

Push-Pull Factor Theories of Migration: An Analysis of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

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Abstract

People have always moved, whether from one continent to another, or from one country to another or within the same country. The motives for such movements have also always varied from one local context to another and from one individual to another. It is such motives for moving that is well captured by Everett Lee in what he calls the push-pull factor theories of migration. While such pull factors may be real at their face values, especially when considered along the line of the oddities that constitute the push factors at the place of origin, yet many diasporic literatures have proven that the usually expected "El Dorado" at the place of destination is not always the case. Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, which this work sets to analyze, also affirms this observation. It, more so, depicts that though the choice destination may be the same, the pushing factors of various individuals may vary from one person to another according to each person's peculiar circumstance. A lot of studies have been carried out using Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* but to the knowledge of these researchers little or none has been done on the analysis of Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* in the light of Everett Lee's Push-Pull Factor Theory of Migration. This present work, therefore, seeks to engage in a voyage of discovering how dynamic or multifaceted the push factors among migrants can be and to what extent such factors that usually pull them to their choice destinations are realistic and eventually accomplished. Our finding is that different shades of results are usually experienced by migrants as against the straight-jacket "Golden Fleece" utopia that is usually expected.

Keywords: migration, push-pull factors, diaspora, post-independence

Introduction

Background to the Study

Human migration has been defined as the "the movement of people from one place to another with the intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily, at a new location (geographic region)" (en.wikipedia.org. Retrieved, March 18, 2023). This movement from one place to another is usually over long distances and can be either internal or external. Internal migration occurs when one moves from one location inside a country to another location inside the same country. Indeed, this is the dominant form of migration that is usually seen globally as orchestrated by factors such as urbanization, industrialization, trade and commerce, tourism and the likes. External migration, on the other hand, occurs when one leaves the shores of one's country to another entirely different country. Our interest here lies in both the internal and external forms of migration since they both occur in the text under discourse herein.

Whichever it may be (internal or external), it is clear that people engage in any of these types of migration on account of various reasons. It is these reasons that are addressed as the push-pull factors by Everett Lee. These reasons shape the various forms migration can take. Hence, it can take the form of invasion, conquest, colonization, trafficking or immigration, etc. Beyond the internal and external forms of migration, there are other forms of migration that can be categorized as either voluntary or involuntary. The wake of neo-colonialism and the unbridled spate of political maladministration in the Nigerian leadership space ever since independence have placed a very thin line between these two types of migration such that unlike the involuntary or forced migration that took place in the form of trans-Atlantic and transnational slave trade of the colonial era, there is also a current massive drive to seek greener pastures abroad; what has now become known as the *japa* syndrome.

This too, in its turn, also reflects some sort of ‘slavery’, whereby Africans nay Nigerians now on their own decide to travel abroad to do whatever it takes to have a better life. In other words, when Nigerians migrate or at least, yearn to migrate abroad nowadays, they do so in reaction to the unwholesome atmosphere of tension that has dominantly prevailed within the Nigerian state for donkey years. These constitute what Everett Lee tags as the “Push factors” at the places of origin. The embers of such ambition are usually fanned by the erroneous but pervading impression that once one travels abroad, everything becomes *uhuru*. This impression constitutes what Lee has also dubbed as the “Pull factors” at the places of destination.

And so, every typical average Nigerian, especially the youth, always yearns for the ‘grand’ opportunity to leave the shores of the country. And when one leaves, they leave with only one mind-set – the quest to survive and make it big. As a result, many lose themselves in their blind bid to make it by all means and at all cost. It is this mindset that drove the ambitions of the four girls that take the center stage in Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street*. This situation is heightened by the high expectations, demands and pressures that usually emanate from home, since almost everybody believes that ‘money is plucked from trees abroad.’ But then, experience has shown that all that glitters is not always gold, since things are not always what they seem on the outside. Instead, this study discovers, quite pitifully, that most of these compatriots in diaspora usually end up being alienated as the ‘other’ in foreign land. And if care is not taken, some of them end up paying the ultimate price, as in the case of Chisom nicknamed Sisi in Unigwe’s text.

What have been said so far present the various forms migration can take particularly the internal and the external as well as the voluntary and the involuntary. It has also hinted at the regular and irregular types of migration. My effort herein shall, therefore, be to situate our text and the theories under discourse within the category to which they belong with a view to aptly addressing the factors that usually necessitate each of the types of the migration that were made in our text.

Statement of the Problem

A lot of scholarship has been produced on the experience of migrants in diaspora across many parts of the world. Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sister’s Street*, as a veritable diasporic text, has also been analyzed by many scholars on the bases of very many diasporic topical issues. But none has so far been produced along the line of Everett Lee’s Push-Pull factor theories of migration. It is this gap in scholarship that this present work is set to fill by engaging in a deep-seated analysis of the text as a diasporic piece of literature in the light of the push and pull factors delineated by Everett Lee in his theories of migration.

Significance of Study

First and foremost, the work bears the relevance of joining the many preceding voices in singling out the Nigerian diasporic experience from many other diaspora that there are, both within and beyond Africa. It, thus, underpins the necessity of casting a very critical glance at Nigerians’ diasporic experiences and the literature thereof with a view to highlighting that the issue of disillusionment and green pasture facade are actually at the bedrock of the mass exodus outside the Nigerian shores. It, therefore, goes further to demonstrate the importance of looking well before one leaps, as all that glitters is indeed not gold. It shall also serve the purpose of calling the government of the day to question as it also projects some diatribes against nauseating government policies that engender the urge for migration and its attendant identity crises.

Scope/Delimitation of Study

As already hinted, this work is limited to the Nigerian Diasporic experience amidst other types of diaspora that there are. For the purpose of this inquiry, Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* shall serve as our only primary literary text. Hence, our study shall be further limited to the female gender since all the major migrant characters in our text are all females. Nevertheless, inasmuch as we tend to focus on Nigeria’s diasporic experience, yet it must be noted that our scope also extends to migration into Nigeria by a person from other African nationality (Alek, later named Joyce) as captured in our

text. And finally, both the internal and external forms of migration shall as well feature in our discussion, with Europe nay Belgium as our destination of interest.

Research Methodology

The research methodology that shall be employed in this work is the qualitative research method, which deals with the collection of non-numerical data. In this wise, an extensive use of the library, text books, journals (online and printed), conference papers, other Internet materials and even the mass media, shall be made. The text and theories under review shall also be extensively studied for facts and validity.

Theoretical Framework: Everett Lee's Push-Pull Factor Theories of Migration

On a general note, we already know first and foremost that migration is one of the distinguishing features of human beings that has been occurring from the very beginning of man's appearance in this universe. Migration is broadly understood as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. The reasons that people migrate are determined by what Everett Lee has described as push and pull factors, which are forces that either coerce people to leave old residences and/or induce them to move into new locations. These could be economic, political, cultural, and environmental. Push factors are conditions that can force people to leave their homes and are related to the country from which a person migrates. Push factors include non-availability of enough livelihood opportunities, poverty, rapid population growth that surpasses available resources, "primitive" or "poor" living conditions, desertification, famines/droughts, fear of political persecution, poor healthcare, loss of wealth, and natural disasters, etc.

Pull factors are exactly the opposite of push factors – they attract people to a certain location. Typical examples of pull factors of a place are more job opportunities and better living conditions, easy availability of land for settling and agriculture, political and/or religious freedom, superior education and welfare systems, better transportation and communication facilities, better healthcare system and stress-free attractive environment, and security, etc.

But before delving properly into a detailed discussion on Everett Lee's push-pull factor theories of migration, it will be pertinent to make an acknowledgement of Ravenstein's "Laws of Migration", which serves as a precursor to that of Everett Lee. Ravenstein's laws were first presented before the Royal Statistical Society on March 17, 1885. Ravenstein's original paper was based upon the British Census of 1881. In 1889, Ravenstein explored the subject further with data from more than twenty countries. These laws (or generalizations) are presented in a condensed form as follow:

1. Migrants move mainly over short distances; those travelling longer distances head for the great centres of industry and commerce.
2. Most migration is from agricultural to industrial areas.
3. Large towns grow more by migration than by natural increase.
4. Migration increases with the development of industry, commerce, and transport.
5. Each migration stream produces a counter-stream.
6. Females are more migratory than males, at least over shorter distances. Males are dominant in international migration.
7. The major causes of migration are economic.

We find that the sixth and seventh laws of Ravenstein have great connections with our text, which is focused on women who migrated on account of various forms of economic and societal instabilities. In all, we see that the clear demarcation made by Lee in specifically identifying the factors he regarded as push and pull factors are not same with Ravenstein, who appeared to have muddled up the two sets of factors.

Everett Spurgeon Lee, Professor of Sociology at the University of Georgia, is known to have first presented his model at the Annual meeting of Mississippi Valley Historical Association, Kansas City, in 1965. In 1966, his seminal work, 'A Theory of Migration', was published in *Demography* journal. He has conceptualized the factors associated with the decision to migrate and the process of migration

into the following four categories: (1) Factors associated with the area of origin; (2) Factors associated with the area of destination; (3) Intervening obstacles; and (4) Personal factors.

In elaborating on these four categories, Lee stipulates clearly that there are significant differences between the factors associated with the area of origin and those associated with the area of destination. While push factors are the ones that exist at the point of origin and act to motivate migration, on the other hand, pull factors are present at the destination, which attract migrants (work opportunities and availability of jobs, conducive educational facilities, religious or political freedom). Push and pull factors are usually paired before a final decision to migrate is taken. In other words, migration can only occur if the reasons for emigrating (the push) appear to have a solution in the pull destination. In the context of labour migration for example, the push factors are often characterized by the lack of job opportunities in the areas of origin and the pull factors are the economic opportunities available in the receiving areas. Migration may then take place after both these are properly weighed. Nevertheless, it must be noted that a person usually has a better and more realistic knowledge about the place of origin, while his knowledge about the place of destination is always somewhat superficial and inexact. Intervening obstacles also have to be overcome before migration finally takes place. These include distance and transportation, lack of transport facilities, inaccessibility because of the topography (rugged mountains and physical barriers), and restrictive immigration laws. But then, current technological advancements have reduced these intervening obstacles in modern times, especially those of distance, transport and topography. And finally, the personal factors are of the utmost importance because, instead of the actual factors associated with the place of origin and/or destination, the individual's perception of these factors is found to actually influence the actual act of migration. Hence, different people could be faced with these same factors in the same locations, but the decision to migrate is always hugely personal.

Review of Related Scholarship

It is a known fact that no literature exists in a vacuum. Hence, beyond entertainment and beyond imaginative creativity, literature essentially serves the purpose of mirroring the society and the activities therein. Such activities constitute the themes writers focus on. Demetrio captures this when he asserts that

Literature is a social institution: it is created by the writer, who is a member of the society. Its medium is language, which is a social creation. It represents life, which is a social reality. It is addressed to men who form a social body. It is centrally conditioned by social and other forces and, in turn, exerts social influence (11).

The colonial experiences of most African countries rank among the major, if not the highest historical experiences that continues to shape many African societies till date. One of such major influences of colonization is its injection of inferiority complex into the fabrics of people's existence in Africa. This comes with huge consequences of different forms and levels of alienation. Unfortunately, the respite that was expected at independence has proven over the years to be mere rhetoric. Hence, Africans, nay Nigerians have always found themselves in dastardly situations of hopelessness, which continues to drive the urge to jet out of the country. This creates a scenario of reversed slavery. Whereby Africans themselves opt to go slave for their colonizers in their own lands. The impression is usually that everything that obtains abroad is superior and better only for the harsh realities to shockingly dawn on many when they eventually cross the border.

It is this experience that continuously propelled the many scholarships that been devoted to the diasporic experiences of Nigerians abroad. Such writings exist both in fictions, as in Unigwe's text being analyzed herein, Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and *The Slave Girl*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifeoma Odinye's *Pain in the Neck*, Blaise Ezeokeke's *Last Declaration*, etc and in other genres. Whatever form they take, "Nigerian diasporic literature narrates the Nigerian experience, the struggles associated with imperialism and its disparagement and repression, which remain visible features of post-independence Nigeria" (Onuh, 45).

This clearly shows that the effect of migration on individuals is usually drastic, especially since they are not treated properly and equally by the host country. Such effect often leads to a psychological, sociological and economic breakdown of the migrants, as perfectly seen in the character of Flicht in the Last Declaration. It is the nauseating experiences of such migrants living outside their indigenous countries that constitute what appears in the form of diasporic fiction and indeed, in other genres of literature.

Odinye perfectly captures this ugly trend of dashed hopes abroad, especially as it pertains to the oddities the female gender is subjected to in the diasporic quest for survival. Her work is simply reminiscent of the prolific Buchi Emecheta's, *The Slave Girl* and *Second Class Citizen*, both of which are perfect feminist responses to the ordeals of the female child in a patriarchal society and worse still, in diaspora. In fact, the experience of migration drove many African scholars and writers into lending their voices to their many odd experiences in the global settings they found themselves. Emecheta for one, just like Odinye and Ezeokeke, used her fiction to depict both her early and late life experiences in colonial Nigeria and post-colonial London. As Meriwether (2011) puts it in his review on Goodreads, Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* is "a personal story, one that candidly depicts the challenges of living with a difficult and unfaithful spouse, of being a young mother with little money, of the added challenge of —polite racism that forces her to live beneath her previous standards, and even her own trivial concerns, such as not being properly dressed in the hospital after nearly dying during childbirth". Adichie's story in her *Americanah* brings a new angle to the entire gimmick as it depicts the role of the media in painting lofty pictures about life abroad. Her story becomes more interesting as it tells the story of no other country but America, thereby showcasing that what obtains for the goose in Asia going by Odinye and Ezeokeke's accounts also obtains for the gander in such a great continent as even America. In fact, through Adichie, it becomes indisputably glaring that indeed "all that glitters is not gold", as an ancient cliché has it.

In Adichie's own articulation, "Ifemelu's ideas of America are shiny, glossy television shows and advertising: she saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease" (99). These were the factors that pulled her to America, as against their many opposites that pushed her initially out of Nigeria. But then, she finds out first hand and pitifully too, that life in America is nothing like what is portrayed in the television. And so, the craze to leave one's indigenous country to a foreign land just because of the utopic promise of a better and more satisfying life turns out to become what it is: utopia indeed! Thus, nothing but devastation and ultimately identity crises set in when upon arriving at the destination, the immigrants find something entirely different from what they once thought to be the answer to all their prayers. This must have been the propelling factor that motivated Adichie towards making it clear through her piece that indeed all does not simply become *uhuru* just because one has crossed the borders of Nigeria. And this was exactly the experience of the four female protagonists of Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*.

***On Black Sisters' Street* in Brief**

The fiction, *On Black Sisters' Street* (shall going forward be represented with the acronym OBSS for the purpose of this work), was first published by Chika Unigwe, a Nigerian writer, in 2009. It tells the story of four different women: Sisi, Efe, Amah and Joyce, who found themselves within the same world in the distant land of Brussels, Belgium, all in the quest to survive. For the most part of their early stay in Brussels, each of them holds her peculiar ugly past story close to her chest and confiding in no one until one of them is suddenly murdered in cold blood by unknown elements (unknown at least to them). The tragedy draws them close to each other leading them to opening up to themselves about their ugly pasts. It is the story of these pasts that form the corpus of the text as they are narrated in the form of flashbacks to their peculiar pasts and flash forwards to the present situation. The author adopts the style of dedicating each chapter of the work to each particular character or city in the text, thereby maintaining the reader's focus and attention on each particular character and city being exposed at each point in time. The details of these stories they share shall be explored using the same model as we seek to identify the various push and pull factors contained in their peculiar individual narratives.

Push and Pull Factors in *On Black Sisters' Street*

A study of Unigwe's OBBS clearly shows a perfect representation of various push and pull factors that actually influenced the actions of the four major characters in the text. As already mentioned, she presents these factors using the technique of flash backs and flash forwards and devoted each chapter to a particular character or city. While each of their stories is peculiar to each of the ladies, yet they have some uniform underlying elements and factors. These we shall x-ray in what follow hereunder taking each character in perspective.

The Push-Pull Elements in Sisi Migration

Sisi, whose real name was Chisom, was the most beautiful of all the four girls, at least according to Joyce's estimation (Unigwe 13). She came from a modest Christian home of a father, who was a civil servant and a petty trading mother. Her life was always driven by the primary motive of becoming somebody bigger and better than her father, who incidentally "had not studied beyond secondary school and often blamed his stagnant career on that fact" (Unigwe 19). Her father's eternal words would always be, "The only way to a better life is education. *Akwukwo*. Face your books and the sky will be your limit. It's in your hands" (Unigwe 18). No wonder, she was excited upon her graduation as she looked forward to a realization of everything she had always dreamed of. "She did not need a clairvoyant to predict her future, not when she had a degree from a good university. She would get a house for herself. Rent somewhere big for her parents.... a massive house where she had the space to throw Saturday-night parties" (Unigwe 18). She and her family were so obsessed with their belief in the power of a university degree to turn their lives for the better that they always kept fantasizing about the many good things to follow upon Chisom's graduation. In fact, for her father, "there were only two certainties in their lives: death and Chisom's good job" (Unigwe 21), as far as university education was concerned. In the face of such high hopes as these, one can then imagine the huge disappointments that Chisom and her family faced when after two years of job hunting, she was not even invited for interview to any of the locations she had applied to. Even when she demeaned herself by applying to jobs she knew she was more qualified for, the results always turned out the same. She soon came to the stark and disheartening conclusion that it is "Unless you have found out that one of your friends is the director of any of the banks, because that is how things work, you know?" (Unigwe 23). This was her push factor – a factor that falls under Raventein's seventh law on economics and under one of the push factors enumerated by Everett Lee. It is on account of this push factor that she quickly and firmly jumped at Dele's offer of being ferried abroad to become a commercial sex worker since she had the physical asset that could fetch her money, as against the intellectual asset she had banked on all through her life, following her dad's admonitions. She even had to accept this offer in spite her decent family background, her relationship with her boyfriend Peter (who tried to dissuade her from travelling in the vain hope that things will turn out better for them) and the stringent conditions of the offer, thereby perfectly demonstrating how desperate her push factors had made her become.

As far she was concerned, "She knew that she could not withstand another year in Lagos. Not like this. *I must escape*" (Unigwe 30). And that was why despite the difficulty and the shame in her acceptance of what Dele had to offer, she chose to keep it to herself without informing her family and boyfriend about the details of the offer. She was rather filled with the thoughts of whom she would be after she must have made it big abroad. And so, "She did not tell them that she had already decided to change her name, to adopt a new name that she would wear in her new life. Sisi.... She would rename herself Sisi: a stranger yet familiar. Chisom would be airbrushed out of existence at least for a while. And once she hit it big she would set up a business or two. She could go into the business of importing second-hand luxury cars into Nigeria" (Unigwe 44). Even the normal nostalgia of leaving home, which she found to be indeed brutal at her point of departure could not stay her mind from leaving Lagos. All that mattered to her was that she was plunging bravely into a future that held bright hopes for her. And for her, "it was all thanks to Dele", to whom she felt she owed her life (Unigwe 48).

In all of these, we see the potency of the pull factor that drove Sisi towards making such ignoble choice of even losing her identity. Of course, this highlights one of the major crises that are associated with many Nigerians in diaspora, who are usually besieged by a crisis of identity as they strive to become

something they are not. Hence, they end up being neither here nor there, all in their desperate and often futile bid to make it big in foreign land. Unfortunately, they become so beclouded by their ambitions and the 'juicy' factors pulling them that they fail to realize that all that glitters is not indeed gold.

It is pertinent to note that in presenting Sisi's story, Unigwe also took a swipe at the government of the day whose policies are at the bedrock of the impoverishment of the masses. Sisi's father is a vivid victim of the unwelcome embargo that was placed on second hand cars and many other everyday items by the President Obasanjo administration. In fact, Unigwe presented that administration's policies as being so bad that the military regime of Abacha was even considered better, at least for the fact that it was known to be a military dictatorship as against the so-called democracy that still wore the garb of dictatorship (90). This dastardly situation constitutes one of the major push factors that drive people into seeking to migrate since they still find themselves in the sort of precarious situation Sisi's parents found themselves even after donkey years of civil service and hoping against hopes.

As such, instead of spending years slaving endlessly and in futility for Nigerian government, it was better for her to *japa* (in the current colloquial expression of migration). And once abroad, "She knew that she would make it here" (Unigwe 98). In her illusions, "It was the place to be when your dreams died, the place of miracles: a place where dead dreams resurrected and soared and allowed you to catch them and live them" (Unigwe 105). In short, "She could see her life before her: money. And more money. A return to Nigeria with a poise and wallet that Chisom could never have had" (Unigwe 236). Phew!!! What a big dream! What a big pull! That was why as much as Sisi never enjoyed the sex work she was doing, she tried never to put her mind to it. Rather, "on such nights, Sisi threw her legs in the air and counted how much more until she could open her boutique. Start her car export business. Her internet café. All the dreams filling her head. The dreams expanding to make sure nothing else came in" (Unigwe 238). Whether she eventually made it, whether such dreams ever come to fruition as they are dreamt and whether indeed all migrants, who also had such high hopes about making it big abroad, eventually makes it is always left to be seen.

The Push-Pull Elements in Efe Migration

Efe's story was simply that of a teenage young girl, who lost the care and guidance of a mother as a teen and then fell into the hands of a callous and flirtatious forty-five years old man, who deflowered her at the age of sixteen. Efe became caught in the mix of a disinterested father, who became devastated on account of his wife's death and a man with money "*wey full everywhere like san' san'*" (Unigwe 49). And this man, Titus, was also ready to spend the money on Efe just so he could have his way in between her thighs and continue doing so. The escapade continued with things going on smoothly for Efe and her siblings (who were also benefitting from the largesse of the amorous affair) until Efe took in. The news of her pregnancy broken to Titus marked the end of the relationship and climaxed in her being chased out of Titus' house by the latter's wife. This marked the huge turning point in Efe's life that placed her face to face with the desperate urge to survive in order to fend for her son, Lucky Ikponwosa (L.I., as Efe's father named him for short).

Her avowed determination to provide her son with the kind of life she had dreamed for him when she thought she would be able to get Titus' help became the push factor in Efe's own case. In her own words to the baby, "I promise you, I shall get you out of here. I don't care how I do it". And indeed, "She had never been more serious about anything else in her entire life" (Unigwe 77). This desperation must have been fueled by her own father's outburst against the child thus: "I cannot be raising my child and be raising another man's child too, you hear that? There is only so much trial a man can bear in this world" (Unigwe 77).

So, when Dele eventually asked her if she would want to travel abroad, she could not understand the rationale behind the question. For her, "Who did not want to go abroad? People were born with the ambition and people died trying to fulfil that ambition" (Unigwe 81-82). So, why ask her if she wanted to travel abroad when it was everybody's dream? That was why "She had agreed to his terms before she asked what she was expected to do abroad". In fact, as far she was concerned, "People knew the risks and people took them because the destination was worth it. What was it the song said? *Nigeria*

jagajaga. Everything scatter scatter. Nobody wanted to stay back unless they had pots of money to survive the country. People like Titus and Dele” (Unigwe 82). This mindset perfectly encapsulates both the push and pull factors that drove Efe’s desire to emigrate from Nigeria.

All that mattered to her was that “L.I. would get a better life. Go to good schools, become a big shot and look after her when she was old and tired”. Hence, “L.I. was a worthy enough investment to encourage her to accept Dele’s offer. And even if leaving him would be the hardest thing she would ever do, she would endure it for his sake” (Unigwe 82). After all, even though Dele had not exactly told her that, she had dreamed up the riches she would amass for herself and had calculated that she would be able to afford a Mercedes by the time she had spent a year working. Her confidence also anchored on the assurance that Dele had given her about white men having a predilection for black women having been fed up with their own white women and wanting “a bit of colour and spice” (Unigwe 84). What more could be more encouraging than such hopes, especially when coupled with the high expectations of her sibling, Rita, who also expressed the desire to also be gifted with a Mercedes as well. It is, therefore, not surprising that giving these push and pull factors, not even the painful nostalgia of being separated from her family, especially her son, L.I., could deter her from pursuing her ‘Golden Fleece’ abroad. For her, that was the price to pay!

Loss of personal happiness is another price almost all desperate migrants have to pay as they are pushed and pulled by various factors. For Efe, she tries not to think about happiness. “L.I. is getting a good education. Dat one suppose dey enough for me” (Unigwe 114). In other words, the push and pull factors end up taking the place of true happiness for many migrants. In fact, the attainment of their pull factors becomes the definition of happiness for them. Hence, even though they do not find joy in the things they do for money, yet they persist in doing them because of the force of the factors pulling them to do them. As far as Efe was concerned, one thing was very certain and that was all that mattered: “We’ll make it oo. There is no ‘if’ about it. How can we come to Europe and go back empty-handed? God forbid bad thing!” (Unigwe 177). Such is always the nature and potency of the factors pulling migrants to their places of destination.

The Push-Pull Elements in Ama Migration

Ama was a girl that found herself in the very unfortunate circumstance of a pretentious and hypocritical foster father (although she initially thought he was her father), who began to defile her sexually from the night of her eighth birthday. This was the fundamental push factor she began to experience – the fact that this foster father of hers, Brother Cyril, was a very highly respected puritanical man, who was known for his moral uprightness. In Unigwe’s depiction, “Brother Cyril was an assistant pastor at the Church of the Twelve Apostles of the Almighty Yahweh, Jehovah El Shaddai, Jehovah Jireh, one of the biggest churches in the city. The Devil did not belong to anywhere near the house which he was the head” (128). On account of this he repudiated anything ‘ungodly’ be it music, dressing, language and what have you. As Unigwe put it, “The music of the world was to be kept in the world, away from the confines of the house. As were alcoholic drinks. And cigarettes. And magazines with lewd pictures. And bad language. Their house was a house of holiness. And if Brother Cyril had his way, he would have had the entire house painted white for its sanctity” (129). To be sure, “Everyone in sleepy Enugu knew Brother Cyril. In under two years of joining the church he had risen in rank to Assistant Pastor, only one set of ears away from God. This was mainly due to his moral uprightness and the holiness which shone off his still white collar. The sins of the world curdled on his forehead causing furrows, five or six lines that lay like lax, one on top of the other” (130).

These depictions serve to perfectly capture the image of the disillusion that Ama felt when this same man, described in such heavenly words as the above and who would always say, “you have to be prepared to meet the Lord at any given moment” (131), defiled her sexually at the very tender age of just eight. Ama became so disillusioned that the pink walls in the sitting room of her father’s house became the only ‘person’ she could talk to about the ongoing amorous and illicit affair. For how indeed could she tell anyone that this man, who has been so decorated above was the same man, who always sneaked into her room like a ghost and raped her night after night from the night of her eighth birthday,

while demanding submission from her as one of her Christian obligations of honouring her father and her mother (Unigwe 132). Her situation was worsened by the fact that her mother did not care enough as a mother would to inquire into her sudden dislike for pap, owing to its “warm and yucky” similarity with the sperm that her father usually ejaculated during the unholy affair.

It is on account of all these that she began to nurse the desperate ambition of travelling abroad for the first time – a place that will keep her very far away from her father (Unigwe 134). “She imagined being in Monaco, all rich and grown up, without the huge menacing presence of her father, drinking and smoking in defiance of her father’s rules, shaking and twisting to the Devils music” (Unigwe 135). And so, her primary push factor was her hypocritical father and his nauseating amorous abuse.

Funnily, when Ama did leave home, thirteen years later, it was neither to any of the big cities abroad she had dreamed about. It was to Lagos! But for her, it was still at least “Bigger and wider than Enugu. It was a good place to start from” (Unigwe 135). And it indeed turned out to be a good place to start from! Mama Eko, her mother’s sister, whom she went to live with in Lagos turned out to be the exact opposite of Brother Cyril. Her lifestyle of drinking alcohol, smoking, using swear words, dressing seductively, etc, all stood in stark contrast to the things Brother Cyril preached. And for Ama, they perfectly represented the sort of change she wanted. Hence, she whole heartedly plunged into it and joined Mama Eko in her restaurant business, which gave her ample opportunity of mixing up with people of all kinds – something she was forbidden to do, while under her foster father.

Nevertheless, soon after, the predictability and the circular motion of her life at Mama Eko’s place began to make Lagos boring for her. She began to feel pushed again by the urge for another more complex change of lifestyle – something that could launch her into the exotic lifestyle of the ladies she admired when they came to their restaurant to feed. In fact, she became so obsessed with becoming like such women that “if their hands touched hers when they took the tray of food from her, she saw it as a sign that their luck would rub off on her; that one day, she could afford to patronize a salon like Headmasters, ask for a pedicure and a manicure while professional hairdresser wove expensive extensions into her hair” (Unigwe 161). Hence, her secondary push became her inordinate quest for financial freedom or economic upliftment – the quest to make it big!

This push prepared the ground for her eventual acceptance of Dele’s usual offer, which came thus: “If you wan’ make easy money, if you wan’ go abroad, come my office on Randle make we talk. But only if you dey serious o. If you no dey serious make you no waste my time and yours. You hear me so?” (Unigwe 163). Even though she initially resisted the offer with some insults hurled against Dele when he specifically mentioned what she was to going abroad to do for him, she eventually thought better about it and kept repeating “Sorry Oga Dele. Sorry sir”, in order to demonstrate “Not contrition, but fear of a lost opportunity....” (Unigwe 167).

She had to begin with servicing Dele sexually right inside his office in order to make good her resolution. All through the sexual escapade that took place there, her thoughts were “already on a new life far from here, earning her own money so that she could build her business empire. And once she was a big woman, people would respect her, even Brother Cyril”. What is more! “It was this dream that spurred her on in Antwerp; the men she slept with were like Dele, just tools she needed to achieve her dream. And her dream was expansive enough to accommodate all of them”. (Unigwe 169). With a mind so made up, not even the nostalgia she felt about leaving Mama Eko, especially when she said “May God guide you” could dissuade her “from anticipating with delight the start of her new life” (Unigwe 170).

Upon arriving in Zwertezusterstraat, Ama continued to be consoled by the firm belief in her pull factor such that she would constantly remind herself that “One day, when I make it, I’ll go back and build her (referring to Mama Eko) a mansion!” (Unigwe 177).

The Push-Pull Elements in Joyce (Alek) Migration

Joyce, originally named Alek by her Sudanese parents was the only one among the four women that was not from Nigeria. Her own push factors appears to be the most pathetic of all. She was a very unfortunate victim of a clash between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which had been guarding the predominantly Dinka town and the Janjaweed militia. The first thought about migration came from her father, Nyok, a police officer, when she was just fifteen. He was preparing to move his entire household to somewhere around Khartoum from where they hoped to eventually migrate to either the UK or America. This migration was not for sightseeing or a vacation trip. It was a fleeing from home, as Unigwe described it, on account of the tension in the land (Unigwe187). Pitiably, it was never to be! For on the day of the planned trip, Janjaweed militia invaded into their home, massacred her parents and only brother and left her for dead after subjecting her to multiple rapes (Unigwe188 – 191). When she eventually woke up after hours of unconsciousness to join the group of women and children that survived the mayhem, the only thought in her mind was simply to survive. That was what she owed her deceased family. And so, the decimation of her family in one sweep of massacre and her desperate determination to survive for their sake became her own primary push factor. Finding herself setting up a personal tent as a refugee in a refugee camp at the tender age of fifteen was nothing near her initial dreams of becoming a medical doctor. Georg Steiner was therefore right when he postulated that "migration has also become increasingly complex, manifesting itself in mixed population movements including refugees, asylum seekers, economic and other migrants whose motivations for travel are often diverse and overlapping" (Obiezu and Odimegwu xxvi). The best Alek could do was simply to smile to the stars with which she always conversed to ventilate her burdens, until she stumbled unto Polycarp, a Nigerian soldier, who was among the soldiers guarding them in the camp. It was Polycarp that brought back joy into her life so much so that he even had to take her along with him back to Lagos when he was redeployed to Lagos, after about two months of their intimate love tangle.

Through Polycarp's description of Lagos for Alek as they arrived, one gets into Unigwe's mind about the government of the day thus: "And this is Lagos in the twenty-first century. Lagos in 2004! All our government is good for is stuffing their pockets. They don't care what happens to the people they are supposed to be ruling" (214). After all, as Sisi had earlier observed, President Obasanjo's own children were all placed at Ivy League universities in the US (Unigwe201 – 202). So, if that is the case, it, therefore, becomes necessary that every other person who can, should also find their own way outside the country for their own survival. It is such political maladministration as this that constitutes one of the perennial push factors that usually drive people into wanting to migrate from Nigeria.

However, for Alek, everything seemed very okay so long as Polycarp was by her side. "She felt very lucky to have been given another chance. And with Polycarp by her side there was very little else she wanted" (Unigwe 218). And if Alek's situation had remained like this, maybe, just maybe, she may not have felt any urge to jet out of Nigeria. But her joy was cut short by Polycarp's parents, who would not hear anything of their first son not marrying a fellow Igbo girl, not to talk of marrying a foreigner. In Polycarp's submission, "My parents will never forgive me" (Unigwe 223). It was this twist of fate that rekindled that initial plan Alek's father about travelling abroad with his family, which got thwarted by their gruesome murder. And so, to make up for the joy of the relationship that has been suddenly cut short by family interference, Polycarp offered to introduce Alek to a man, who could get Alek to any country of her choice, no matter where. This depicts how Alek got pushed into Dele's abroad den.

It is worthy of note that Alek, unlike the other three ladies, appeared not to have been desperate about leaving for abroad. All she wanted was survival and happiness. It did not matter to her where she got it, so long as she got it. She would have been pleased to stay on with Polycarp in Nigeria or indeed anywhere of his choosing, if his family had not been such tribal bigots as Polycarp and his mother presented them to be. Matter-of-factly, even after she had been told that she had no nuptial future with Polycarp, she remained as dutiful as ever in the home front, performing every task that was expected of her as the woman of the house. "Perhaps in a part of her mind she could not control, the idea had snaked in that in remaining dutiful she may yet sway their minds" (Unigwe 226). But that was never to be! As a result, part of her firm resolutions upon arriving Zwertezusterstraat was that never again would she allow her happiness in life to ever depend on another's, for that was the fundamental push that landed

her into the odd job and life she found herself in (Unigwe 241). This perfectly captures one of such painful emotions of many migrants, who find themselves abroad, especially on involuntary cases.

Evaluation: Similarities and Dissimilarities of the Push and Pull Factors among the Major Characters in *On Black Sisters' Street*

The Similarities

1. **Irregularity of their Migration Status:** Irregular migrants are migrants whose stay abroad are questionable for a number of reasons such as the illegal nature of the work they do or the illegality of their visa or the illegality of their route of entrance, et cetera. In *OBBS*, the sisters qualify as irregular migrants not just by virtue of the nature of the work they do but virtue of their appeal for asylum that was always turned down, as was seen in Sisi's case. Hence, Christiana Idika was very correct when she posited that "Most migrants enter and overstay their visas, whereas others become irregular when their asylum status is rejected and they could not leave the country, either because they do not want to or because, they have no Nigerian passport for them to return to Nigeria" (Obiezu and Odimegwu 186; Emphasis mine).

Almost all the highlighted situation in the above quote apply vividly to the four women since they, of course, would not want to go back to Nigeria as early as they had come, just because their appeal for asylum was rejected. It is not surprising that asylum status was rejected for all of them because as Idika further asserts, "asylum status is mostly rejected in case of Nigerians and consequently, they fall mostly among this category that must return to Nigeria" (Obiezu and Odimegwu 188). But even if they wanted by any means to return to Nigeria, they were trapped within the net of Madam and Dele, who always seized their passports upon their arrival to ensure they remained in their servitude till they paid off all they owed Dele (Unigwe 233 – 234). This was a common pull factor among all the four ladies.

2. **Quest for Survival:** As already seen in the analysis above, one common denominator that runs across the four women's sojourn abroad is their common push for survival. The survival instinct ranks highly among everything that they desired and sought for. Hence, even when the goings were rough and they detested what they did, this underlying push kept them going. Sisi's pain during her first experience of what she had to do in Brussels perfectly captures this push. As Unigwe described it, "Tears found their way to her eyes. She was not doing this because she liked it, she reminded herself. But she was here now and there was no going back" (Unigwe 208 – 209). In the light of the foregoing and as already noted elsewhere in this piece, happiness was not an option. The only 'happiness' that mattered was the ulterior desire to make it big against all odds.
3. **Obligation from Home:** As already seen, all the women had their peculiar obligation from home. Although, each of them differed in the obligation that pushed them, yet there was this obligation from home that always preoccupied their minds at all times and always pushed them on against all odds. For Sisi, it was the desire to make it big in order to turn the fortune of her family around for the best. For Efe, it was the obligation to ensure that her illegitimate son, L.I., had the best of life. For Amah, it was to acquire the kind of wealth that will empower her to have her abusive foster father, Cyril and Dele under her control. And for Joyce, it was to justify the one-day massacre of her entire family right before her, otherwise, the soldiers could have as well killed her that same night.
4. **The Dele Link:** This points to the common route through which the four women escaped the factors that were pushing them outside the country. We are inclined to think that Unigwe intended to demonstrate that there is always a common nexus in the processes and means through which migrants, especially irregular ones, find themselves outside the shores of the country.
5. **Initial Lofty Ambitions:** Another major similarity is the crashing of the original dreams the migrants had before being pushed by dominant prevailing forces to seek available alternatives abroad. All the four ladies had one lofty dream or the other about their destinies. But circumstances beyond their control all saw those dreams crumble like pack of cards and existing

only as wishful thoughts within the confines of their mental configurations and interlocutory effusions. Sisi wanted to be a well-paid civil servant having graduated with a university degree – something different from her father’s level of education and which should better her lot than her father’s. Efe wanted to be a writer – a very famous one at that! Amah wanted to be a pop star, while Alek wanted to be a medical doctor (Unigwe 242 – 243). But all these remained only within the circumference of illusions.

6. **Deception Motif:** There is also always the deception motif associated with the push and pull factors of migrants. It is either the migrants themselves are deceiving their kith and kin about their actual mission abroad, both before the travel and during their stay abroad properly or that the arrangers of the journey are deceiving the migrant about the actual nature of the mission. In the cases of Sisi, Efe and Amah, they were the ones who deceived and continued to deceive their relatives about their actual mission abroad. But in the case of Joyce, she was the one that was deceived by Polycarp and Dele about the actual mission she was going abroad to execute. No wonder she vowed never to forgive the two of them when she eventually realized her actual mission (Unigwe 241).
7. **Sadness Motif:** We see this reoccur in the testimonies of the four ladies, especially after the death of Sisi. In fact, it appears as if Sisi’s death jolted them from the dogmatic blindness or illusion that their push and pull factors had put them into. For we begin to hear their dark past stories vis-à-vis their present helpless conditions only after the death of Sisi. As Efe put it, “We’re not happy here. None of us is. We work hard to make somebody else rich. Madam treats us like animals. Why are we doing this?” (Unigwe 290). But before Sisi’s death, they appeared to be basking in the illusive euphoria of the promises of their pull factor, which was primarily “money”. Sisi herself confessed this despite the difficulties they had with the nature of the work they had to do to make the money (Unigwe 236).
8. **Nostalgia Motif:** We see that each of the ladies always felt a deep sense of nostalgia at different times in their lives, beginning from the moments of their departure and at some points during their stay abroad. The pain of leaving loved ones behind always battled prominently with the push factors that drove them to leave. While Sisi battled with leaving behind her family and boyfriend, Efe battled with leaving behind her only son, L.I. and siblings. Ama battled with the nostalgia of leaving Mama Eko behind while Joyce struggled with the pain of leaving Polycarp to an unknown land for unclear purpose. This feeling kept creeping in at different points of their stay at Antwerp but was always subdued by the attractive factor that has pulled them there – money!

All these similarities found among the diasporic experiences of the four young ladies touch at the heart of similar experiences encountered by almost every migrant in diaspora, especially the irregular and involuntary ones. We see them also reflect in the depictions of other diasporic writers other than Unigwe’s text being explored herein.

Dissimilarities

1. Alek appeared to be the only of the four girls that was not desperately attached to find her survival abroad. The circumstance of her rejection by her lover’s family saw her face to face with the option of travelling abroad as something she could not resist.
2. Further still, she alone was the only one who did not exactly know what she was travelling abroad to do, unlike the other three, who were in perfect knowledge of the commodity they were going to sell abroad, only that they hid the details from their kith and kin. As Unigwe put it, “Arrangements that she understood neither head nor tail of were made” (231). Hers (that is, Alek’s) was sort of an involuntary migration that more properly wears the outlook of human trafficking for commercial sex purposes without her knowing it to be so. Instead, she was told that “Dele will find you a job as a nanny in Belgium” (Unigwe 231).
3. More still, Alek and Sisi were the only ones that had to change their names for the purposes of their mission. While Sisi voluntarily and personally changed hers from Chisom to Sisi, Alek’s own was initiated and changed by her handler, Dele, who said to Polycarp, “The name has to go. Alek. Sound too much like Alex. Man’s name. We no wan man’ men. *Otioo*. Give am woman name. fine fine name for fine gal like her” (Unigwe 230). “Joyce” became the final

choice name after pondering with such other female names like “Cecilia” and “Nicole”. Alek’s nationality was also changed from being a Sudanese to being a Nigerian. All were done without her approval. She was even so stupefied by the whole process as to even resist or roundly reject the choices.

4. Of course, there is also the dissimilarity in the particular situations that prompted their drive for wanting to travel abroad as has already been properly x-rayed in the foregoing analysis. While, each had a push, such push was peculiar to each person.
5. It was only Sisi that had a university degree among the four and whose own push was related to the inability of her university degree to fetch or secure her a job.
6. It was also only Sisi that met her Waterloo by paying the ultimate price of death, according to the depictions of the text. How others ended and whether their big dreams were eventually achieved later on were left to be seen.
7. Although Joyce also had the obligation of surviving for the sake of her family members, who were killed in one night, she too was the only one, who was not tied by the obligation of having to pay back personally to Dele for her freedom to be regained. Polycarp opted to be her benefactor in that regard. Hence, in her low moments, it was Sisi, who had adopted her as her younger sister that would always encourage her by reminding her “how lucky she was that she could keep most of her earnings, unlike the rest of them, because she had a benefactor who was paying off her debt” (Unigwe 235).

The import of all these dissimilarities is that they go to show that despite the common elements in the experiences of almost every migrant abroad, each migrant always has their own peculiar circumstances ranging from the pushing factors back home at the places of origin to the pulling factors at the places of destination. This, we see too when other diasporic writings are equally studied.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The text *On Black Sisters’ Street* is obviously a powerful work on migration, which we have shown to traverse a very wide scope on the issue of African nay Nigerian migration. But migration is indeed a highly complex topic and process. Our study reveals that Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* focused only on the irregular and somewhat involuntary aspects of migration. It touches only on that aspect of migration, which as Adepoju observed, is usually being “fueled by unstable politics, ethno-religious conflicts, and rapidly growing populations with resulting increases in the labour force, persistent economic decline, and environmental deterioration” (Obiezu and Odimegwu xxvii). This perception is at the background of the common and age-long negative depiction of African nay Nigerian migrants as ‘desperate’ and (supposedly passive) victims of ‘merciless’, ‘ruthless’ and ‘unscrupulous’ traffickers and criminal-run smuggling gangs.

Idika is of the avowed and apt view that this depiction of African migrants is largely one-sided and homogenous. She insisted that such reductionist narratives “affect also the account on Nigerian migration in Europe, whereby the focus is often on trafficked sex workers and refugees and asylum seekers” (Obiezu and Odimegwu 182). No wonder there are avalanche of policies that have been developed across boards with a view to “curbing migration by ‘fighting’ and ‘combating’ irregular migration through a crackdown on trafficking and smuggling networks in combination with the intensification of border controls” (Obiezu and Odimegwu 181). Incidentally, most of the available data sources and literature usually focus more on this irregular aspect of migration such as asylum seekers and sex workers as we have in Unigwe’s text; thereby creating a very big lacuna about the general view on African nay Nigerian migration studies.

It is to this end that this present work recommends the need to further broaden the studies on other aspects of migration which Africans make. There is need first and foremost for more literature on the regular and voluntary aspects of migration in order to depict stories about how Nigerians contribute in technology and intellectual transfer from our shores to foreign lands. Nigeria loses many of her fine brains to the global community in such spates as cannot be easily neglected – what has been generally dubbed as “brain drain” and “brain gain” (even though some have chosen to refer to it as “brain waste” because of the denigration and downgrading of Nigerian intellectuals, who find themselves abroad after

having schooled in Nigeria). There is the need for literature that captures this trend. There is also a dearth of literature that capture the diaspora remittances that Nigerians abroad also make to the GDP of the nation. In other words, it is not all negativity, as Unigwe's text and many other available diasporic literatures tend to present. Hence, while we do not take anything away from the beautiful strengths of the work, we make bold to recommend the need for responses that take care of the gaps mentioned above and even more from the positive point of view. Not just for the mere purpose of patronizing what is ours, but for the objective purpose of complementarity and balancing of views.

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