

PULL FACTORS OF MIGRATION IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET*

Dr. Adaoma Igwedibia

Department of English Language and Literature,

NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka

ae.igwedibia@unizik.edu.ng

&

Ebube Nzediegwu

Postgraduate student

Department of English Language and Literature

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

ebubenzediegwu@gmail.com

Abstract

Over time, research on cross-border mobilities most notably: drug and human trafficking, have been interpreted as negative consequences of globalization, by theorists and critics alike. Most studies have examined issues of unhomeliness or push factors as a cogent factor in the understanding of migration. However, recent studies on the forces that lure the migrant from his home have shown a yawning gap in studies and critical appreciation of migration. Data for this paper are taken from Chika Unigwe's novel, *On Black Sisters' Street*, which emphasizes the state of heightened issue of migration for clearly economic opportunities, which has been identified as one of the chief factors responsible for forced migration and the trafficking of vulnerable women into cross-border prostitution. Thus, the study employs Pull concept of migration in binary opposition with the Push concept, and its capture of the vulnerability of economically disadvantaged women into the intricate web of sexual enslavement, exploitation, bodily harm, and sometimes brutal death. In its findings, the paper concludes that the condition of vulnerability resulting from Pull factors starts with existential conditions - Push factors; the socio-economic problems created by globalization in disadvantaged countries and ends with destinations of promising livable conditions.

Keywords: Push, Pull, human trafficking, migration, globalization.

Introduction

Following the effects globalization and cosmopolitanism: the movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary, literary studies have received increase efforts in capturing these happenings in burgeoning migrant narratives as well as critical appreciation. Therefore, in articulating its wide range of perspectives as well as attendant themes, theorists and scholars alike presents Migration as multiscalar: capturing its intercontinental; intra-continental; and interregional (rural to urban) features (Williams and Balaz 2), inviting a plethora of models towards the understanding of the myriad economic and non-economic forces behind the decision to migrate.

For decades, scholarship on movements across the border have hinged on Push factors. According to Nicole Simpson, "Migrants can be "pushed" out of their home countries due to deteriorating economic conditions or political unrest" (1). Thus, Push factors are forces of expulsion associated with the area of origin, which maybe natural disasters; physical conditions; over population; fear of insecurity; religious intolerance; differences in economic opportunities; differences in social amenities and change in social status such as high level of education and wealth. For example, in his *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said remarks on the push factored cross-border movements. For Said, exile "has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (181). Reflecting largely on the political, Said observes that some aspects of migrant identities and conditions narrativized by many African writers, who left oppressive regimes to seek exile in other countries lie on political issues. In appropriating the musical concept, "contrapunctal" to describe the plurality and simultaneity of visions that exile may give (191), Said differentiates levels of migrants: the exiled, refugee and the expatriate. To Said, the one who is on exile is (s)he who is prevented from returning home, while the refugee is a creation of twentieth century modernity: large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance (187), while an expatriate "voluntarily live(s) in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons" (187). Thus, as Said believes, exile and the new forms of mass migration like refugee and economic migration are associated with "the modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers" (180).

Conversely, although the Push conceptualization in migration studies highlights a stringency of economic, social as well as psychological and political reasons that cause discomfort in immigrant's homeland (*Reflections on Exile* 1), it casts a one-eyed look on migration since it surveys only the home and not destination countries.

Against this backdrop and in bid to address this yawning gap in scholarship, this study employs the Pull concept in examining the destinations of migrants. Thus, although *On Black Sisters' Street* documents the plight of Africans fleeing pain and annihilation, Unigwe also exposes conditions of attraction that draws migrants to their intended destination, 'El Dorado' - greener pastures. These conditions posit possibilities for better life, which maybe more jobs, better jobs, higher wages, worker welfare, health care, religious tolerance, refugees and asylum policies. According to Lauren Berlant, "everyone whose bodies and lives are saturated by capitalist forces and rhythms" must necessarily confront the urgencies of livelihood and survival (Berlant 192). Looking at the four girls at the center of attention in Unigwe's novel – Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce, the need for survival exemplifies "how different kinds of persons catch up to their new situation of economic vulnerability" (Berlant 192). When constrained, Unigwe's women are left with few options of survival as citizens of geographical spaces identified under hegemonic sites of "political, social and economic dysfunction" (Eze 90). So, in attempt to seek a better life, the female voices and their stories do not only highlight the suitability of a Push concept reading, but also encourages the survey of Pull factors in the text.

Problem of the Study

The research text overtime past have received quite a number of critical appreciation in regards to Push factors of migration; from the Ecofeminist, Marxist to Feminist perspectives. However, the problem remains that paltry or nothing has been done as regards the Pull concept, a concern which the current study seeks to address.

Objectives of study

The primary objectives of this study are twofold:

- I. To analyze the pull forces of Migration depicted in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*
- II. To examine the pull forces that influence migration particularly in the context of narrative and characters of Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study employs the Postcolonial theory to look at the neocolonial causes and effects of migration. The Postcolonial theory fundamentally seeks to understand the relationship of power binaries, between the colonizer and the colonized whilst looking at the history of imperialism and colonial rule. This means that it is impossible to conceive of "European philosophy," "European literature," or "European history" as existing in the absence of Europe's colonial encounters and oppression around the world. It also suggests that the colonized world stands at the forgotten center of global modernity. The prefix "post" of "postcolonial theory" however rigorously debated has never implied that colonialism has ended; indeed, much of Postcolonial theory is concerned with the lingering forms of colonial authority after the formal end of Empire. Other aspects of Postcolonial theory openly endeavour to imagine a world after colonialism, such as Migration, which is the pivot of our study.

In this regard, this study explores the relevance of postcolonial theory to migration. In so doing, it begins with the premise that, by definition, migration must be considered in the light of postcolonial theory, for above all, Postcoloniality is about power exchange; superiority and inferiority. Furthermore, since Postcolonialism has been defined as both a social movement and a research approach whose main agenda addresses the power binaries of superiority and inferiority, the study methods utilize social, cultural, and political analysis to engage with issues of migration. In so doing, analytically interrogates certain areas of motivation/reasons for the influx of migrants to the superior West from the less affluent countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Examining Employment, Higher wages and Asylum as Pull factors of migration in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

Nicole Simpson in his words states that migrants "In making their decision, individuals compare the net benefits of migration to the costs. By better understanding what forces affect specific migrant flows (e.g. demographic characteristics, migrant networks, and economic conditions), policymakers can set policy to target (or reduce) certain types of migrants" (1), the Pull concept becomes rather important and paramount in realizing a complete understanding of migration in literature. That being said, one can therefore dare the conclusion that scholarship on migration is fragmented and incomplete without recognizance on forces that beguile migrants.

Thus, examining opportunities for better employment, higher wages, facilities, better working conditions and attractive amenities, is the same as looking at the Pull forces on the migrant. In the text, the female characters get attracted by employment, financial stability and provision of basic amenities. Sisi is lured by Dele. When Sisi meets up with Oga Dele at his office on Randle Avenue, the pimp didn't care much about Sisi's intellectual capacity as a graduate individual. Rather, he

praised her body shape to give her a glimpse of the job she should expect to do in Europe: “You fit sleep on it. No need to decide now. But I swear, with your melons, you go dey mint money anyhow!” (40). So, why is it that Dele could not think of anything different for Sisi other than making salacious comments about her body as a female at their first encounter? This could potentially posit the problem of power imbalance in gender norms where men tend to lure women into a degraded role within society. Nkealah argues that objectification of women is intimately linked to the place that women are given in society, raising the issue of gender dynamics. The man seems naturally to enjoy all the privileges which predestine him in a position of domination over the woman.

Speaking of *On Black Sisters’ Street*, Bernadine Evaristo asserts that the author unmask, unequivocally, one of the factors that forces African women to head into uncharted territories to become sex workers. The most striking, according to Bernadine, is the unfettered voice Unigwe uses to outline the entangled factors that shape the prostitution industry to make it a pull factor for the most deprived: “*On Black Sisters’ Street* is a probing and unsettling exploration of the many factors that lead African women into prostitution in Europe, and it pulls no punches about the sordid nature of the job” (Evaristo 2011). This Pull forces, unquestionably, leads to big dreams of delusionary Europe that every potential immigrant sees before making their first foray into the promised land. Sisi did not make an exception: “She would set up a business or two. She could go into the business of importing fairly used luxury cars into Nigeria” (41). At one point, as she became hopeless to find a job at the bank, and her boyfriend Peter being unable to help her out, Sisi had a second thought, the possibility of training as a nurse. That job has the potential to produce a reverse effect, becoming a pull-factor for immigrants who are returning in Africa in the hopes to tie a knot. This means that, once Sisi had set her sight on Europe, she was determined to do anything she could to make her dream come true. “At Christmas most of the men returning home from Europe and America with wallets full of foreign currency, to scout for wives, always went for the nurses. They said it was easier for nurses to get a job abroad” (28).

Being the “common denominator” for the four women, Oga Dele has a specific way to lure each one of them into his ring. For Efe who suffered her father’s indifference, even after she fell pregnant from a man called Titus, was working at Dele’s office for her third job as a janitor. Although he is a pimp, it took seven months before he suggested that Efe go abroad to make a fortune, instead of juggling between three jobs. According to Dele, “Belgium. A country weydey Europe. Next door to London” (70). Well aware that Nigerians are historically familiar to London, Dele knew that if he made it sound like twin places that would facilitate the decision making for Efe to accept the offer. Ama, who was raped by her stepfather, Pastor Brother Cyril, at her younger age, met Dele at her Aunt Mama Eko’s canteen where she works. Dele is a regular customer of the canteen, and beyond going there to eat, he is able to lure Ama into his business by making fallacious promises to her: “If you wan’ make easy money, if you wan’ go abroad, come my office for Randle make we talk. But only if you dey serious o” (138). The only reason Ama left her village Enugu was to escape her abusive step-father to start a new life in Lagos, so Dele’s invitation sounded promising to her, and she agreed to meet him. Upon Ama’s arrival at the office, after ignoring multiple warnings made by her aunt Mama Eko, Dele takes no detours in explaining the project briefly: “I go straight to the point, You no be small gal. Na woman you be. Mature woman. I go tell you wetin it be. I need women. Fine, fine women like you make dem go work for abroad for me. For Europe. For Belgium” (140). That is the same strategy Dele uses to recruit girls in Lagos and send them to Europe as prostitutes. But the perplexity of the Dele’s words left Ama hesitant. Nevertheless, Sisi who already has a mindset about her plans for Europe envisioned a future in which she would have earned enough to buy her father a car, buy her mother a house in Ikoyi, and buy herself a good man who would father her children and give her parents the grandchildren they had always dreamed of before they were too old to appreciate them. With the amount of money she imagined she would



earn, would even be able to buy her father a chieftaincy title in their village. Buy him some respect and a posture that belonged to a man his age. Back home, everything is for sale (146-7).

Conclusion

The motivation behind this paper is located in the need to flag the forces that attract the immigrants to their intended destination. The lives and stories of four trafficked women in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* are used to reinforce the position that Pull factors are only potent to the emigration and recruitment of women as sex slaves by human traffickers, when Push factors exist. Resting on that position, this paper attempts to contribute to the debate on how these female migrants emigrate to countries with more welcoming economic status than their home country where several forces of oppression; economic, political, social, etc., plague women.

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