

Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, Postcolonialism and Hybridity in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and August Wilson's *Radio Golf*

Lorraine Hansberry'nin *A Raisin in the Sun* ve August Wilson'un *Radio Golf* Adlı Eserlerinde Avrupa-merkezcilik, Afrika-merkezcilik, Postkolonyalizm ve Melezlik

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a thematic study dealing with a postcolonial critical view of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and August Wilson's *Radio Golf* (2005). In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Beneatha views Western cultures as superior and she ultimately opts for Afrocentrism. The spirit of Beneatha will be analysed with a focus on Frantz Fanon's arguments against 'négritude' and Eurocentrism. Hansberry, through the voice of Mama Lena, calls for a union between the African and the American selves, as well as between the Western and the non-Western cultures. The issue of the oscillation between Eurocentrism and Africanness is shared by August Wilson in his last contemporary play where he exposes different facets and layers of identity. Contemporary black citizens have achieved their American dreams of collecting lucre, but they are still grappling between keeping faithful to their African heritage and cultural repertoire or adopting the Western way of life and distance themselves from their roots. This dilemma is best exemplified through Harmond and his wife Mame Wilks. Unlike Wilks, who imitates the prestigious way of life and looks for appearances and social status, Harmond crosses the boundaries of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism and he tries to find a space for intercultural communication between the Western and the African cultures. The discussion part will relate the two plays to the recent events surrounding Floyd's murder during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The aim is to examine the critical situation of blacks during crisis and to demonstrate that they are disproportionately targeted. The rationale for choosing a modern African-American text that explores contemporary Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, assimilation, nativism, and decolonization is to show that race is a universal issue. The goal is to suggest hybridity as the best alternative for establishing a more humanitarian society where different races can be interwoven.

Keywords: Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, Americanness, The Myth of Négritude, 'Black Lives Matter'

ÖZ

Bu makale, Lorraine Hansberry'nin *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) ve August Wilson'un *Radio Golf* (2005) adlı eserlerindeki Avrupa-merkezcilik (*Eurocentrism*) ve Afrika-merkezcilik (*Afrocentrism*) üzerine postkolonyal eleştirel bakış açısını ele alan tematik bir çalışmadır. *A Raisin in the Sun*'da Beneatha, Batı kültürlerini üstün görür ve sonunda Afrika-merkezciliği tercih eder. Beneatha'nın tutumu, Frantz Fanon'un 'zencilik' ('négritude') ve Avrupa-merkezciliğe karşı argümanlarına odaklanılarak analiz edilecektir. Avrupa-merkezcilik ve Afrikalılık arasındaki salınım meselesi, August Wilson tarafından kimliğin farklı yönlerini ve katmanlarını ortaya koyduğu son çağdaş oyununda ele alınmaktadır. Bu ikilem, en iyi Harmond ve eşi Mame Wilks'te örneklendirilebilir. Prestijli yaşam tarzını taklit eden, gösteriş ve sosyal statü peşinde olan Wilks'in aksine Harmond, Avrupa-merkezciliğin ve Afrika-merkezciliğin sınırlarını aşar ve Batı ile Afrika kültürleri arasında kültürlerarası iletişim için bir alan bulmaya çalışır. Tartışma bölümü, iki oyunu Covid-19 Salgını sırasında Floyd'un öldürülmesiyle ilgili son olaylarla ilişkilendirecektir. Amaç, siyahilerin kriz sırasındaki kritik durumunu incelemek ve orantısız bir şekilde hedef alındıklarını göstermektir. Çağdaş Avrupa-merkezciliği, Afrika-merkezciliği, asimilasyonu, yerliliği (*nativism*) ve sömürgeleştirilmeyi (*decolonization*) inceleyen modern bir Afrikalı-Amerikalı bir metin seçmenin gerekçesi, ırkın evrensel bir sorun olduğunu göstermektir. Amaç, farklı ırkların iç içe geçebileceği, daha insancıl bir toplum oluşturmak için en iyi alternatif olarak melezliği önermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Avrupa-merkezcilik, Afrika-merkezcilik, Amerikalılık, Négritude Miti, 'Siyahilerin Hayatı Önemlidir'.

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Introduction

African-American individuals have gone through a long path of segregation and continuous calls for equality. Racism has led to the divided inner house of some African-American citizens who vacillate between accepting their origins or embracing the American way of life. For instance, Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) and Wilson's *Radio Golf* (2005) revolve around the African-American characters' oscillation between Americanness and Eurocentrism. This research is meant to investigate identity crisis in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and August Wilson's *Radio Golf* and to delve into the intricacies of the African-American self. The main problem for some black characters lies in imitating the White American Dream of achieving material success. This paper gives insights about generation gap, the intellectual development of the new black generation, namely Beneatha Younger and her peers and the struggles black protagonists face (namely Harmond Wilks) for the pursuit of their dreams. The goal of this research is to analyze the long history of slavery and the way the mainstream culture affects African community in 'the land of opportunities.' The paper aims at finding out the obstacles black characters face and perceiving the elements hindering their dreams of prosperity, social mobility and justice. The final objective is not to focus on the Youngers or the Wilks families, but to understand the long quest for African-American belonging.

Longing for belonging will be analyzed using an eclectic approach: textual analysis, thematic concerns and postcolonial hints will be deployed to map out identity crisis in the plays under examination. Identity crisis stems from the oscillation between Americanness and Africanness. Indeed, black characters in the plays under study are torn between following the American way of life or keeping faithful to their roots. Self-loathing disappears when black characters understand that négritude is a myth and that they are supposed to merge within American social fabric without forgetting about their national culture. The innovative aspect of the paper lies in linking the dramatic texts under study to the current events of 'Black Lives Matter.' The ultimate goal is to show that racism exceeds the dramatic text as it is still continuous; blacks are still stereotyped as being 'uncivilized,' and 'criminals', especially during Covid-19 pandemic. Linking the thematic approach, the postcolonial reading and the George Floyd's murder is meant to show the realistic side of the plays under examination and the way they touch upon African activists and citizens.

Eurocentrism: Theoretical Framework

Before beginning the textual analysis of the plays under study, it is important to define Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. From a postcolonial perspective, Eurocentrism is defined as “a by-product of European colonialism and it is a by-product of the myth of European supremacy that was invented to justify and legitimize colonialism” (Prasad, 2018, p. 303). Eurocentrism places European culture at the center and marginalizes other cultures like African culture. It is perceived that the mission of European imperialism was to tame, to change, and to civilize the ‘uncivilized’. In this respect, British political theorist Leonard Woolf legitimizes European invasion of African lands, stating that “the African was a savage with all vices of savagery. Not satisfied with perpetual and unavoidable sufferings that providence inflicts upon their own and their neighbours’ lives as miserable as possible” (Woolf, 2018, p. 54). In other words, European colonialism is intended to rescue Africans from barbarity and backwardness and to invite them to become more developed. This biased view is not accepted within a postcolonial framework, which “does not view Eurocentrism as an ideology or a mode of representation, but sees it as the very basis of domination in the colonial and modern imperial contexts” (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 324). This domination has capitalist purposes, aiming to exploit African raw materials and mineral wealth.

Eurocentrism has been extended as it has included the whole Western world and “it reads Western global victory as the victory of humanity itself” (Tibebu, 2011, p. XX). The victory of the Eurocentric ideology and Western culture lies in imposing its lifestyle and creating unequal cultural polarities. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon criticizes Eurocentrism and declares that cultural polarities and racism are cultural by-products. Fanon (1986) writes:

I am black; I am in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos – and the white man, however intelligent he may be, is incapable of understanding Louis Armstrong or songs from the Congo. I am black, not because of a curse, but because my skin has been able to capture all the cosmic effluvia. I am truly a drop of sun under the earth. (p. 27)

He declares that white superiority is a myth and his skin color does not determine his inner self. He deploys negation ‘I am black, not because of a curse’ to demonstrate that black skin is not a curse, but the negative image is created by imperial forces to enhance imperialism and cultural polarity. This cultural polarity is criticized by some African-American playwrights, like Hansberry and Wilson who reject assimilation and to criticize extreme Afrocentrism.

Eurocentrism in *A Raisin in the Sun*

Eurocentrism has generated in some African-American characters feelings of self-loathing, as they are ashamed of their roots and they do not accept the African style. For example, George pokes fun at Beneatha when she wears a traditional dress, implicitly believing that African clothing is associated with backwardness. Beneatha strongly criticizes George's denigration of his origins and invites him to find out cultural richness and African glory. She addresses him saying, "you are looking at what a well-dressed Nigerian woman wears. (...) Enough of this assimilationist junk!" (Hansberry, 1995, p. 60). Beneatha defines assimilation as 'junk' because it blights the African self and leads to the denial of native roots. Beneatha challenges George's views of Africa as a sterile continent and convinces him of the rich cultural heritage. George's limited view about Africa is the outcome of Eurocentrism, which instilled feelings about European supremacy and African inferiority in the African mind. Eurocentrism is further examined through ostracization of black citizens and their confinement to segregated ghettos. In this respect, the white American citizen, Linder, puts pressure on Mama Lena and her family, trying to convince them not to move to the white neighborhood. His attitude reflects the exclusion of blacks and the supremacy of authoritarian whites who want to remain in the center and humiliate other races. He argues: "For the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities" (Hansberry, 1995, p. 102). He plays on the sentimental chords of Mama Lena by informing her that happiness consists of being confined in black neighborhoods, and that moving to the white neighborhood is a source of misery because it leads to the torment of blacks. Linder's biased attitude recalls the postcolonial discourse of power and the inequality between Western and African cultures. This biased attitude is a fine example of Eurocentrism and the exclusion of the racially different other. Eurocentrism is thus "the intellectual rationalization of Western modernity. It is the self-consciousness of capital accumulation in the land of its origins Western Europe" (Tibebu, 2011, p. XX). Eurocentrism in *A Raisin*¹ is made clear through the geographical exclusion of African-American characters and the consideration of the European whites as superior. This geographical separation leads to the absence of intercultural communication, demonstrating that Eurocentrism fosters cultural clashes.

¹ *A Raisin in the Sun* will henceforth be referred to as *A Raisin*.

Eurocentrism in *Radio Golf*

The ideology of Eurocentrism is also present in contemporary African-American plays. Despite the passage of time, Wilson's relatively more recent play exposes the same issues of apartheid, white dominance, the centrality of the mainstream culture and the continuous oppression of non-Western cultures. Eurocentrism in *Radio Golf* can be analyzed through the character of Roosevelt and his assimilationist attitudes. Roosevelt believes in the superiority of the European style and is ashamed of his African roots. He informs the audience: "It's not my fault if your daddy's in jail, your mama's on drugs, your little sister's pregnant, and the kids don't have any food because the welfare cut off the money. Roosevelt Hicks ain't holding nobody back" (Wilson, 1988, p. 77). Roosevelt is obviously going through self-estrangement and denies his origins. He is ashamed of his African relatives because of their delinquency, irresponsibility and extreme poverty. This self-minimization is the outcome of Eurocentrism, which presupposes the denigration of Africans and the dominance of Western styles. Roosevelt is influenced by Eurocentrism and adopts a capitalist view by following Smith's instructions and he betrays his origins. Indeed, "Roosevelt uses his unethical autonomy to re-center white dominance by giving his white business partner, Bernie Smith control over the redevelopment plan that initially belonged to Harmond" (Radcliffe, 2019, p. 4). He is obviously betraying his roots, supporting the capitalist plan of Smith and stealing Harmond's business plan for financial gain. Harmond dreams of reconstructing the African home of his Ancestors. Roosevelt finds legitimate excuses when he informs the audience that his mission lies in "protecting the company's financing structure by going through with the plan to raze the home that was purchased illegally" (Wilson, 1988, p. 79). His statement reveals his greedy nature and his indifference toward destroying the African-American home. He is easily manipulated by Smith and he is with a capitalist mindset which motivates him to give priorities to personal gains. He is influenced by Eurocentrism and he even imitates white characters even in their personal preferences. His influence is evident in his interest in golf which is often considered to be a white practice. In fact, "Wilson chooses golf – a professional sport once inaccessible to blacks to examine the erosion of African-American cultural values in the pursuit of success as defined by the dominant white society" (Booker, 2007, p. 3). The presence of Tiger Woods' poster in the office of Roosevelt indicates that he is "frequentering the golf course where he rubs shoulders with the white business elite" (Cengage, 2016, p.57). Roosevelt is keen on imitating the white way of life because he has 'a white-black complex' and internally believes that the white race is superior.

According to Fanon (1986), “if there is an inferiority complex, it is the double process: primarily economic, subsequently the internalization or better the epidermalisation of this inferiority” (pp. 10-11). Roosevelt is among the African-American characters who are ashamed of their low economic backgrounds and of their skin color. This opportunist character is heavily criticized by his black peers for being influenced by Eurocentrism, for developing feelings of self-hatred and for betraying his origins. Sterling rebukes Roosevelt with the following speech:

You a Negro. White people will get confused and call you a nigger, but they don't know like I know. I know the truth of it. I'm a nigger. Negroes are the worst thing in God's creation. Niggers got style. Negroes got blind-eyetist. A dog knows it's a dog. A cat knows it's a cat. But a Negro don't know he's a Negro. He thinks he's a white man. It's Negroes like you who hold us back. (Wilson, 1988, p. 107)

The use of animal imagery indicates that Sterling dehumanizes Roosevelt for his tendencies to align with white society and he accuses him of perpetuating Eurocentrism at the expense of his human dignity, his identity and his original roots. Sterling argues that being influenced by Eurocentrism is a sign of backwardness because it creates psychological complexes and it prevents black individuals from moving forward or being aware of their uniqueness.

This part has explored the role of Eurocentrism in fostering self-loathing and convincing Roosevelt about his inferiority. Both Roosevelt and George from *A Raisin* share materialistic spirit; they imitate the white styles and ways of life, are ashamed of their origins, and have a passionate desire for being identified as white citizens. This tendency toward whiteness is caused by Eurocentrism and the illusory belief in white supremacy. Both George and Roosevelt are criticized in the play by the believers in Afrocentrism, such as Beneatha and Harmond. The next part will shift from Eurocentrism to Afrocentrism and will criticize the notion of centrality because it blocks continuity and cultural dialogue.

Afrocentrism: Definition

Like Eurocentrism, which is based on the centrality of Western culture, Afrocentrism places African culture at the center and idealizes Africa:

Afrocentric, Africentric or African centered are interchangeable terms representing the concept which categorizes a quality of thought and practice which is rooted in the cultural image and interest of African people and which represents and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of African people as the center of analyses. (Bangura, 2019, p. 2)

Put differently, Afrocentrism glorifies African culture and emphasizes the role of the African

citizen in building history and in reconstructing Western civilization. In this way,

Afrocentrism which means African centred-ness, does not violently confront any person or people, but is a resolute attempt to put the records right. It is about placing African people within their own historical framework. It is a demand that the contributions of Africans in all areas of civilization be reflected in world history. (Onyemuni, 2005, p. 21)

Afrocentrism pays tribute to the African individual, his hard work and participation in the development of Western culture. However, Afrocentrism can be criticized for its extremism, the retreat into the shell of the self and the refusal of the culturally different other. Fanon (1986) declares that Africanness and Eurocentrism are two faces of the same coin. He believes that “The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accord” (p. 60). In other words, Afrocentrism is based on extremism as it deals with nationalism and an ignorance of mainstream culture and Eurocentrism is based on homogeneity as it focuses on the exclusion of minorities and racial groups. Beneatha and Harmond share the same experience of oscillating between Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. The next part will examine Afrocentrism in the plays under study.

Afrocentrism in *A Raisin*:

Afrocentrism in *A Raisin* can be analyzed through the character of Beneatha and Asagai. Beneatha is impressed by the intellectual side of Asagai and learns from him many new ideas about African culture. He makes her aware of the role of the African citizens in shaping Western history and in participating in the development of civilization. For example, Beneatha learns that the image of Tarzan should not be viewed as a negative symbol of savagery and barbarity, but is rather connected to the origins and the development of civilization. Beneatha informs the audience: “It’s just that people ask such crazy things. All anyone seems to know about when it comes to Africa is Tarzan” (Hansberry, 1995, p. 41). Beneatha is implicitly giving prominence to the richness of African culture and revising stereotypes about African people. She argues that African achievements should not be reduced to the primitiveness of Tarzan; instead, they should be linked to African glory and civilization. Beneatha’s belief in African glory emerges when she puts on Nigerian traditional clothes and Asagai praises her: “This is not so much a profile of a Hollywood queen as perhaps a queen of the Nile” (Hansberry, 1995, p. 46). The image of royalty indicates Beneatha’s self-pride and her interest in reviving African traditions and customs. She represents the new black generation which is a category creating a meeting zone between American and African selves.

She is a black doctor who believes in globalization and the cohabitation between African and American cultures. Like Beneatha who achieves her dream of becoming a doctor in a white-dominated society, bridging the gap between Americanness and Africanness and preserving her identity, Harmond aspires to revive his demolished black neighborhood. Harmond's tragic flaw is his Afrocentric ideology and his refusal to accept the implications of the mainstream culture. In this sense, he is different from Beneatha who opts for hybridity.

Afrocentric in *Radio Golf*

Afrocentric in *Radio Golf* can be analyzed through the characterization of Harmond and his connection to the African roots. Harmond holds positive views of the African individual, who is endowed with moral goodness and who respects law. Harmond is opposed to capitalist corruption and is ready to sacrifice his career, to defy Eurocentrism and to concretize the African-American dream of racial equality. When Mame warns Harmond saying, "if you do that you're throwing everything away. All your hard work. Your career. Your reputation" (Wilson, 1988, p. 105), he answers eagerly: 'All I'm trying to do is save Bedford Hills Redevelopment. You got to have rule of law. Otherwise, it would be chaos. Nobody wants to live in chaos' (p. 105). His answer demonstrates his dedication to preserving African glory and adhering to the American ideals of justice, democracy, and equality. Harmond's belief in the American dream of racial integration emerges when he calls for a tribute to African-American figures like Sarah Degree, the first nurse in the American neighborhood. His wife interrupts him, saying, "Model Cities Health Center has been around for twenty-two years. The organization has some history in the neighbourhood. Nobody knows who Sarah Degree was. I understand the sentiment, but it's not practical to throw all that history away" (Wilson, 1988, p. 10). Mame criticizes her husband's focus on the African center and his ignorance of American history. She implicitly delivers the message about the necessity of creating a smooth link between the African and the American selves. However, Harmond is dedicated to revise history and to better represent African-American icons like Sarah. Harmond amplifies the voice of repressed African-American citizens and criticizes American history for misrepresenting African icons and for ignoring the role of African women like Sarah in boosting American health services because of their philanthropic aims and hard work. The role of Africans in establishing American civilization and improving the quality of American life is also discussed by Beneatha who shares with Harmond the same ideology of Afrocentrism and the same message about criticizing American history for misrepresenting African efforts. Beneatha uses education as

a subversive tool for imposing her African-American identity and Harmond uses his position as a mayor to revise stereotypes about blacks as ‘criminals’ and downtrodden citizens. Harmond imposes his culture and he reveals that

...being the first black mayor of Pittsburgh would “make” history—and, most important for this discussion, his place in Wilson’s ten-play cycle. In so doing, it makes clear that the cycle is the story of the place history created for displaced people, people who, from the second they were sold on their home soil by their own chiefs to traders and captains. (Alan, 2018, p. 140)

Harmond is thus portrayed as an African militant as he carries out the dream of his ancestors and insists on defying the mainstream culture and the capitalist forces which grab his rights of ownership.

Harmond does not surrender to the capitalist forces and is dedicated to achieve his dreams by fixing the law and through his belief in the American dream and having positive hopes about achievements and progress. He says,

Bedford Hills acquired 1839 illegally. It bought it from me but I didn’t own it. I bought the house before it went to auction. That’s against the law. That’s corruption. I’m going down to the courthouse and file an injunction to stop the demolition. (Wilson, 1988, p. 105)

Harmond explicitly criticizes Eurocentrism and the capitalist system, which is meant to serve the interests of the elite. He calls for racial equality and for embracing views that are more egalitarian. He believes that a black citizen can achieve their dreams in ‘the land of opportunities’ and he sticks to the African-American dream of equality. He believes that Afrocentrism can thrive in an American context where justice is supposed to reign supreme. His view recalls Fanon’s ideas about the myth of *négritude* and his arguments about the possibility of achievement and prosperity for blacks. In his *Toward the African Revolution*, Fanon (1988) writes: “The truth is that there is nothing, a priori, to warrant the assumption that such a thing as a Negro people exists. When someone talks to me about Negro People, I try to understand what is meant” (p. 40). Fanon argues that *négritude* is a myth created by imperial powers for the sake of dominance. He implicitly attacks imperial forces for creating racial stereotypes and widening the chasm between Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. In the same context. Harmond believes that blacks and whites are equal, and they are expected to be protected by law. Even when he faces capitalist corruption, Harmond insists that the law can be fixed to better represent blacks:

If it don’t take all the quarters you fix it. Anybody with common sense will agree to that.

What they don't agree on is how to fix it. Some people say you got to tear it down to fix it. Some people say you got to build it up to fix it. Some people say they don't know how to fix it. Some people say they don't want to be bothered with fixing it. (Wilson, 1988, p. 93)

The recurrent use of the verb 'to fix' suggests revision of Eurocentrism and a call for a democratic representation of black individuals.

Harmond's enthusiasm, nationalism and his attachment to the African roots remind us of President Obama and the dilemma between preserving African roots and achieving the American dream in a white-dominated atmosphere. Both Harmond and President Obama share the same question: "whether one can remain committed to a liberal paradigm of black empowerment and at the same time achieve economic or political success within the more conservative, white dominated American mainstream" (Alan, 2018, p. 9). Like President Obama, who embodies the achievement of the American dream and the success of racial justice, Harmond represents the black enthusiasm for creating equality between the mainstream and native cultures.

Discussion

In the context of globalization and in the era of 'Black Lives Matter', racial groups are not well represented. Racism remains today a major concern. Many American citizens do not have the same healthcare chances and they do not have access to basic rights. The tragic death of George Floyd has shown that racial injustice is still going on. This incident has proved that socio-economic injustice is reigning supreme. Blacks are stereotyped as being prisoners, criminals, thieves and through other negative social connotations. Floyd was taken as a cheater and he was arrested in a merciless way just because he is an African-American citizen. He was not given the chance of social redemption in a society where blacks are downtrodden. The American policeman did not understand that Floyd's "last stint in prison had been so traumatizing that he was terrified of what might happen if he got caught up in it anew" (Samuels and Olorunnipa, 2022, p. 50). The topic of African-American identity is of utmost interest regarding the continuous debate about the suffering of blacks in the era of 'Black Lives Matter', in the period of Covid-19 pandemic and in the post pandemic period. Racism remains one of the social pandemics pervading the American society.

Conclusion

The present research merges postcolonial hints with thematic concerns and it offers new insights about Americanness and Africanness. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of binary

oppositions between mainstream and local cultures, enabling an understanding about the importance of hybridity in determining the African-American identity. Bridging the gap between Americanness and Africanness is the key for African integration within the American social fabric. Interdisciplinarity between Africanness and Eurocentrism fosters a multicultural climate where different cultures can be mixed together. The two plays under study share a universal message about the necessity of respecting the culturally different other and accepting cultural multiplicity, especially in the context of globalization. Another message is related to proving that identity should not be limited to skin color, banishing stereotypes inflicted upon blacks and giving tribute to intellectual capabilities of African-American individuals. Hansberry and Wilson share the mission of changing negative views about blacks and calling for a humane consideration of colored people. Fanon (1986) asserts that “What matters is not to know the world but to change it” (p. 17). Hansberry and Wilson aim to change the world by implicitly calling human rights activists to fight against racism, criticize cultural homogeneity and recreate a more egalitarian society where social equality reigns supreme.

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