europe would always need qualification—he or she wouldn't simply become native European, there had to be origin explanation" (Habila, p. 165). From the narrative, it becomes clear that migrant and refugee fictions are deeply replete and imbued with the trauma of origin (Arnett, p. 103).

Manu, a Libyan, whose parents are originally from Nigeria, is a medical doctor in his real identity; but he works as a bouncer in a Nightclub as he awaits the result of his asylum application (Habila, p. 5). The question one may ask is why will a qualified medical doctor, works as a bouncer in a nightclub? Manu has to give-up his true identity, and takes up a false identity, just to fit into

the new environment of western culture. Manu's ordeal started after the fall of Gaddafi, when ethnic rivalry and violence set in and the citizens started attacking anybody who does not look like them, he was even attacked by his own patients. He moved to Berlin with his family, because "that's is where everybody is going" (Habila, p. 91). Manu has become rootless, hence, the need to dissolve the past. He states boldly when asked if he is from Libya, "I have no country" (Habila, p. 87). This becomes a shift from exile to migration which challenges the binary logic and emphasizing the rootlessness of migrant (Mardorossian, 2002: 16).

Manu has a daughter, Rachida and both of them are in Berlin in search of his wife and son. The wife and the son are believed to have died on the sea, but he feels that keeping their memories alive means that they are not dead (Habila, p. 97). However, towards the end of the novel it is discovered that the wife is alive and could not locate her family. Manu does not have many stories, as the narrative reveals, "Stories are made up and traded as currency among homeless, rootless people, offered like a handshake, something to disarm you [...] The water they all crossed to come here has dissolved the past" (Habila, p. 83). The sea becomes a dual metaphor, providing them with the means or bridge, a purification process for the creation of a new life; however, this new life never materializes, because home keeps calling for return, since the migrants do not have roots in their host community. The same sea that takes them to Europe, also takes their lives. Abrogating his past has made him to dispersed abroad. Manu leaves Libya as a medical to find a new life in Europe, but ends up achieving nothing, but despair

Portia is a Zambian student and the daughter of a dissident poet, James Kariku. Her father, "was part of the university-based group of intellectuals agitating for multiparty democracy" (Habila, p. 132). He left Zambia at the wake of the repressive regime that was clamping down on opposition and the academia. His poems and writings got him into trouble and he flees to Europe trying to be in exile (Habila, p. 132). He becomes a sort of professional exile, switching from one fellowship to another.

Portia came to Basel in search of her brother David, who has changed his name from David to Mousa and David again in order to take a new identity. David stays in an abandoned building as a refugee. As refugees, they were "not allowed to go anywhere, not church, or library, or public building" (Habila, p. 106). His attempt at a contract marriage to enable him get work permit leads to his deportation to Mali in a very demeaning manner. The narrator reports thus: "What do deportee feel: relief, shame, anger? Surely, they must feel relief to be away from all that European suspicion and alienation? (Habila, p. 109). She reasons, what could have motivated her brother to leave home, and her father to seek activism in exile and delusion (Habila, p. 157) David's death confirms Portia's fears that the trials and ordeals of migrants, the dangerous trips they make through the desert and sea did not worth the life they lead.

Karim flees Somalia with his family through Yemen, Syria, Turkey, and Bulgaria. They are arrested by the Bulgarian border guards and driven to prison in preparation for deportation. His protest that he is a United Nation protected refugee would not deter them. The guards detained them and fed them in the most dehumanizing manner as Karim retorts, "The food also was bad" (Habila, p. 182). The narrator worries whether the lives of migrants in Europe "Is to diminish the

human in them” (Habila, p. 183). Karim explains his ordeals and trials thus: “I have seen people who suffer more than me. I have seen people die in the forest, trying to cross the border” (Habila, p. 172); again “Every day they take out dead bodies” (Habila, p. 185). With this disposition, tenacity and audacity of hope, he says, “My story also is sad, but I have seen more sad stories in my travelling” (Habila, p. 173). Karim’s joy only lies in the fact that he is alive, whether he is actually living or existing, he is not bothered. In this state, he could not but help thinking about returning to Somalia.

Somalia with her failings is home to Karim and his family while Europe could not offer him any succour or relief to his economical and psychical distress. He begins to reason that: “I still feel sad because of the life we are living. I always think, what if we are back in Somalia, and everything is okay, and we are living in our small home with our shop” (Habila, p. 185). Life at home, in a small home is better than the prison he finds himself in Europe. This agrees with Arnett’s position that the idea of “home is something that is doubly alien and alienated” (Arnett, p. 111), the trauma of losing one’s home becomes an isolating experience (Arnett, p. 110). Karim ability to come to terms with his inability to protect his family and his eventual escape, is inhered in the metaphor for the traumatic experience of displacement for migrants or refugees (Arnett, p. 104). This makes him come to the reality that his home in Somalia, with all its weakness is the ideal home. “I was afraid, I was tired, I miss my home and I miss Mogadishu and my shop and my simple, life selling little things with my family” (Habila, p. 178). He misses his country and has nostalgia for return.

Edward DOCX argues *Travellers* “conjure in the reader the seemingly irreconcilable feelings of both intense revivification and displacement [...] dispossession and human suffering”. He further explains that the novel paints a true picture of migrants’ trials and suffering. In his opinion, Tomkin Boyd avers that *Travellers* is about “a course of elegant deracinated narcissism” where Habila “leaves realism behind in his hallucinatory interlude where misery and despair of migrants plight mingle with a curious resignation”. The narratives according to Boyd, have “beguiling buoyancy”. It might not be apt to see the novel not having realism, the stories are very realistic and almost factual; as some events in the narrative are based on Habila’s personal interviews with refugees. Stephen Bush reasons that the novel is about refugees fleeing war, bigotry and heterodoxy of creed, economic collapse and globetrotting academics. On the other hand, Ugbabe holds that *Travellers* is about the psychology of departure and destination and the traumatizing experience of crossing borders. It is the experiences of crossing the borders coupled with the experiences at their destinations that make these migrants to become traumatized and disoriented.

Disoriented Voices of Migrants in *Travellers*

Habila’s *Travellers* presents the reader with the narratives of characters who are disoriented, emotionally wrecked and who have become deeply traumatized as a result of their trials and ordeals in Western societies. The trauma they experience is as result of their failed dreams. None of them could return voluntarily, the return that could have become therapeutic is dreaded. For

instance, Juma goes on hunger strike to protest his asylum status and to resist deportation; the woman who lost her children on the sea has become demented; as she loses her psyche.

Portia's father James Kariku, on the other hand, has become demented, traumatized and disoriented as a result of the trials of exile and his inability to re-integrate into his community after his return. This is in tandem with the position of Edward Said who avers that: "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealing rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted" (173). The narrator reports that James Kariku left Zambia, but only returns irreparably damaged by the torture of exile and it was the return that ultimately killed him (Habila, p. 126). "Exile was his life. The return killed him" (Habila, p. 139). He became a near-psychic patient, which also explains the idea that there is a connection between psychoanalysis and psychiatry (Greedharry, p. 15); this shows the nexus between the self and the mind. As the reader sees in James Kariku, exile has created a psychiatric disorder in him. Psychoanalysis therefore becomes the means of probing minds and selves. The probing reveals that trauma and disorientation—are the effects of exile, displacement and migration.

Julia Udofia points out that returning migrants who have failed to achieve anything like the protagonist in *Travellers*, become disoriented, alienated and rejected by the people (2016, p. 13). It is around these characters that Habila weaves his narrative of trauma and disorientation. James Kariku, Portia's father is a symbol of African intellectuals who have become disoriented as a result of exile. Portia describes her father thus: "He looked happy to see me. But it was awkward. I didn't know how to be a daughter, and clearly, he had forgotten how to be a father" (Habila, p. 140). Exile made him to sever all ties with home. And it becomes obvious that that he has become disoriented, "As days passed by alarming signs began to show, he appeared disoriented, unsure where he was, or what day it was. He'd go to the window and peek outside at passing cars [...] Once, they found him seated at the yard, under the cashew tree, in the pouring rain" (Habila, p. 137). The question that the reader asks is, what will make such an intellectual figure, poet, philosopher and thinker lose his mind? The peak of his disorientation is at the point where he attempts to leave Zambia with neither a valid passport nor visa. From his action, the reader could see the ego as the carrier of neurosis, which eliminates the autonomy of self (Peck and Coyle, p. 187). Portia has to fetch him from the airport where he is seen ranting and almost fighting the officials who prevented him from boarding. He could not achieve anything in exile, rather he returns demented.

Karim has the illusion that the fluidity of western borders meant that they [migrants] belong to the same global patrimony. He is surprised when the Muslim who offered to help him, were only doing so to enlist his children into the terrorist cells (Habila, p. 189). Leaving Somalia and traveling to Europe has not brought any succour to his family, it is all tales of woes. Through Karim's story, Habila makes a bold statement that all migrants stories are tales of woes. How could Karim and his family "chose the wilderness of exile over home" (Habila, p. 214). Exile and migration meant death, to be away from the known world is exile and exile is death (Said 2000, p. 173). Karim therefore, is emotionally, psychologically and economically dead. His exile status tends to focus

on what he left behind and the possibility of a return (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 17). He continues to romanticize home and this brings to bear the question of belonging.

The nameless protagonist appears to be the most disoriented character. He is emotionally derailed and wrecked; while at the same, he become the interpreter of the major events in the narrative. Through him, Habila reveals the glorying and harrowings of horror in the sea, which has become a metaphor of death, rather than a bridge to the life that they had hoped for. The “sea was restless, roiling and snapping [...] spouting foam like an enraged leviathan” (Habila, p. 189). The place where he is kept is more than human effluence and trash, it was the smell of misery and despair” (Habila, p. 200). When the migrants arrive, they are properly deloused before they can inter into Europe. These camps epitomize the liminal space of transition, a sort of limbo, a purgatory, where people are stuck between the known and the unknown. The refugee camps are the liminal space (Courtois, pp. 27-28). The sight of these migrants in the camps is horrible; “it was never a pretty sight: some had feet rotting in their wet shoes, some had shit and vomit caked to their skin and hair, some were delirious with fright from being trapped between dead bodies for many days in the boat” (Habila, pp. 201-202). This Post Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by horror and victimization makes them become traumatized and disoriented.

It is this kind of condition that the protagonist is held where he has lost “all will to live” (Habila, p. 206). He becomes so disoriented that his life began “alternating with depressed silences” (Habila, p. 207). He becomes unsure of what to do, either leave or wait for the worst. “I have seen too many die here. Healthy, normal people. The next day they fall ill and the next day they are dead [...] Who is to say if I am not dead already, the people around me could be shadows, wraiths, like me. If I am alive, then I am barely alive” (Habila, p. 208). He has become a withered and empty man, and in place of this void, restless thoughts invade him. The absurdity of his disorientation is seen in these imagery as he discombobulates from his dreams where floating human bodies appear to him as fish (Habila, p. 234). Everything dawn on him that he is being deported back to Africa without any thing only an overwhelmed emotion, void and nothingness. When he finally gets to Nigeria, he sees the visible shame and despair from his mother; who had invested heavily on him, with much hope and expectations, but to her dismay, her son returns without anything; not even his American wife.

The mother is ashamed and disappointed, and the father feels the only way to save the mother the trauma is for him to return to America. According to his father, “Your mother had built so much hope on you.” (Habila, p. 267). The protagonist returns home, but has no home, for him to have a home, it has to be negotiated or re-negotiated, craft or possibly create a new one. Since he could not craft a new home, he feels his mother’s unfulfilled expectations and palpable shame. In America or Berlin, he has no home, as Udofia argues, “home is now one place in which people are rooted but which is a place of construction” (2016, p. 14). This further explain the fact that the nameless narrator in America and Berlin he is merely an abject. Abjection is something revolting and strange to the self and paradoxically part of the self and pose a threat to the boundaries of the self. Abject forms include forced and illegal migration, which contrast with cosmopolitanism (Toivanen, p. 2). The consequence of this that migrants like Habila’s nameless protagonist in

Travellers do not have roots in their host communities, and could not construct one. Their dilemmas cut between “being part of the place you were and a part of a broader human community” (Appiah, xvi). The failures or the neurotic compulsion to repeat failure and the unfulfilled dreams are the issues which Habila uses in this novel to call on those who are even anticipating such treacherous journeys to have a rethink.

Basma becomes traumatized when she suffers a boat mishap, as she and her family migrated to Europe. She has no memory of any past, and she has no destination and she is cruelly taken to the camp where she sits all-day staring at the sea and listening to the voices of her children who drowned. She has lost her mind and is in a semi-somnambulist or sleepwalking state, “she couldn’t remember who she was and where she comes from. All she could remember was the sea. Occasionally, her memory flashes and she will remember that she is a wife and a mother and hopes that her daughter and husband were alive somewhere. In her disoriented state she begins to have nightmares and dreams of many faces. The loss of mind becomes loss of identity. She is given the name Sophia, which she rejects; “My name is not Sophia[...]She shook her head, overwhelmed by the memories racing into her head[...]Basma, she said, repeating the name slowly”(Habila, p. 227-228). In spite of the trauma she is going through, she refuses to give up her identity.

Basma has a son, Omar and a daughter, Rachida. It becomes clear to the reader from her narrative that she is Manu’s wife. Manu and her daughter, Rachida are searching for a nameless woman. The boat mishap flung them apart and compounds their problem. She suffers a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and depression sets in as a result of the accident in the sea. She loses memory, becomes distressed, upsetting with the feeling of a repeat of the tragedy, which creates fear and phobia in her. This agrees with the Freudian topographical model of the *preconscious* which includes memory of experiences which can easily be brought to consciousness (Houston, p. 140). Basma’s condition becomes a metaphor for the condition of African women migrants who have been manifesting psychological symptoms such as: hysteria, anorexia nervosa, agoraphobia and claustrophobia because of the trauma they face in their new environment (Kapoor, p. 69). This condition makes her trauma more severe compared to the other characters.

Juma like many other migrants, has managed to get to Europe, but upon arrival he is kept in a detention camp awaiting deportation. Juma asserts his agency by choosing a self-imposed precarity to protest against the dehumanizing treatments of migrants (Helga, p. 173). Juma believes that: “Hunger is a tool. It is power. By refusing to eat, you are telling your enemy, ‘There is nothing you can do to me anymore. I am willing to starve myself to death to prove a point, what else is there to fear’” (278). He was inspired by a man in Germany who decided to stay up in a tree to protest against the police who came to break up the refugee tents. “The police were flummoxed; they didn’t know how to handle the man. He stayed there, in the cold European winter, hugging a tree branch, in the falling rain, shitting and pissing on himself, with no food, and only rainwater to drink, not coming down” (Habila, p. 279). With this inspiration and renewed vigour, Juma is ready to press against his forced deportation. His trials and ordeals in the hands of the police and immigration officials have had a toll on him. The narrator reveals thus: “I realized

Juma might not all be there, mentally. His travails had taken a toll on his mind and often he appeared to be lost, drifting and sometimes hardly aware of where he was or what he was doing” (Habila, p. 279). These trials and ordeals are made worse by the “Home Office’s cruel and inhumane immigration policy, and the promise to create a hostile environment for immigrants” (Habila, p. 280).

Juma is eventually deported in this disoriented state of mind, after the officials have given several reasons for bowing to the pressure of the people that he should be deported. Luck plays into him, though he has made up his mind that he was not going to get down from the aircraft; the Nigerian government denied the plane landing. He is returned to Berlin and kept in the camp, but this time having access to people and books. It is at this point that he narrates his ordeal in a letter he wrote to the protagonist and Portia. The letter chronicles the events which forced him to emigrate to Europe. These events include: the insurgent attacks that sacked his village and killed members of his family, and forced about ten thousand of them into refugee camps in Niger (Habila, p. 285). He manages to cross to Libya, where they had to drink their urine, just to stay alive for another ordeal (Habila, p. 287). Crossing to Europe, the ordeal is traumatizing for Juma, all around him are floating bodies and screaming children (Habila, p. 288).

After all these experiences, Juma becomes skeptical about the existence of God: “But sometimes you wonder if there is a God, why does He allow such things happen. Why are some people born to suffering and heartbreak, while others from the day they were born till they die know nothing but happiness and pleasure? Is God biased [...]?” (Habila, p. 289).

Juma questions the very tenets of religion and humanity vis a vis God’s creation. Religion becomes baseless, empty and meaningless, if it does not take into account humanity, which is the very essence of religion. Juma’s skepticism makes the reader wonders, if God looks down from His throne in heaven and see the suffering he and other migrants go through; can He still see them, as *His beloved children with whom He is well pleased*. Juma suffers humiliation and dehumanization in the hands European authorities after fleeing the insurgency in Nigeria, only to be chased by the Nativists protesting against migrants. Dehumanization becomes a border wall that he must cross, especially, as undocumented immigrant (Lailami, p. 61). Juma’s case resonates the story of the Other who has remained resolute to the point where he could not speak for himself. His narrative is keeping the memory of migrants who defies western erasure alive. The image of Juma disintegrating into a pile of twigs on the floor shows a perfect epistomization of the vulnerability and invisibility, which intensify the humanizing effect in the novel, which creates compassion in the mind of the reader. (Helga, 2020, p. 176).

Conclusion

This article has examined the idea of migration, trials, ordeals and the vicissitudes which African migrants go through while in abroad. It looked at the factors that forced the migrants to be scattered abroad, which include: civil strives and forced displacement, insurgency, creed heterodoxy, political persecution, economic and educational reasons, exile and asylum, among others. Form the analysis, the article revealed that all the characters became disoriented and

traumatized as result of their trials and ordeals coupled with failed dreams. It also revealed that trials and ordeals of migrants leave them disoriented, traumatized, demented emotionally and psychically dehumanized. From the analysis, it becomes obvious that none of the migrants in Habila's *Travellers* has any mental reprieve; as all of them live a desultory life. The article posits that Habila ventriloquizes the migrants' narrative to create compassion for refugees, who are the forcefully displaced Other. It is the view of this article that, if political stability is enthroned in African nations' governance, improvement in educational and infrastructural development, and creed tolerance; economic prosperity would be enhanced and this will go a long way in curbing, and reducing forced displacement and migration.

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