



## **Pulled and Pushed Between Progress and Disillusionment: Migration in Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers***

**\*Nihal Farhan Kabir**

### **Abstract**

Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* presents migration as a movement the characters initiate in search of better economic opportunities away from home. These characters, in their journeys, are faced with hope, success, failure and disillusionment. Existing criticism do focus on these thematic elements but no work has used any theory of migration in the comprehension of the plays' thematic dynamics. This paper seeks to fill this gap by analyzing these characters' migrations and the associated elements through Everett Lee's 'Theory of Migration.' This theory deals with how elements such as pull-push factors, intervening obstacles and personal factors affect migration. The objective is to investigate how the plays' characters responding varyingly to these factors affect the outcome of their migrations, and how these outcomes influence other prevailing thematic elements. Taking findings from existing research, the discourse of the play will be analyzed in light of Lee's theory to comprehend the characters' senses of homelessness and disillusionment as they relate to their migration experiences. This paper's investigation of the migration presented in *The Swamp Dwellers* through Lee's migration theory shows that migration itself, with all its concerning factors, is a driving force behind the feelings of hope, homelessness and disillusionment in individuals.

**Keywords: migration; Soyinka, the swamp dwellers, everett lee, factors, disillusionment**

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\* Nihal Farhan Kabir, Lecturer, Department of English, University of Chittagong  
Chittagong – 4331, Bangladesh, Email: [nihal\\_eng@cu.ac.bd](mailto:nihal_eng@cu.ac.bd)

## Introduction

Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* depicts characters moving between locations in search of betterment of life. Migration, denoting such kind of movement, has always been an integral mechanism in human existence and in the present day and age, it has become even more prominent due to the forces of capitalism and modernity. Especially, in West Africa, and more specifically, in Nigeria, migration is a typical movement pattern as a result of the colonial enterprise (Oyeniyi 1; Ferrara 73). Everett Lee, in his essay "A Theory of Migration," contends with the notion that migration means progress and deems it to be "true" (54). This essay will contend this notion as it plays out in Soyinka's play. *The Swamp Dwellers*'s portrayal of migration transcends mere physical relocation, and serves as a space for reflection on the inherent hope and the possibility of disillusionment that is inherent in such a quest away from one's homeland. While the play itself is highly localized in the Yoruba culture in Nigeria, "Soyinka universalizes human experience with migration while grounding his play in the particulars of Yoruba tradition, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, and the post-colonial experience in West Africa" (Ferrara 73). This universalization paves the way for analysis of the text's localized depiction of migration through Lee's theory of migration, a theoretical framework intended as a "general schema into which a variety of spatial movements can be placed" (Lee 49). Commonly known as the 'Push-Pull Migration Theory,' this framework will be used to analyze how the characters in the play – specifically, Igwezu, Awuchike and the blind Beggar - vacillate between the areas from and to the migration takes place, each, with their own sets of "personal factors," reacting varyingly to the "push" (negative) and "pull" (positive) factors that drive the migration movement as well as to

the "intervening obstacles" (Lee 49; Gaonkar). For the twins Igwezu and Awuchike, their village in the swamp serve as the "area of origin" while the city stands for "area of destination;" conversely, for the blind Beggar the swamp is the destination, presenting him with an alternative form of home and hope. Using Lee's theory of migration, this essay will delve into how economic struggles, economic circumstances and personal factors influence migration experiences, emphasizing how some migrants achieve success while others find themselves entrapped in a cycle of disillusionment. This exploration will reveal deeper insights into the wider implications of migration, underscoring how the migrant's journey, experience and the eventual outcome pushes the sense of homelessness into individuals, leaving them disillusioned of the hope they once harbored.

## Migration, Nigeria and Wole Soyinka

According to Everett Lee, migration is the "permanent or semipermanent change of residence" and to expand this definition, migration can be interpreted as a "move" from an "area of origin" to an "area of destination" (49, 50). In the early 1970s, migration rose in regards to Nigeria "buoyed" by an "oil boom" (Adepoju and Human Resources Development Centre 1, 6). Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers*, in its inception, was impelled by this existence of oil, the consequential increase of economic expansion and the resultant movement of people within the country. James Gibbs remarks, "Soyinka started writing *The Swamp Dwellers* after reading that oil had been found in marketable quantities in the Niger Delta" (39). Fueled by his sense of the impending "internal" migratory movement of his home country, Soyinka designed the characters Igwezu, Awuchike and the Beggar to represent the migratory populace within Nigeria (Lee 49). And the mention of "oil" in the play connects it to the localized new Nigerian

reality of oil propelled economic expansion (Soyinka 92). Furthermore, within Nigeria, the key motivations behind such migrations, which can be deemed as “internal migration”, are the “economic opportunities” and the “most predominant” are the “rural-urban migration flows” (Lee 49; Poufon et al. 10; Oyeniya 1). Igwezu and Awuchike, similarly, migrate from their rural home region to the urban city area in an endeavor to capitalize on the perceivable economic opportunities presented by the city. Existing research has already established a trend in analyzing the play’s nature of Migration. Dr. Onyekachi Eni claims, Igwezu and Awuchike “symbolize the youths forced to migrate from the flood-ridden village in search of wealth and self-actualization in the city” (19). His paper grounds the motivations behind rural-urban migration in the adverse climate change in the rural areas. Similarly, Mohammad Ataulah Nuri’s research highlights how young migrants find the necessity to migrate due to how they have “alienate[d] themselves from their own place” as a consequence of ecological issues (138, 141). As such, both Eni and Nuri highlight the problems found in their village homes as a necessary drive for migration. These papers further delineate the elements in the city which might cause such migrants to gravitate towards it, while also foregrounding the disillusionment that might be found there. In a similar manner, Mark S. Ferrara emphasizes the “corrupting nature” of the city that could result in such disillusionment (68). While existing criticism does focus on the migration depicted in *The Swamp Dwellers*, there is a gap to be found as Everett Lee’s ‘Theory of Migration’ has not yet been used to shed light on this thematic elements & its constituent – i.e. the locations and the migrants. This paper intends to provide insight into this gap by analyzing Igwezu, Awuchike and the Beggar, as well as Alu and Makuri, alongside the locations mentioned in the text to create an

understanding on the nature of migration as per Lee’s theorization.

### **Pull and Push Factors of Migration in *The Swamp Dwellers***

Everett Lee’s theory of migration is a well-known theoretical framework that explains how migration occurs both inside and between communities. In order to comprehend the elements that drive choices concerning migration and the effects of migration on both “origin” and “destination” areas, Lee’s theory was put forth in the middle of the 1960s (Lee 49). The theory is a “conceptualization of migration” and contends with “a set of factors at origin and destination, a set of intervening obstacles, and a series of personal factors” (52). The factors at origin and destination areas are commonly known as “push factors” and “pull factors” (Singh). It is also essential to have an understanding of the “area of origin” and the “area of destination” in terms of migration, wherein the former denotes the place from which migration takes place and the latter denotes the place in which migration culminates (Lee 50). Pull factors are the opportunities and conditions in an area that draw or “pull” migrants to move there, whereas push factors are the circumstances and conditions in an area that force or “push” people to leave (Gaonkar). Both origin and destination areas contain push factors which “hold or attract” people and pull factors which “repel” them (Lee 50). Any area, origin or destination, with a disproportionate balance between the push and pull factors affect the migrations that takes place. Simply put – an area with more pull factors will attract individuals and an area with more push factors will drive them away. The destination area’s pull factors and the origin area’s push factors must create a “balance in favor” of the migration to overcome “the natural inertia which always exists” (Lee 51). According to Lee, “a good climate” would count as a

pull factor and a “bad climate” would work as a push factor, meaning - areas with positive environments would pull (or “attract”) individuals, creating an impetus for the area to migrate towards, and areas with negative environments would push (or “repel”) people away to seek migration, creating migrants from its denizens (50).

In Soyinka’s *The Swamp Dwellers*, for Igwezu and Awuchike, the village adjacent to the swamp land represents the area of origin and the city represents the area of destination. On the other hand, for the Beggar, Bukanji is the origin area and the swamp land adjacent to the “river” is the destination (Soyinka 90). All these migrants are impelled to make the move due to adverse environmental conditions in their home locales. In the case of Igwezu and Awuchike, the swamp was run over with “floods” and “oil” and for the Beggar, his home Bukanji was afflicted with “drought[s]” and “locusts” (Soyinka 87, 92, 98, 99). So, in the cases of migrants in the play, adverse climate conditions, in line with Lee’s postulations, work as push factors in the origin driving individuals away to migrate to varying destination areas. While adverse climate change does work as imperative push factors in the case of these migrations, there are other push factors at work alongside this. As a result of the mentioned adverse environmental transformation, economic opportunities in these origin areas became scarce which, in turn, is another driving push factor that impels their inhabitants to seek said opportunities elsewhere – to migrate. The Beggar’s area of origin Bukanji was beset with “dry soil” on which cultivation was highly improbable and when the conditions were improving, locusts “came in hordes” & turned the village back to how it was (Soyinka 99). In the swamp land, the origin area for Igwezu and Awuchike, conditions are such that “not a grain [can be] saved, not one tuber in the soil” and there is “not much” land left for

cultivation anyway (Soyinka 92). Such a scarcity in terms of economic opportunity works as a key push factor for these characters and for them the area seems “as if it carried a plague” (Soyinka 87). Igwezu & Awuchike are pushed to migrate away from the swamp land and the Beggar is pushed away from Bukanji. When considering both areas of origin, Lee’s postulations regarding push factors can be perceived as drivers of the migratory move in the forms of negative climate factors and a shortage of economic opportunities. When it comes to the pull factors, Bukanji, for the Beggar, rears not much but what can be retrieved from his memories – the bountiful crop, after periods of drought, which turned the village into a “clan,” and the “clan a household” could serve as a pull factor but “it turned out to have been an act of spite,” indicating the disaster brought on by the locusts (Soyinka 99). Thus, what was once a pull factor diminished in power and it did not have the capacity to attract or hold its denizens, signaled by the Beggar’s move away from the area. Pull factors for the swamp land are constituted by family ties and traditional bonds. There are numerous reverent mentions of the Serpent of the swamp, a symbol of tradition, and in Alu’s reminiscence, the land is portrayed as the “perfect bridal bed,” symbolizing the strength of familial union in the area (Soyinka 86). As such, the denizens were “able to laugh with the Serpent” even when “times were harsh”, marking how “strongly they have shaped their belief and life with nature” of the swamp land (Soyinka 87; Nuri 137). These pull factors are strong for the “older generation of the swamp dwellers,” e.g. Alu & Makuri, but not so much for the “new generation,” e.g. their sons Igwezu and Awuchike, as growing economic push factors outweigh these socio-cultural abstractions (Nuri 137, 138). Of course, focusing only on the areas of origin does not shed a comprehensive light on the whole nature of migration as it is a move between two points and the



origin area represents just one of these. The other is the area of destination, which demands similar focus as per Lee's theory and for the purpose of this study.

The destination area for the dwellers of the swamp land, in *The Swamp Dwellers*, is the city and for the Beggar, it is the swamp land itself. Economic opportunities are, basically, what constitutes as the pull factors for the city – “all the young men go into the big town to try their hand at making money” (Soyinka 83). Both the twins, Igwezu and Awuchike, left for the city to improve their economic conditions and so, economic reason can be established as strong pull factor in favour of the city as an area of destination. As for the Beggar, the swamp land represents the opportunity to “work on the soil” that can be kneaded with his hands (Soyinka 89). This destination area presents land that can be cultivated at least, something which his origin area did not offer, and as such, this cultivable land creates a working pull factor for him. In Lee's conceptualization, push factors are contained in the destination area as well and in *The Swamp Dwellers*, evidence to the same abounds. The city, the destination area for Igwezu and Awuchike, is rife with “corruption,” “harshness” and “hostility” which “sever[s] the ties and the love of kinship” (Nuri 137; Soyinka 103). While Igwezu arrives at the city mostly to escape the push of his area of origin, he did have some pull factors regarding the city in his consideration. But he becomes privy to its negative aspects after living there for a time. These social conditions in the city serve as push factors that drive away immigrants, as was the case for Igwezu. The swamp itself contains a number of push factors that have already been discussed and the Beggar grows privy to them as the play culminates when he suggests an inhabitant of the swamp, Igwezu, to “go back to the city” (111). The swamp's push factors and the city's pull factors create a balance in favour of the

move from the swamp land to the city, impelling the migration of Igwezu and Awuchike. And, for the Beggar, Bukanji's push factors and the swamp land's pull factors work in tandem to create a congenial path of migration. The factors in the areas of origin and destination work together to create conditions in which, these migrants were able to overcome their natural inertial and make the move.

### ***The Swamp Dwellers: Migration Experiences, Individual Responses and Evaluations***

As per the discussion thus far, it is evident that there are discernible push and pull factors in the area(s) of origin and the area(s) of destination that serve to regulate the migration that is depicted in Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers*. But using Lee's theory of migration propels the discussion further into nuances that can be found in the experiences of the individuals in light of such factors and how they themselves perceive said experiences. As per Lee, push and pull factors for “both origin and destination is differently defined for every migrant or prospective migrant” (50). So the factors contained within any area could be perceived as both push or pull factors depending on the ones who perceive them. Despite being exploited by the Kadiye (Hogan 591), Alu and Makuri never attempts to migrate away from the swamp land due to their evaluation of the socio-cultural positives - the pull factors - contained in it. When it comes to the origin area, there is often “an overevaluation of the positive elements in the environment and an underevaluation of the negative elements” (Lee 51). This seems to be the case for the play's couple, the older generation dwellers of the swamp. But for the new generation, Igwezu and Awuchike, these pull factors are overshadowed by its push factors – i.e. adverse climate and scarcity of economic opportunities, and the pull factors represented by the city. While that might

be the case, the twins' evaluations of or responses to the factors in the city demand contemplation. For Lee, "migration is selective [in] that persons respond differently to the sets of [pull] and [push] factors at origin and at destination... and differ from each other in terms of the personal factors" and this "selection is bimodal" (56). What this means is success rate of migrants depends on their perceptions of the factors in the two areas of migration and that migration carries in it the possibility of both kinds of migrations. "Personal sensitivities, intelligence, and awareness" are what constitute the personal factors and these affect "perception of [the push and pull] factors which results in migration" (Lee 51). So personal factors affect the experience of the migrants which, in turn, could result in "positive" migration, denoting successful & effective migrants, and "negative" migration, denoting migrants who might not be successful & proven ineffective but had to migrate due to perceived push factors in the origin area (Lee 56). Awuchike, who is "anything but a fool" and whose heart was "more suited to the city," represents a positive migrant who responds "primarily to [pull] factors at destination" as he succeeds in timber business, aligning with the economic atmosphere of the city (Soyinka 107; Lee 56). His goal was to make money on the city, and that is why he aligned himself with the economical currents of the urban area to succeed & establish himself the destination area. His personal factors affected a positive response in him in regards to the pull factors in the city and thus, he succeeded and became a positive migrant, "profoundly transformed by his migration to the city" (Ferrara 67). On the other hand, Igwezu can be established as a negative migrant as he responds "primarily to the [push] factors at origin", seeing how he, "a fool", moved to the city as a means of an escape from his area of origin that he perceived as a "slough" (Lee 56; Soyinka 92, 111). His goal was mostly to escape

the economic stagnation of the swamp rather than to integrate into the city by responding to its push factors, and as such, he crumbled under what he perceived as the harsh hostility of the urban existence, "having been defeated and frustrated by the city" (Eni 3). So, Awuchike succeeded and stayed in the city while Igwezu returned to the swamp, having "lost everything" being "newcomer to the race" (Soyinka 107, 104). His personal factors could not align him with the pull factors of the city and so, he failed & became a negative migrant. Furthermore, Lee posits that there are "streams" and "counterstreams" when it comes to migration (54, 55). Streams denote the "well defined routes" along which migration takes place while counterstreams are the same routes in reverse (Lee 54). As migration transpires, "there is an increasing ability to evaluate the [pull] and [push] factors at origin and destination" and a counterstream develops from "a re-evaluation of the balance of positive and negative factors at origin and destination" (Lee 55). So, after migrating, the migrant develops a better understanding of the factors at work and might reevaluate them in light of this understanding. In Igwezu's case, his failure in the city provided him with the understanding to reevaluate the pull-push factors in the city and he comprehends that the pull factors in the city are not as attractive as was deemed from the distance of the swamp land. As such, he decided to return, embarking on the counterstream to represent a negative migrant.

The Beggar's migrant status further compounds Igwezu's status as a negative migrant. The area which Igwezu deems a "slough" is an area that the Beggar wants to cultivate as he "dream[s] of cleaving ridges under the flood and making little balls of mud in which wrap your seeds" (Soyinka 111). His sensitivities and spiritual awareness, i.e. personal factors, create a positive response within him to

the swamp land, his area of destination. As such, he wishes to stay here and seek what the land has to offer. His spiritual awareness allows him to move past “big cities” and find a destination in the swamp land which might allow him to “give his soul to the soil” (Soyinka 90, 92). Non-corrupt opportunity of labour is a prominent pull factor for him, given his personal factors spiritual sensitivity and awareness, and he thus aligns himself with the swamp area. His drought ridden area did ‘push’ him out but it is the opportunity of a clean spirituality infused labour that ‘pulled’ him more. As such, the Beggar, while not yet successful in prospering economically, can be deemed as a positive migrant as he responds primarily to the pull factor of the destination area. But for Igwezu, the swamp land counts as the area of origin. The same overevaluation of the pull factors and underevaluation of the push factors in regards to the swamp land that can be applicable for Alu and Makuri, can be applied in Igwezu’s case as well. After failing in the city, he returns to the village where he grew up in to re-apply himself in the land’s harvest endeavours. But the land “betray[s]” him and he fails here as well (Soyinka 105). With his newly formed understanding in the city as well as this experience of failure in his origin area, he re-evaluates his area of origin as well. In this re-evaluation, his former overevaluation of the pull factors is mediated as he realizes the true nature of his origin area. His encounter with the Kadiye enlightens him of the incapacity of the system of traditional bonds (Gibbs 41). Furthermore, as a result of his “rebellion against the status quo,” there is a possibility of violence as the “villagers will demand his blood” and this serves as a newfound compelling push factor which was not present before (Ferrara 73; Gibbs 41). So in his reevaluation of the swamp, his positive response to its pull factors is diminished and the number & force of the push factors are heightened. The betrayal of the land of his origin, along with this

enlightenment in regards to the fragility of the local tradition, makes him cognizant of the “final wedge into [his] growing loss of touch” (Soyinka 105). Though he was a denizen of the swamp land, he was also a “city returnee, who has come back to the village in search of socio-economic and spiritual anchor” (Eni 3). But in his own area of origin, the pull factors are reevaluated in such a manner that they are hardly strong enough to keep him there while the push factors, old and new, are stronger than before. Whereas the swamp drove the final proverbial wedge, the city had “kicked [him] in the small of his back” beforehand (Soyinka 104). Consequently, in Igwezu’s final evaluation, his origin area (the swamp land) is deemed as “one slough” and the area of destination (the city) as “another” (Soyinka 111). Like many young people, Igwezu first came to the city in search of wealth, but his ambitions are thwarted by the general hostility of the city, so he goes to the country in the hopes of finding peace on his farm in the swamp land. But the total destruction of his estate by the flood and his unsavoury interaction with the Kadiye, the priest of the serpent, pushes him away from his home again. The adverse ecological push factors remained as before and now the possibility of violence from a religious mob further drives him away. For Eni, this “cyclical movement of Igwezu” is a metaphor for the “futility of...search for peace and self-actualization in the absence of a corresponding change of attitude” (22). This aligns with the negative migrant’s response towards the factors in the areas – as in the play, Igwezu can be observed to be responding primarily to what has been established as push factors, and without changing this attitude, he cannot find peace. He is compelled to expulsion by the overwhelming push factors in both areas and now he is “disillusioned” with no place with strong enough pulls factors to hold him and he is left with no place to go (Ferrara 68; Articles). But the same swamp land is the

area of destination for the Beggar in which he has the beginning of a positive migrant experience and the city is the destination area for Awuchike in which he has already become a positive migrant. Existing reviews and criticism dwells substantially on Igwezu's homeless and disillusioned status in which he is deprived of the peace he so desires – deeming him being in a passive role. But observed from the perspective of Lee's theory and what has been discussed so far, Igwezu's personal factors and the resultant active responses to the factors in the two areas could be deemed as the reason for his condition in life. The Beggar, for instance, was pushed from Bukanji due to extreme droughts and so the wetness of the swamp seems like a boon to him: "how thankful we would have been for the excess that you had here" (Soyinka 98). Coming from a place with a climate of extreme nothingness, even the land of the disruptive swamp water seems something of worth to him – he is pulled by the opportunity for morally upright labour. But this same area, which is the area of origin for Igwezu, becomes a place where he is felt pushed, whereas, he was supposed to overevaluate the pull factors and underevaluate the push factors of his origin area. Furthermore, his economic failure in the swamp, as well as in the city, drives his confrontation with the Kadiye, which leads to the aforementioned disillusionment with the religious and traditional values. But for his parents, Alu and Makuri, these values represented familial and communal bonds that hold them happily to the swamp land. Moreover, in the city, Igwezu was betrayed by his brother and wife due to economic reasons, which created a deflated perspective in him in regards to "the ties and the love of kinship," i.e. familial bonds, as well as the true nature of economic affluence (Soyinka 103). His personal sensitivities, along with the understanding developed in the city, transformed him into a state where these pull factors, that work strongly for his

Parents as well as the Beggar, ceases to work for him at all. Similarly, Igwezu's experience in the city can be compared with Awuchike's. The twin brothers moved to the city to make money and as already established, the money of the city – i.e. economic opportunities, works as the only observable pull factor. Awuchike, responding primarily to this pull factor in the destination area, established himself in the city as his personal factors aligned with the money making economy centric atmosphere of the urban environs. But Igwezu, failed in doing that – he was still more keen on brotherly ties or marital ties or familial ties, overall, and responded more to the factors from the origin area than to the factors at destination, resulting in him becoming a negative migrant. This study, thus, shows that the references to Igwezu's hardships and disillusionment that abound in extant criticism regarding *The Swamp Dwellers* can be analyzed through Everett Lee's migration theory and the analysis places Igwezu in an active role in which he could not capitalize on the migration in a positive manner, and so, his conditions in life can be explained through his experiences with the elements of migration. This is not to say that Igwezu is the one at fault for his own situation or that the conditions didn't victimize him but to delineate how migration is an experience within the text that can shed further light on Igwezu's conditions as well as other characters' & contribute to the text's field of study.

### **Culture, Society and the Journey: Intervening Obstacles in *The Swamp Dwellers***

Lee's theory of migration further delves into the migration process by deliberating on the intervening obstacles between the points of migration (52). As mentioned numerous times, migration happens between two areas – origin and destination. And between any two such areas, there will always be "a set of



intervening obstacles which may be slight in some instances and insurmountable in others” (Lee 51). These obstacles are “barriers or challenges that migrants may encounter during their journey” and these could be “physical,” “cultural” or “social” along with other possibilities (Gaonkar). For people such as Alu and Makuri, the cultural or social bonds, i.e. pull factors themselves, could be deemed as intervening obstacles – which do not allow them to make the migration even when they could see that their home is a “mire” (Soyinka 83). For the migration between the swamp land and the city, in addition to these socio-cultural obstacles, there are “flooded roads and other discomforts” (Soyinka 97). Lee’s conceptualization of personal factors aid in this analysis as well. Separate people might view the same obstacles with different levels of difficulty. Lee posited that the rate of “positive” migrants “increases with the difficulty of the intervening obstacle,” meaning positive-negative migration rates are entwined with the difficulty of the intervening obstacles – when the difficulty is greater, the chances of positive migration is higher and when the difficulty is deemed not so great, the chances of negative migration is higher, meaning migrants have a higher chance of returning with easier intervening obstacles. For the Beggar, distance is the primary intervening factor as he came to the swamp land from a place “very far” away (Soyinka 88). According to Lee, distance is the most notable intervening obstacle that is always present in migratory movement (49). But for the Beggar, the push factors already discussed were so strong that the pull of anything else was enough for him to deem that distance a necessary intervening obstacle that has to be overcome. And as he was able to overcome this great obstacle, he was successfully able to initiate himself as a probable positive migrant in the swamp area. As for the twins, we can perceive two ways the intervening obstacles affected their

migration experiences. For them, the socio-cultural bonds are also barriers to migration along with existing “flooded roads and other discomforts of the journey” (Soyinka 97). Lee notes that “it is because [the migrants] are already to some degree like the population at destination that they find certain positive factors there, and it is because they are unlike the population at origin that certain minus factors there warrant migration” (56). This aligns precisely with Awuchike as he establishes himself like the city demanded. Not only that but Awuchike’s dealings with the intervening obstacles also aligns with Lee’s postulation. Because Awuchike is like the population of the city, he was able to establish himself there by responding to the pull factors. And, because of his lack of likeness to the swamp dwellers, he harbored a “negative attitude to the social bond and his community” that had obstructed his parents from making any probable moves and had to “cut off all his relationships” (Nuri 139). This shows how due to his dissimilarity with his own communal area of origin, his personal factors transforms the socio-cultural bonds existing there as great limiting factors, i.e. difficult obstacles, to his movement. His ability to ‘cut off’ these bonds signals his overcoming of these great intervening obstacles which, in turn, facilitates his success in the city and his becoming a positive migrant. With Igwezu, the same intervening obstacles are also present but he is not affected by them in the same way as his brother. He is not so much like the dwellers and more like the dwellers of the swamp, and as such, he “shows the sign of a strong bond to his community” (Nuri 138). So the socio-cultural factors do not work as obstacles for Igwezu, seeing how his migration remained unaffected despite their presence, which was not the case for Awuchike or their parents. It is noteworthy that while his migration as a movement was unaffected by these obstacles because they seemed not that difficult for him, it is

their ease that contributed to Igwezu becoming a negative migrant – stemming from his failure in the city and leading to his return to the swamp land. Even the floods and discomforts in the journey were able to be overcome by him more than once due to his personal factors, perceivable by the “sign of a strong bond to his community,” and his similarity to the swamp people, which was not the case for Awuchike (Nuri 138). As the obstacles were easily traversable, this lessened his impetus focus on the pull factors of the city, i.e. the economic opportunities, and this facilitated his negative migrant status. This happened in reverse for Awuchike, as the obstacles were perceivably more difficult for him and as a result, he responded more to the pull factors of the city, leading to his success as a migrant.

### **Migration in *The Swamp Dwellers*: Shelterless Disillusionment**

Placing Igwezu and the other characters within migration mechanism sheds light not only on the characters but also on the nature of migration itself as it affects human experience. While “*The Swamp Dwellers* repeats the common motif of the good countryside and the evil city,” where the good countryside proves to be not as good as well, Igwezu’s failure to function in his village in the swamp land and in the city can be viewed in light of more than the existing research frameworks allow, using the migration framework provided by Everett Lee (Hogan 589). People such as the Beggar and Awuchike find their homes in their destination areas due to the factors posited by Lee – i.e., due to their own respective sets of personal factors, they respond primarily to the pull factors of the destination areas after overcoming intervening obstacles that were difficult for them. As a result, they fall in line with the positive migrants who are, or have the perchance of being, effective and successful. Igwezu is someone who, due to his own separate set of personal factors,

responded primarily to the push factors at his origin area and also for him, the intervening obstacles were not so difficult. When he experienced living in the city, his grown level of understanding diminished the pull factors of the city as well, and he became aware of the strength of its push factors – the harshness, hostility and corruption. As a migrant who was pushed away from his area of origin, he was pushed away from his destination area as well, forcing him to return to his familiar swamp home which had given him his “colour”, though it had pushed him away in the first place (Soyinka 87). But once he was back, the push factors in this origin area became even more powerful for him as his harvest was destroyed by the flood & oil, and the area’s pull factors – i.e. socio-cultural ties – also diminished in power. As such, he felt a stronger push in his area of origin than what he had originally felt at the time he migrated away from it. As a consequence, he is pushed between both the city and his home village, becoming “shelterless” migrant (Nuri 139). The other migrants, Awuchike and the Beggar, and non-migrants, Alu and Makrui, do not correspond to this shelterless or homeless condition as they, due to their own sets of personal factors, responded primarily to pull factors of the respective areas and the sets of intervening obstacles for them were of considerable difficulty. In existing researches, Igwezu’s condition as a failure who is rendered disillusioned, “moneyless, wifeless and shelterless” is analyzed from cultural, economic, social and even mythological perspectives (Gibbs 40; Ferrara 68; Nuri 139; Hogan 587). This research, using Lee’s theory of migration, has contributed to this field of analysis by shedding further light on his condition as a recurring negative migrant who has been pushed between the two worlds in which he sought but found none. As Lee postulates, “the decision to migrate...is never completely rational” and there is “always an element of ignorance or even mystery

about the area of destination, and there must always be some uncertainty” (51, 50-51). This proves true for Igwezu as responding primarily to the push factors at origin, his decision to migrate to the city was not driven by logic, like it was for Awuchike. Furthermore, his developed cognizance to the city scape demonstrates how the city was not a properly known place for him originally – proving the city as a destination area of mystery and uncertainty. All the other factors were compounded by this uncertainty – and thus, this uncertainty compounded his disillusioned and homeless migrant status. While Igwezu’s conditions in the traditional rural swamp and the modern city as well as his disillusionment regarding them has been highlighted in numerous research works, Lee’s theory emphasizes his disillusionment as that of a migrant as he realizes the notion that migration – i.e. moving to the city for shelter and progress – is an illusion.

### **Conclusion**

*The Swamp Dwellers* challenges Lee’s assertion that migration is progress through its portrayal of migration – presenting it as an illusion. While other migrants in the play might have found some solace in this illusion, Igwezu realizes its true nature in his evaluation of the experiences in the uncertain city destination as well as in his own homeland. Examining Wole Soyinka’s *The Swamp Dwellers* through Everett Lee’s theory of migration exposes a nuanced portrayal of migration as a journey filled with both possibilities and uncertainties. The migrants portrayed in the play go through varying experiences with migration resulting in different outcomes: while Awuchike succeeds in the city and becomes a positive migrant by aligning himself with its pull factors, Igwezu is pushed back to return home disheartened where his state is worsened further, having

failed to respond positively to either place’s pull factors and rather aligning with the negative push factors. His back-and-forth movement between the origin and destination areas, coupled with realization of the fact the neither place could offer the stability or satisfaction he desires, highlights the misleading notion of progress inherent in migratory movements. To the contrary, the Beggar finds hope in the very land that Igwezu feels to be pushing him away. This, along with Awuchike’s response to the city, delineates how personal factors influence the perceptions of migration experiences. Thus, migration is depicted as an unpredictable risk instead of a sure way to success, where some might succeed and others might not. This study, as such, contributes to the existing criticism of Soyinka’s text, showcasing how the characters’ feelings of hopelessness, homelessness and disillusionment have their groundings in the nature of migration as well along with other thematic elements. Utilizing Everett Lee’s theory of migration, *The Swamp Dwellers* ultimately becomes a literary space in which the idea of migration as an opportunity for betterment of economic conditions and life is questioned, highlighting its psychological and social consequences.

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