

Full Length Research Paper

Migration, disillusionment and diasporic experiences in Segun Afolabi's *Goodbye Lucille and a Life Elsewhere*

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This paper 'Migration, Disillusionment and Diasporic Experiences in Segun Afolabi's *Goodbye Lucille and A Life Elsewhere*' centres on the issues that have defined Nigerian migrants abroad. The paper seeks to identify the various regrets that have attended Nigerians' quest for greener pastures abroad. It also focuses on the abandonment syndrome that has characterized the lives of Nigerian professionals abroad. Many Nigerian professionals have abandoned their more lucrative jobs in Nigeria only to go and take dehumanizing and degrading jobs simply because they want to live abroad. This paper also highlights the illusions that have made this move a worthless effort. The various negative tales of the migrants are discussed to validate the assertion that there is no place like home.

Key words: Migration, diaspora, abroad, home, displacement, loneliness.

INTRODUCTION

The human nature is dynamic and receptive to change; which could be voluntary or involuntary; therefore in its quest to ensure that basic needs such as food, shelter and security are guaranteed all efforts are deployed towards the achievement of these goals.

Human beings move to the extreme to ensure that their survival is achieved even if it means giving up a certain uncomfortable location for another one which they perceive comfortable, little wonder it is not surprising to find people moving from one geographical location to another in order to fulfill their needs.

Migration in Latin 'migrare' means to change residence. Social scientists have traditionally defined migration as the more or less permanent movement of people across space (Petersen, 1968). Migration is referred to as any residential movement which occurs between administra-

tive units over a period of time (White, 1980). Other scholars have defined migration as the change in the centre of gravity of an individual's mobility pattern. Also, scholars like Michael et al. (1994) define migration as the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.

Diaspora is derived from the Greek verb 'speiro' (to disseminate) and the preposition 'dia' over. In human context, the original Greek word 'diaspora' refers to migration and colonization, which is in contrast to the original meaning. The word has a more deadly and brutal significance for other groups of people such as Jews and Africans. Diaspora in these cases represents a collective trauma, banishment and dreams of homeland while living in exile.

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It is not possible to give a uniform definition; it is complex and must always be placed in its social context. Different authors and scholars have tried to define it depending on their theoretical focus and ideological leaning.

According to anthropologist James Clifford (1997), he views Diaspora relations primarily as different responses in the form of boundary, fixing and identification in a context of deterritorialization and transnationalism; he tries to see how these people construct "home away from home". He believes diaspora is about long distance, exile, separation with an always relevant issue to return. Some sociologists like Cohen (1997) and Safran (1991) define certain criteria that must be shared to determine Diaspora.

They retain a memory, a vision or a myth relating to their original homeland. Emigration from another homeland often ends up with traumatic experiences to two or more unfamiliar regions. The individuals believe that they cannot be fully accepted by the countries in which they reside.

In Nigeria for instance, migration occurs, because migrants believe they will be more satisfied in their needs and desires, they migrate to the Western Hemisphere in search of "a greener pasture". After the end of colonization, the West was assumed to be the commercial and cultural hub of the world.

The migrants believe that the centre signifies realms of possibility, fantasy, wish fulfillment where identities and fortunes might be transformed. The migrants did not know the centre was also a place of banishment, unlawful practice, oppression, social disgrace and frustration.

Causes of migration

In order to develop response to migration, it is important to understand the underlying drivers. Human beings have migrated for various reasons since their emergence as the centre of creation. Among the natural causes are: prolonged droughts, floods, environmental degradation and natural disasters.

In Nigeria for instance, social reasons have prompted many more migration than natural phenomena. Examples are unemployment, civil unrest, inadequate food supply caused by population increase, bad governance, defeat in war, the desire for material gains, search for religious or political autonomy, poverty, criminal consents, high population pressure and education.

Effects of migration

The effects of migration vary widely; the sending countries may experience both gains and losses. It affects the corporate national reputation, which is the good and bad name to the country. If it is negative, it will rub off on the nation and if it affects the country, it affects the citizens

by denial of visas to serious minded people. In Nigeria for instance, some people have been caught abroad for drug smuggling, money laundering and, fraud which has smeared the country's image. The developing countries suffer from "brain drain" the loss of trained and educated individuals to migration; in Nigeria, they are currently more Nigerian scientists and engineers working in the United States than there are in Africa.

The effects are widespread because such movement decimates indigenous populations through warfare with invaders and through vulnerability to new diseases, alters physical characteristics through adoption, inter marriage; for instance, many Nigerians are married to white men or women.

Also changes in cultural characteristics through the adoption of the cultural patterns of people encountered, most Nigerians start to dress like westerners, we see our men braiding their hair and wearing earrings because they want to copy the white people.

It modifies language. Many native groups lose their traditional homelands, languages because they are absorbed into larger societies. Some children in Nigeria cannot speak their native language at all because they were born and raised abroad.

Migrants face many difficulties while abroad. A valid and active sense of self may be eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration (Maxwell, 1963); the migrant is alienated of vision, from the society, he struggles hard to fit in, discover self and belong.

Furthermore, the Diaspora individual often has a double consciousness a privileged knowledge and perspective that is consonant with post modernity (Appadurai, 1996). The individual living in the Diaspora experiences a dynamic tension, everyday between living 'here' and remembering 'there' i.e. between memories of place of origin and entanglements with places of residence and between the metaphorical physical home (Boehmer, 1995).

Also, the experience of loss marginality, displacement and exile is intensified through the experience of racism and adds to the Diaspora generated in the individual. The migrant holds on to memories which hold the past and present together, they give shape and texture to identities that are fragmented by migration, displacement and Diaspora living.

People who migrate tend to seek an environment similar to the one they left, they imagine and re-imagine their homes and bond with those they had previously thought of as strangers.

The institution of literature is under the direct control of the imperial ruling. One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a standard version of the metropolitan language as the norm and marginalizes all variants as impurities. According to Edward Said's terms of conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiations (Said, 1984), that is a mimicry of the centre

proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed. It causes those from the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become more English than the English. Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and medium through which conceptions of truth, order and reality become established.

A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement, crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective relationship between self and place. Critics such as Maxwell said "a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or voluntary removal for indentured labour."

The alienation of vision and the crisis in self image which this displacement produces is found in Nigerians who travel overseas.

The Lonely Londoner by Samuel Selvon is the life of West Indians in Post World War II London, a city the migrants consider the centre of the world; the novel is centered on Moses Loetta a Trinidadian who moves to London. After more than ten years in London he has not achieved anything; his homesickness increases as he gets old. They came for a better life but what they find is bitter coldness both from unforgivable winters and the cold prejudice of the people they encounter. They experience hunger, hopelessness, discrimination for jobs and on the job. Their lives mainly consist of work or looking for a job and various petty pleasures (Selvon, 1972).

In George Lamming's (1994) *In The Castle of My Skin*, he tells the story of the mundane events in a young boy's life. The main concern is not about the individual consciousness; rather, Lamming uses the growth and education of G as a device through which to view the legacy of colonialism and slavery in a Caribbean village. Through the protagonist, we see the effects of race, feudalism, capitalism, education and emigration on his small town. G migrates to London and the United States, returns to his home in the Caribbean and helps his home country obtain Independence (George 1994).

Also in George Lamming's (1994) *The Emigrants*, he explores the massive Post War II migration of West Indians to Great Britain. His story focuses on a group of emigrants who travel by ship from the Caribbean to England, a place they have been taught to believe is culturally superior to their native Islands. Once settled in their new environment, the emigrants discover a lack of welcome, disillusionment and a feeling of alienation and subsequently long for home. African-American literature is full of pieces that illustrate the migration and urbanization of African Americans which starts with the emancipation of slaves. According to Naipaul (1967:141-2), the requisite for happiness was to be born in a famous city. To be born

on an island or in an obscure country, second hand and barbarous was to be born to disorder.

In Chimamanda Adichie's 2009, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, we see how Akunna travels abroad believing that the grass is greener on the other side of the hill. On the first page, we see they all believe that in a month, she will have a big car, a big house only to discover that she is wrong. The title implies the choking isolation of Akunna, a Nigerian who relocates to the United States only to find out that her new country is not what she has expected it to be. We see how she is alienated and lonely. We see how she gets menial jobs when she says she will work for two dollars less than the other workers; she stays in a tiny room with a stained carpet. We also see some of the embarrassing questions she is asked; whether she has seen a car before and many others.

In Sefi Atta's collection of short stories titled *Lawless and other stories* (Atta, 2008), "Twilight Trek", "A Temporary Position" and "Last Trip", we see the illegal connection and desperate attempts most Nigerian youths make to cross overseas. In "Twilight Trek", Nigerians are desperate to travel overseas despite all the tortuous experiences encountered in the process (be it legal or illegal). This quest becomes inevitable considering the fact that the home front is practically particularly uncomfortable to live in and the leadership feigning insensitive to the sour conditions of the citizens. So people commit all sorts of crime in order to raise the capital with which to travel, despite the fact that being a Nigerian is an anathema to obtaining visas.

We also know that too many Nigerians have died on their way to overseas. The narrator remembered what his mother has told him, all things considered, to trek overseas is reasonable. A man she knew hid himself in the wheel well of an aircraft that flew overnight to London. It could have been the low temperature or high altitude that finished him. Immigration officers discovered his body two days later. They deported him back to his burial (Twilight III). This is tragic; more pathetic is that after one succeeds in crossing over, one discovers that one has to pass through ordeals to ordinarily survive the socio-political-geographical confrontations. It dawns on one that home is home, the best. It is this home sickness, alongside the temporariness of one's stay wherever that is not one's native land that infiltrates into the subject matter of "A Temporary Position". While abroad one conceals one's identity as a Nigerian to avoid being repatriated. They carry fake names on CV; one's name is not the curse but the country.

So, even when Nigeria bullies one resulting in one's desperate resolve to escape to Europe or the United State, one has to know one's residency is purely temporary since the foreign country is not prepared to welcome and embrace one, mostly owing to one coming from the most touted corrupt country.

In Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Moving the Centre: Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, he is concerned with moving the centre

in two senses: between nations and within nations (Ngugi 1993); in order to contribute to the freeing of the world cultures from the restrictive walls of nationalism, class, race and gender. Between nations the need is to move the centre from its assumed location in the west to a multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world. Within nations, the move should be away from all minority class establishments to the real creative centre among working people in conditions of racial, religious and gender equality.

Goodbye Lucille is a novel that tells a story which revolves around a Nigerian photographer who lives in a shabby Kreubery apartment owned by Frau Lieser. He is Vincent by name; he lives in London. He leaves London to get away from himself (1). He wishes to become a high profile photographer, taking pictures of stars (3) but ends up by becoming a freelance photographer. This aborted dream makes him to live in penury; he only pays his house rent, feeds himself and nothing more.

Through photographing, he becomes acquainted with Maria whom he covers stories for. He has a friend/fiancée called Lucille. They call each other every week after his departure from London and he used to visit her at the initial stage of his departure. Unlike him, Lucille is organized. Other friends of his are Benvit popularly called B, who is engaged to Angelika, Tunde also a Nigerian as well as Claudia and Sylvie whom they meet at the party.

Vincent is a clubman, likewise all his friends. Lucille visits and they have misunderstanding owing to his excessive drinking and inebriation. Consequently, she leaves abruptly. This makes him visit London again to apologize for what he does not to be seen as an offence. He finds out that she no longer has interest in him and that her relationship with a lawyer is intense.

Vincent lost his parents in a motor accident in his tender age. He and his brother Matty were brought up by their uncle Raymond; but he never calls or writes. Matty points out this uncaring attitude of his when he visits London, but he is adamant. Some weeks after his visit, Matty calls to inform him that Uncle Raymond is getting worse and Aunt Ama (his wife) wants them separate to Lucille's disappointment.

Claudia accompanies Vincent to Nigeria leaving her mother Frau Shiegel in the hands of Julius. He becomes dismayed when he recognizes that his uncle's sickness does not need the consternation with which it is attached. And he regrets coming when his uncle tells him he is not appreciative of all his fatherly love for him. The one that agitates him is that of Aunt Ama. It seems like a thunder to him because she is very humane by nature. She persistently inquires the reason for his behaviour, until he is forced to say "I thought... you don't want me" (201). The rest of his stay in Nigeria is enjoyable; Claudia keeps his company and Asa, his nephew, plays and sings joyfully around them. They go on excursion to Jos, pay visit to museum and zoo. He enjoys local dishes Eba and Egusi soup, bush meat and so on which he has not enjoyed for

a long time. They travel back to London.

Frau Schelegel is still sick; she is an alcohol addict. She has been warned by her doctor to stop drinking but all to no avail until she eventually drinks and smokes herself to death. Claudia becomes disillusioned, Vincent promises after burial "I want to stay with you" and further states "I though, may be we..... we could try at something.... Life, you and me" (301). This overwhelms Claudia because she had the notion that Vincent hates her due to his treatment in the beginning.

Finally, the story ends with Vincent and Claudia as they stroll down during nightfall. The title of the novel is suggestive of the incidence at the end of it. Claudia gives Vincent the companionship he demands from Lucille and this moves him to promise to stay with her thereby bidding goodbye to Lucille who refuses to reciprocate his love.

The title *Goodbye Lucille* is drawn from the acceptance of Claudia by Vincent. Vincent has dated Lucille for years and they were engaged to marry each other. This makes him to feel contrition the first day he had sex with Claudia, which is seen in (23). However, Lucille takes offense to Vincent's way of life; she travels to London, gets engaged to a lawyer and discards Vincent's love. The love Vincent needs is given to him by Claudia. The love which is rejected by Lucille is reciprocated by Claudia when he pledges his faithfulness and thereby figuratively bids goodbye to Lucille (Afolabi, 2007).

Segun Afolabi's text explores the implication of mass migration and the conditions of hybridization. The text also deals with the recent controversies surrounding multiculturalism and issues of migration; it deals with the in between world of migrants and negotiates questions of identity, alienation and belonging.

In the novel *Goodbye Lucille*, Vincent is sent to England to school by his foster parents, to get good education. A grown man, he discovers that life is not rosy (palatable). The next movement is when he leaves London for Berlin, in the first sentence of the novel which reads "I left London to get away from myself (1)". Displacement sets the theme for the novel; however, it is not enforced by some other power but self induced. Vincent's move to Berlin is a form of freely chosen exile. Exile tells of displacement, dispossession and loneliness. Among the things that people strive for in their attempt to get along in the world are; casual sex, alcohol, a place to call "home". In the novel, Vincent (photographer) strives for all these three things especially a place to call home. This striving after a place to call home brings us to the issue of homelessness. Vincent says, "life is a never ending road". In fact, as "a shapeless, ragged road with turnings, random as a game of chance" (219); this shows that Vincent is a marginalized narrator (Aginew, 2005).

Vincent is alienated from his foster parents who brought him up after his parents' death. As a result of not being able to meet the demands of the society, he lets himself go overweight, drinks heavily and embarks on

one night stands.

Vincent has high expectations for himself, but ends up becoming a freelance photographer. His emotional reactions are slurred, his slow to understand how deeply hurt Lucille is by his lack of commitment, he is slow to realize that Claudia, who he had a fling with is a serious person after all.

When the definition of home is blurred, the option is either to enjoy life in the new home or die there, which is the case with many illegal or unemployed African immigrants in the West. Vincent is lost and detached from what should be home. He leaves London for Berlin to get away from himself. But he still finds it hard to be responsible and committed to his photography or to other aspects of life. This is an interest picked up to give meaning to his own fragmented and incomprehensible existence. Vincent stays in an all purpose flat in a rundown settlement with punks, drifters, homosexuals, junkies and asylum seekers and a deranged landlady, which is not everyone's idea of home.

Vincent occasionally reflects on his position in the world, when in Nigeria he discovers that the streets of Berlin are more familiar to him than anything in Nigeria and it discomferts him (209). The unfamiliarity of the African surrounding prods him to think of his destiny even though what he had tried to get away from is not so much the place as the people connected to this place (Nigeria). "I had tried to get away, but where was I going? Was there any sense in any of it?" (272). "In the middle of nowhere" (273). He discovers that Nigeria is not home to him, neither is Berlin.

He repeats a cycle of remembrance in his mind when he realizes that he might not return to this place, but that he would certainly remember it. Returning to the place one left is always an option. The return must not take place in spatial terms. We see when Vincent's aunt says:

Leaving a place does not mean leaving your memories behind. You know when you leave a place, if you move in favour of another, you can never completely forget the first.

She goes on to say that the former place "is like a stone tied around your heart. It keeps you from floating away from yourself, from losing something essential that once belonged to you" (249).

This statement of Vincent's aunt shows that migration could be liberating to the person who leaves one place in favour for another, but this liberation is limited because the person is only liberated in terms of space not in terms of mind. Translocated bodies are tied by mental or emotional strings to one's essential being. Place here is encoded as something both spatial and mental place maintains its national hold even on those whose life consists of a series of translocations.

Translocation in this novel is connected to the possibility or the promise of "living life from a clean slate"

(164). It is the tension between remembering and renewal which is the key feature of human life.

In the novel, Vincent uses his camera and gets involved with asylum seekers from all kinds of countries. For some unexplained reasons he wants to take their photographs but when asked by one of them, An, a Kurdish refugee, for his reason, he cannot offer a plausible answer at first "it's my job, and I want to" (32). When the Kurdish (asylum seeker) insists that Vincent should let him know when he realizes why he took the photograph. He uses photography to give his incomprehensible existence a meaning. Vincent's life can be said to be a clear example of a "translocation biography".

In the end, both Vincent and Claudia begin a new life united in their grief and detachment; they step on the road, in no particular direction, though we come to a conclusion that Vincent does not get away from himself, but he discovers his true self on a journey. It is Goodbye Lucille, hello Vincent.

A Life Elsewhere is the title of Segun Afolabi's debut collection of short stories. It contains seventeen different stories, which is a reflection of his transitory childhood, as the son of a diplomat (Afolabi, 2007).

The characters in Segun stories regard "elsewhere" as a place that they must transform into home. The far East, Europe, America, Africa, the stories are varied as their geographical setting. The product of this experience is a clutch of characters that live elsewhere marooned in worlds whose structures and habits they can barely grasp.

The themes of the collection are loss and nostalgia, loneliness, fear and all pervasive sense of dislocation. Segun's characters come from and arrive in various parts of the world, but each is lost in an emotional desert, and every observation leads them back to the same kind of awareness about themselves. These are tales of Diaspora of people making their lives in new lands, some of the first time; others in the second or third generations. It explains the universal need to establish family and identity in a world where the boundaries of geography, culture and language are increasingly fluid.

However, only "Monday Morning", "The Wine Guitar" and "Arithmetic" will be explicated in this chapter.

"Monday Morning"

"Monday Morning" won the 2005 Caine Prize for African writing. The story focuses on a family of asylum seekers marooned in a refugee hostel. On Sunday, they wander Regent's Park, temporarily uplifted by its beauty and peacefulness, but on Monday morning, they return to the world of the hostel where they are condemned to simply wait for the next phase of their journey, struggling with the torment of memory and fear of the future. Their family is displaced by war and as a result they move to another country where their language is not spoken. The country

is English speaking one. The father finds it difficult to cope due to his taciturnity and his inability to learn the new language. At night we see how the father dreams of how he used to be in Nigeria; he lived comfortably, but in the foreign land he is exposed to the harsh weather and the unfriendly people. He could not be employed without his document and as a result does menial job to keep his family, his wife and his two sons — Ernesto and Aifredo. The father is injured when he has to slide down a pole to escape the scrutiny of immigration officials.

In his country, he was a chef, but here he works in a site. He wonders if he will forget how to cook because he has not done it in a long time. He missed his former job where he handled meat, vegetables, and spices, which he loves so much. His family becomes chaotic as the wife “who did not need him to be someone he was not (7)” becomes against him. In the confusion the youngest wanders off, with the excuse that he wants to see Emmanuel and heads for the “glass hotel” admitted to one of the rooms by a cleaner who speaks his language. He sits on a bed and dreams, gazing at the view and sees the things high in the sky and sleeps off until “Monday Morning”. The story is a subtle but direct reprise of the confusion, terror and hope suffered by the family and thousands of other people like them. It establishes the mood and themes that run through the collection.

“Arithmetic”

In “Arithmetic”, a bereaved father thinks back to a confusing youthful sexual encounter that has left him emotionally scared. The narrator watches the door close on the London underground and reflects. He is always worried about separation, people not making it to the doors in time, watching their companions disappear as the train starts to pull away. The narrator is married to Alicia; they do not have a child, which makes them worried; it causes a lot of strain in their marriage. The narrator remembers his childhood, his parents were barely there for him, his father was a busy man, his mother was not around. He was always with the maid, Jumoke. The narrator is molested by Jumoke. He becomes the object of rage. This act becomes a stigma in the narrator’s life; it makes him withdrawn to the society he finds himself. He feels guilty; he blames himself as the reason why they do not have children.

In (71), the narrator wonders the point of having children if you behave as if they are not there. He wishes they could have children that without children there will be no gain, no addition, nothing to look forward to. The narrator’s father was a businessman who liked gain, accumulation. He never knew his father’s business, he never asked, his father never told him. That was the kind of life he lived growing up.

“The Wine Guitar”

In “The Wine Guitar”, an old musician, Kayode, remains

in a foreign land; his wife has gone back to their country.

He was all alone, his children had stopped communicating with him; they had taken sides. He had forgotten so much about himself; the hunger now was for the food of his youth, all sophistication and learned habits washed away. He usually ate in a shabby restaurant “Mama Yinka”; the food he had loved no longer gave him pleasure.

In the evenings, he would go to the club with his friend Salvatore to play his guitar; they are rarely called up on stage to play. They only drink free drinks in the house. One day in the club, he meets Agnes, a prostitute he had slept with. They expose themselves to harsh weather just to make ends meet.

Sometimes, it seems to him he had tried and failed, or had been carried along a road whose destination was not his own. Everything he felt was gradually being stripped away from him, his family, his voice and his years. While at home preparing to eat, he closes his eyes and he feels he is at home, he thinks of his wife, children; he longs for a reconnection with them.

In the analysis of the text *A Life Elsewhere*, tales of Diaspora of different people, how they strive to construct a home away from home was x-rayed.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at the issue of migration and Diaspora experiences in the novels of Segun Afolabi’s *Goodbye Lucille* and *A Life Elsewhere*.

In *Goodbye Lucille*, we were able to look at the experiences of Vincent in Berlin. Vincent is sent to England to school by his foster parents. He had great expectations of becoming a high profile photographer, but ends up as a freelance photographer. Vincent is disillusioned; he is detached from the society he finds himself in. In an attempt to get along, he indulges in casual sex, alcohol and strives mostly for a place to call home. At the end, he leaves London for Berlin to get away from himself but Berlin offers no better option for self improvement.

In his collection of short stories *A Life Elsewhere*, the themes of the collection are loss, loneliness, nostalgia and displacement. The various characters in the stories are shown trying to make their lives in new lands. It tells us about the quest people engage in, in order to construct a home away from home. As earlier written, migration is being caused by different reasons; for instance in Nigeria, people often migrate as a result of poverty, unemployment, academic purpose, crime, and golden fleece, etc. The level of corruption and mismanagement of funds has led many citizens astray, as they remain unemployed for years and also poor academic facilities and structures have made most wealthy parents and guardians send their children/wards abroad to receive qualitative education abroad. Poverty is another major factor enhancing migration; most young

citizens of Nigeria try all possible means to travel overseas to make quick money; as a result, they engage in all sorts of crime like prostitution, fraud and drug peddling. On the other hand, the experiences they encounter in their new country are what we refer to as Diaspora experiences. Most of these migrants end up by becoming second class citizens, servants, underdogs and are exposed to discrimination.

Like Vincent who had high expectations for himself, their dreams become aborted. Migration can be curbed by good governance and economic boost in Nigeria. If our leaders will work selflessly placing the society first, before their own private needs, by building factories, industries, etc in order to employ the youth, then unnecessary migration will cease and people will no longer be exposed to ill treatment in foreign lands.

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