

Contextualizing Power Dynamics in Dul Johnson's *Deeper into the Night* and Olusegun Adeniyi's *Power, Politics and Death*

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Abstract

This piece appraises the implication of power in selected Nigerian literatures. It is a comparative inspection of Dul Johnson's Deeper into the Night and Olusegun Adeniyi's Power, Politics and Death. The paper quizzes the validity of both literary and non-literary texts as parameters for expounding the complex relationship between aesthetic activities and the Nigerian context. This proposition proceeds on the assumption that Nigerian history provides the background and material basis upon which both artistic dimensions have been substantially apprehended by these writers. Given these considerations, the study employs New Historicism, one of Poststructuralist theory, as a paradigm for probing both writers' works, especially as it facilitates the foregrounding of such critical parameters as power, resistance, hegemony, as well as subversion, fragmentation to name a few and how these concerns are interlaced in the experiences of the Nigerian people. In this context, through the tenets of the theory, both texts have been deployed within a larger discursive terrain to establish how they constitute arty commentaries on the specific and general dimensions of the Nigerian space. This paper is at once a contention that is firmly drawn in New Historicist discourse, especially given that the boundaries between the literary and the non-literary have been dissolved and as such, both are substantially implicated in each other. Thus, by undertaking a trope in the theory, this study underscores that the chosen literary text (Dul Johnson's Deeper into the Night) exist as associate material of coordinate relevance to the non-literary text (Olusegun Adeniyi's Power, Politics and Death). It is in the fabric of these texts therefore that better kaleidoscopes rooted in Nigeria are fostered.

Introduction

This exploration is a comparative scrutiny of Dul Johnson's and Olusegun Adeniyi's interpretations of the many models of power, its dynamics and how these enthrallments have transformed into an overall narrative for the Nigerian people. Dul Johnson's *Deeper into the Night* and Olusegun Adeniyi's *Power, Politics and Death*, trickle deep into the fabric of Nigerian history to encapsulate the many significant dimensions of power in the society and their implications within the contemporary Nigerian existence. The aesthetic writings of these writers anchor inspiration from the series of crises, militancy and human carnages across the country, especially those relating to Plateau State, Niger Delta and the like. *Deeper into the Night* and *Power, Politics and Death* are these writers' attempts to revision one of Nigeria's most vexing and complicated social problems. By so doing, Johnson and Adeniyi reconstruct vital historical engagements in the nation and the trajectories

such incidents have generated within the landmark of Nigeria's socio-cultural, religious and political subsistence.

Articulating the Vertical Model of Power and the Nigerian Experience

In his genealogy of power, Foucault describes the vertical dimension of power as something possessed by individuals of a specific class (in most political theory), with one person at the apex, operating via negative sanctions. How the elites wield power within and outside its own terrain is the concern of this dimension. From a New Historicist perspective, Heller (1996) summarizes Foucault's vertical vintage of power by glancing at how individuals within a selected class possess and exercise control through the various institutions of government. Invariably, this model centers in one part, how the elites are implicated within the terrain of power and in another part, how the weak are consciously excluded from power in the society. This is possible given that all the various economic,



political and other relevant institutions are fashioned within a socio-political space to further the strength and exercise of influence by the dominant class. Again, this purview is not far off Antonio Gramsci's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and how they are deployed to convey domination by those within the terrain of power. This brand of power is usually repressive in a New Historicist sense. From the above, Johnson's perspective on power is thus conceptualized from a perpendicular dimension with the view to re-historicize the various experiences that have characterized the post-independence Nigerian reality on the one hand, and with the intention of probing them on another hand. To a great extent, *Deeper into the Night* is concerned with the conundrums of political power, its strategies and how the dominant group within Nigeria's political space determines and negotiates power. It is also concerned with the way the Nigerian socio-political space is constituted by the discourse of power.

Johnson begins chapter one of *Deeper into the Night* by establishing the operations of power, particularly from the model of sovereignty. He depicts political power from the vertical angle which Foucault refers to as the "macro politics of power" and its implication within the context of a fictional community in the novel. From the vertical or the macro dimension of control, Johnson portrays the complex power relations within the political class. This vista is attained through the narrative voice of Nimfa and Alhaji Dampara Danmatsi. Nimfa who had shown open interest in power, is obsessed about occupying the leadership void in Fatim now Gwangtim, renamed after his father, who had turned down the people's request to serve in the capacity of a modern leader for the community. Nimfa's desperation to become Gwangtim's modern leader is evident even before the death of his father.

Nimfa was quite the opposite. Yet, he was desperate to become a chief, even before his father's death. In his ailing days, Gwangtim had asked Nimfa to oversee the affairs of the community. Nimfa went about everything like a

monarch. A few people complained to his father and Nimfa's close friends told him about it. . . Old Gwangtim had called the elders and told them to make Butko the leader of the community immediately. The community waited for this to happen, but it did not. The elders seemed incapable of going against Nimfa's whims. (11-63).

Against all odds; against his father's choice of a leader for Gwangtim people, Nimfa becomes the ruler of the land. With the attainment of his obsessed goal, Nimfa begins to broker power like a dictator. Using state apparatus to his gains, he becomes one person at the apex operating with negative sanctions. He wields power with a tyrannical and totalitarian disposition. Nimfa's control of power describes the Foucauldian stance on the vertical dimension of power. To Foucault, power in a Marxist sense is limited to a few people (Jessop 2014:5). In other words, there is a limited amount of power in the society which can only be held by one person or a group at a time. Thus, the person or group always exercises power within the confines of the ruling class. In this respect, Foucault's argument is fashioned on the principle that the person wielding power exercises it to subvert and exploit the masses. It is on the basis of this, that the people of Gwangtim expressed their disdain and disenchantment for Nimfa's brand of leadership. While Nimfa is busy orchestrating power in the way he knows best, Alhaji Dampara Danmatsi, the Emir of Karara, schemes a plan to annex Gwangtim as part of his new territory. For "he had watched the village grow from a few huts to over one thousand. As it grew, so did his interest, until interest became obsession. Then, he had asked to see the "head" (11). This is a statement on the kind of contriving of power and tussles obtainable within the political class in Nigeria.

To accomplish the above realization, Alhaji Danmatsi decides to deviously court Nimfa's attention. He increases his visit to Nimfa's palace often bringing with him beautiful and rare gifts. Nimfa views with suspicion Alhaji Danmatsi's gifts to him. Even though he accepts



a few of the gifts, he turns down Alhaji Danmatsi's expensive Turkey mats. To Nimfa, the mat is a symbolic form of hegemony and subversion. To him, it is Alhaji Danmatsi's subtle attempt to woo him into a kind of submission to his wimps and caprices. Nimfa senses from the outset that the mats were a subtle kind of domination that is hegemonic and tries to reject it. For this reason, Alhaji Danmatsi becomes livid and irked. His is irritated for "Nimfa accepted all the gifts, but rejected the prayer mats, to Alhaji's shock and embarrassment. Alhaji Danmatsi felt irritated. His pride was badly hurt"(11 - 12). At this level, Johnson explores how the dominant class negotiates power in Nigeria. In short, the writer sees power as sovereignty. He is interested in the kind of power that occurs within the confines of those at its echelon. In other words, Johnson examines a centralized kind of power and its consequences for the dominant class in Nigeria. For Johnson, power in this sense is possessed or can be possessed by a few people.

In view of this, Johnson confines to Gramsci's state apparatus and its internal mechanisms when he furthered the experiences of the duo in the novel. Using the instruments of the state, Alhaji Danmatsi begins to wax in political strength. For:

With no known root in the land, Alhaji Danmatsi had grown steadily in power and influence. Local chiefs bowed to him, and many literarily worshipped him. His influence with the government had also increased overtime, to the extent that he could threaten to remove a local chief from office at will, if the chief did not do as he wanted (12).

Alhaji Danmatsi's continuous political growth and relevance within Gwangtim community were inspired by his enormous wealth. His strive for power along personal interest paved way for his popularity to the extent that people in the community began to use his "connections" in government and state level. They saw him as a man who wielded so much weight that he moved so freely through the villages of the land as if he was an ancestor spirit. More so, with time "even

the chiefs stopped grumbling and were willing to yield to his authority over them" (13). How the elites, Nimfa and Alhaji Danmatsi, acquire power and the consensual submission of the very people who are dominated is a phenomenon Gramsci (1971) refers to as "hegemony" (30). Hegemony in this sense operates in a way that the dominated consciously and unconsciously acts in accordance to the dictates of the dominant. Thus, Johnson's exploration of Marxist model of power that is predominantly anchored on class domination is an attempt by the writer to show how this dimension of power can be repressive. Johnson embodies in these narrative voices how power operates through representation by law. It is no wonder therefore, to forge the frontiers of power, Alhaji Danmatsi "a man whom Nimfa had crushed not long before, was the same man to whom Nimfa had to seek support for his ambition" (13). The interplay of power between Nimfa and Alhaji Danmatsi in Gwangtim and the twist associated with their relationship are representative of the kind of intrigues and complications enmeshed in the political process and the political landscape of Nigeria.

These intrigues, subtle power play, power tussle and power shifts within the circle of the elites can also be situated within Olusegun Adeniyi's *Power, Politics and Death* which is the writer's front-row account of Nigeria under late president Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The text is an account of the political drama in Nigeria. Such drama within Nigeria political terrain is what Abubakar Aliyu Lima (2019) refers to as "drama staged in the mighty name of partisan politics". Again, such theatrics by some dramatist personas on the stage of absurdity is better branded as "political tragic-comedy" in Liman's words. Thus, power dichotomy is succinctly apprehended in the power struggle between Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Vice President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Given the tension generated in the Nigerian polity by Yar'Adua's long absence from the country on the occasion of ill-health and subsequent treatment abroad, it was much speculated that a "leadership vacuum" had been created.

With the foregoing, Vice President



Jonathan's political antics to clutch political power became visibly written on the wall. The judicial maneuverings to compel President Yar'Adua to transmit a written declaration to the National Assembly under section sections 5(1) and 148(1) of the Nigerian constitution to enable him, Jonathan, exercise the executive powers vested in the president in the absence of the president became the order of the day. Adeniyi recounts Jonathan's attempts to negotiate a space within power in the absence of his boss, President Yar'Adua, when he got a court pronouncement that the VP could in fact act for the president without any letter from the president. To Adeniyi, it "didn't require any investigation to ascertain the brains behind this whole judicial maneuverings" (199). Clearly, Adeniyi interrogates how power is aspected within the terrain of sovereignty. The capacity of the elites in Nigeria to negotiate control within the space marks the very condition of power. In fact, Greenblatt observes that "power in this context is the attempt by the dominant order to generate subversion for its own use" (8). In other words, Adeniyi's *Power, Politics and Death* is an exploration of how the ruling class in Nigeria subverts and maintains control of power in the society.

It is worthy to note, that Jonathan like Alhaji Danmatsi in Johnson's *Deeper into the Night*, began to grow steadily in power and influence once President Yar'Adua was away for treatment in Saudi Arabia. Many pro-Jonathan rallied around him with deliberate political move to install him as president. This situation was vividly captured by Adeniyi when he averred that "some 41 politicians led by a former President of the Senate, Senator Anyim Pius Anyim, and his deputy, Senator Ibrahim Mantu, called on Yar'Adua to urgently transmit a letter of his incapacitation to the National Assembly to salvage the nation's democracy from danger" (212). The position of the pro-Jonathan group was what John Campbell (2010) described as "elite maneuvering and bargaining"(24), which has become part and parcel of Nigeria's political culture.

In a similar fashion, President Yar'Adua

like Nimfa in Johnson's *Deeper into the Night* viewed with suspicion Jonathan's political move. It is for this reason that the President, his handlers and the pro-Yar'Adua group successfully resisted the idea of the pro-Jonathan group to send a delegation to Saudi Arabia to visit Yar'Adua as well as the motion to invite the CPP Dr. Salisu Banye to come home to brief the Senate on Yar'Adua's condition. Senate President Mark, a pro-Yar'Adua, adeptly ensured that the motion to visit Yar'Adua did not see the light of day. In short, he practically in Adeniyi's words "staved off attempts by some senators citing constitutional points of orders to raise Section 143 (on impeachment for gross misconduct of being away from his duty post for more than 42 days) and 144 (on incapacitation)" (212). By this "elite maneuvering" the Senate President, David Mark, was biding time to truncate Vice President Jonathan's ambition of becoming the president in absence of President Yar'Adua. From the foregoing, Adeniyi like Johnson interrogates the tension associable with the complicated structure of power in Nigeria. The writer is obviously in the know of what Greentblatt succinctly (1982) refers to as the "contradictions within the structure of power" (87). He therefore describes the dominant class in Nigeria as one that is always on the verge of negotiating and exercising power.

Articulating the Horizontal Model of Power and the Nigerian Experience

While there is a kind of power that functions within the vertical terrain, there is yet another that operates within the horizontal. By horizontal model of power, Foucault (1982) refers to the kind of power that can be located within the space of the weak or the dominated in the society. This brand of power is concerned with how the voiceless in the society negotiate and use power especially within their space. In other words, how the powerless negotiate a space within domination is the core of the horizontal vintage of power. On this view, Johnson's *Deeper into the Night* and Adeniyi's *Power, Politics and Death* are the writers' exploration of the New Historicist horizontal model of power, which Foucault refers to as the "micro-politics of



power” (9). These artistic works engage a broader dimension of power beyond the vertical model and the complex relationship that is embedded in it. The texts resort to the horizontal or micro dimension of power to contend that power is not always implicated only in the terrain of sovereignty instead power is distributed throughout social relations.

Schematically, Foucault (1975) contends that “power is a dispersed capillary woven into the fabric of the entire social order” (136). Foucault’s emphasis here is that power within the Nigerian context is expressed through different channels and not necessarily limited to the dominant political class only. In essence, *Deeper into the Night* and *Power, Politics and Death* are Johnson’s and Adeniyi’s attempts at interrogating the different layers of power beyond the boundaries of power as sovereignty, to something more amorphous. By doing so, the writers encapsulate within their works instructive attempts to contest and re-conceptualize the notion of power and how this purview facilitates an understanding of the many influences that have contributed in determining Nigeria’s democratic existence. The texts are therefore, a symbolic affirmation of the complex nature of power, its complexities, and its dynamics and how all these are conveyed in the characters the writer weave in their works.

In *Deeper into the Night*, Johnson draws from the multi-faceted experiences and activities of Mamzhi and the vigilante group he formed in Gwangtim to illustrate how power is always in circulation throughout social relations. Mamzhi who returned from Jos had witnessed series of violence meted out on people in the guise of ethnic cleansing and had also “learnt many things from his involvement in the crisis in Jos, from tactics to hardware manufacture” (159). He brings to Gwangtim his knowledge and experience to establish deadly vigilante groups known to the community as “The Group” a more dangerous arm of the mother group popularly known as “Salvation Army” and a sister group also known as the “Smash Group”. Initially, the responsibility of these vigilante groups was to ward off invaders and any form of security threat

to the community. Mamzhi and the members of these individual groups save Gwangtim on different occasions of grave crises to great admiration. His image “loomed over every house like a ghost. He was feared, respected and worshipped”(142). Gradually, admiration turns into hero-worship by the villagers who were blind to the growing vices that Mamzhi and his members pick with their increasing acquired power. Mamzhi believes that;

These things that are happening are just the beginning. From all indications there will be more wars. Don’t forget that I returned from the city not too long ago. I saw things, and I heard things in the city. I saw plain, naked wickedness; I saw brutality against the meek and weak. There are wicked people around, and we must counter wickedness with greater wickedness, if we must survive. Violence begets violence, and force must be met with greater force. That is my philosophy (157)

Mamzhi and his group’s philosophy negate the values of the land he claims to protect. Through the mechanisms of The Group, the Salvation Army and the Smash Group, he becomes excessively obsessed with power and becomes even more powerful than Nimfa, the leader of Gwangtim community. He begins to violate the norms and traditions of the land along with his members to meet his whims. Mamzhi’s acquisition and expression of power (as an ordinary citizen of Gwangtim) along with The Group, the Salvation Army and the Smash Group, is in consonance with what Foucault refers to as how the dominated breaks rules and finds a niche somewhere within power. This tendency exemplified in the activities of Mamzhi and his group members ushered room for the havoc, carnage and unavoidable schisms that followed subsequently in the novel.

On this breath, The Group along with its sister bodies “had preceded the police and its strength and power was more recognized. In fact, it was as if there was no police at all. The police had therefore, come to fear them as they feared



armed robbers” (167). Mamzhi like the vigilante groups enjoys immeasurable popularity and unbridled control in the land. He begins to take decisions for the community without consulting with the elders and leaders of the land. His blatant disregard for the laws of his people and The Group’s subsequent willful massacre committed on the indigenous people of Gwangtim in the name of sanitizing the land of saboteurs and traitors trigger annoyance in the hearts of the people as they begin to question their growing power and domination. In short, Gwangtim people notice the destructive nature of the activities of Mamzhi, The Group, the Salvation Army and the Smash Group. For they have become “a danger to Gwangtim” (194). Going by this, Mamzhi and his group’s popularity, power and the influence they compel on the police authenticate Foucault’s notion of the centripetal relationship within the structure of power. To Johnson, even the masses have power and can sometimes use it negatively. For this reason, the dynamic relationship within the nature of power is one that is sometimes horizontal and vertical at the same time. This position is what Greenblatt (1982) considers as “the push and pull” within the structure of power or the binary oppositions within the nature of power.

While the suggestions to curb the excesses of Mamzhi and the groups are deliberated upon by the leaders of Gwangtim, some villagers suggested other serious means to nip the powers of Mamzhi, The Group, the Salvation Army and the Smash Group in the bud. In the face of these deliberations, an internal friction begins to play out within the vigilante groups that Mamzhi himself had formed. Laknap who is Mamzhi’s deputy begins to probe Mamzhi’s totalitarian and despotic brand of leadership within the group. Laknap created a faction within the groups with the likes of Binkur, Karnap, and Nanzhi in his support. With this, the relationship within the groups has been fractured.

The emergence of a new faction within the “The Group” as formed by Laknap is a testament to the fact that power is not a reserve of a person or a political class. Power is not static; instead, power is fluid and always in circulation

within the society. Also, the internal crisis within the different vigilante groups above highlights the peak of ideational and philosophical contests occasioned by the quest to acquire and exercise power by the dominated. This instance typifies what Greenblatt (1982) describes as the interplay of power within the class of the powerless. From a New Historicist angle, the sudden schism between Mamzhi and his group members as Laknap, Binkur, Karnap and Nanzhi essentially defines the conflicting character of power and how the voiceless acquire a voice by negotiating a space within domination.

Such power dynamics and its circulation can also be located within the premise of the debates generated in Olusegun Adeniyi’s *Power, Politics and Death*. The text is the writer’s attempt at probing the problematic of militancy in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. In consonance with Johnson’s perspective on the horizontal model of power, Adeniyi argues that power in Nigeria is also relational. In other words, within this dimension, power in Nigeria consists primarily not of something a person has but rather power is a matter of what people do, subsisting in their interactions with other people. Adeniyi captures this in the activities of a popular Niger Delta militant known as Henry Okah and the group he founded known as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Henry Okah’s militant activities in this area were initially believed to be a form of protest over the injustices of the Nigerian state against the Niger Delta region. Okah’s MEND claimed it was fighting for a fair share of oil revenue for the residents of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Gradually this agitation metamorphosed into criminality. Just like Mamzhi in Johnson’s *Deeper into the Night*, Okah began to act against the cause for which his militant group and the like purportedly stood for. Adeniyi avers that: “Okah was already on the security agencies’ wanted list following his alleged involvement in massive theft of arms and ammunitions from the Nigerian Army, whose officers were eager to apprehend him” (63). With his surging popularity and power, Okah had engaged the services of some Nigerian soldiers to supply to him stolen



arms and ammunitions to facilitate kidnappings, hostages and attacks on oil installations in that region. Spear heading the foregoing activities of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) were Henry Okah, the leader of this group alongside his young brothers Charles Okah and Bowei Okah under his chain of command. Within MEND were other factions led by Tompolo, Solomon Ndigbera alias Osama Bin Laden, Wisdom Okorosa and Asari Dokubo who renamed his own faction as Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and subsequently became its leader. In view of this, the groups witnessed spin-offs by radicals who claim they are agitating for independence for the region. The preceding is descriptive of Adeniyi's conviction on how power is completely ubiquitous to social networks. In clear terms, the writer is saying that the masses in Nigeria are as much products of power as they are wielders of it.

Like its sister groups, MEND became a thorn on the nation's flesh. In a show of strength and counter-strength, reports submitted by late Lt. Gen. Luka Yusuf to investigate huge theft of arms at 1 Base Ordnance Depot in Kaduna (1 BODK), revealed that Henry Okah was:

the main source of over 2000 G3 rifles, 600 AK47s and about 40 GPMGs and 2 rocket launchers that were returned to River State government. In fact, Sonny Bowei Okah admitted that he moved 1,800G3 rifles from the OSD for this exchange...The presidency, the SSS and the military have been seriously infiltrated by the militants of Niger Delta. This is a fact gathered from Sonny Bowei Okah and other civilian suspects..." (Adeniyi 2011:64).

From this submission, Henry Okah was not acting alone. His sudden acquisition of military strength and power was aided by insiders within an institution of government responsible for the security of lives and properties of the Nigerian people.

Fundamentally, the foregoing report detailed how arms and ammunitions belonging to the Nigerian Army were sold to some militants,

with the name of Henry Okah and his brother, Charles Okah featuring prominently. One of the accomplices responsible for the supply of such weaponry to the Okahs was the son of a retired Major whose last unit before retirement was 1BODK, where he was quartermaster. This retired major was the conduit for the initial set of weapons sold to the people who were stoking the Niger Delta crisis. Here, Adeniyi debunks the Gramscian notion of power as sovereignty, to describe how power does not operate only within a centralized source but how it flows from the bottom to the top. This relationship between Henry Okah, his brothers, the retired major and his accomplices is what New Historicism dubs as the centripetal relationship of push and pull within the structure of power. To a large extent, the writer depicts how the horizontal and vertical models of power are implicated in each other. He looks at power dynamics at the micro level and how they are interlaced at the macro level.

Largely, Henry Okah began to wield more power and influence on the Nigerian military because subsequent events revealed how more Nigerian soldiers became entangled in the shady business such that "some of the soldiers involved in the theft of weapons actually escorted the stolen arms in uniforms to their destination in Niger Delta" (Adeniyi 2011:63). The theft was staggering to say the least and the crime was properly organized that the investigating team could hardly establish the exact amount of arms stolen due to deliberate false accounting and destruction of stock cards by the perpetrators. In fact, in a show of shame, the major and his accomplices introduced a crafty system which involved daubing the body of the truck containing the weapons with human waste to ward off security men who might want to examine it out of curiosity and suspicion. In this respect, Henry Okah's activities with the Nigerian military are symbolic of the writer's conviction that power is de-centered and plural. The writer appropriates the Foucauldian notion of how power is diffused throughout the social order, constituting individual subjectivities, colonizing the body itself, utilizing its forces while inducing obedience and conformity, to describe how one



man especially from a dominated class, could subject an institution of government to his whims.

Conclusion

Taken overall, *Deeper into the Night* and *Power, Politics and Death* are Johnson's and Adeniyi's ways of focusing on the different histories on power in Nigeria especially from the New Historicist perspective. The juxtaposition of these texts (literary and non-literary) clearly justifies the New Historicist principle that a work of art is not an autonomous body of fixed meaning that should be read in isolation, but represents a diversity of dissonant voices and unresolved conflicts that must be interrogated in relation to other cultural texts (Gallager 2000:5). In a Greenblattian sense, these writers are saying that the cultural and political space in Nigeria are made of divergent groups and as such the experiences of the group at the margins are just as relevant as those of others at the center. For this

reason, these writers deliberately create characters that are symbolic in their depiction of the many layers of power, mainly as found within the post independence Nigeria. Thus, the concurrent reading of *Deeper into the Night* and *Power, Politics and Death* facilitates both writers' attempts at challenging the conventional wisdom on the one dimensional nature of power as found in the circle. Through the New Historicist tenet of co-texting, both writers works attempt to correct the impression that power within the Nigerian polity deals simply with sovereignty and as such it is one dimensional. To these writers, such misconception has contributed in frustrating the understanding of Nigeria's democratic space. To this end, they argue that even though the dominant class in Nigeria negotiates power within its structures, the dominated also negotiate and use power good or bad.

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