

English Short Story: No Place Like Home

LEVEL B1-B2

ADJECTIVES FOR DESCRIBING PLACES IN AFRICA



TRADITIONAL



MODERN



BUSTLING



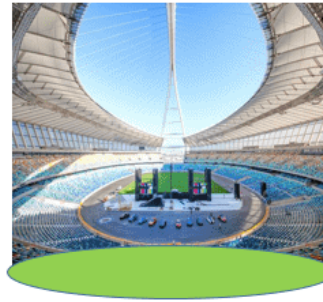
BUSY



WILD



OPEN



LUXURIOUS



DECREPIT



WILD



OPEN



LUXURIOUS



DECREPIT

I met Amandi shortly before he was to be deported. Fate threw him onto my path and time cruelly took him away. Our destinies became intertwined at the Immigration offices.

I was going to get my third temporary residence permit. He was going to get his deportation order. My joy deeply contrasted with his sorrow but our encounter created magic.

He was being summoned to go home against his will. The word 'deport' rang in his head like an ominous chant. "De-port", 'expelled" —to be removed from one's port, to be unanchored. Deportation meant the end of his dreams. He was finally leaving and he did not want to. Yet he did, three months later, without much ceremony.

Once he arrived in Lagos, he sent me an SMS: "I've arrived safely back home. Take care Mada. Keep dreaming."

I thought about my dreams and what they meant to me. Amandi had arrived in this country to do business studies. After he got his degree with stellar results, he decided to pursue a Master's degree. It took him five years to achieve this.

That was ten years ago. So much has transpired in those ten years. It would take me a whole night to recount my story. Ten years is a lot when you live on borrowed land.

We continued to communicate. Arriving back home provided him with much-needed relief. He now had a permanent home with temporary jobs. The job market was pitiless and he encouraged me to work

hard so that I could secure a job right here. It was not worth going back home, he warned. There was nothing for young men to return to.

He sent me photos from time to time. The backdrops filled me with nostalgia. I came from a different country than his but I still recognised the same patterns. The packed streets, the dirt roads, the colourful markets, the hustle and bustle of everyday life —oh and the stunning girls by the river! My heart longed to have the same experiences. I wanted to have the familiar. Permanence was what my soul yearned for.

When I sat in my student room, hemmed in and claustrophobic, I wished for more company. I longed for laughter-filled afternoons and carefreeness. Yet I kept on because I knew that I was building my future.

I ignored the exhaust fumes that filled my lungs and triggered allergies that I had never had in my previous life. On my desk, sat different types of vitamin supplements to compensate for my struggle to adapt. I yearned for pristine air and the chatter of children playing in the background.

Then we forgot. Forgetfulness is a powerful skill to have when you live on borrowed land.

You forget that you look different. You blend in as much as possible. You discard what previously made you and acquire the robes of the new land. You strive to remain inconspicuous. Memories of former disappointments, traumas and triumphs stay tucked in the drawers of amnesia. It is better that way. It is necessary for survival. Only the present matters.

So, little by little, I started to forget Amandi. He was merely a person that I had previously known. Snippets of his life no longer sparked a longing in my heart. Amandi was part of the past and I did not want to have anything to do with the past.

Five years elapsed and during that period I got news from a common friend that Amandi was now married and had settled down. His dreams of Europe had finally flown away for good. I hoped he had a job that gave him enough money to take care of his budding family.

I also started a family of my own after I met a woman whom I utterly adored. She was local and braved the odds to marry me, a foreigner. Foreign to the land, foreign to the customs, foreign to her ancestors.

We knew that we did not have the same past but we shared the same dreams. We were aware of our differences and we embraced them fully, without fear. It was therefore of no big surprise when we tied the knot.

Then we started to build our home on the shaky foundations of impermanence. For how can your house remain sturdy when the pillars of your ancestors are absent?

Tirelessly we toiled to make our new home stand tall and proud. Yet we knew that ours was just a temporary home for how can one build permanence on borrowed land? How can one feel secure on the beds of hostility? How can one build a future when the present is under constant threat? How can one have ambition when dreams are nipped in the bud?

In moments of despair I remember what pushed me to leave home. I was born in a magnificent place. Memories of my childhood are filled with glee and wonder. I remember how I spent whole mornings and sunny afternoons playing outside with my happy friends. Back then, I did not have many needs. Friendship sufficed; brotherhood carried the day. We were free of worries.

I remember how we all started leaving like flies attracted to the sweetness of honey. Photos of abroad showed a painless land full of milk and honey. We looked at our dusty roads and compared them to the motorways of faraway lands. Surely suffering was a word that did not exist there. We imagined a future in our homes and saw none.

All that glared back to us were awful infrastructure, blackouts, water shortages, bone-chilling hospitals and death. Death was a permanent feature and soaked into our lives. We never thought of having dreams because death would rob them anyway. Our former home had failed us.

The wave continued and drove us away in huge numbers. We left by any means: car, bus, boat, plane. One by one we said goodbye to friends and family. We travelled north, east and west, mainly to the west. We rarely saw the people we had left behind. Left with sadness, they wished they could join us too, wherever we were. They wished they could partake in our newly-found joy.

Soon enough we found out about the treachery as soon as we landed on the new soils. The false promises of joy shone in the darkness and we realised that it would be difficult to recover our past.

We knew that it would be extremely difficult to build a normal life for how can one build long-lasting happiness on the lands of other people's ancestors? Despite one's willingness to accept and adapt, how can one understand the history and struggles of borrowed land? How can one fully share the joys and sorrows of another people without losing oneself?

It was clear that we had failed to look at our former land with hope and love. We found out about the goodness of our land when it was too late. We left to settle on other people's lands thinking that the grass was greener on the other side. The glitter of the new land failed to seduce us and we started to hate the plasticity of it all.

Besides, our hosts felt threatened as they asked themselves unanswered questions. Who are these people? Where are they coming from? What are they going to do here? We do not have enough jobs! Our schools are flooded! They do not speak our language!

We ignored them and did our best to fit in. We tried and succeeded and failed and succeeded again. It was an endless labour of love. When we got fed up, we thought of Amandi and other countless dreamers that had failed to achieve their dream of staying in Europe. We also thought of countless others that were literally dying to reach the shores of Europe!

Was it wise to go back home? No. It was our duty to fight on no matter the circumstances. Our new home offered us security, good education, permanent electricity and water, excellent hospitals. Our new home gave us questionable jobs but we did not mind because we had food on the table, always.

Time passed and our new home offered us hope. We started dreaming again. We bought houses. Children came into our lives and we thought we could build a permanent home.

Yet our children felt the lack of their ancestors. Our children failed to belong to this new place that did not recognise them fully as their own. Our children had no past to compare it to the present. Our children could only compare the present to the present and all they saw was the injustice. The deafening injustice.

We learned to ignore the pain. New forms of happiness filled our lives and we tried as much as we could to give meaning to this new home. Yet, a threat always lurked in the background. Constant reminders of our 'unbelonging' were always thrown onto our paths. We learned to ignore them.

We discovered new skills, new passions and realised how bright and beautiful we were. We realised how these passions would never have developed back home. Sadness filled our hearts when we thought of children that were still learning under mango trees.

We felt helpless, and defenceless, but realised that we could not remain so. We needed to do something. We realised that Rome was not built in a single day. Our home, back home, could be rebuilt if only we wanted to.

Memories of our beautiful home filled us with hope and new expectation. We had a magnificent home, back home, and only realised it too late. Our eyes had been blinded by the promises of the new home. One by one we were plucked from the lands of our ancestors. Our roots were severed and we lost grip of reality.

Materialism gave us false promises of well-being but we realised that it was just an empty well. The jaws of capitalism continuously swallowed us and gave us ephemeral promises of joy and satisfaction. We never realised that the belly of this new world was ravenous and we had to constantly fill it, constantly.

We turned our eyes from mother nature and her nourishing undemanding ways. We saw our former home with new eyes and we felt tears welling in these new-born eyes. What a world we had left!

There is a beautiful place called home. I haven't been there for a while. Now there is a new home in my heart, though I feel its foundations are loose and shaky.

At night, hopeful images of back home fill my dreams. I am inundated with happiness at the thought of a new reality. I am filled with new joy at turning back the hands of time.

I am building my home here, haunted by the memories of Amandi and his failed dream. How long will it take to build this new home, I often ask my wife. How long will it take? She says we have to be patient. Patience is key.

Yet, deep down my heart I know that I am living on borrowed land, on borrowed time. This land is not my own. It will never be. I am rootless and I cannot feel the unconditional love of my ancestors. Everything I am building is like a sandcastle and will disappear at high tide. This is the reality of my life.

Truly, there is no place like home. There is no damn place like home.



Learn **English**
With Africa