

Migrant Narratives and the Search for Identity in Selected African Novels

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Abstract

Migration and identity are prominent themes in contemporary literature reflecting the global realities of displacement and cultural integration. This study delves into the paradigms of migration and the search for identity in Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Helon Habila's *Travellers*. Through a qualitative analysis of these texts using Evarett Lee's Push-Pull theory and Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity theory, this study interrogates the interconnectedness of migration and migrant's identity. The fusion of migration and identity suggests the wide range of emotions people go through when they are uprooted from familiar environments such as cultural clashes, economic imperatives and social integration. The characters' journeys range from pursuing the 'American Dream' to longing for a place called home. These findings capture the complex interactions between cultural assimilation, economic inequality and an overwhelming longing for a secure sense of identity while highlighting the resilience and adaptability of migrants amidst systemic inequalities and cultural tensions. The effects of migration on people's culture have developed into mindboggling questions that have taken center stage in the minds and works of contemporary literary writers and researchers. This study illuminates the enduring quest for belonging and self-discovery offering insights into the human condition in a globalised world.

Keywords: Migration, Identity, Cultural assimilation, Systemic inequalities

Introduction

The history of human progress and cultural evolution has been marked by migration, which has become one of the most significant and urgent global concerns of our time. The legal standing of individuals changes when they migrate to another country. They unexpectedly acquire the designation or status of migrants. Migration is a very complicated phenomenon. There are many different and evolving factors that influence migration. Besides, it is difficult to categorise migrants because they arrive under a variety of conditions, from a variety of surroundings, and with a variety of personal traits. It follows that addressing the issues that arise and creating sensible policies to protect migrants require an awareness of the causes and effects of migration as well as theoretical and

practical abilities.

Migration has shaped societies, civilizations, and individual lives throughout history, making it a defining aspect of the human experience (Gabaccia 56). People's moving across borders has sparked economic and social transformation, but it has also been closely linked to the nuanced idea of identity. Globalisation, conflict, and economic inequalities have all heightened the dynamics of migration in the modern age, making it a crucial subject for investigation (Castañeda and Shemesh 61). The concept of identity which is complex and anchored in social, cultural, and personal factors is inextricably linked to migration (Eriksen 28). People frequently struggle with issues of self-identity, belonging, and the balancing of many identities as they cross geographical and cultural borders (Rosenmann, Reese, and Cameron 211). The examination of migration in literature frequently goes beyond the straightforward depiction of physical mobility; it also includes the characters' psychological and emotional journeys as they negotiate the choppy waters of identity creation (Mahalingam 9).

This study not only highlights the physical movement of people but also explores the emotional and psychological transformations that occur during migration. Through a critical examination of the selected literary works, the study examines the stories of migrants who courageously traverse boundaries both physical and psychological, inviting readers to accompany them on their transformative journey. The study offers a detailed understanding of how migration experiences are portrayed in literature and how they affect characters' sense of self by concentrating on three paradigmatic aspects, including: economic migration, forced migration, and voluntary migration.

Literature Review

For millennia, migration has affected human history, societies, and cultures. It is a complicated and ubiquitous phenomenon. It entails the translocation of individuals or groups of individuals, frequently accompanied by a change in domicile, as a result of a variety of circumstances, including economic opportunity, political unrest, environmental concerns, and social goals. Understanding the dynamics of human mobility and its enormous ramifications for individuals, communities, and nations requires a thorough understanding of migration. Drawing from other works on the topic, this introduction gives a general overview of the main ideas, historical setting, and current significance of migration. Migration has been a common practise throughout human history. People travelled for trade, conquest, exploration, and religious pilgrimage throughout antiquity. For instance, the massive network of the Silk Road permitted considerable cultural interactions and migration (Hansen 5).

Vordermeyer distinguishes three forms of migration - "refugees," "the bearers of hope," and "the world players," (111) each of which differs in the degree of personal choice. These categories inherently include specific traits that affect the process of identity reconstruction because it relies on the motivation behind the move, the cause, and the emotional attachment to the place of origin. Due to the fact that the migrant will seek in the host country what he was missing in his home country and will miss in the host country the things that he left in the country of origin (Vordermeyer 112).

Identity and Identity Formation

The concept of identity has sparked interest and research in a number of academic fields, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. It describes a person's sense of self, which includes their values, personality traits, beliefs, and self-perceptions (Erikson 50). Although the idea

of identity has been examined from a variety of angles, there is a unifying theme that acknowledges that it is a dynamic and growing construct rather than a fixed or static thing. According to Stryker, the self can be viewed as a reflection of the society to which it belongs (15). Stets and Burke argue that since society does contain a variety of selves, there ought to be something that exceeds the self. At that point, scholars establish the concept of identity to explain the variations in the self in society (228). Identity, as Stryker posits, is the social position that one not only occupies but also internalises (20). In other words, an individual has an identity associated with each of their social statuses. It is reasonable to say that self and identity are distinct concepts, with self preceding and shaping identity.

Additionally, individuals employ their identities when interacting with others. For instance, when a student and a professor interact, it is not merely the student self or the professor self involved; rather, two distinct identities are aware of each other and the roles and social statuses assigned to them through agreements between themselves and society. Conversely, if this particular encounter involves a business transaction where the professor is the buyer and the student is the seller, the selves would then assume different personas (Stets and Burke 229). Therefore, the identity is not a fixed, tangible thing; rather, it is very malleable and subject to change depending on its surroundings, context, and expectations from the other party, which may be a society, a group, or other identities that are similar to itself.

Methods / Materials

This study examines the paradigms of migration and the search for identity. The study uses *Behold the Dreamers* by Imbolo Mbue, *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo, and *Travellers* by Helon Habila as the main focus in its contextual analysis since these works properly reflect the multifaceted nature of migration and its impact on people's sense of identity in society. The study uses a qualitative research design in order to provide comprehensive knowledge of the relationship between migration and how individuals negotiate their identities. The texts are critically analysed using Everett Lee's Push-Pull theory and Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity theory, for the reason that they extensively examine the underlying reasons for migration and how migrants negotiate their identity, respectively. Each text is analysed in accordance with the relevant theories, looking at how they relate to the lives and pursuits of the fictional characters as they battle social norms and cultural dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

The Push and Pull Theory of Migration

Numerous variables influence migration as a global phenomenon, influencing both individuals and communities to relocate. The push-pull theory is a fundamental parameter that aids in illuminating the complex reasons and circumstances that support human mobility. Frequently credited to economist Ernst Georg Ravenstein, this theory posits that a combination of "push" factors compelling individuals to leave their place of origin and "pull" factors attracting them to a destination influence migration decisions (Ravenstein 199).

The interaction between pressures that push people away from their existing place and those that pull them towards new opportunities is acknowledged by this dual framework (Ravenstein 199). The circumstances and situations in a person's country of origin that promote migration are known as push factors. These can include a lack of possibilities for personal or professional advancement, economic

challenges, political unrest, military conflicts, and environmental catastrophes (Lee 47). People feel it is necessary, as a result of these causes, to look for alternative places where they might improve their quality of life.

Pull factors, on the other hand, are the opportunities and appeal that a destination offers. These can consist of the prospect of employment, improved living conditions, educational opportunities, political stability, and social networks that support integration (Massey et al., 199). Pull forces function as magnets, luring immigrants to places where they hope to find better opportunities. Push and pull variables are rarely the only ones that influence migration decisions; instead, these two forces frequently interact in complex ways. When deciding whether to move, where to migrate, and when to migrate, individuals and societies balance the relative importance of these elements (Stark and Bloom, 1975). Along with individual desires and resources, societal and cultural variables are also very important in determining migration choices. If there are barriers between the two locations, the flow of migrants may not fully develop.

The Social Identity Theory

The self, identity, and identity creation are the main topics of this theory from a group membership perspective. The idea holds that group membership and the self's activation by this group (acceptance and approval) are adequate to explain how identity is formed. The self, will comprehend that he or she belongs to a group and should identify with that group and act accordingly as a result of category or group membership (Stets and Burke 2011). According to social identity theory, this awareness will motivate/oblige people to understand the dynamics of the group, its structure, and how to modify themselves in order to fit in. At that point, conceptions of in-group and out-group begin to take shape.

The self will identify with people who it perceives as being similar to it and will refer to them as “in-group” people, while people who do not belong to her group will be referred to as “outgroup” people. This self-categorization and self-comparison also establish the concept of “other,” which will be used to accelerate the process of forming group identity (Abrams and Hogg 1990). In order to give its followers a sense of exclusivity, the group also uses the idea of the “other” or “out-group” (310) to perpetuate its existence. Organisations engaged in organised crime or terrorism are two examples of this. Terrorist organisations with political or religious agendas must distinguish themselves and their approaches to solving current issues. As a result, they will be set apart from other social entities and stand out on the list.

People frequently find themselves having to classify others and themselves in the context of migration based on their cultural background and immigration status. The development of social identities in a new host community depends on this categorization process (Tajfel, et al. 1978). People frequently favour those in their in-group (i.e., the social group they belong to) over those in their out-group. This can be seen in the context of migration as people looking for encouragement and validation from other people who have experienced the same things. When immigrants encounter difficulties or discrimination in the host society, migrant groups that are supportive of one another may emerge (Brown, 1990).

The social identity theory sheds light on people's acculturation choices as well. For instance, someone

could use assimilationist tactics to blend in more with the host culture and win acceptance. It is possible to interpret this as an effort to change their social identity in order to fit in with the dominant group in the host society (Berry, 698). On the other hand, those who have strong ties to their native culture may do so in order to maintain their sense of social identity and ethnic or cultural group membership. The identity danger idea is another one that is highlighted by social identity theory. According to this notion, people may feel as though discrimination or unfavourable stereotyping threatens their social identities.

Discussions

The Dynamics of Migrant Encounters in the Text

Jende Jonga, the fictional character in Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, relocates to the US from Cameroon in search of better economic prospects and a better life for his family. The movement of the Jonga family reflects a typical worldview among migrants and represents the belief in upward social mobility associated with the American Dream. James Truslow Adams initially used the term "American Dream" in *The Epic of America* (1931). According to Adams, it refers to a dream "In which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognised by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position," (402). This is only attainable in a society where possibilities abound, and that is precisely what the United States aspires to be: the perfect destination for industrious Americans or immigrants looking for ways to better their standard of living. The political instability and corruption in Cameroon, the characters' home country, shape his decision to migrate to the United States in search of economic opportunities and stability.

Behold the Dreamers primarily tells the tales of two families, which serve as archetypal representations of wider social groups. The Edwardses, who are descended from earlier European immigrants, are archetypes of the traditional white upper-class American family. The Jongas are the main characters. The family represents the modern-day experience of Cameroonians who move, scattered throughout foreign lands and creating communities in the US and other nations yearning to achieve something better than the circumstances and position in which they find themselves. This is evident from Jende's thoughts upon getting his US visitor's visa in Limbe:

He was leaving Cameroon in a month! Leaving to certainly not return after three months. Who travelled to America only to return to a future of nothingness in Cameroon after a mere three months? Not young men like him, not people facing a future of poverty and despondency in their own country. (19)

He gets this extremely well-paid job as a chauffeur, having made a favourable impression on Clark Edwards. With candour and joy Jende gives a glowing description of his home town Limbe in Cameroon that prompts a question from his employer:

Why did you come to America if your own town is so beautiful? ...Because my country is no good, sir." ... "I stay in my country, I would have become nothing. ...But in America, sir? I can become something. I can even become a respectable man... Someone like me, what can I ever become in a country like Cameroon? I came from nothing. No name. No money. My father is a poor man. Cameroon has nothing (30-40)

Prosperity has different meaning for every character in the text. For JendeJonga, it means making a respectable living and eventually getting his family into a nice house instead of their roach-infested Harlem flat. For Neni, his wife, it means fulfilling her ambition of becoming a pharmacist. But even wealth and successful career don't guarantee happiness for those who already have it, like the Jonga's employers. In the novel, historical events such as the 2008 financial crisis deeply affect the lives of the characters. The collapse of Lehman Brothers, where Clark Edward, Jende's boss works, destabilizes his perception of the American Dream and his prospects for a better life in the United States. The push-pull theory can be used to understand the situation of Jende Jonga, the main character of *Behold the Dreamers* whose sole purpose of migration is to better the live of his family believing wholeheartedly the possibility of achieving his 'American Dream.'

Migration as depicted in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* stem from the postcolonial events such as Zimbabwe's tumultuous political landscape under Robert Mugabe's regime influence the characters' perceptions of their home country. The socio-political unrest, economic collapse, and widespread poverty drive Darling and her community to seek refuge elsewhere as the writer uses a fictional city, Paradise, as a metaphor for the impoverished and underdeveloped regions of the world that are still in the process of recovering from colonial rule. The shanty town is characterised by dilapidated huts and slums, inhabited by individuals living in extreme poverty. The residents, particularly the children, constantly suffer from hunger due to the lack of adequate food to satisfy their empty bellies. All the children have fantasies of migrating to America where they feel they would be able to enjoy a better life. Zimbabwe might have achieved its freedom formally but the colonial idea that the 'West' is better still lingers. Bulawayo explores the world through the eyes of Darling, a teenager who aspires to learn and understand all that is going on in the world. This idea is evident in their game titled 'the country game' to play the game as Darling narrated:

...everybody wants to be the USA and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece and them. These are the country-countries... nobody wants to be rags of countries like Congo, like Somalia, like Iraq, like Sudan, like Haiti, like Sri Lanka, and not even this one we live in. . . who wants to be a terrible place of hunger and things falling apart? (49)

The narrative forces readers to comprehend the harsh realities of developing nations and the challenges of moving to a new place and achieving dreams are out of reach. The text also delves into how the postcolonial societies continue to be plagued by the notion that the West is superior and how their minds have been so thoroughly colonised by the West that they are unable to see beyond material possessions. The struggles of the diasporic migrant who long to fit in and strive to find home of their own are also captured by Bulawayo in the text. The characters' decisions to migrate can be hinged on the framework of push and pull factors. In the context of the text, the push factors might include the challenging conditions in Zimbabwe, such as political turmoil, economic hardships, the absence of healthcare facilities etc. The pull factors could involve the perception of a better life, educational opportunities, and the allure of the United States.

Helon Habila's *Travellers* is a novel that explores the experiences of African migrants in search of better living conditions in Europe, with a specific focus on migrants from different parts of Africa. Everette Lee's push-pull theory (1966), which explains the forces that influence migration decisions,

can be effectively utilised to analyse the motivations of the characters. Socio-political dynamics in the home nations of immigrants explain for the decisions opted by most young people who myopically think that Europe has the answer to their unsolved issues. Through flashback, Habila's characters disclose the events that led to their displacement from their homeland to Europe. Their experiences create the sense that while some individuals are forced to leave because of socio-political violence, others are just fed up with their socio-economic situations and opt to explore alternate means of changing their conditions and Europe becomes their destination.

Socio-political instability, resulting from ineffective leadership and the yearning for change through violent wars has been the leading source of migration in Africa with overwhelming repercussions. Due to instability, some people who had better jobs at home find themselves in Europe, doing degrading jobs, which only add to their suffering and animosity towards their countries of origin. Manu, one of the characters in *Travellers* with awful experiences as a refugee in Europe, had been a medical doctor in his homeland but finds himself in Germany, working as a doorman in a nightclub:

“Part of his job is to hold the door for them as they come out trying to orient their senses to the cold...”(73)

The interesting irony here is the fact that Manu left behind a prestigious profession of medical doctor in his home country and embraces the degrading work of a doorman in a nightclub in Europe, where he is viewed as less than human. However, he is booted out of Libya by political conflict which has caused many to abandon the land:

“I was the only doctor left for miles around...I took the kids to school as usual and the gate was closed. Not even the guard was there. That was when I knew it was time to go” (90)

Like Manu, Karim was also a victim of socio-political insecurity:

“In 1990 President Siad died and overnight Somalia descended into political chaos. Time passed. Fractions organized around family ties and tribal loyalty divided the country into fiefs overseen by warlords. And thus begins Karim's personal nightmares” (168).

Also, a teenage rebel, motivated by tribal prejudice, falls in love with Karim's ten-year-old daughter, and subsequently threatens him with firearms. This makes Karim and his family victims of both political and tribal persecution, prompting them to leave behind their things to become migrants in another country encountering various dehumanising experiences.

Issues of Migrant Identities In The Texts

Identity is formed through the process of navigating personal circumstances, social environment, interpersonal connections, and institutional structures. Social identity theory research has demonstrated significant variation in the identification patterns of migrants. These patterns can range from identifying with one's country of origin, religion, or mother tongue to identifying with the host country, neither, or both. Within the context of migration, ethnicity and religion assume significant importance as markers of identity formation. The novels delve into the psychological impact of migration on individual identity. The characters in Mbololo's *Behold the Dreamers*, Bulawayo's *We*

Need New Names and Habila's Travellers grapple with feelings of displacement, alienation, and a sense of belonging.

According to Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics. In *Behold the Dreamers*, the characters categorise themselves as immigrants from Cameroon, forming a distinct social group within the larger American society. They share common experiences, cultural practices, and migration narratives that shape their collective identity. Individuals derive their sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. In the novel, the Jonga family and other Cameroonian immigrants like Winston and Fatou identify strongly with their cultural heritage and shared experience of migration.

Despite the challenges they face in the United States, they maintain a sense of pride and solidarity in their Cameroonian identity, finding strength and support in their community. Their search for identity is portrayed through the characters' struggle to reconcile their Cameroonian heritage with their aspirations for a better life in America. This tension is particularly evident in protagonist Jende Jonga's desire to provide for his family while grappling with the realities of his immigrant status. Mbue explores themes of cultural displacement and the challenges of assimilation, highlighting the cultural clashes and systemic barriers faced by immigrants as they seek to carve out a place for themselves in a new country. These cultural clashes arise as they struggle to adapt to American customs and societal expectations while simultaneously preserving their own cultural identity. This clash is evident in the interactions between the Jongas and their affluent employers, the Edwards family, highlighting the divide between immigrant experiences and the American Dream.

In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, characters classify themselves according to many social groupings, including their ethnicity, country, and socioeconomic level. Tajfel and Turner (1979) explain the mechanism of social group identification in three mental steps. The first one is self-categorization, which denotes one's categorizing and classifying oneself in terms of particular social categories in order to understand the social world. The second step is social identification. Individuals identify with some of social categories and subject themselves to the norms of those categories as reference points for their behaviors. This process involves the adoption of the identity of the category. The last step is social comparison. Once individuals have categorised themselves as belonging to a category and have identified with the corresponding social groups, they tend to compare it with others. This comparison results in evaluating other individuals as 'in-group' or 'out-group' in other words, as 'us' or 'them.' Darling and her friends establish a close-knit group in Zimbabwe, bound by their common experiences of poverty, political turmoil, and cultural heritage. However, after relocating to the United States, Darling is classified as an immigrant, belonging to a marginalised subgroup within American society.

This categorisation impacts her relationships and experiences as she navigates the complexity of identity in her new context. Darling's sense of identity is strongly connected to her Zimbabwean background and the community she left behind. She identifies deeply with her culture, language, and customs, seeking consolation and connection in memories of home and family. However, as Darling adjusts to life in the United States, she struggles with contradictory aspects of her identity. She suffers a sense of displacement and alienation, longing for the comfort and belonging she felt in Zimbabwe but yet seeking acceptance and assimilation into American society. The omniscient narrator raises

the question of diasporic people' identities in the chapter "How They Left," generalising Darling's experiences in these words:

"Leaving their mothers and fathers and children behind, leaving their umbilical cords underneath the soil, leaving the bones of their ancestors in the earth, leaving everything that makes them who and what they are, leaving because it is no longer possible to stay. They will never be the same again because you just cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same".
(146)

Aunt Fostalina's character is driven deeper into the absorption and acculturation of the American identity and the way she wishes to be viewed, as an American. It seems ludicrous and a mockery of living the American Dream. She starves herself in order to achieve the beauty standards she has internalized through media, attempts to talk in the American accent in the expectation that she will not be recognised as the 'other' but with respect. Back home, she is viewed as a successful immigrant who has been successful in fulfilling the American Dream as she is able to send money to her family, but the reality is unsettling. She is still treated as a 'foreigner' and hasn't been embraced by the society as one of their own. She has lost her actual self in the goal of being socially accepted and treated as an equal.

The appropriation, the instinctive yearning to belong to America gnaws away at her identity and the story finds her fighting to grasp and accept her position that she would always remain the 'other'. The employment conditions of illegal migrants are horrible as is obvious in the narrative and depict that Darling and many other immigrants from other nations had to resort to all kinds of jobs in order to earn money. Their unlawful status limits them from applying for positions that might be less exploitative and more suited to their education and work experiences but they are never allowed to, as Darling says of the migrants' identity:

Others with names like myths, names like puzzles, names we had never heard before: "Virgilio, Balamugunthan, Faheem, Abdulrahman, Aziz, Baako, Dae-Hyun, Ousmane, Kimatsu. When it was hard to say the many strange names, we called them by their countries...So how on earth do you do this, Sri Lanka?. . . Come, Ethiopia, move, move, move; Israel, Kazakhstan, Niger, brothers, let's go!" (288)

The obliteration of their real names is symbolic of the loss of their own identity. They are perceived as nothing more than machines that function. The loss of names is the loss of voice, of culture, of languages and personality. The diverse background of the immigrants is disguised under the name of the country that they originally belong to, highlighting that their distinct names carry no relevance or status in the America they came to. Their transnational identities have gotten jumbled in their own minds as they strive for survival in a land that is as alien as it is special to them. They face discrimination, poverty, and cultural alienation, which deeply impact their sense of self and belonging. Cultural clashes emerge as Darling and other migrants navigate the complexities of American society while holding onto elements of their Zimbabwean identity. This tension is palpable in their interactions with American peers and authorities, who often view them through a lens of stereotypes and prejudice. As Darling navigates her identity as an immigrant in the United States, she examines the discrepancies between her Zimbabwean background and the advantages enjoyed by

Americans, addressing feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Darling also compares herself to other immigrants and refugees in her new community, recognising similar struggles and marginalisation experiences while acknowledging cultural, language and background disparities.

In Habila's *Travellers*, the protagonist and narrator of the story, a Nigerian journalist who was forced to leave his home country because of political persecution, represents the hopes and hardships of numerous African migrants who come to Europe in search for refuge and opportunity. Through his perspective, readers are exposed to the harsh realities that beset migrants as they confront the threat of violence, discrimination, and exploitation while finding themselves in new circumstances. Social Identity Theory offers a valuable framework to analyze how the characters negotiate their identities amidst the challenges of migration, displacement, and cultural adaptation. The characters in *Travellers* categorise themselves and others based on various social groups such as nationality, ethnicity, and migration status. They form distinct communities and networks based on shared experiences of migration, cultural heritage, and socioeconomic background. As evident from the text, the writer interacts with other African migrants as they tell him their stories traversing Europe, forming bonds and alliances based on their common identity as migrants from Africa. 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.... It is these conditions that migrants lived. Mark particularly lives "... peripatetic life, moving from Stockholm, to Potsdam, and now Berlin (18-19).

Other characters like Manu who had to give-up his true identity and take up a false identity, just to fit into the new environment of western culture, and Karim who fled Somalia with his family are individuals who experience the difficulties of migration and relocation, their identities undergo a transformation, becoming more flexible and complex. They are required to reconcile their African identity with their experiences in European society, navigating intricate connections between their previous and current selves. These characters engage in social comparison as they negotiate their identities in respect to the societies they come across throughout Europe. They compare the disparities between their personal experiences as migrants and the privileges enjoyed by European citizens, confronting feelings of alienation, marginalisation and unfairness. They also engage in self-comparisons with other migrants and refugees, acknowledging common challenges and experiences of being displaced, but also addressing differences in culture, language and background.

Conclusion

The study done so far in this analysis clearly extrapolates the dynamics of migrant encounters and the cultural, economic, religious and social imperatives with other sundry challenges faced by migrants in the new countries they find themselves. The central character Jende in Mbue's book comes to the realisation that, as an undocumented immigrant, he is not able to explore economic opportunities in the US. His wife's immigration status also serves as an impediment to her dreams of becoming a pharmacist in the United States. He makes the decision to return back home in order to start afresh. The characters in Bulawayo's story are unable to return to their native Africa due to their legal situation and inability to fulfill their ambition of a better life. Due to their position as undocumented immigrants, the protagonist, Darling, and Uncle Kojo are relegated to the margins of American society. Although Bulawayo's characters are free to leave the country, US immigration laws could hinder them from coming back.

The research shows that Habila uses the migrants' narrative to cultivate empathy for refugees, who have been forcibly relocated. From the analysis, the research found that all the characters become bewildered and traumatized as result of their difficulties and ordeals paired with failed dreams. It also indicated that hardships and ordeals of migrants leave them disoriented, scarred, deranged emotionally and psychologically dehumanised.

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