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The Ecological Scuffle in Chimeka Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of environmental humanities include a careful attempt to formulate a new framework through which to read, analyse, interpret and apprehend issues of ecological degradation, environmental activism, and ecological justice system. By adopting the ecocritical theory, the study seeks to closely examine ecological struggles in parts of Nigeria's Niger Delta region, the environmentalism of the poor and their efforts at reclaiming their environment. Through Chimeka Garricks' fiction, *Tomorrow Died Yesterday,* the paper avers that a people's freedom and restoration from the forces that contend and dispossess them, will begin with their choice of language. When confrontation is activated using the right words and expressions, the possibility of positive change is in view. The paper concluded that language is not only a tool, but also a place; and subscribes to revolutionary discourse in getting back what was stolen or lost.

Keywords*:* bioregionalism, dwelling, land ethic, language.

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I. Introduction

Chimeka Garricks, a writer of Niger Delta extraction, has presented a fictional account of the consequences of a poor or complete absence of *land ethic.* Aldo Leopold, in his book, *A Sand County Almanac* (1968) conceptualized the idea of a "land ethic" simply as caring about people, about land, and about strengthening the relationship amongst them. For Leopold, his most enduring dimension of "land ethic," is a moral responsibility of humans to the natural world. In his estimation, as evident in the fourth section of his book, *A Sandy County Almanac,* he proposed the creation and adoption of an ecological ethic:

> The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals; the Mosaic Decalogue is an example. Later accretions dealt with the relationship between the individual and society. The Golden Rule tries to integrate the individual to society; democracy to integrate social organization to the individual…there is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations… (p. 16).

For him, the extension of ethic to this third element in human ecology is an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is with respect to this lack of land ethic, that Chimeka Garricks submits a fictional account of the consequences of a total absence of land ethic. Garricks' *bioregionalism,* to borrow the expression of Allen Van Newkirk, does not celebrate the particular, unique and often indescribable features of place; instead it shows, in ironic forms, human's disconnection from those indescribable features of place and how this disconnection has changed his own nature. Bioregionalism stresses participation in a community, local control of resources, and a considerable measure of self-determination. It strives for harmony between human societies and nature by respecting the *genius loci* of places (the guardian spirit of a place or the special atmosphere of a particular area or locatioon).

To fully apprehend Garricks' bioregionalism, it will be appropriate to examine Martin Heidegger's concept of "dwelling". Heidegger (1971), in *Poetry Language and Thought,* argued that nature ought to be seen as "the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising-up into plant and animal" (p. 124). For Heidegger, mortals "dwell in that they save the earth" (p. 124). or "are at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature" (p. 124). However, "saving does not mean to only snatch something from danger…it means to set something free into its own *presencing*. To save the earth is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from spoliation" (p. 124). At the core of Heidegger's argument is what he calls *presencing* (p. 124). Presencing, according to Heidegger is a recognition that every nature has

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its essence for existence. What this means is that to actualise a proper land ethic, which places moral values on land and its use by man, man must first internalize the authentic features of land which is a pointer to its *presencing*. By this recognition, humans can appreciate the value of nature and "the recovery of the art of dwelling with nature" (Harvey, *The nature of environment*, 1993, p. 17).

II. THE ECOLOGICAL QUESTION

One of the ecological questions we find in Garricks' *Tomorrow Died Yesterday,* is the devaluation of nature or wide spread toxic colonialism. Bythe use of the word, *question,* we refer to a matter requiring discussion, attention and resolution; a matter of urgent importance. In finding an answer to this question, the parties involved have been enmeshed in different forms of scuffle; from the physical suffle to legal scuffle as well as verbal scuffle. Thus, we can apprehend Garricks' concern with ecological injustice in his fictional Asiama community by closely examining the array of images of a dislocated landscape, severed by oil exploration and exploitation. Garricks' imagery of ecological destruction aligns with Heidegger's claim that the authenticity of dwelling is being destroyed by mass production and technology. Garricks reveals in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* (2010) that:

> In 1997, there was a spill from one of imperial's pipelines into the Asiama River. Amaibi wrote a damning report, organized a group of fishermen and got Kaniye to sue on behalf of the fishermen for one billion naira (p. 15).

Precisely, this is a situation in Asiama which devalues nature and counteracts the Heideggerean idea of dwelling. Since dwelling implicates the notion of *presencing,* another expression of a moral ethic towards nature; then Asiama's destruction, through spillage negates the call for moral responsibility to the natural world. The exposition, in effect, is to reveal a bipolar world in which man and nature exist asymmetrically as it is in the context of Garrick's Asiama Community. The beauty of Garricks' construction of bioregionalism is manifest through his exposition of its opposites to unmask and make us appreciate the importance of cultivating a moral value for nature. It is only in doing this, that he (Garricks) can bring us to the full glare of environmental injustice and its effects on both man and non-human nature. In doing this Garricks dwells considerably on the hamful pollution that permeates the Asiama community. Through his imagery, we experience in Asiama's pollution what Jim Puckett calls *toxic colonialism.* By toxic colonialism, Puckett refers to dumping of some, if not all the industrial wastes of Western countries on territories of less developed nations (as cited in Dalyell, 1992, p. 2). Toxic colonialism typically thrives in countries tha do not have sufficient resources, political will, and knowledge to resist it.

Another ecological question that is striking in Garricks' fiction, is the dispossession and displacement of a people. It is losing grip of, or being robbed of, one's ancestral inheritance. It is this robbery and eviction that galvanized Doye--a lead character in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, to make a life-threatening decision to pitch his tent against the forces that have taken so much from his soil with no programme at *regeneration,* remediation, or compensation. The historical foundation of Doye's struggles are rooted in the belief that the destruction of his people's land and sea amount to the collapse of their means of livelihood. In *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, we find "pictures of black oil gushing into the lifeless river, dead fish, damaged net and traps, and the haunted faces of some fishermen" (Garricks, 2010, p. 354) so that "these days", as Doye recounts: "…papa did little fishing. His reason was that Imperial Oil chased away most of the fishes when it laid pipelines in the river and the ocean...," (Garricks, 2010, p. 118).

Implicitly, in the above expression is a political-economic power relation and its discriminatory practices. There is, as the action of "papa" and that of "Imperial Oil," the assumption that man and nature are intrinsically bonded. Hence, the pollution of the river results in the socio-economic dislocation of "papa", a metaphor for the Asiama people. Since most of those who rely on the river for fishing are the poor and disempowered Asiama people, the impact of the spillage is not only ethnically discriminatory, but also economically impoverishing. And, if one cares to think about it at all, there is a symbolic dimension to this; that is, a kind of ethnoecological imperialism at work. There is, in the spillage, stigmatization and sustained impoverishment of the "other" through pollution, defilement, impurity, and degradation. This is where the actions of Imperial Oil begin to bear a deliberate political dimension, as Harvey (1998) paints it:

> If, 'some pollutions we used as analogs for expressing a general view of the social order,' and if 'pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter--claims to status', then claims about pollution as 'matter out of place' cannot be separated from claims about the impurities and dangers of 'people out of place' *("What's green…?",* p. 38).

The out-of-placeness of pollution and the out-of-placeness of people naturally contribute to an insertion of the people of Asiama within the bonded polluted space and, by and large, their dislocation. By this insertion, little wonder then, that:

> The fire, bright and brilliant, gave enough light for us to see their deep-roasted corpses which littered the shore. The corpses were contorted into violently grotesque positions in death. Death, from the pipeline explosion, had been immediate. We smelled the heady aroma of burnt flesh (Garricks, 2010, p. 122).

Recall that the deceased body of Doye's elder brother, is among the bodies which litter the shore as Doye graphically narrates to us. It is indeed true that in acting on the environment, we, conversely, act upon ourselves. It is the practice of this logic that has sparked militant resistance. It is in this resistance that the notion of injustice evidently resides. First of all, to understand environmental injustice, it will be necessary to explore its opposite, that is, environmental justice. According to the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, DC; part of the communique from that Summit affirms the sacredness of mother earth, ecological unity, the interdependence of all species, and their right to be free from ecnvironmental destruction; the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of sustainable planet for human and other living things (Harvey, *The nature of environment*, 1993, p. 370). On the other hand, it also connotes a demand for the "cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production" (Harvey, *The nature of environment*, 1993, p. 370).

It is against the above backdrop that we appreciate the grim nature of environmental injustice in Asiama, especially in view of the fact that the continuous (as against the demand for cessation) production of toxins and other hazardous materials render the Asiama rivers heavily toxified. It is sad that the producers are not held strictly accountable to the people. Aside pollution, the people are also denied of opportunities. Doye puts it in these words, "my people have the oil, yet it is your people that have all the jobs in the oil companies. Your people refuse to employ my people; they say we are not qualified. Yoruba man, answer me — are my people not qualified?" (Garricks, 2010, p. 7). This expression underscores the politics of "otherness" in the distribution of the proceeds from oil, the very product that accounts for the degradation of the Asiama land and rivers. In the face of this, is there any doubt that political equations surrounding environmental politics in Asiama violates "the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild ... cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all ... communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources" (Harvey, *The nature of environment*, 1993, p. 370).

Destructive operations of multi-national corporations, military occupation, repression, and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures are common social problems in Asiama. When the resonance of ecological destruction continues to echo unabated and the dislocation of the people takes a renewed dimension, is there any reason why militant local struggles for environmental justice would not create an ethnic-terrorist ferment? Recall that Doye, the metaphor for militant resistance, holds a degree in petroleum engineering, but with his qualification, he is still unemployed owing to ethnicity as he puts it: "…the Yorubas control all the juicy jobs in the oil industry, and they are the most openly biased tribe in the country, our people are left with the menial jobs" (Garricks, 2010, p. 234). The effect of this unfair treatment of the Asiama people is evident in Doye's decision to take to arms in the belief that only revolutionary measures can put the Asiama people and others on the same harmonious path to development. Doye's decision is borne out of the general approach to the environmental problems. This approach is the capitalist-oriented style of responding to environmental issues. This approach intervenes in the problem only "after the event".

III. The Value of the Environment

What exactly is the value of the environment? It is based on this question and its answer that one can appreciate what constitutes the ecological scuffle? What constitutes our values? Is there any moral principle in the operations of Imperial Oil and its government agencies with respect to land ethic? How can we challenge the status quo? The value of the environment in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* is primarily instrumental and utilitarian, especially its relatedness to to the economy. Thus, there appears to be no dimension or aspect in the operations of Imperial Oil which recognizes the environment as part of a biocentric community. What this means is that, the environment is seen in terms of the "other", an "instrument" that can only be "used" to achieve an end (capital accumulation). Hence, environmental problems are regarded as mere "incidents", or the result of "errors" that should be dealt with "after the event" of production. The consideration of the environment as instrumental to capital accumulation and

thus of utilitarian value would not have mattered if its destruction and the resultant dislocation of the people that inhabit it have not sparked militant resistance. Do they (the management of Imperial Oil and the government) count their losses while exploiting Asiama and its people? All parties are, as the story reveals, losers: the Asiama people lose their land, rivers and animal species. They also lose their social and economic bearing. Imperial Oil on the other hand, loses some of its expatriate workers such as Manning; it loses its oil facilities to bunkering and pipeline vandalism as well as its gains to both pipeline vandalism and recurrent payment of ransom. Then, the government loses its oil earning to oil theft and its international reputation. It is in trying to curb these loses, that the scuffle among these three parties or stakeholders ensues. In the contested terrain of oil politics is the widespread venality and corruption which, consequently, turns Asiama into a world of roving bandits. All these constitute slow violence as their consequences are often not immediate but postponed.

As a complete report of human experiences in the Niger Delta, fictionalized as Asiama, *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* revolves around a search for values in a degraded society. These values are bound up with the environment in the belief that the biological interaction between human and non-human species is constantly being damaged. This search for values in a degraded society, motivates Amaibi's action, specifically, his quest to see that Imperial Oil compensates for the damages meted on the Asiama land and water. But what exactly was Amaibi action? He (Amaibi) "…wrote a damning report on the spill in 1997 from one of Imperial's pipelines and organized a group of fishermen and got Kaniye to sue on behalf of the fishermen for one billion naira" (Garricks, 2010, p. 15). The value which underpins Amaibi's action does not rest solely on his regard for the ecosystem; it rests on his understanding that environmental problems are largely the by-product of culture, as Donald Worster puts it:

> We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystem functions but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding (p. 27).

What Amaibi seeks is not a total reformation but an understanding of the impact which man's cultural activities create on the physical environment. It is within the purview of this "understanding" that we find the significance of Doye's action in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*. The dynamics of this understanding is rooted in the conflicting orientations of the Asiama people and the management of Imperial Oil and their collaborators in the government. It is this conflict that provides the dynamic principles which underwrite Amaibi and Doye's struggle for change. From this standpoint, we begin to appreciate the notion that the process of change often involves the tension between incompatible forces. As Haralambos and Holborn (2008) posit that, "the struggle between incompatible forces grows in intensity until there is a final collision. The result is a sudden leap forward, which creates a new set of forces on a lighter level of development" (p. 867).

To clearly explain the ideas of loss and the determination to find what was lost, it will be necessary to evaluate Doye, a character in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* and his complaint. His grouse and protest hinge on the premise that his ancestral home is the womb that bears the oil, blessed with rivers and a rich aquatic lives, but through oil exploration activities and sustained pollution, his father who is a career fisherman, can no longer do his fishing business. In addition to this loss, Doye laments the inability of educated indigenes of the region to secure employment in oil corporations domiciled in their communities. It is a case of giving and giving and never getting anything in return; indeed, such an experience is nothing short of a "victorious death," as Ayi Kwei Armah puts it:

> Whatever cannot give, whatever is ignorant of even receiving, knowing only taking, that thing is past its own mere death. It is a carrier of death. Woe to the giver on the road to such a taker, for then the victim has found victorious death. Woe to the race, too generous in the giving of itself, that finds a road not of regeneration but a highway to its own extinction (*Two thousand seasons,* xii).

It is for this reason that one can apprehend Doye's struggle beyond a mere confrontation between restive youths and an imperialist oil conglomerate. The struggle is an ideological one; indeed, it is a confrontation in terms of conflicting ecological values and economic conditions, both of which are steeped in a deep-rooted crisis of collective self-discovery. The stubborn attachment of environmental values to the economic foundation of the society crystallizes in the assertion that "... the Niger Delta struggle is essentially a fight for oil, or the control and use of the resources from oil" (Garricks, 2010, p. 324). Here, militancy is not only animated by a capitalist economic programme, but it is animated as the consequence of alienation; it is

rooted in the misplaced values placed on the environment as a useful and practical economic tool. This notion becomes very logical when considering Doye's declaration: "I'm just taking my share of oil money" (Garricks, 2010, p. 235).

From the exploration of the dialectics of dispossession and resistance so far, one can observe that the circumstances in which Asiama finds herself are conditions of life where social justice is unattainable. However, these conditions are essential because of their ideological rootedness in alienation both for the people and for the environment. An awareness of this alienation forms the central issue in the discourse of *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* rather than a bitter complaint against some individuals perceived as the "inflictors" of pain. This alienation, is at the core of the scuffle. Hence, Garricks' novel has a firm grasp of the ideo-political imperatives of popular struggle, and the dialectics of radical consciousness.

IV. The Ecological Scuffle

One unique technique employed by Garricks in telling his story is the fusion of the matrixes of character, language and action in a nexus that is representative of lived experiences in the Niger Delta. This nexus manifests in terms of the interaction between the characters and various discursive acts in the novel's dialogue, from which it becomes natural to see the nature of the link between the text and the reality of the Niger Delta experience. To better apprehend how character and language function, we will recall Chinua Achebe's assertion in *Home and Exile* (2000) as he writes on the influence of the twentieth century on Africa. Achebe had insisted that one of the influences of the era on Africa, manifests in the process of "re-storying people who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession" (Achebe, 2000, p. 79). In explaining what Achebe meant by *restorying,* Onyemaechi Udumukwu in his *The novel and change* (2006) explained that re-storying is animated by a thought and desire "to become someone else we were not at the beginning" (p. 122). For Udumukwu, the desire to become someone else is "all about the possibility of adopting the resources of language in order to empower others by creating conditions for their re-invention" (p. 122).

Achebe's assertion, especially as interpreted by Udumukwu, paves the way for an understanding *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* as a literary process of social and political *restorying* of the Niger Delta experience. Garricks employs multiple narrators and the deployment of other marginal characters; thus the narrative technique of *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* deftly opens up opportunities and spaces for action. What we mean here is that Garricks uses the language of his characters to re-construct power dynamics in the Niger Delta with a view to re-positioning the people and their environment. Garricks' vision is implicated in the existing power structure which is wielded by "a few very powerful people in the country" (Garricks, 2010, p. 112); and in confronting this, he uses characters who are bold and daring enough to resist the status quo.

The ideology from which Garricks' vision of power is born is captured in "a few very powerful people in the country" The characters of Granger, Tubo, and Chief Ikaki, fall within this bloc of powerful or influential people. As a power-wielder, the domineering presence of Granger is made apparent in his speech: "The Niger Delta has many problems, Dr. Akassa. It is my personal wish that somehow, in spite of our differences, we can work together to solve some of them" (Garricks, 2010, p. 27). Evident in Granger's submission is the presence of a subject who generates the discourse. This subject is indicated in the use of forms of the first-person pronoun "I". Although "I" is not used in the quotation above, but the "my" which substitutes "I", especially its relationship with personal or personal pronoun, draws the attention of the reader to the personality of Granger. By a close examination of Granger's language or expression: "The Niger Delta has many problems, Dr. Akassa. It is my personal wish that somehow, in spite of our differences, we can work together to solve some of them" (Garricks, 2010, p. 27), the reader is placed in a position to interrogate why the solution to the Niger Delta problems is the personal wish of Granger. We will return to Udumukwu's *The novel and change* (2006) in order to fully apprehend the discourse strategy employed by Garricks to portray the ideology from which his vision was born. Writing on the microstructure of power, Udumukwu paraphrases Emmanuel Yewah's position on political rhetoric in post-colonial African context in these words:

> One of the conditions that enables a political speech maker to operate, is the establishment of an 'I-You' relationship. Within this relationship, the speech maker is capable of bracketing the evidence within his own perception of the world, thereby creating a one-dimensional space for the discourse (as cited in Udumukwu, *The novel and change*, 2006, p. 124).

Granger's expression is a careful attempt to create an 'I-You' relationship with Dr. Akassa; and by this, he is not mobilizing action for environmental remediation for Asiama people, but he is struggling to bracket Dr Akassa within his own angle of vision in order to project this vision as all-inclusive; a vision that will

begin and end in rhetorics. Within the realm of power, as it is in Granger's case, discourse functions to portray the views of the power wielder not through language as a way of saying things, but through language as a veritable means of expressing power.

To counter Ganger, the power wielder, Garricks adopts a different discourse form for Doye, the face of social change or revolution. While the language of power adopted by Granger is less forceful, the language of Doye is always imperative. Doye's language therefore, falls into what Harvey described as, "voices from the margins" (*The nature of environment*, 1993, p. 100). The idea is this: no matter how marginalized you are, never keep mute, rather have a voice, have a language; this kind of voice, for Harvey, is more authentic, less corrupt and more revolutionary. The voices from the margin spring from the awareness that society has evolved so that there are those who are so radically the "other", radically marginalized that the salvation of others is solely in their hands. Harvey amplifies this fact in these words:

> … outside the dominant systems of determination, so marginal in relation to the iron cage of circular and cumulative causation, that they and only they have the capacity to see through the fetishisms that fool the rest of us. They and only they have the capacity to generate radical change (Harvey, 1993, p. 100).

Following the above, language can be used as a weapon for struggle, for confrontation and for sustained demand for a change. The above quotation reminds us that "language is a place of struggle..." (Hooks, *Choosing the margin as a space*, p. 12). It is important we cite at this point, fractions of Doye's expressions: "stop complaining" (Garricks, 2010, p. 33) "you and you... Go and bring the thing" (Garricks, 2010, p. 35), "Hurry up" (Garricks, p. 35), "You two, count the money. If you steal anything…" (Garricks, 2010, p. 35), "Get up, stupid fear fear man" (Garricks, p. 37), "Open your eyes, Amaibi, or I'll shoot you" (Garricks, 2010, p. 37) and some others. Notice that the verbs are all in the active voice and stylistically, this reveals not only the kind of person Doye is, but how his discourse pattern serves as a medium to transgress boundaries and to push against oppression set by racial and class domination.

It is important to note that action is not exclusive. Action is relative in that every action has an agent who does not only act but presents reasons for the action. The reasons are expressions of language, whether spoken or symbolized. Hence, Doye's conversation (discourse) pattern is implicated in his action and vice versa. This is because "coming to voice", as Bell Hooks argued, entails "intense personal emotional upheaval regarding place, identity and desire" (Hooks, *Talking Back*, p. 15) in fact, it is a "revolutionary gesture" (Hooks, *Choosing the margin as a space*, p. 12). Put differently, the use of the discourse of resistance is intended to drive home the pains and sorrows of the oppressed. Hooks further noted that those who dominate or exercise dominion over a people often go as far as deciding the language of this subaltern or less-powerful people: they also influence their voice – "their presence changes the nature and direction of our words" (*Choosing the margin as a space*, p. 16). Thus, language becomes a place of struggle. To make this clear, Hooks added:

> Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to the oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination—a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew (*Choosing the margin as a space*, p. 16).

What Bell Hooks seeks to achieve is to drive home the point that a people's freedom from the forces that contend with them, begins with their language or choice of language. Following this, language becomes action in itself: "Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance (*Choosing the margin as a space*, p. 17). Recall that Bell Hooks has reminded us that "language (discourse) is a place of struggle" (*Choosing the margin as a space*, p. 12). So, within the discursive struggle between the characters in the text, is their relationship to a standpoint and location (place) from which they create a space for challenging notions of dominance and resistance. Thus, through the engagement of language, character and action, the reader can fully apprehend how the idea of injustice in relation to power, gets constructed in *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*.

V. Conclusion

Confrontational discourse is a term for strategies of persuasion, debates and forms of communication that directly challenge the authority of an opponent. One can deduce, through the writings and language of the characters of Doye and Kaniye, that appropriate deployment of language in this fictional work, serve as

a potent tool for confronting environmental injustice and suggesting alternative forms of managing the Niger Delta region: her people, her natural resources and her infrastructure. Whenever dialogue assumes a confrontational twist, then there are some underlying conflicts of ideas. What Garricks achieves through Doye's language use, is to galvanize the Niger Delta people to positive actions and healthy confrontational discourses that can birth social change within the region and beyond.

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