

Analysis on Portrayal of Wisdom in Customary Religious Thought in Ethiopian Pedagogic Policy and Practices

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Abstract

This research dealt with assessing the portrayal of Oromo Belief system in both liberal and secular educational provisions from the past to the present in order to mark the place of ritual and cultural endowments attached to Oromo Governance and Belief Systems.. Contextual discourse analysis was used in order to intensify the gap between religio-cultural and pedagogic/ andragogic practices. The documents were selected through criterion sampling technique. Units of analysis were research articles and textbooks units. In the study, the findings indicated that, the Oromo religious and cultural endowments were regarded as ungodly and archaic where Orthodox Christian and Islam Religions were considered more advanced. In the feudal regime, the Orthodox Christian Religion dominated almost all views as a state-religion. In the socialist-era, the Marxist-Leninist Ideology overshadowed all religious thoughts excepting Orthodox Christian Religion and Islam to some extent. In the current federal system, all religions are said to be developing taken the system of education as secular and non-existence of any state-religion. Yet, the educational values of religion, especially indigenous religious views such as of Waaqeffannaa of Oromo and notable socio-cultural institutions are, still, denigrated since they are more ceremonial than practical. To that end, the upcoming generation is more likely to be kept far away from the indigenous religion and cultural endowments.

Keywords: Oromo, Religious, Views, Pedagogic, Policy, Practices

1. Introduction

This survey basically addresses the display of Oromo religious thought in Ethiopian curricula as well as the Christian or Islam thoughts. It is evident in history that, Oromo people in Ethiopia have adopted the Semitic religions through non-peaceful means as wars drove them into division in their stronghold [1]. It is evident also that, being Christian or Islam has never put any sharp divisions among the generations of Oromo with regard to culture, language and sense of nationalism, if not for the snare of ruling agents which used to apply the "Divide and Rule" scheme by expanding sense of divisions. In spite of all divisions and exploitation by the past Christian Kingdom and of Islam, Oromo Religion has survived vanishing. However, it is largely oral in the mode of dissemination and more likely to have lost most of the novel representations [1].

With regard to education, Oromo Religion has earned very little space owing to the country's longstanding pressure over indigenous knowledge and customary resources and the subsequent tendency of the people to have considered all incoming thoughts as more

advanced and timelier. In this article, then, the representation of Oromo Religion in Ethiopian Education System will be looked into based on written historical sources, textbook survey and experiential reflection. In that, the article will have four sections: Background, Methodology, Presentation of Data and Major findings and recommendations. Oromo traditional religion is a set of belief in One God known as "Waaqa Tokkichich" the overarching reference being to the power of creation and blessings of reproduction. In the system, Oromo people take "Waaqeffannaa" or worshipping as the adoration and holistic belief in God through Monothetic faith. Man's being in the faith of Waaqeffannaa is described as Namummaa or Humanness, which is endowed only by God. Humanness according to this faith is, then, the holistic being of physique, psyche and spiritual entity guided and controlled by the Safuu or moral structure. In that moral creed, every Oromo personality holds the truth of being and living peacefully with the like human beings and nature. By and large, in Oromo closet under Waaqeffannaa, every bit of creation has due recognition. Simply stated, Oromo has a two-way creed in the belief system. One is

the vertical relation created with God, and the other is with fellow human beings and nature.

In Oromo religious thought, seasons and phenomena have got due spaces to hold. For instance, the rainy season is described as dark since people cannot move from place to place due to heavy rain and subsequent overflow of rivers. As a result, when Spring season comes, all members gather from their villages and go to the riverside to celebrate the coming of dry season. This is termed Irrecha Booqaa Birraa or the Spring Festivity. During this time, elderly people take the lead and open the festivity at the rivers and lakes where appropriate. The moment is also termed Xaddacha Saaquu or opening the court because, this time, the Oda Assembly which was interrupted due to the rainy season is opened and people from the cross-rivers sit to discuss issues. Such discussions are also led by the elderly people who lead the ceremony with blessings. Public hearings are also held under the same. The other ceremony is one held during the end of the dry season when rain is sought important. This is termed Irrecha Gaaraa or Upland Festivity. This time, people mount an upland owe sacrifices to God in order to give them rain. Elderly women have the utter most role in praying for rain as well as elderly men. It is believed that, sooner after the prayer is over, rain starts to pour down.

The third form of Oromo festivity is Irrecha Ateetee, which signifies Productivity Festival. At this ceremony two events are held. One is thanks giving for what God has given, especially when a mother who has been yearning for a baby gets one. The other prayer for some more mothers who want to get babies. They pray goddess of productivity to owe them off-spring. In Oromo belief system, spiritual endowments are guided by Ayyaana or God's Grace. In that, every person is said to have been endowed with Ayyaana, and how he/she behaves or does is deduced even from that. For instance, someone who is easily infuriated is said to have been endowed with tiger spirit. Likewise, someone who asks for support while he or she can live ably is said to have been endowed with dog's spirit. Moreover, a person with hyena's spirit does not lack things to eat and tends to share things easily. Such a system of identifying spirits is termed Ayyaana Heduu or identifying Spirit. Oromo society, overall believes in One God, the creator, replenishing and guarding God. Life is regarded as the gift of God which is provided under the auspices of Uumaa or the creator. In that, the creator formed both male and female beings for every life. The designation is in the form of Horo (the male) and Hortuu (the female) like it goes in the Bible for Adam and Ebb. Horo is said to be the ancestral father of all humans and Hortuu the ancestral mother. The related meaning for Horo and Hortuu is, therefore, taken as being the father and mother of all races and human successions.

In Oromo code of belief, the upper seat is the Sky and the footage is the earth. God is believed to have made the sky exist without any pillar, and stretched the earth without any anchor to keep to poles. God is also believed to have made rivers go without a driver and ordered the sun to rise and set without order. In reality, such fertile and indigenous sources of wisdom are not sure to have had any spots

of being represented or presented in Ethiopian education system. Yet, researches are rare to disclose whether Oromo Religious thought is clearly portrayed in the education system in the way it can develop generation's insight to use, improve and benefit from the encapsulated wisdom. In spite of the fact that, the current Ethiopian Constitution stipulates the people's rights to bring their cultures and views to light and develop, the same document blocks religious views to be detached from the education system [2]. The auxiliary policy also overruns the Oromo Religious views and of the rest people [not the core of this work anyhow] with the rationale of marking the decree that, there is no state religion.

2. Methodology of the Research

2.1 Research Approach and Design

The philosophical underpinning for this study was socio-critical view which underlines the issue of power relations within the society and interaction of race, class, gender, education, economy, religion and other social institutions that contribute to a social system [3]. This paradigm also works for analysis of the cases in Ethiopia where education as well as other political undertakings has deep stratification according to power relations [4]. Critical discourse analysis was used along with critical ethnomethodology [5]. The critical discourse analysis dealt with Oromo Religious views as related to man-to-God relation and man-to-man relation which also included spiritual and moral issues largely practiced in the society. The ethnomethodological analysis embarked upon how Oromo Religious views came to change in status as the people came to be overruled by the non-Oromo governors, and the subsequent alienation of the Oromo cultural base and religion even from educational grounds.

2.2 Contextual Description

Oromo people are one of the ethnic nationals of Ethiopia constituting almost one-third of the Ethiopian population . presenting the background of the people Wikipedia [6] states the following about Oromo people:

The Oromo people are a Cushitic ethnic group and nation native to Ethiopia who speak the Oromo language. They are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and represent 34.5% of Ethiopia's population. Oromos speak the Oromo language as their mother tongue (also called Afaan Oromoo and Oromiffa), which is part of the Cushitic branch of the Afroasiatic language family. The word Oromo appeared in European literature for the first time in 1893 and slowly became common in the second half of the 20th century. So, the reference to portrayal of Oromo Religious thought in Ethiopian curricula is an extension to the description given above. It should be noted also that, Oromo people use the Latin Alphabet terming it Qubee Afaan Oromoo or the Oromo Scripts as related to the way the language is spoken and understood.

The use of Afaan Oromo in script was initiated by Onesimos Nasib of the Matcha Oromo clan who, himself, was enslaved and taken to the port but later ransomed by some missionaries and became a preacher and translator of the bible into Afaan Oromo [7]. Perhaps, Onesimos used the Sabeian script as used in Ethiopia to reach the people with the gospel. So, all references to

Oromo in the indigenous form were presented in the Latin style and given meaning in Oromo. Data for the study were collected from books, experiential diaries of different writers and textbooks prepared to be used in Oromia (region administered by Oromo nationals ever since the downfall of the military regime). Criterion sampling technique was used to select the sources and identify the units. Units of analysis were book chapters, emphatic notes and summaries.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the research were first identified as per the pivot of the study. Then, the selected units and sub-units were checked for their pertinence. Based on the selection, careful interpretation was made on the portrayal of Oromo Religious thought into Ethiopian education of the contemporary era (1993-2020 GC).

2.4 Analysis of Oromo Belief System

This part of the chapter deals with results of review on Waaqeffannaa that signify Oromo identity and worship system, Oromo religion and centers of attention in the worship process, Oromo views of God and nature and different Gada institutions which could be the points of concern when it comes to the portrayal of Oromo traditional belief system.

2.5 Oromo Identity and Worship System

Oromo society is conscious of its cultural identity, its relationship to nature and the existence of a powerful force that regulates the connection between nature and society on the one hand, and society and God on the other [1]. Schematically, Oromo belief system depends on the existence of a strong and pure relationship between man and God wherein monotheist faith is the trend of belief. It must be noted that, Oromo society has reflection of identity that has its insight-base anchored to customary knowledge and knowledge of laws that govern the relationship between man and the almighty on the one hand and man-to-man on the other. It also marks the relations members of the society have with nature [1]. This could be portrayed as in the lines below:

Waaqa (God)!

Danda’aa oobdii bal’aa (Omnipotent being of mighty stead)

Abbaa ifaafi dukkanaa (Holder of brightness and darkness)

Isa ajjeesee **hinbaqanne** (Non-retreating heroe)

Kan dubbatee **hinkakanne** (He who doesn’t abstain on its oath)

Gur’aacha garaa garbaa (Embracer of the blue ocean)

Leemmu garaa taliilaa (Spring of pure splash)

Tokkicha maqaa dhibbaa (One having many titles).

The lines, here, denote the designation of God in the original Oromo lingua as omnipotent, owner, heroe, enthusiastic, all-governing, pure in holdings, and one with One with many ranks and titles. Oromo society gives such a portrayal of God in relation to its immediate life and the environment in which it leads life. Such a living is guided by laws and orders. Hence, knowledge of laws is also divided into the non-changing law of God with which all things and events are created and guided (immutable law), and the laws of human beings which can be changed through agreement and democratic discussion among members [1]. With that in

view, Oromo religion and political system are intertwined under the umbrella of Gada System, a self-contained system of power transfer every eight years through which generations of people are destined to play different roles as per their ages and grades [8]. Religion and religious practices also reinforce each other where the political philosophy encompasses initiation, participation, democratic power-transfer and shared political practices. This highly coincides with the nexus between social and natural laws in Oromo viewpoint.

So, Oromo identity is surrounded by three forms of ties as indicated below:

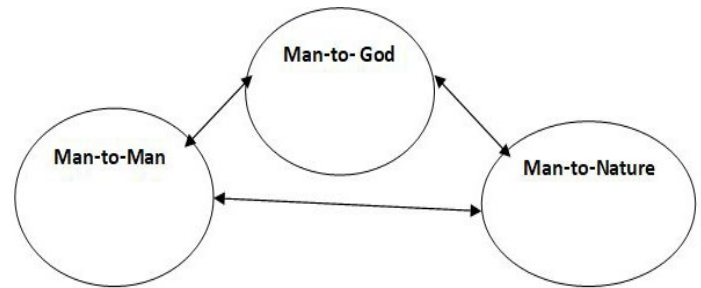


Figure 1: Tri-Format Indicator of Man’s Interaction with Nature and God

To illustrate a bit, in the first place, there is a kind of relation between man and God, which is also termed Waaqa that is all-making, superior and all-decisive. In the middle position, there is a man-to-man relation which follows from and is guided by man’s relation with God. The third is mans relation with nature or the natural environment based on the abiding of natural and social laws. Coming to Oromo belief system, Waaqeffannaa is guided by the power of revelation coming to the Qallu (Prophets) and Ayyantu (Disciples). That highly resembles the role of different prophets in the Christian denomination in guiding worship and that of disciples who assume stewardship in serving the people. They also direct human action and relationship with God through five laws [9]. These laws include Waaqeffachuu or worshipping which goes with delivery of prayer every day and every time necessary; Laguu/Lagachuu which goes with refraining things not to be done such as assassination in retributive manner, theft, eating crawling beings and the flesh of non-ruminant beings such equines.

The third pillar in the laws is Safuu which equals moral codes to respect God and the elderly, and wiseness in respecting women or men as well as the self. The Seera Safuu also guides people to respect the Qallus and the Ayyantus whenever they instruct, preach, advice, and pass by. The fourth pillar is respect and care for the Ulfoo or the respectable such as rivers and streams, mountains and hills, Odaa or oak tree which serves as a seat of assembly, the Bokkuu or the scepter as a God-ordained symbol of authority with signs put on it to represent both male and female dispositions. Dooqa or cowry and Callee or beads as signs of union with Waaqaa (God); and the thirty-three body parts of man, so far named as Horo, which means one who produces offspring [9]. Kallacha or the sign of authority held by Gada heads at the forehead, and

Caaccuu, embroidery on the dresses of the Gada heads, are also respectful.

Moreover, Siinqee as the sign of every woman's respect and Qanafaa symbol of respect for a woman in the maternity season after delivery are respectful or Ulfo. The point is that, when a woman is abused by her husband, she immediately rushes out crying whereupon the Haadha Siinqees or heads of Women in charge of making follow-up and decisions call upon all women in riots. They never get back home unless the victim gets justice. The abusing husband is punished with due decision of the Shanacha or the assembly of five households. Likewise, a woman in her maternity season is not forced to do heavy duties or beaten, whatever her errors may be. The fifth pillar in the laws is Hooda which refers to accepting God's decision as it comes down from on high such as admitting the inevitability of death when near relatives or friends die; when herds are stricken by drought or plague or lightning suddenly kills someone.

2.6 Centers of Worship in Oromo Tradition

Oromo society has certain institutions under its Gada System through which Gada rituals and religious ceremonies such as Irrecha (seasonal thanksgiving) and Ateete (Productivity ceremonies) are carried out [8]. The Oromo centers are marked by Odaa Assembly. So far, Oromo society has had five such assemblies at different locations in the south, east, west and center. Such Odaa centers are of Odaa Roobaa in Baalee Zone, at a special locality known as Gindhiir; Odaa Nabee which is located in the center around Dukam, some 31 kilometers away from Addis Ababa/ Finfinne; Odaa Bisil of Iluu-Galaan in West Shewa approximately 175 kilometers away from Addis Ababa ; Odaa Bulluq in Western Oromia, Horro-Guduruu Zone, and Odaa Bultum in the eastern verge of Oromia or Oromo Regional State, situated in Harerghe Zone. According to Shellema, Odaa or oak tree is believed to be a sacred species under which the Gada heads pass basic laws which also has the likeness of the senate hall [10]. It is a plain shade for open-air discussion which is reasonably chosen for its special features of standing drought (being evergreen). Oak tree is also preferred to have the quality of repelling poisonous beasts such as snakes, and quality to nurture other plants without harming. Odaa Assemblies, besides being held at individual locations, are also held at the team of heads when very critical decisions are required to be made or new laws are to be coded.

Such an undertaking takes place at Gumii-Gaayyoo or the general assembly of Gada heads. Where mobility creates distance, the society has the right to assume new assembly places of Odaa which represent the proximate seat. For instance, in the north, Odaa Makoodii/Garaadoo of Wollo; and Odaa Birjaa of Gujii are additional centers [10]. From the above analysis, it could ascertain that, in addition to believing in one almighty God, Oromo society some means of regulating relationships with other human beings and with nature. The trends of Seera held by Qallu and Ayyaana or prophecy held by the ministers guides the social laws of production, care for resources, defense and family life.

3. Waaqeffannaa and Oromo Institutions

Aligned with the centers of law-making that have so far been presented as Odaa Assembly, Oromo society has had different institutions designated by Bokkuu Institution , Siinqee Institution, Shanacha and Ayyaantuu just to trace a few.

3.1 The Bokkuu Institution (The Sceptre)

According to Alemayehu, Bokkuu is the sign of power possessed by Abbaa Bokkuu (the respected leaders) that are appointed for purposes of leading ceremonies, conflict resolution, defense, peace-making and related social services [8]. Having the scepter at hand is the signifier of being able to order people to do or not to do an action. According to Shellema, Bokkuu is a symbol of power for administration, setting out for defense and settling disputes [10].

3.2 The Siinqee Institution

Siinqee is a symbol of fertility, a stick which married women hold to regulate their life with and preserve their womanhood along with the right vested in the Gada system. According to Alemayehu, a female practice holding Siinqee at home though she is allowed to exercise the role only after getting married [8]. Upon outing, her mother gives her the Siinqee blessing her daughter to be a good wife, wise mother and productive woman of her time. Women with their Siinqee also bless their army in time of defense and appease people when they come into clashes unwarrantedly.

3.3 The Qallu Institution

The Qaallu institution is the center for Oromo religious leaders having moral authority and social obligation to support Oromo democracy and oppose tyranny. The religious leaders, Qallus, also work to their spiritual vestige to encourage harmonious and democratic relations based on the principles of one God or Waaqaa [1,8]. In the Qaallu Institution, social justice, the God's laws, the rule of law, and fair deliberation of power are held at neutral level. In that, the religious leaders do not tilt to groups in specific. Safuu (morality or moral ethics), ka'oo (proposed wishes), human Waaqaa (God's power) and uumaa (interplay between man and God, and other creatures) are pivotal concerns. Above all, whereas the Bokkuu and Siinqee Institutions are primarily social, the Qaallu Institution is religious in essence.

3.4 Oromo Worldviews

The top referent to power in Oromo is God, which has the title of Waaqa Tokkicha, literally meaning One God who has neither a similitude, nor an equal. According to Addisalem and Rajan, Oromo society has a distinct view of God as One which hosts all without partiality [11]. In the blessings and prayers God is said to be "Danda'aa obdii bal'aa" God who is mighty and powerful in His holdings; " Abbaa ifaa fi dukkanaa", meaning one who bears the day light and the dark night apparently. The other view is about God's Grace which is termed Ayyaanaa, an eternal power with which God creates beings. It is believed also that, the spirit of power exists before anything and everything. Ayyaanaa is also believed to control, guide and protect God's creatures. In relation to Waaqeffannaa, Ayyaanaa is a spirit that regulates situations and acts in line with the third point is Safuu (moral assets and

dispositions), and power with which people are protected from harm and impurity. Asefa asserts Safuu to constitute the ethical bases upon which all human action should be founded, which also direct people on the right path, as ordained by God's power through Ayyaana [1]. Once again, as in the institutions, Ayyaana goes to the supernatural deity whereas Safuu goes to the the moral dispositions underlying social norms and laws in Oromo.

The fourth point in Oromo view is Namummaa (humanness) , the potential a person should possess as a human being with respect to potential to grow into good and mature relations in the vertical and horizontal aspects [12]. The vertical aspects are two-pronged, one which exist between people as per their experiences in age and position; the other being the vertical relation with God. The horizontal aspects deal with positive human relations of mutuality, transparency and self-reliance [12].

3.5 Waaqeffannaa, Oromo Worship System

Derived from Oromo term “Waaqaa”, the process of Waaqeffannaa deals with believing in One God, a traditional belief system that has come down through generations. Tabor contends that, Oromo people in their traditional religion express respect and admiration for their God which they term “Waaqa Gurraacha” meaning Black God residing the Blue Sky [9].” They give the attribution that, Black Color is the symbol of kindness and mightiness on creating beings. Waaqeffannaa is held adoring God as the master of all events; host of creatures; mighty; kind; patient; and nourishing [9]. As opposed to worshiping false gods or carved statutes as substitutes , Waaqeffannaa is bringing true respect and adoration for God, One God that is the host of all [13]. In the Waaqeffannaa process, there are divinities known as Ayyaanaa/Ayyaantuu mainly considered as representations of one God with true divine nature. The nexus between the divinity and the Qaalluu or religious ritualist helps smooth and timely communication of God's words to the people in the manner that a Bishop or an Imam delivers religious messages.

The place of worship for the Qaalluu rituals is termed Galma which is arranged to be a sacred place for each Ayyaanaa or divine spirit. In that, each Ayyaanaa has its own Galma (place of delivering religious ceremonies), which could be located around hilltops, mountains or hillsides for reservation from disturbing noises [13].

3.6 Analysis of Textbooks for Early, Middle and Higher Grades of Oromo Students

In line with the practices and trends of Oromo traditional religion and belief system, the succeeding textbook analysis was held to signify the portrayal of essential values in the learning material. The analysis was supported by researches held Oromo Gada system which was underlined to have values pertaining to environmental protection, social well-being, political solidarity and consensus [14]. In line with the values asserted above, two textbooks were analyzed for portrayal of Oromo worship system in textbooks. For the purpose of emphasis, Afaan Oromo textbooks for grades five and eleven were looked into.

3.6.1 Textbook for Grade Five

Afan Oromo textbook for grade five holds twenty-six units which refer to personal practices and readers. There are also 152 practice exercises referring to personal dispositions and care, tales, ways of producing goods, observing natural environment, using and caring for natural resources, health and personal hygiene, miracles, social communication, poems and introducing people of model nature and deeds. Though the text presents different items representing various points related to personal social situation, there were no references to Oromo culture and belief system. The exercises solely referred to the reading passages which were collected from non-cultural readers which were largely scientific and based on the objective manifestations rather than spiritual assets. It appears that, in its socio-economic and cultural communication, Oromo society has the practices of using oral tradition in the form of proverbs, idioms, songs, rhymes and related spiritual assets which pool experiences from past to the present. Such resources could have been used best reflectors of Oromo identity and belief system. It is noted that, Abrahamic belief system first passed on from generation to generation through positive transfer of oral nature. The same is true of Oromo but the chain of transfer through oral means is deterred due to rarity of options for parents and children to sit at hearth exchange words of mouth. The simplest attribution could be the erroneous ambition on the part of parents to expect in-school learning to hold everything the child needs, and the alienation of culture and schooling as atmospheres at odds.

3.6.2 Textbook for Grade Eleven (Afaan Oromo)

Textbook for grade 11 Afan Oromo has seventeen units of reading which focus on basics of language learning, autobiography, man and the natural environment, gender issues, tales, globalism, tourism industry, school dropout, Olympic sport, poem, feature of people in the Gada System, small-scale enterprises, hunger at global sphere, letter writing and information processing. Among all the units, the one referring to Gada system is a plain example for Oromo socio-economic interchange, yet with little reference to Oromo belief system. So, there were very few references to Oromo religion in general and Waaqeffannaa in particular.

4. Summary and Conclusion

Though Oromo people has longstanding historical legacy of contributing for the world the practices of Gada system as an egalitarian democracy, the domestic education system has very limited space for the teaching of the Oromo traditional view, even where the country's constitution clearly articulates the right to do so (FDRE Constitution, Article 27, Sub-article 1) [1]. Sub-article 1 of the 27th article in Ethiopian constitution stiputes the succeeding notation:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

In this article, freedom of thought, conscience and religion are earmarked to be held with clear statement thereof to hold or

adopt a religion or belief where practice and teaching are also the strategies to implement. From the analysis it could be clear that, Oromo society has contributed for the world ideology in terms of direct belief in Waaqaa or God and practices of indigenous democracy. Perhaps, the Gada system has been registered as a productive and progressive practice at UNESCO. Yet, the educational inclusion to help the new generation grasp the belief system of Waaqeffannaa and the overall assets of Gada system is a long-awaited assignment. Evidences are manifest in Afaan Oromo teaching materials wherein only a chapter about Gada system was added among 43 chapters taught at two levels selected for this analysis.

5. Recommendations

Cognizant of the essential contribution cultural assets can have for children; with deep sense of commitment and zeal for rebuilding forgotten identity of Oromo, every Oromo intellectual and more specifically, those working in education office, professors in universities with Oromo background or those who have interest to hold research and enrich the Religio-cultural assets of Oromo need to keep eyes on the issues of Oromo belief system. Moreover, Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureaus and International agencies should work on the advancement of Oromo Belief System to a cultural milieu for upcoming generations to learn from.

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