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## Creating African Futures in an Era of Global Transformations:

## Créer l'Afrique de demain dans un contexte de transformations mondialisées :

## Criar Futuros Africanos numa Era de Transformações Globais:

## بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

# The Role of Music in the Age of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe



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## **Abstract**

The paper examines and analyses the otherwise underestimated role of music in the era of HIV and Aids in Zimbabwe. Music is essentially the creation or adaptation of sound and speech by an individual or group of people or community for the purpose of performance, entertainment or amusement and education. Thus the paper examines how selected songs on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe reveal ways through which musicians have conceived ideas to encourage people to deal with anxieties and fears in their daily encounters with life's vicissitudes in so far as HIV and AIDS is concerned. The paper proceeds by way of asking the following pertinent questions. What does music teach about HIV and AIDS to the nation? What kind of pedagogy does music advance and what are its premises and its major philosophy? How does music demonstrate the musicians' ability to construct their responses to the larger questions of existence in the era of HIV and AIDS? The paper also continues to demonstrate the ways in which Zimbabwean music captures the effects of HIV and AIDS and how the epidemic completely altered the lives of the people infected and affected. It then moves on to describe how music is capable of handling the emotionally delicate issues related to the people's suffering. The writers thus argue that music plays the role of reassuring hope among people living with HIV and AIDS, and also demonstrates that music provides the inspiration to fight the scourge. Most importantly, the paper argues that the lyrics are the medium which carry the cause of the struggle to those in the city and also to those in the country. The writers also attempt to unpack the many ways in which the music serves as a magical tranquilizer and how it cuts across the people's spiritual, psychological and physical wellbeing. It cuts boundaries and carries the message of hope. Music plays an important role in which the feeling of suffering and death is suppressed, and also serves to propel behaviour change.

## **Introduction**

HIV and AIDS pose a serious threat to human life. It is estimated that in Zimbabwe over 5000 people die of the illness every week (Shoko, 2013: 23). This article contributes to literature on the role of music in the response to HIV. It therefore informs the reader about the lines along which musicians or music construct responses to the larger questions of existence in the light of the HIV and AIDS scourge. Music serves as a tranquilizer. As Barz and Cohen (2011) have highlighted, music has served as a source of hope and healing in the face of HIV and AIDS in different contexts in Africa. Mapuranga and Chitando (2006) have also maintained that Pentecostal gospel music in Zimbabwe is a source of "healing and regeneration." Consequently, in this article we seek to explore the various roles played by music in responding to the impact of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. This is critical as the epidemic had the effect of deepening the Zimbabwean crisis (2000-2008). Thus:

The crisis was compounded by the high death rate due to HIV and AIDS. As the economically active population was being decimated, the number of orphans and vulnerable children increased significantly. Grandmothers were called upon to parent



one more time. As death became an integral part of life, with urban cemeteries filling up rapidly, many wondered whether in fact the crisis represented “the last of days” (Chitando 2012: 276-277)

In African communities, especially the Shona and Ndebele people, health and well being is of central importance (Shoko, 2007) and they always cherish abundant life (Magesa, 1997). In the world view of Shona and Ndebele traditional religions (the Shona and Ndebele being the two dominant tribes in Zimbabwe) old age is regarded a sign of ancestral blessing, as dying young brought panic to society (Chitando & Chitando, 2008). In response to the pain caused by death, African communities would sing songs of wailing and sorrow to serve as some form of tranquilizer to the bereaved people. Therefore, from time immemorial in the African society, music was (is) an important aspect in life, a *sine qua non* it is hard to imagine how an African was going to cope with situations (happy or sad).

### Music as Information

One of the biggest challenges facing Africa’s response to HIV and AIDS has been lack of access to the latest, scientifically validated, life saving information on the epidemic. In the absence of such information, rumours and myths have tended to enjoy mileage. In the case of Zimbabwe, during the mid-1980s when the epidemic was first discovered, there was a lot of fear and misinformation. Some people who died of AIDS during this period were buried hastily and were wrapped in plastic because it was believed that their corpses could infect the living. Furthermore, the mistaken belief that sex with a virgin can cure one of HIV and AIDS has been persistent.

Music has played a major role as a source of information on HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Many artists have regarded their status as agents of change and transformation as necessitating their involvement in awareness raising in the wake of the epidemic. Consequently, most of the songs in the late 1980s and early 1990s were about basic facts relating to HIV and AIDS. What artists such as Paul Matavire did in the song, “*Yakauya AIDS*” (AIDS has come) was essentially to challenge the official silence and secrecy surrounding HIV and AIDS. By adopting defensive African nationalist positions (Chirimuuta and Chirimuuta 1987), government officials and intellectuals were not proactive in alerting their communities of the epidemic.

Matavire’s song broke the shame, silence and secrecy surrounding HIV and AIDS by declaring, “*amai nababa, iriko yakauya AIDS iriko. Ndovaudza vanoramba*” (mother and father, AIDS is there, it has come. I tell them but they refuse to accept). The artist challenges the silence by insisting that, indeed, “AIDS has come.” He deploys artistic devices that include repetition (“*iriko*” (it is there) is used twice), invoking the parents (“*amai nababa*” as heads of families) and acknowledging the resistance (“*ndovaudza vanoramba*”). Although the song proceeded to use frightening and stigmatizing images/descriptions of people living with HIV, it must be commended for availing information on the epidemic at a time when the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had not yet up the struggle against



HIV and AIDS seriously. By insisting that, indeed, “AIDS had come,” Matavire served to warn his compatriots about the reality of the epidemic. This shook many citizens from the slumber that denial had forced them into.

By providing information on HIV and AIDS, Zimbabwean musicians were upholding their role as strategically placed individuals who have the responsibility to inform, alongside providing entertainment. Even in the traditional setting, the musician was tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that members of the community were aware of the danger that threatened the viability of the community. The artist was, therefore, expected to empower members of his/her community with life saving knowledge. To a very large extent, Zimbabwean musicians have sought to uphold this role in the time of HIV and AIDS.

However, Zimbabwean musicians have not been able to keep pace with the rapid developments that characterize HIV and AIDS. For example, there have not been any artists who have addressed the role of microbicides, promoted the use of anti-retroviral therapy and other positive developments within the HIV and AIDS sector. Many people living with HIV continue to die due to spiritual beliefs that associate the taking of anti-retroviral drugs with lack of faith (Chitando and Klagba 2013). Artists could play a very strategic role in availing information on the efficacy of anti-retroviral drugs in prolonging life. To say this, however, is not to overlook the challenges associated with life prolonging treatment in the time of HIV and AIDS.

### **Music as Prayer**

In communities and even in churches, people appeal for the divine intervention through music. Music, therefore, carries the prayers of the people and their wish to gods to be saved from diseases and afflictions. During periods of war, drought and pestilence, Africans are known to gather together, singing for life and protection from God, gods and ancestors. In such songs, confessions are made to appease the divine and thereby attracting mercies. Traditional healers (*n’angas*) sing songs to get into a trance in order to diagnose a patient.

One of the dominant reasons why music serves as prayer in the face of HIV and AIDS epidemic is the sheer devastation that the epidemic has caused. Individuals, families, communities and nations have felt powerless in the face of the epidemic. Prior to the increasing availability of life prolonging drugs, AIDS was responsible for the high death rate. In the face of many people dying young and the catastrophe of orphans, music served as prayer. In particular, gospel musicians such as Charles Charamba, Pastor Haisa, Fungisai Zvakavapano-Mashavave and others composed music that called upon God to have mercy on the people.

A form-critical analysis of music that served as prayer shows that the music was characterised by the artist describing the trauma caused by HIV and AIDS, highlighting the helplessness that people were experiencing and finally inviting God to intervene and change the situation for the better. The descriptions of the effects of HIV and AIDS tend to be vivid and touching: homes have been turned into ruins, children have become orphans and cries of pain can be





heard across villages and cities. Unfortunately, families and communities have run out of ideas regarding the most effective strategy for tackling the enemy in their midst. Only God can save them from HIV and AIDS, artists submit.

One of the challenges posed by music as prayer is that it tends to dramatise the extent of the epidemic and to limit the potential of human agency. Indeed, from the very beginning, HIV and AIDS were presented in apocalyptic fashion. A history of AIDS in Africa (Iliffe 2006) shows that the initial response was one of panic and fear. Most of the songs that appeal to God have tended to convey a sense of paralysis, despair and hopelessness. However, the reality on the ground is that HIV and AIDS have demonstrated the importance of agency at the personal, family and community levels. Although some critics are right to question the effectiveness of the responses of many African governments (Ige and Quinlan 2012), there is need to acknowledge the emergence of leaders in the response to HIV and AIDS. In Zimbabwe, the activities of individuals and organizations of people living with HIV and AIDS, home-based care, support for orphans and other gallant acts at family and community levels have been salutary. In addition, the work of faith-based organizations in responding to the epidemic needs to be acknowledged (see for example, Mombe, Orobator and Vella 2012).

Despite the critique that music as prayer underrates the capacity of individuals, families, communities and nations to respond to HIV and AIDS, we can also interpret music as prayer as the expression of lament. For example, Oliver Mtukudzi's popular song, "*Todii?*" (What Shall We Do?) is both a prayer and a call to action. In the song, Mtukudzi challenges sexual and gender-based violence, as well as the tendency to deny the reality of HIV and AIDS. Thus:

*He-e todini?*

What shall we do?

*Senzenjani?*

What shall we do?

*Zvinorwadza sei kubhinywa*

How painful is to be raped?

*Newaugere naye?*

By the one you live with?

*Zvinorwadza sei*

How painful is it to be raped?

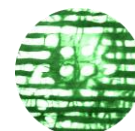
*kubhinywa neakabvisa pfuma?*

By the one who paid the bride price?

As we shall reiterate later, Mtukudzi demonstrates a lot of courage by challenging marital rape in a context where most men imagine that their paying lobola (bride price) grants them exclusive, permanent and ongoing sexual rights and privileges from their wives. The song, "*Todii?*" was well received throughout Southern Africa and beyond (Kyker 2011: 246).

### **Music as Tranquilizer**

Music has healing power. It addresses the fears and hopes of the community (Chitando and Chitando, 2008: 64). Through music, societal fears are named and as the community communes through listening to music on such deadly diseases as AIDS, cancer, malaria and Heart diseases, it prepares itself to face them with courage and strength (Ibid). In this regard,



music serves to empower society to be stand firm in the face of threats to health, well-being and, indeed, life itself. Gospel music has been particularly effective in accomplishing this role in Zimbabwe. For example, Charles Charamba's laid-back song, "*Ikoko*" (There) must be understood against the reality of contemporary challenges, particularly HIV and AIDS. Thus:

<i>Ishe Jesu vakakwira kudenga</i>	Lord Jesus went up to heaven
<i>Kundondigadzirisa imba yokugara</i>	To prepare a house for me to live
<i>Iye akavimbisa achauya onditoro</i>	He promised to return and take me
<i>Ndonodogara naye ikoko</i>	To live with him there
<i>Ikoko! Ikoko! Kusina nhamo nematambudziko</i>	There! There! Where There is No poverty and problems
<i>Ikoko! Ndisiyei zvangu ndiende ikoko</i>	There! Just let me go there

In this song, Charamba demonstrates artistic mastery by placing emphasis on an abstract place, "*ikoko*" (there). While he may not be able to give a vivid description of what obtains in this particular place, he leaves his audience without any doubt about the beauty of the place. There! One can only long for the place! It can be contrasted sharply with happens "here." Here, is a place of poverty and problems. HIV and AIDS and the attendant high death rate definitely constitute key markers of "here." For Charamba, this life is characterised by pain and suffering, hence heaven is so attractive as it is the antithesis of this wretched earth.

Music with an eschatological and futuristic theme became more popular as the Zimbabwean crisis deepened. Charamba's song must be located within this quest to comfort Zimbabweans and equip them to live to fight for another day. While such music had the effect of deadening the pain, it ran the risk of preventing citizens from asking very hard questions relating to governance. As one popular critique goes, it made Christians so heavenly-bound that they were of little or no earthly relevance. For the most part, this emerged from fatalistic theologies that surrendered all to God, depriving flesh and blood human of agency. There were certain readings of sacred texts that promoted this tranquilising aspect of religion and music. Thus:

...many readers tended to adopt a spiritual, other-worldly interpretation of Zimbabwe's problems. They sought to understand the implosion of Zimbabwe's economy in terms of "principalities and powers." As a result, there was greater investment in the emergence of "prayer warriors" and intercessors to transform the country's fortunes. Especially within the Pentecostal fold, this tended to remove Christians from directly participating in political processes.

### **Communicating HIV and AIDS Messages? The Case of Male Circumcision**

Music creates language and labels with power not only to conscientise people, but to instill discipline, and sometimes fear. Some of the songs and advertisements aired on the national broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, send the message that those who will



have been circumcised, are SMART (Jah Prayzah's song, "*Ndagaya mushe mai mwana*," (I have thought properly, mother of my child/ren) Winkie D's song "*Pinda muSmart*", "Get Smart"). Being not circumcised is seen as a dirty condition. This has been communicated against the backdrop of the aggressive marketing of medical male circumcision as an HIV prevention strategy. While there have been debates about the cultural and religious dimensions, most HIV and AIDS activists argue that male circumcision is a valuable HIV prevention strategy. However, given the condemnation of circumcision by early missionaries, non-circumcising communities in the country have struggled to accept the practice. The use of star musicians such as Jah Prayzah and Winkie D to promote male circumcision seeks to challenge negative attitudes towards the practice. As Chingondo (2014: 149) argues, there is need for continuous widespread health education in Zimbabwe if male circumcision is to gain greater acceptance. On the other hand, Mandova, Mutohori and Mudzanire (2013: 588) maintain that the practice has deep cultural significance amongst some indigenous communities and must be utilized in the national response to HIV and AIDS.

The mobilization of popular musicians to promote voluntary medical male circumcision to prevent HIV in Zimbabwe has both positive and challenging aspects. The positive dimension is that when such individuals are seen endorsing the practice, those who hero-worship them may be persuaded to accept it. In addition, it must be acknowledged that these musicians have contributed towards greater awareness of the role of voluntary medical male circumcision in Zimbabwe. The concept of "*kupinda musmart*" (becoming/joining those who are smart) has enjoyed considerable currency. In fact, if one says, "*ndakapinda musmart*" (I joined the smart ones/campaigns), it is generally understood that one has "gone under the knife." The "smartness" being communicated by these glamour musicians can be understood in two senses. In the first instance, those men who are not circumcised are seen as "dirty" in terms of struggling to uphold penile hygiene. Second, the very idea of appreciating the value of voluntary medical male circumcision in the context of HIV and AIDS is taken as denoting higher levels of intelligence and sophistication.

However, the challenge lies in the packaging of the message on male circumcision and HIV. The language and images deployed in this initiative must be strategic and creative (Kahari 2013: 70) if the gains made thus far in addressing HIV and AIDS are not to be lost. Many men may not realise that male circumcision is not a "stand alone" HIV prevention strategy. It must be used alongside other strategies such as abstinence, faithfulness and the use of condoms.

### **Music as an Opportunity to Speak about Sex, Sexuality and Abuse**

From the foregoing section, it is clear that Zimbabwean music on HIV and AIDS has had to break the taboos and silence surrounding discussions on human sexuality. Whereas prior to the epidemic individuals, families, religious institutions and others tended to be circumspect when discussing sex and sexuality, the era of HIV and AIDS introduced greater openness. This has had the positive effect of demystifying sex and sexuality and enabling more



empowering discussion of the topic. A number of artists have succeeded in challenging the secrecy around sex and sexuality, thereby contributing towards HIV prevention in Zimbabwe.

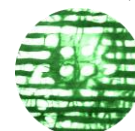
In an earlier section, we drew attention to Mtukudzi's song where he sings about the reality of marital rape. By raising this topic publicly, Mtukudzi has broken many taboos. First, he dared to refer to sex and sexuality openly. Second, he was courageous to name marital rape as such ("*kubhinywa*"). Third, he is unambiguous in denouncing the practice of marital rape. Fourth, he recognises its implications in the era of HIV and AIDS. Indeed, Mtukudzi is right to refer to some married men who are living with HIV, whose partners may be HIV negative, but who refuse to use condoms during sex. They maintain that since they are married, they must not be "burdened" with the condom and that their wives must not deny them their conjugal rights on the basis of their refusal to use condoms. Mtukudzi emerges as an artist who challenges sexual and gender-based violence and addresses HIV in a direct way (Mapuranga 2012).

Other artists such as Pah Chihera have sought to counter the narrative of exclusive male violence against women by calling upon women not to treat men badly. In the song, "*Musavadadire Varume*" (Do not look down upon men), she seeks to promote love and "quality time" between men and women. Thus:

<i>Wangu murume ndiSinyoro, wakandikoshera</i>	My husband is Sinyoro (praise name) who is important to me
<i>Vasikana handimborara</i>	Ladies, I never sleep
<i>Sinyoro vane rudo</i>	Sinyoro is so loving
<i>Sinyoro vanotandara</i>	Sinyoro stays up for long
Chorus: <i>Kana hope!</i>	Chorus: No sleep!

Although Chihera may be criticised for exaggerating the importance of men to women's lives, she demonstrates a lot of creativity by using innuendo and suggestiveness to address the importance of sex and sexuality in marital relations. This is critical as HIV infection has been increasing among married couples due to concurrent multiple sexual partnerships. One strategy is to promote sexual satisfaction in marriage. An analysis of the song shows that the persona celebrates the fact that she is satisfied sexually. The references to not sleeping at night, as well as the husband's ability to stay up till late relate to sexual activity. She also mischievously calls the husband, "Sinyoro." While culturally the wife is expected to call her husband by his clan/praise name (and vice versa), Chihera seeks to capitalise on the contemporary discussion of the "uncondomised" penis as, "*nyoro*" (wet). "Sinyoro" is clearly attached to sex. We are suggesting that Chihera builds on the ongoing HIV prevention messages to promote fulfilling sexual relationships within marriages in Zimbabwe. All the other women in the song also confirm their husband's ability to "stop them from sleeping" ("*vasikana handimborara*").

While the HIV and AIDS epidemic has facilitated more open discussions on sex and sexuality, we contend that some artists have pushed the boundaries in this regard. One artist,





Jacob Moyana, courted controversy with his song, “*Munotidako*” (You want us there). However, the song is a rather naughty play on the Shona vulgar term for buttocks (“*dako*”). It forces whoever wants to pronounce it in full to make reference to this rather taboo term, in formal conversations at that! In addition, a number of videos from Zimbabwean dancehall music feature sexually explicit dances. Gussy Warrior’s “*Seunononga*” (Like you are picking up something) followed the same pattern. Saul Jah Love’s “*Simudza Musoro*” (Raise your head) provides a “step by step” process for engaging in sex. The title itself alludes to an erect penis. While sexuality has been an integral part of Zimbabwean dance (for example, in the Bende or Jerusarema dances), youthful dancehall artists have made the sexual dimension particularly blatant and “in your face.” As we shall elaborate below, young women dance wantonly, suggesting that their bodies are permanently available to all who may so desire them. Dancing groups made up of young women such as “Bev” have appeared on the scene, projecting the female body as entertainment for male eyes.

In this regard, we observe a paradox: whereas HIV and AIDS have facilitated open discussions on sex and sexuality, they have also spawned a wave of unrestrained displays of sex and sexuality on the Zimbabwean music scene. Zimbabwean dancehall, which has outstripped the dominant genres of sungura, urban grooves and gospel music, has been quite assertive in this regard. Its young enthusiasts preach freedom and independence in all areas, including sexual expression. While we are conscious of the dynamism of youth culture (and music), we contend that the glorification and routinisation of sex poses a major challenge in the wake of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.

### Music and Gender Stereotypes

We have already drawn attention to the images of women in Zimbabwean music on HIV and AIDS, particularly with reference to dance. Some of the lyrics also present women as the source of HIV infection. This feeds into the stereotype of women as “dangerous” (Chitando 2012) and as being responsible for the epidemic. Matavire employed the story of creation in the Bible to suggest that women are responsible for all the suffering in the world, claiming, “*dai vasiri vana mai, nyika iyo inoiyi riri sango remichero, mudyandigere*” (had it not been for the women, this world would have been Paradise, without us having to work). Various other artists have tended to present problematic and biased images of women in the context of HIV and AIDS. For example, in the song, “*Tapera*” (We are finished) Mtukudzi seeks to address toxic masculinities by challenging men to resist temptation. Thus:

<i>Varume vakuru</i>	Grown up/old men
<i>Murume mukuru</i>	A grown up/old man
<i>Varume vakuru munenge pwere sei?</i>	Grown up men, why are you like children?
<i>Murume mukuru unenge pwere seiko?</i>	A grown up man, why are you like a child?
<i>Rega kuvarairwa</i>	Do not be enticed/get carried away
<i>Usavarairwe</i>	Do not be enticed



<i>Kuyeverwa</i>	Do not be ensnared
<i>Ndoona wobata musoro</i>	I see you holding your head
<i>Wobata musana</i>	You are holding your back
<i>Pakati pemhandara</i>	Amidst young women
<i>Tapera!</i>	We are finished!

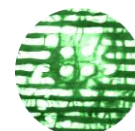
While Mtukudzi is clearly trying to inculcate a sense of responsibility among men and challenging them to refrain from having multiple sexual partners, he does so at the expense of presenting women as “dangerous.” The conclusion one draws is that “those who are perishing” (“*tapera!*”) are men and that women are the danger that is lurking everywhere, ready to pounce on the men. The deployment of the term, “*usayarairwe/kuyeverwa*” (do not be enticed) evokes the image of the python that attracts its prey by changing its colours playfully in Shona *ngano* (folktales). Such conclusions are problematic as they tend to pit men against women. Furthermore, they entrench the negative attitudes towards women that are dominant in patriarchal societies such as those found in Zimbabwe. According to Vambe (2007: 235):

Some male and female singers have gone further to depict black women as the sources and carriers of the deadly virus. The images which have been used to describe black women as obstacles in the national fight against AIDS are related to black women’s assumed “looseness” and being “dangerous.” What is implied is that both AIDS and black women constitute a problem. In a certain sense, the negative images of black womanhood in the songs and oral poems attempt to imitate the master narrative provided by the colonial government and post-independence black leadership’s contempt for black women.

As we see it, the challenge lies in mobilizing artists to adopt gender justice and to promote positive and liberating images of women in the face of HIV and AIDS. Women are not dangerous: they are endangered by HIV and AIDS! Zimbabwean music on the epidemic must invest more in promoting solidarity across racial, ethnic, gender, religious, age and other variables. Negative and disempowering images of women weaken the overall response to the epidemic.

### **The Messenger and the Message? Debates on the HIV Status of Artists**

Finally, we would like to draw attention to another debilitating debate which has characterised discourses on music and HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. This relates to the perceived HIV positive status of various artists. Since many Zimbabweans from various social locations have been infected by HIV and have died from AIDS, it is reasonable to assume that some musicians are living with HIV and some have died of AIDS. However, we are convinced that the insistence that musicians must be forced to disclose their HIV status is misplaced and tends to be informed by malice and the failure to accept that artists are entitled to their privacy.



While we applaud individuals who have disclosed their HIV positive status, such as Pastor Maxwell Kapachawo, and have contributed towards challenging stigma and discrimination, we do not believe that every person living with HIV must feel compelled to disclose his or her status. In most instances, the rumour that a particular artist is infected is fuelled by stigma and discrimination. Instead of haunting individual artists and bombarding them with questions regarding their HIV status, there must be greater investment in encouraging all citizens to become aware of the HIV status and to promote responsibility in relation to HIV and AIDS.

## **Conclusion**

Music plays a major role in the lives of Zimbabweans. In this article, we have explored the various roles that music has played in relation to HIV and AIDS. We have argued that when HIV and AIDS were discovered in the country, there was widespread panic. In the absence of life saving medication, many people died. However, music served as a source of information, a form of prayer, as well as a tranquiliser to enable people to cope. Music has also been utilized to verbalise HIV and AIDS, as seen in campaigns to promote voluntary medical male circumcision in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, it has facilitated open discussions about sex and sexuality. We have highlighted the positive aspects of these developments, alongside drawing attention to problematic dimensions. What remains clear, however, is that long after HIV and AIDS would have become mere footnotes in Zimbabwe's history, the music will continue to play.



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