

**JAPA SYNDROME IN AFRICAN NARRATIVES: CAUTIONARY LESSONS FROM UNIGWE'S ON
BLACK SISTERS' STREET AND HELON HABILA'S TRAVELLERS**

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Abstract

*In recent years, there has been an uncontrolled increase in the number of Africans seeking greener pastures abroad. This is closely linked to the social and political quagmire bedeviling the continent, with the youth being the most affected. Most migration intentions are driven by push factors such as unemployment, insecurity, and political persecution, alongside pull factors like better opportunities in Europe and America. The aim of this essay is to evaluate the unbridled proclivity of Africans toward migrating to Europe, using Unigwe's On Black Sisters' Street and Habila's Travellers as case studies. The paper argues that although there are cogent push factors compelling Africans to migrate, a cautionary voice is necessary, as inhumane and unforeseen challenges often await them. These include exploitative job opportunities, modern slavery, prostitution, racism, imprisonment, death, and the problem of liminality during sea border crossings—especially through Libya to Europe. The research adopts a **descriptive content analysis** methodology and is anchored on **Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory** and **Everett Lee's push-pull migratory theory** as its theoretical frameworks. Post-colonial theory offers a trenchant lens for interpreting the "othering" of African migrants by host communities, while Lee's theory elucidates the push and pull dynamics behind the rising tide of African migration to Europe. Drawing from the harrowing experiences of characters in both texts, this research concludes that although some of the horrific scenes may represent extreme cases of failed migration, they serve as cautionary tales. Would-be migrants—and Africans at large—must learn from these narratives and reflect critically, recognizing that life in Europe is not always as rosy as imagined.*

Key Words: Japa Syndrome, Cautionary Lesson, Modern Slavery, Racism, Liminality

Introduction

The term "Japa" means to run, to flee or to escape. Japa is coined from Yoruba language which is used to describe the massive exodus of Nigerians to other countries in search of greener pastures. The word "Japa" with other Nigerian words like Agbero, Eba, Abi, Area boy, Adire, 419, Gele, Naija, Suya, Yahoo, Yahoo boy etc were added to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary in January 2025 (Adeduyite 12). Japa, according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is the emigration of Nigerians to other countries especially Europe and North America in search of further education, employment or economic opportunity. Migration is a natural human experience from the beginning of the world, since there are various reasons for relocation which includes war, medical, education, visitation, tourism among others. However, in Africa, massive migration to Europe is a serious situation mostly caused by bad governance, unemployment, insecurity which has resulted into terrorism, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, incessant strikes in tertiary institutions and poor working conditions. Thus, the monstrous problems of push and pull factors encourage Japa syndrome in Africa. The push factor of unemployment, insecurity, lack of social services and social amenities in Africa to pull factor of pristine opportunities in Europe account for Africans' unfiltered penchant for migrating to Europe.

Demographics by different authors has it that between 2019-2021 alone, an approximate of 1,115,500 Africans migrated to France (David 2022), an approximate of 1,656,000 Africans migrated to United Kingdom (Table 2021), an approximate of 1,322,625 Africans migrated to Spain (Poblacion 2021), about 1,150,627 Africans migrated to Italy (Dati 2021), about 1,000,000 Africans migrated to Germany (Statista 2021), about 714,732 Africans migrated to Netherlands (Gasegelacht 2021), about 550,000 Africans migrated to Belgium (Vonour 2021) and a host of other European countries receiving African migrants on yearly basis. The figures above are alarming and worrisome because this is an official numbers of legitimate African migrants, excluding undocumented and illegal migrants. For illegal and undocumented African migrants, the number is equally high as records has it that

“in only September 2023, Over 120 boats, carrying roughly 7,000 migrants from Africa-more than the population of Lampedusa in Italy, arrived on the island within the span of 72 hours” (AP News 2023).

Now, the question arises that, does this massive exodus of willful or forced migration worth investigating? What are the factors that prompt Africans quest to migrate to U.S.A, Canada, and Europe? Should this human exodus be stopped? Or should this be allowed to become a continuous process? Is it really greener in U.S.A, Canada, and Europe? Does this exodus has effects on Africa and Africans? While Eurocentric economists describe “African migration as having some positive economic benefits for African countries of origin through foreign currency remittances to the growth of National GDP and encouraging more people at home to go to school” (Hughes 9), the effects on the Africa continent are enormous ranging from neo-colonialism and modern slavery (Donato and Gabacia 15), trafficking and prostitution (Kaye 45; Maphosa 158; Maye 17; Marshal 75), brain drain (Maharaj 129; Kweitsu 18; Sefa-Dei and Asgharzadeh 32; Olumide and Ukpere 2426), horrific treatment of xenophobia, imprisonments, deportations and deaths(AP News 2018).

The problem of push and pull factor is made manifest due to the economic hardship and war in some African countries, where some African men, women inclusive have descended so low and had formulated a cartel of human trafficking that have no control over their lives and emotions once they arrive in Europe. Hence, these voluntary migrants or objectified trafficked bodies’ movements, aspirations and emotions are controlled by these international cartels for profiteering as Jones *et al* explain that “sexual slavery or servitude attaches the right of ownership over one with the purpose of forcing them to engage in sexual activities such as forced prostitution, forced marriage and sex trafficking” (203). To be moderate, tales of young African girls cleverly deceived by their families and friends to Europe, who were later trafficked into prostitution are rampant. On the contrary, some African migrants are fully aware of the dangers that await them, yet embark on such journey. The widespread of this social problem has thus awakened the interest of the diaspora writers to capture the huge negative consequences of globalization on Africans.

Therefore, this essay focuses on examining the reasons why a large number of Africans migrate to Europe. While numerous studies on Sub-Saharan African migrant literature have explored themes such as culture contact, identity crises, objectification, sex trafficking, individual agency, and the nightmares of transnationalism and globalization, little attention has been paid to the moral lessons readers can draw from migrants’ experiences abroad. This is the gap in knowledge that this paper seeks to address. These moral lessons include the exploitative job opportunities faced by African migrants, their poor living conditions, experiences of racism, unjust imprisonment, wrongful classification as refugees, deportation, and even horrific deaths. This study, therefore, was undertaken not just to evaluate the unbridled inclination of Africans toward migrating to Europe using Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street* and Habila’s *Travellers*, it equally strives to advice that a cautionary voice is needed because inhumane and unforeseen problems await them, thereby foregrounding issues that a would-be migrant should consider before travelling abroad.

Unigwe and Habila in both texts depict how push and pull factor seem to induce the idea of migration in Africa. These factors are responsible for the spate of migration of the major characters in both narratives. They tend to seek a better life abroad. These factors include crisis, civil war, economic and political instabilities among others while tales from abroad promise lack of war, better paid jobs and political stabilities. Obviously, these factors are either influenced by government’s bad policies, corruption or political instability that can cause people to leave their habitual residence to other countries. For instance, in several sub-Saharan African countries, the recurring violent conflicts, underdevelopment, poverty, political instability and corruption have forced hundreds and thousands of Africans to migrate and settle in Europe and America. The political and economic activities of these countries have been perturbed by armed conflicts, poor governance, increased poverty and immense suffering with extensive human rights violations that cause extensive population displacement.

It is in this situation that Alek in *On Black Sisters’ Street* equally finds herself in a refugee camp when soldiers killed her entire family in Sudan. The devastating beginning of the war is highlighted in the text in the following words: “The Sudan People’s Liberation Army, which had been guarding the predominantly Dinka town, was withdrawing. There was a rumour that the Janjaweed militia were making their way to Daru, to sniff out the SPLA members. And to cleanse the city of its Dinka population” (Unigwe 187). Alek and her family witness and experience the brutality of the military. They are trampled upon and harassed by the soldiers. During the raid the soldiers forcefully get into Nyok’s house (Alek’s father) looking for rebels. In an authoritative tone they demand, “where are they?”... ‘Where are the rebels? Bring them out’ Brrgghh. A kick against the cupboard door” (Unigwe 188). Alek’s father who is in great fear hides his children in the cupboard and insists that there is nobody in his house except himself and his wife

Alek's mother cries out in agony when the soldiers shot her husband in front of her because he tries to protect his family. Her stubborn and consistent wailing attracts a bullet to her head as she too is shut dead by the heartless soldiers. The pain Alek feels multiplied as these soldiers rape her as "one by one the other men came and thrust themselves into her, pulling out and coming on her face. Telling her to ingest it; it was good protein. Good food. Fit for African slaves...Alek had no idea how long she was left there. Naked". (Unigwe 190-191). All these traumas put together propel Alek to migrate in search of security and economic prosperity.

The political instability that aids massive exodus of Africans to Europe is made evidential in Habila's created voices of Karim, James Kariku, Juma and an insane woman. The story of Karim is a pathetic one since he has no option than to migrate due the political crises in Somalia as the narrator reveals:

In 1990 President Said Barre died and overnight, Somalia descended into political chaos. Time passed. Factions organized around family ties and tribal loyalty divided the country into fiefs overseen by tribal warlords. And thus began Karim's personal nightmare. (Habila 168).

And how does his nightmare begin? Abdel-Latif- one of the tribal warlords pushed Karim to migrate to Europe. Against all odds and in an authoritarian style befitting of African rebel leader, Abdel-Latif wants to marry Karim's daughter who is just ten years old in a commandeering voice "just prepare your daughter for the wedding. It will take place next Friday, five days from today" (Habila 171). Plagued by the infectious fear of this directive, Karim consulted his father-in-law who places two option thus "You have two choices here. You can stay and let him marry your daughter, or you can leave town. You decide" (Habila 171). So, Karim has no option than to migrate as he painfully recalls: "I leave everything we own, everything, including the goods in my shop. I tell my in-laws to sell everything they can sell and send us the money after. This is the beginning of our life on the road" (Habila 172).

The same political instability orchestrated by bad African leaders that birthed rebel group in Somalia, occurred also in Nigeria in form of religious extremism. In Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country, religious extremism carried by Boko-haram and Funani jihadists is another push factor that encourage Japa syndrome. Juma- one of the migrant to England is pushed to migrate due to religious extremist activities in Nigeria. Narrating his push factor story why he left Nigeria, Juma recounts despondently, the heinous activities of religious extremist thus:

The school where I taught had been attacked by religious extremists. One of their aims is to stamp out Western education... That night our village was attacked. Each shot was so loud, imagine someone knocking on your door with a rock in the middle of the night, the sound cutting through your dreams. My old father came to my room and told me to run. He handed me a little package, in it was all his savings. Well, that is how I left home, with only the clothes on my back. We ran all night long, we crossed a stream, and in the morning they told us we were in another country, Cameroon. (Habila 284).

Juma's sudden journey to Europe began through the land border crossing from Niger to Libya before arriving Italy. This atmosphere of insecurity aids Japa syndrome among Africans since there are stable governments in Europe that can guarantee the sanity of human lives. It is lack of secured environment that pushed James Kariku- the renowned poet, out of Zambia. Bad leadership in Africa does not only breed conflicts that aid migration, but the activities of some African leaders equally pushed independent minds abroad. This is the case of James Kariku, as according to the narrator, faced political persecution from his Zambian government because "of his writings, not just his poems, but articles as well, in the newspapers. ... he is one of lucky ones who escaped into exile to spend the rest of their lives in limbo" (Habila 132).

Tale from Eritrea also confirms the push factor of political persecution as the once powerful woman, now insane from Eritrea left due to political persecution as the narrator informs us that "those who knew her said she had lost everything to the government of her country when she escaped. Houses, cars, and her husband was arrested" (Habila 292). Hence, generally, Unigwe and Habila present a continent which is littered with economic hardship, conflicts, religious extremism, political dictatorship and mismanagement of public funds, that inadvertently aid Japa syndrome to European countries. In Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi's father is one of those who experienced the reign of President Obasanjo. The mismanagement of public funds left many families in perpetual poverty. The narrator remarks:

There was her father. He worked in the Ministry of Works. A civil servant, he had imagined that one day he would be able to buy a car. A second-hand Peugeot 504, but apart from a pay rise in his first year his salary had remained static even as the price of everything else rose. He could never afford a car. Especially not now that President Obasanjo had put an import embargo on cars older than five years. (Unigwe 89-90)

Bad governance has destroyed the African economy. In Nigeria as *On Black Sisters Street* highlights above, it is worse. Inhabitants suffer the effects of tyrannical rules as those in power seek only to enrich themselves and forget about the wellbeing of the nation. This leads to the problem of unemployment even among graduates. Chisom in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* who bloomed in aspirations after her graduation of getting a job in Lagos ends up disappointed at the state of affairs in Nigeria and decides to relocate abroad for a better life. "I'm glad I've graduated" (Unigwe 18), she often said with such pride. The days after her graduation were filled with laughter and impatience to hit the job market. The narrator states:

She did not need a clairvoyant to predict her future, not when she had a degree from a good university. She will get a house for herself. Rent somewhere big for her parents. Living with three people in two rooms, she wanted a massive house...she had envisaged her four years of studying Finance and Business Administration culminating, quite logically, with a job in a bank, one of those banks dotting Lagos like a colony of trees. She might even be given a company car with a company driver... (Unigwe 18-20)

Chisom's anticipated success is the only gate way out of poverty for herself and her family. Her parents depend on the benevolence of the government to give her a good job at the bank which will change their life for good. Despite all her efforts, life becomes worse for the entire family as her quest to get employed become fruitless: "...she had spent the better part of the two years scripting meticulous application letters and mailing them along with her resume to many different banks in Lagos" (Unigwe 22). Her job hunting does not yield any fruit as she is not called for any interview as "It was as if her resumes were being swallowed by the many potholes on Lagos roads" (Unigwe 22). And after two years of unfruitful job hunting, "I must escape" (Unigwe 30) Chisom laments. It is at this point that Chisom makes up her mind of leaving Lagos for Belgium in search of greener pastures. The quest for better life in Europe equally pushed Ama and Efe to migrate to Europe because Lagos according to the narrator is a "place that has no future" (Unigwe 17) since "Lagos was a city of death and she was escaping it". (Unigwe 84)

Having examined the various factors that pushed Africans away from their homes, it is equally important to ask some pertinent questions. Do characters in both texts who are pushed away by certain factors in Africa find better replacement in Europe? Does pull factor of better jobs really await them in Europe? Does the humiliation of offering dehumanized jobs to Africans worth the journey? Does the act of modern slavery via trafficking, prostitution and imprisonment worth the journey? Does the disrespect of the "othering" of African in racist tagging worth the journey? And more importantly, does the horrific soul torturing, death and liminality in land and sea border crossing worth the journey? In answering these questions above, characters experience will be applied, and in the process, a cautionary advice will be given to would-be migrants to be weary that all is not rosy abroad.

Major characters like Sisi, Ama, Alek and Efe in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* are pushed away from Africa because of economic hardship and lack of job opportunities. For instance, Sisi is unable to get a job after two years of graduation. Ama could not get a better job and therefore works in her aunty's food shop while Efe shuttling among three jobs but cannot take care of her son and herself. However, evidences from the text reveal that all is not rosy in Belgium as the nanny works promised- "Dele will find you a job as a nanny in Belgium" (Unigwe 198)- are not readily available as Alek laments "where are the children I am supposed to be looking after?" (Unigwe 199). Thus, they are reduced to mere commodities whose bodies are purchased in exchange for money.

Equally in Habila's *Travellers*, the promised jobs are not equally available in Europe. For instance, Manu who was a surgeon in Libya is reduced to a bouncer in Germany as the narrator mockingly informs us that "Manu, who told me he was a doctor in his former life, now worked as a bouncer in a nightclub" (Habila 5). Mark- a Malawian, a Master degree holder before he left Africa and whose father is a wealthy preacher in Africa now "freelanced for crew.com, an organization for out-of-work actors and film technicians" (Habila 18), while David- son a renowned poet from Zambia works in 'Brigitte's father's chicken farm" (Habila 107). A graphic description of dehumanized job opportunities meant for African migrants is given by Karim when he recalls:

But in Turkey, all the foreigners are treated bad. I only get the worst job, in a furniture company, we carry furniture to people houses, sometimes we repair furniture, and as you finish one job, another one is coming. You have to work many hours, for very little money and sometimes, they just force you to work overtime with no pay, whether you like it or not (Habila 178).

This act of modern slavery pervades both texts. One of the primary aim of African migrating to Europe is to live a better life as the push factor promised saner living conditions for her citizens and migrants. It is the poor standard of living in Lagos and unemployment that propels Sisi to migrate to Belgium in search of jobs. Yet, in Belgium, she finds herself in a sorry state of selling her body for money. Sisi, Ama, Alek and Efe in the spirit of uncontrolled

quest for Japa, do not consider the gravity of the type of jobs that await them in Europe. Painfully faced with the reality of no nanny jobs, they offer their bodies to strangers in exchange for money. Thus, their passports are seized until they prostitute their bodies to free themselves. In Belgium, they became slaves. Therefore, would-be migrants, especially ladies should reflect on accepting demeaning job offer of prostitution in Europe irrespective of any push factor in Africa.

The poor living standard of African migrants in Europe is also equally captured in Habila's *Travellers*. Mark who is a successful actor in Africa before migrating to Europe ends up living "in an abandoned church building next to the river Spree" (Habila 14) and when that building was seized by the police, Mark and his African migrants moved into "The Heim- an abandoned school building, most of its windows had no panes, and its yard was overgrown with grass and trash ... the smell hit us even before we entered the building: fetid, moist and revolting. This was the most un-homely place I had ever seen" (Habila 57).

Instructively, to further demonstrate that all is not rosy in Europe, Habila captures the home of other African migrants living in ghetto, sleeping in "bunk beds with tattered mattresses on them in which men slept with their legs hanging over the sides" (Habila 58). The same pipe dream is voiced by Efe in *On Black Sisters Street* when the narrator piques her mind that "before Efe came to Belgium, she imagined castles and clean streets. But now, when she thinks of it, when she talks of where she lives in Antwerp, it is a botched dream" (Unigwe 23). And for Sisi, her expectation of living in a finer house in Brussels compared to theirs in Lagos equally fall short of her dream when she reflects "the house itself was quite a disappointment, really. A ground floor flat with a grubby front door and, five bedrooms not much bigger than telephone booths" (Unigwe 86). This is the sorry state that would-be African migrants must learn from. Also, Juma's case in Europe was so precarious that he ends up eating from the dustbin as the narrator reveals "And there is good food there, in the bins outside. I did that for months before they caught me" (Habila 275).

Highly worrisome is the plight of African migrants because some are treated less than animals as German Police "pile migrants into buses, promising to resettle them, and then dump them outside the city, in the middle of nowhere" (Habila 65). Often times, many African migrants find themselves in Refugee centres in Europe that are "badly underfunded and overcrowded as usual, since what is meant to hold five hundred people, holds over two thousand migrants" (Habila 202). More terrific is the assumption that African migrants whose documents get missing are wrongly dubbed as refugee as experienced by the narrator as the Camp Director explains to Matteo thus: "This one, he came to my office two weeks ago. He was not a refugee, he said. His document went missing and he ended up on the refugee train" (Habila 204).

Different stories of painful deportation, imprisonment, border crossing and death are another issues would-be African migrant should consider before relocating. In both texts, African migrants are subjected to brutal experiences of deportation as Sisi was asked to leave Belgium within three days as the narrator reveals "The officer behind the table had told her: we are not satisfied with your story. You have three days to leave the country" (Unigwe 156). In Habila's *Travellers*, Portia while discussing the horrific tale of David's deportation with the narrator recalls "her brother with other deportees, handcuffed, led by immigration officials through a deserted terminal, at night, to a waiting plane chartered specially for the purpose" (Habila 108). To advance the line of cautionary warning, Africans should be weary of the effects of deportation since most deported returnees find it difficult to integrate. The scar of coming back poorer than expected can lead to depression as Portia rhetorically asks "who was at the airport to receive him? What do deportees feel: relief, shame or anger?" (Habila 109).

Therefore, Africans who wish to travel abroad must reflect on the legitimacy of their stay in U.S.A, Canada or Europe, rather to be deported to feel the options of relief, shame or anger. For would-be African migrants, they must evaluate the plight of the narrator who left Nigeria, very wealthy but ends up a poor man to be deported with "a toothbrush given to us by the camp director, a comb, a change of underwear, a sock, my slippers- I put them all in a polythene bag" (Habila 213) and finally deported to Nigeria as the narrator reveals her mother's wailing "I could hear the shame in her voice, her son who had gone to America had returned poorer and thinner than he had left" (Habila 247). On advisory note, these pains of shame, anger and depression need a second thought irrespective of the pull factor Europe is promising African youths.

Another cautionary lesson Africans must learn from the experiences of the character in both texts is the evidence of Homi Bhabha's concept of "othering", demonstrated in indiscriminate imprisonment of African migrants and racial discrimination against them. Bhabha's explanation of immigrants occupying the "outsider" position, in the eye of host communities otherwise referred to as the "Other" is manifested in the manner Europeans see African migrants. Karim informs us of how "many men, many from Morocco, Algeria, Eritrea, Nigeria, Ghana, Mali...were put in prison" (Habila 181) by the Bulgarian government without trials. Juma ended up in prison till

the end of the story. For many host communities in Europe, the perception of tagging Africans as “other” is active and visible in both texts.

In *On Black Sisters Street* also, Unigwe explores how racism intersects with sexism as most whites prefer black prostitutes. Most times, Sisi and Ama experience stereotyping and prejudice from the Belgian host community, who view them through the lens of coloured slaves that must be devoured without mercy. Equally in Habila’s *Travellers*, owner of a café discriminated against African migrants by “turning away black people, claiming they were all illegal immigrants and drug dealers” (Habila 24). Host communities see their white people in their city or country as tourist, professional but wrongly tag African migrants as refugees. Mark had this experience and queried the journalist thus “do white people always assume every black person travelling is a refugee?” (Habila 42). Cases of racist speeches directed at African migrants littered both texts.

Lastly, Africans must learn lesson from the risk involved in land border crossing and antecedent deaths that await them. This is so important because, while it is easy to encourage youths to migrate to Europe, Canada and US due to the push factors of economic hardship, unemployment, conflict and political instabilities, we must insist on legitimate relocation. More importantly, the Libya land-sea route must be discouraged. This is so because, there are cases of deaths that could be avoided. In many diaspora texts dealing with border crossing, spatiality and liminality, the Libya- Italy route is a death trap. This is why Fedorova (2020) warns Africans on Libya’s slave auctions new status that “Libya has become a notorious hub for slave trading and Italy has become home to criminal groups seeking migrants from Africa for modern slavery”. Thus, would-be migrants and family members must try hard to discourage the sea border crossing, irrespective of the push factors at home. For instance, in Habila’s *Travellers*, Juma who used the land border crossing to Europe tells us of his bitter experience from Cameroon to Libya via Italy route. After going through the hazardous desert crossing, Juma finally arrived in Libya, only to be arrested by border police as he narrates:

I made it to Libya, only to be arrested by border police. I was in prison for many days, weeks or even months, who knows? We were kept in a dark room and forgotten, in that room I heard different stories: they said we were being kept there to be sold to people who would harvest our kidneys and hearts and other organs. Others said no, we would be sold to rich households to work for ever as slaves. We had to drink our own urine, and that only about six out of the twenty men locked up in that room eventually made it out. (Habila 287).

While it is true that the push factors of unemployment, poverty, economic woes, conflict, and political persecution can trigger unplanned migration to Europe, land border crossing should be discouraged in order to avert Juma’s horrific experiences. Relatedly, his experience did not end only in Libya borders. When eventually he was able to pay for his sea journey, he tells us of another bitter experience thus:

The boat sank of course, less than an hour after we set out. I don’t know what happened. Some said we were shot at by a militia boat, some said it was the same traffickers who wanted to take us back and make us pay all over again, I don’t know, and right now it is not important how or why it happened. All that matters as our boat sank into the water was that I couldn’t swim, and that people were clawing their way up the deck, kicking and holding on to their children. Most of them, like me, didn’t have life jackets and couldn’t swim. (Habila 288).

The Libya-Mediterranean border crossing must be discouraged due to unavoidable deaths associated with it. This is so because, reaping horrific booties from the boat mishap above, Juma authoritatively warned Africans on the evil of sea border crossing when he reflects painfully: “Later, I learned, that of the over three hundred of us who left Libya that morning, only me, the man and girl, and five other people survived” (Habila 289). This monumental massive deaths of Africans in the Libya sea crossing is collaborated and equally experienced by the narrator of Habila’s *Travellers*. While the narrator is on sea expedition with Matteo, he reveals horrific deaths at the sea when he says “I looked terrified, restless... bodies floating face up, limbs thrashing, tiny hands reaching up to me. Hundreds of tiny hands, thousands of faces” (Habila 234). Most times, survivors always live in regrets of their loved ones who died in the process of crossing the sea as the narrator reveals “the director pointed at the woman and whispered, they say she sits here every day to listen to the voices of her children who drowned” (Habila 203) or “I can’t sleep at night. I see dead babies and drowning mothers” (Habila 205).

Conclusion

The crux of this research is twofold: on the one hand, it evaluates the push factors that drive the *Japa* syndrome among Africans; on the other, it offers a cautionary perspective that life in Europe is not always as ideal as imagined, due to inhumane and unforeseen challenges such as exploitative job opportunities, modern slavery, prostitution, racism, imprisonment, death, and the issue of liminality during dangerous sea border crossings. It is important to acknowledge that push factors such as unemployment, poverty, economic hardship, conflict, war,

poor leadership, corruption among the elite, and political persecution—clearly portrayed in the selected texts—often compel Africans to seek better opportunities in Europe. However, the examples illustrated in both texts equally affirm that Europe does not always deliver on these expectations. For many characters in both novels, the anticipated better job opportunities are non-existent. Adequate housing for African migrants is often elusive, with many forced to live in substandard conditions—such as unfinished buildings—or eventually becoming refugees. Others face discrimination, deportation (often returning home poorer), or pay the ultimate price with their lives. Thus, African leaders must act swiftly and decisively to address the root causes fueling the *Japa* syndrome by tackling the push factors that encourage uncontrolled migration to Europe, Canada, and the United States. This study therefore concludes that, although some of the horrific scenes depicted in the texts may be exaggerated portrayals of failed migration, they serve as important cautionary tales. Prospective migrants and Africans in general must learn from these narratives and reflect critically, recognizing that life abroad is not always as rosy as it may seem.

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