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African Development: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This paper looks at how African countries have been dribbled by the two ideological blocs-capitalist and socialist– all in search for ideal path to development. Their dissatisfaction with these two contending and often conflicting politico-economic prescriptions (path of capitalism and path of socialism) for development led scholars, intellectuals, leaders and policy-makers, and analysts in the Third world, which Africa constitutes a part, to come up with the idea of ‘delinking’ from the international capitalist system. Essentially in this paper, delinking means the breakaway of this group of countries from the imbalanced international capitalist system in order to develop. Various approaches of development are discussed. The paper also discusses ways through which African states are exploited and how these states react to this unequal relationship. The paper, then, visits the various strands of arguments for delinking. The findings reveal that African states need not delink, but remain within, and adjust to, the global capitalist system just like South Korea, India and Brazil. Secondly, African leadership has a very important role in Africa’s development and otherwise. Finally, ideology and language also plays vital role in this same respect.

Key Words: Africa, Capitalism, Development, Globalization.

Introduction: Post independence euphoria by Africans did not last long because most of the policies for economic development could not translate into economic prosperity. Since that period, although African nationalist campaigned against colonial exploitation in pre-independence era, most African states have attempted either socialism, capitalism or have mixed both systems as roadmap to development. Because of the inadequacies of these two economic systems to Africa’s developmental pursuit, African scholars, intellectuals and leaders have given various theoretical and historical explanations as to the reasons for the region’s economic stagnation and backwardness, and based on these justifications, they proffered solutions to Africa’s development conundrum.

We shall use these theoretical and historical approaches to explore the various arguments (and their strands) about Africa’s development and underdevelopment as situated in capitalism and imperialism. The unequal nature of the relationship between African countries and their metropolitan overlords will be discussed. Further, issues of continuous dependence (financial, economic, trade) and debts will be visited. An attempt shall also be made at examining the African response to this unequal association which, according to some scholars, will not end unless by “breaking away” (Rodney, 1972: viii) or by “delinking” (Frank, 1966) these countries from the international capitalist system.

Similarly, the paper will discuss Africa’s institutional responses to these lopsided relations in terms of regional integration institutions like OAU (now AU), ECOWAS, SADC; forums and

conferences in international organizations like the UNCTAD, G-77; and continental initiatives such as the NEPAD. Finally, the role of globalization in African affairs will be examined. The “new scramble for Africa” will be detailed.

In doing so, we will raise and possibly, answer, the following questions: what are the reasons advanced for Africa’s economic quandary and mess? What are the various prescriptions offered as solutions to African economic jam? Finally, which of these prescriptions will give better answers to the question of Africa’s politico-economic crisis? In other words, should Africa isolate its economy from the world capitalist system? These questions would be treated by reviewing the debates on Africa’s underdevelopment.

Conceptualization: Development, like other social science concepts, has defied a single, generalized or universally accepted definition. While some scholars see it as modernization and westernization, others see as economic growth and progress, and other groups view it as availability of infrastructure. But for the purpose of this paper, development can be seen as a qualitative change in the living condition of members of a society.

Africa is a continent perceived to be poor. But actually it is made poor by the dishonest and insincere activities its leaders (including the colonialists) and their cronies. Its share of international trade is quite unimpressive and it is plagued by deadly diseases (like HIV/AIDS, Ebola Virus). The continent is also ridden by political and ethno-religious conflicts which claim many lives.

Capitalism emerged as a system of production in the 19th Century Europe. It focused on individual ownership of the means of production and distribution at the level of industry. That is, it developed from simple commodity production to expanded commodity production and finally to the stage of monopoly. Through the mechanism of unequal trade in goods and conquests, the merchants gathered sufficient capital and started to engage in commodity production.

African Development in Theory: For the purpose of this paper, we adopt the world-system theory which, as elaborated by Wallerstein, presupposes that the “unit of analysis for macro social inquiry” in the modern world is neither class, nor state, but the larger historical system. Wallerstein’s proposition divides the world according “division of labor” into three “hierarchically organized tiers”.

The first tier comprises the advanced capitalist nations. Initially, Western European countries form this category but afterward it increased to include the Japan and the United States. The second tier is the “periphery”. The nations that form this bloc include those of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. These countries are part of this category either as a result of colonial exploitation or as a result of their failure to get through the competition during the early years of capitalism. Third is the “semi-periphery”, comprising of those states and regions that were previously in the core and are moving down in this hierarchy. They consist of those nations, like Italy, India, China, Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa as well as the Asian Tigers that were before in the periphery but now rising to the metropolitan status (Wallerstein, 2004).

Wallerstein (2004) asserts that for “a particular state to remain in the core sector is not beyond challenge”. The competition to the pinnacle of development is an ongoing, recurring process in which those at the top may fall to give way for others to get to the top (Wallerstein, 1974:350). The rise of China, in world economics and politics is a good indicator.

With the aid of this theory, we hope to examine and analyze the politics of delinking and otherwise in relation to Africa’s development question.

Development and what is not in Africa: The concepts of development and underdevelopment have generated a lot of attention in the writings, speeches, commentaries, and even, artistic works, of scholars, leaders, analysts and artists all over the world. These views cut across different paradigms: from classical/modernization school to the radical under-development theories, to the dependency approach and finally, those theories which seek to marry the first three theories.

Classical or Modernization School: Developed by Western social scientists like Rostow (1966), World Bank (1981), Sandbrook (1985) and others, this theory gives explanations of Third World underdevelopment. The crux of its argument lies in the following assumption: i) that African societies have in them values that are against modernism (development) and, therefore, in order to develop, they must drop their cultural values and embrace Western European values; ii) that there are stages of development which every society must pass through, iii) that African political institutions and political culture and socialization are weak, and in order for Africa to develop, it must strengthen these institutions by embracing liberal democracy.

Rostow (1960) proposes the “take-off theory” which is a five stage plan capitalist development. According to him, capitalist development starts from primitive or traditional stage through the transitional stage, Take-off stage, Drive to maturity stage, and finally Consolidation stage.

According to this school, internal politics and other realities such as long years of authoritarian rule and the absence of liberal democracy in Africa is the reason for the region’s backwardness as political corruption, client politics, political purges and rehabilitations, succession maneuvers and many other phenomena distract and disrupt state economic policies (Clapham, 1982; Jackson and Rosberg, 1984).

Although these group of theories hold water, to some extent they are grossly deficient by completely ignoring the external influences on development and otherwise of African societies.

Underdevelopment Theories/UDT or Delinking school: This group of theories is popularized in works such as Rodney (1972), Ake (1982), Nnoli (1981) and Offiong (1981) among others. Their argument is that African underdevelopment is as a result of the nature of relations between Africa and the advanced capitalist countries distinguished by exploitation and marginalization in all spheres and that the only way Africa can make any meaningful progress, is radically “break away” or “delink” from the capitalist orbit. As Claude Ake pointed out:

The present conditions of the Third World countries are not in the least analogous to the conditions of the industrialized countries in the earlier stages of their economic development. The present condition of the Third World is the effect of the slave trade, pillage, and unequal exchange (Ake 1982: 153).

This plunder of Africa’s resources, both human and material, from slave trade to the present are the cause of Africa’s backwardness. These according to Claude Ake, has drawn off and consumed African development.

In the preface to his famous treatise, Rodney (1972) concludes that:

African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries (Rodney, 1972: viii, emphasis mine).

From the above, Rodney (1972) concludes that unless the lopsided relations (in trade, finance) between Europe and Africa are halted, African countries will not achieve development.

Many African leaders have pointed to colonial exploitation as the direct *raison d'être* for the continents rearward. Colonial rule prevented normal socio-economic development in Africa because the Europeans regarded African economy as an appendage of their economy. That Europeans demoralized the continent by taking slaves, profits, and raw materials out of the continent, and leaving nothing in return. The only way Africa can advance is terminate this imperialistic administration.

President Ahmed Sekou of Guinea assumed this very radical view when he noted:

The relation between the degree of destitution of peoples of Africa and the length and nature of the exploitation they had to endure is evident. Africa remains marked by the crimes of the slave-traders: up to now, her potentialities are restricted by under population” (Toure, 1962:145).

Toure (1962) has held that the colonial political and economic system is imperialist and did not bring anything but division, retardation and damage to pre-colonial African economy, politics and society. He further attacked the Europeans' references to their colonial charities as “dubious” excuses to destroying Africa's centuries-old and promising political, economic and social past. According to Toure (1962),

The colonial system took our goods at very paltry prices and sold them at a very high price. The profits did go to the producers who were the real creators, the true owners of the products; they went through many middlemen and into the cash boxes of the colonialists... This is why no colonized country has yet attained a social level comparable with what are considered the lowest levels in Europe (Toure, 1962).

All these, according to Toure, are the nature of European colonialism and the reasons why Africa must break away from this global system of exploitation.

Other African nationalists also pointed to colonial rule as source of Africa's predicament. This can be located in the speeches and writing of Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikwe in which he articulated that colonialism interrupted African development that started in the pre-colonial period making references to pre-colonial societies in Nigeria area.

In his words, Azikwe (1962) says:

Slavery played its shameful role in depopulating Africa; capitalism it of its wealth; colonialism deprived it of its birthright; and imperialism emasculated its will to live as a human being (sic) and to enjoy the fair bounties of the good earth” (Azikwe 1962).

To him and many Africans, the real reasons for the colonizing the continent was to take advantage of, and steal, Africa's resources, and not the selfless duty to develop African condition which they claimed was why they entered Africa.

Applying his thesis to the wider Third World (which Africa constitutes a part), Andre Gunder Frank, a Latin American Economist, popularized the concept of delinking in his book: ***Latin America: A Comparison Between Chile and Brazil***, written in 1966. He sees “development and underdevelopment” as the same and takes the world as unit of analysis by geographically dividing into two parts: one part, which is the developed, is on the Northern Hemisphere; the other; underdeveloped part, in the Southern Hemisphere. According to Frank (1966), “Development at one end leads to underdevelopment in the other end.” He dismissed further the argument of the Modernist transitional stages of development stating that: “The now developed were never underdeveloped, though they may have been undeveloped.”

His three hypotheses try to explain that development and underdevelopment are due to certain contradictions: 1) “the contradictions of expropriation and appropriation of economic surplus” by which he means the absence of appropriation of this economic surplus in the Third World” blocks capitalist development; 2) “if strong metro-satellite links extend underdevelopment, weak metro-satellite relations generate structural underdevelopment and allow further for more possibility of economic development”.

In cumulative terms, these theories have not led Africa and the rest of the Third World out of their predicament. They do not offer a fundamental explanation of the current development problems in Africa; they are usually silent about the continent’s internal contradictions. Consequently, what these theories provide is inadequate to formulating appropriate and lasting policies and strategies to address Africa’s development dilemma.

African Efforts for Development: African countries have sought development through various forums, conferences and initiative. For the purpose of this paper, we would look at the continental and regional organizations, international conferences, forums and initiatives (OAU, ECOWAS, UNCTAD, G-77 and NEPAD) where African countries have tried to pursue their economic agenda as a whole.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): This series of conferences were basically concerned with the need to increase the prices of primary commodities in the international market just like how the prices of crude oil skyrocketed in the early 1970s (Jones, 1983). For the first time in the history of international trade and commerce, African and other Third World countries have a presiding majority in world economic relations. As Jones (1983) observes:

The aggregation of interests of its large membership into small conflicting views gave the Group of 77 (now 154) which included all independent African states, Latin American Republic and Asian countries. This group has 47 seats while the group of developed countries which numbered on 29 and 19 seats (Jones, 1983).

This gave the African and other Third World nations a permanent voting majority in UNCTAD, whose deliberations and agreements are used by the UN and its agency for global trade and commerce, the World Trade Organization (WTO). Despite this majority, African and other Third World countries could not get the “re-structuring of the WTO” membership which was established in late 1940s and which has never been favorable to this group of countries.

New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD): NEPAD reflects the ‘post-Washington consensus model of development’. The debate within this model is no longer about whether the state should intervene in the development process. It is rather about the mechanisms of such intervention and the best relationship between the state, the private sector and civil society for achieving development. Nevertheless Africa is still in a need of a new development model that can provide a partnership framework between the three main development actors. In Nigeria, for example, when the state withdrew petroleum subsidy, the Nigerians all over the country protested over it. Although NEPAD recorded some success, it is still contentious it can give an effectual model for Africa’s development. This position is supported in Paul Muftwang in a paper titled: The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD): An African Renaissance or “Talking Shop? *” where he stated: “in its own theoretical framework NEPAD seeks such a model, but can NEPAD really provide an effective model of development in Africa?” (Muftwang, 2007: 5). He is skeptical about the commitment of African leaders as well as the pledge of support from the international community.

‘Where to’ for Africa?

Analyzing this question is a very uncomfortable ground to tread as one must have to answer series of subsidiary questions. The first is whether Africa should isolate or to use Frank (1966) term “delink” itself from the rest of the world. Second issue to be looked at is that unless Africa’s internal inconsistencies are addressed, development for the continent will continue to be shambles. And finally, African countries must be economically competitive in the current trend of global interconnectedness and interdependence in order to excel.

When talking or debating why Africa should delink from the international capitalist system in the 21st Century, one has to consider, very seriously, the following: 1) development does not occur in isolation; 2) African predicament is as a result of the collection of many factors -colonialism, ill-advised by Breton Woods Institutions, political corruption, political instability, multi-national corporations, lack of effective regional integration, lack of democratic practices, lavish spending of African rulers, currency disparity, and civil strife among other things; and 3) the reality of and the extent to which globalism or globalization has joined together Africa’s economies with world economies.

It is an undisputable fact that development cannot arise when a country or group of countries isolate itself or themselves from the international system. The disparities between and among nations in natural endowments make it imperative for interdependence among them.

Samuel Huntington (1999) tried to justify the development gaps between various countries by some cultural characteristics and values of their respective peoples. His analysis reveal that cultural “disparities” between people that lead to development. Huntington (1999) gave "South Koreans valued thrift, savings and investment, hard work, discipline, and education” as what (together with exports of finished products and foreign investments) boosts their per capita GNP while other cultures, like Africa, "have different values".

But if a Korean culture was at play here, why is it that North Korea is less developed and South Korea developed since five decades ago they were same Korea? “Did North Koreans develop new genes after the separation?” Given this, it has to be admitted that the current state of affairs in Africa is due to a multitude of factors, historical and political. There is no denying the fact that colonialism did have a serious retarding impact on Africa. The same goes for neo-colonial activities that former colonial powers engaged in after independence. But fifty years of self-government should have greatly reduced, if not eliminated, the effects of these systems of exploitation. Africa was divided into colonies and territories owned by European states and from which European corporations took out whatever resources they wanted for their own prosperity, leaving all Africans in the deliberate poverty and neglect now called *underdevelopment*.

Why has Africa refused to develop? Until when we answer this question and proffer right solutions to the malaise, Africa will keep sinking in backwardness.

Political Corruption: This is a serious phenomenon in African politics that has a direct consequence on the economy. Corruption is a relative term used to indicate immoral acts or behaviors in public sphere. In Africa, corruption has many facets that include outright stealing, bribes, favors, nepotism, gifts, misconduct of office, to mention a few.

Outright stealing of public funds is so prevalent in Africa that it is ‘business as usual’ for successive regimes to amass public wealth and stash them in European and American banks. African leaders like President Joseph Mobutu Seseseko was reputed to be "richer than his State (Zaire)"

(Jackson and Rosberg, 1984; Ghislain, 1979), General Sani Abacha who left money running into billions of Dollars of Nigeria's exchequer coffers in Swiss Banks, and many others who have stole their countries wealth and kept in foreign banks. This is what made Kaoje (2009) to remark that: "The ideology of the ruling African elites is 'chop-I-chop'", meaning that 'after you, comes me' to steal. Written elsewhere, the conclusion that can be drawn is that African leaders' corruption is another plot by the Western World to stagnate the industrial and economic development of African states because European nations can direct their banks to not take funds suspected to be proceeds of "state robbery".

According Elizabeth Blunt (2002), corruption in Africa was said to cost the continent nearly 150 billion Dollars. Corruption and embezzlement of state resources belong to the worst examples of immoral practices of political societies in Africa and places the continent at the fore front of the world corruption league table (Blunt, 2002).

In a Report, Stephane Ballong (2009) reveals that:

In total, the French police identified in 2007 during a preliminary investigation, 39 properties and 70 bank accounts belonging to Omar Bongo and his family, 24 properties and 112 bank accounts held by the family Sassou-Nguesso, as well as limousines bought by the Obiang family. The judicial inquiry could see all the alleged ill-gotten assets confiscated and returned to the people of the countries concerned (www.Afrik.com).

Political Instability and Insecurity: From 1960 to 1990 African countries experienced political instability such as coup d'états, civil wars, and politically-instigated ethnic-religious crisis, which have retarded Africa's development in no small proportion in many African countries including the two Congos, Uganda, Nigeria, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia among others. Current security challenges in Africa make life dangerous and miserable. From transnational terrorism to ethnic militia, political assassinations, armed robbery, human and drugs trafficking, and many other vices are on the ascendancy. In Nigeria for example, the Boko Haram, which calls for a theocracy in Nigeria, has defied the Nigerian military and other security agencies. They waste many lives and destroyed properties. The same is with the Al-Shabab in Somalia, the militants in Mali. Going by the law that insecurity drives and scares away foreign investments, development in Africa will continue to be stagnant unless something serious is done to arrest the situation.

Ethnic-cleansing has emerged in countries like Kenya in 2007, which over 1,000 people died at the hands of fellow citizens, nationals and people of the same territorial boundaries. It is ethno-religious strife that led to the creation of South Sudan. The South Sudanese predicament is even worse off as new minorities and uncalled-for socio-economic adversities have now been created than it was in the Republic of Sudan. In Rwanda, close to one million lives were lost in that ethnic extermination conflict and this is not talking about the displaced. In Zimbabwe during the 1980s, a similar episode occurred when the discrimination of Shona and Ndebele tribal groups re-emerged resulting in an unfortunate civil unrest in the northern part of the country.

Although colonial segregation of African societies and their careless boundary demarcations, which they used to divide and rule the people, are partly the reasons for these crises, five decades of nation-building should have divest Africans from such jam and fused the peoples together.

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP): Western financial institutions grants and loans are a double-edged sword. African leaders ventured into this business without full knowledge of it. When their countries cannot repay the loans, they implement series of reform advice (currency

devaluation, downsizing public expenditure etc.) by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Many promising African nations, notably Nigeria, saw their various economies crashing due to inability to repay loans.

Globalization has been known to hold both potential benefits and risks for the economic and political development of states. The extent of integration is clearly reflected in the rising importance of world trade and capital flows in the world economy. An increasingly large share of world GDP is generated in activities linked directly or indirectly to international trade. And there has been a phenomenal growth in cross-border financial flows, particularly in the form of private equity and portfolio investment, compared with the past.

Globalization is an outcome of extension and deepening of trade and financial bond among countries. That is, open economies are more likely to be successful than closed ones. Hence, the current trend of liberalization by countries through macroeconomic policies that create conducive atmosphere for foreign investment.

Greater access to world markets has allowed countries to exploit their comparative advantages more intensively, while opening their economies to the benefits of increased international competition. The rapid increase in capital and private investment flows have also increased the resources available to countries, and accelerated the pace of their development beyond what they could otherwise have achieved.

Globalization is a double-edged sword for Africa. This is due to the fact that most African states have very weak economy and therefore, their share of international trade is almost always in deficit. And in order to benefit from globalization, a country's economy must be able to compete globally.

Conclusion: The time for Africa to initiate its industrial and economic development through the efforts and initiatives of African states and citizens has dawned. The habit of borrowing and then begging these loans to be written off or insolvency declarations together with the custom of blaming Colonialism, Neo-colonialism and multinationals should be cast off. African countries should focus their political, economic and intellectual resources in rethinking new strategies and implementation plans for sustainable and equitable economic and social development. Africa has the potential to stand on its own feet to initiate its industrial and economic development agenda. Based on the above stated imperative, Africa needs to look on the following areas seriously: its past history, overhaul its leadership, agricultural and industrial development, education and attitudinal change through continental orientation.

Africans must know their History. That is, the African must go back to history to understand who he was. The great Italian historian, Cicero, stated that: "A man without history is a man adrift. A society without history is a society adrift." Therefore, as Africans, we should not be ignorant of the fact that, 5000 years before now, our forefathers had fascinating thoughts and practices on politics, economy and society, that led the Greek philosopher Plato, to remark about: "these people (Africans) who have traditions 2000 years older than us (the Greeks)" (Nnoli, 1983). We need nobody to remind us of our place in world affairs. It is left for us to bend on research and hard work in order to tap these potentials for greatness which our forefathers utilized ages ago. This is why J. E. Casely-Hayford noted that:

Before, even, the British came into relations with our people; we were a developed people, having our own institutions, having our own ideas of government (Casely-Hayford, 1922).

We must appreciate these strides Africans had accomplished. We must divorce our minds from the psychological entrapment that we, Africans, are inferior and deficient race. In our opinion, this is where "delinking" is needed badly. That is, acknowledging the ability of the African, and that was why Sir Nnamdi Azikwe recommends that:

Hence I proposed the thesis that mental emancipation was necessary for the mis-educated African to be re-educated and be politically reascent" (Azikwe, 1970).

This is because for too long many Africans have been groping in the dark thinking and behaving like Europeans while being Africans. Fela Ransome Kuti made similar observation about "Lady" who is the refined African lady that is European in thoughts and appearances, and the "woman" who depicts a typical African woman in wrapper and is proud to be an African. Further, Kuti remarks "Body for Africa, mind for Europe". That is, his "lady's" mind is in Europe while her body in Africa.

Leadership is one of the greatest challenges facing Africa. It is very fundamental for the betterment of man and sustainable development of African continent. At the present, "everybody agrees that there is less of it (leadership) than there used to be" (Bennis and Nanus, 2007). Rotberg (2003) considers leadership in Africa as thus: "leadership in Africa is typified more by disfiguring examples – the Idi Amin and Robert Mugabes - than by positive role models such as Nelson Mandelas and Seretse Ghamas" (Rotberg, 2003) and the Ahmadu Bellos.

Richard Dowden (2009: xv) and Chinua Achebe (1983) alluded to this fact that Africa's failed and unsustainable leadership style is the main cause of her "tormented history".

Therefore, Africa needs a committed and principled leadership; leadership that has vision and knows what it wants for Africans; leadership that has convictions of transforming Africa's "mirror into a doorway"; leadership with mission of bringing real positive changes for the continent so that people will benefit.

Revival of Agriculture and Industrialization should be give special priority: Agriculture, as the back born of every economy, must be given due attention by African governments. But since the 1970s, agriculture, especially commercial agriculture, has decreased, largely due to the petro-dollar earnings by some African countries like Nigeria, Angola, and also due to lack of attention by African leaders. In northern Nigeria for example, there are over 600 untapped dams. The land is very fertile and this is, probably, what made one economic analyst to ask: "Is Kwara the new Zimbabwe?" due to e at which foreign farmers are grabbing lands to farm. If we can feed ourselves, we will then venture into the next level of development which is industrialization.

Education is one of the most vital elements in human life. Once a people are educated, they are emancipated. One major difference between Africa and the developed world is the literacy level which is affected greatly by education. In today's world, and Africa, one needs some form of education to get a job. In other words, education makes people employable and a larger working class is produced at the same time. Government generates more revenue in form of income tax, which goes back to the economy.

Attitudinal Change for Development: According to Shettima Ali Monguno, "Africa, in particular Nigeria, is the land of greed" (Monguno, 2009). Most of Africa's potentials are wasted by the gluttony of African leaders and the people against one another. Therefore, in order to get out of the mess, that is backwardness, African leaders and the peoples must remove themselves from the ring

of ethnic or sectional loyalty. We have to detribalize ourselves by playing cards with every element of the population.

Based on the above, denying that colonialism and the current economic dictates of liberalism has very "dislocative" and irreversible consequences on Africa would amount to utter underestimation; it is a stark "intellectual indolence" to confine the African predicament to only colonial and neo-colonial domination.

Very finally, it is the opinion of this paper that Africa should face reality squarely by opening up to the international capital and investments, with all the risks it poses, and then devise mechanisms to control of what comes into Africa.

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