Abstract: Cameroonians saw a positive correlation between the enactment of the Liberty Laws in the early 1990s, the increase in the number of tertiary institutions, and the contribution of its universities to worldwide intellectual endeavors. Nevertheless, as the history of the University of Buea shows, the university space, instead of becoming free, became instead a space of domination. Universities discourage critical scholarship and collaboration, harass politically suspect instructors, and put barriers in the way of professional advancement. For most faculty members, energy in the university space has become focused on survival, with many individuals more concerned with promoting their upward mobility than with the production of knowledge. One particularly unfortunate result is the continued marginalization or silencing of the African voice on the global stage.

Résumé: Les Camerounais ont remarqué une corrélation positive entre la promulgation des lois sur la liberté ou Liberty Laws au début des années 1990, l'accroissement du nombre d'institutions du secteur tertiaire, et la contribution de ses universités à l'entreprise intellectuelle dans le monde entier. Néanmoins, comme le montre l'histoire de l'université de Buea, l'espace universitaire, loin de se libérer, devint plutôt un espace de domination. Les universités y découragent les études et les collaborations d'ordre critique, harcèlent les enseignants politiquement suspects, et mettent des barrières sur le chemin de l'avancement professionnel. Pour la plupart des professeurs d'université, l'énergie de l'espace universitaire s'est maintenant concentrée sur la survie, un grand nombre de personnes étant plus préoccupé de la promotion de leur ascension sociale que de la production du savoir. Un résultat particulièrement malheureux de ce phénomène est la marginalisation continue ou la réduction au silence des voix africaines sur l'échelle globale.
Introduction

Cameroon's university space witnessed a remarkable change in 1993 following a reform of the system, which enabled the creation of six new public universities as well as a number of private institutions. Significantly, this occurred in the changing political context and guaranteed freedoms of the so-called Liberty Laws of 1990. Growth in the number of tertiary institutions was supposed to spawn an increase in the number of faculty, a group that had benefited from a certain amount of immunity even before the passage of the Liberty Laws. Immunity gave academics a voice, thereby increasing their ability to contribute to the pluralization of public space.

This change in the landscape of tertiary education triggered great social expectations for three reasons. First, universities play a major role in the education and training of high-level professionals, precisely the group that is in short supply in most African countries. Several World Bank studies, starting with the Berg Report (1981:81) identified this as a constraint on Africa's development. Second, universities are the sites par excellence for the production and transmission of knowledge, processes which, according to Paulo Freire, are dialectically related (1987:8). Yet in the sphere of knowledge production, as in other spheres in global relations, Africa is consistently relegated to the periphery. As Abiola Irele notes, “African scholarship is at best marginal, and at worst nonexistent in the total economy of intellectual endeavour in the world today” (cited in Bates, Mudimbe, & O'Barr 1993:221). This, however, is not a structural condition, despite the widespread tendency to perceive Western scholars as the gatekeepers of scholarship (Prah 1999:25). Admission is possible, although it is contingent upon certain minimum requirements, such as the respect for scientific rigor that is intrinsic to the Western research protocol. Third, as institutions of civil society, tertiary institutions in Africa have a vanguard role to play as a countervailing force against the omnipotent African post-colonial state. This has been one of their historic missions, given the weak-ness of the other institutions of civil society (Sawyer 1998:21).

African scholarship played this vanguard role before, in its formative years, as demonstrated by its visibility in the struggle against imperialism, structural adjustment programs, and undemocratic regimes (Nieftagodien 1999:59). Indeed
Western social scientists have acknowledged the importance of this contribution and have written about African scholars as a source of inspiration (See Cooper, cited in Nieftagodien 1999:60). At the present historical juncture, when Africa finds itself at another crossroads and facing a deepening crisis, the universities must prepare for and experience an intellectual renaissance. Apparently in recognition of this, the Cameroonian government, in preparation for the 2001 Africa-France Summit in Yaounde, convened a group of scholars to address the broad topic “Africa and the Challenge of Globalization.” Africa cannot be relegated to the cultural and intellectual margins if it is to confront this challenge. In other words, there is a need to reclaim an African vision and dream. Too often, as Arjun Appadurai put it, intellectual endeavor is seen as “naturally metropolitan, modern and Western. The rest of the world is seen as the idiom of cases, events, examples and test-sites in relation to this stable location for the production or revision of theory” (1998:2).

African scholarship, in other words, must bring about a reversal of present trends whereby theories based on empirical research from other cultures are applied indiscriminately to Africa. The African viewpoint on global and local issues must be heard. As Elspeth Huxley stated in the forward to *Red Strangers*, “no person of one race or culture can truly interpret events as they appear to individuals of a totally different race and culture” (cited in Prah 1998:26).

The Cameroonian government's choice for the theme of the 2000 Africa-France Summit can be seen as evidence of *a prise de conscience* that is a promising starting place for an intellectual renaissance in Cameroon. Yet, as proclaimed by the Kampala Declaration of 1990 (a statement signed by a group of African scholars in the wake of a symposium organized by CODESRIA), academic freedom and autonomy are indispensable for the realization of this goal. Research, it has been noted, neither discovers a metaphysical or ontological idea of truth and wisdom, nor realizes a teleological goal in human history. Rather it is a fallible process of investigation which analyzes interconnected phenomena in the past, aims to resolve social problems in the present, and works to prevent catastrophes in the future. These activities can take place only in the context of democratic civic life (Calloni 1998:106). So far, research has been constrained in Cameroon by the violence, both physical and symbolic, that permeates the tertiary educational sector. The government's *prise de conscience* must be more than just a rhetorical strategy,
invoking only a beautiful memory. What remains to be seen is whether the political will that is needed to usher in an enabling environment for research and production will be found.

**University as a Space of Domination**

The creation and etatization of tertiary education in Cameroon occurred almost at the same period as the creation of the hegemonic single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU). Given the tendency of the CNU to shrink the public arena and discourage dissent, it is not surprising that it actively stifled the free and creative growth of the university. The production of knowledge thrives on the continuous questioning of the truth claims of any assertion. As Mill argues, even the most noble and worthy ideas, if unchallenged, easily degenerate into prejudice, into a “dead dogma, not a living truth” (cited in Robson 1977:245). This is the liberal ideal of education: “When there are persons to be found, who form the exception to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for themselves, and that truth would lose something by their silence” (Mill cited in Robson 1977:254).

In the past, production of dissident knowledge was proof that some scholars subscribed to this viewpoint. One exemplary figure is the ethnophilosopher Marcien Towa, whose trenchant critique of the idea of “Negritude” in Leopold Senghor: Negritude or Servitude? (1971) was seen as an apologetic for imperialism, neocolonial culture, and European expansionism. The increasing political strength of such “heretical” views caused people such as Towa to be banished from the lecture halls of the University of Yaounde! Granted, the vocal opposition not only of scholars such as Towa but also of members of the outlawed Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) may have been merely symbolic. That is, they were conscious of the fact that in the end the forces of law and order would treat them indulgently.² Despite the policing of scholarship and ambient fear, “dissidents” in Vaclav Havel's sense of the term were still present.³

Seemingly, the reform of Cameroon's state university system in 1993 set the stage for an enormous expansion in the production of knowledge. As an acknowledgment that
overcrowding in the hitherto single institution, the University of Yaounde, had been detrimental to the production of scholarship, the reform promised to refocus the faculty toward, and reenergize them in the production of, scholarship. Clear evidence of this were the frequent calls for the establishment or resuscitation of the university press. But in order to attain this goal, visibility had to be given not only to what Gramsci called the “organic intellectual” (one connected to a particular political party), but also to the “critical intellectual” (one free from economic and political constraints). In short, this required a change in policy, for critical scholars had in the past been relegated to a kind of gulag *archipelagos*. Towa, for instance, had been sent to work as a researcher at the Institute of Human Sciences, where resources were few precisely because of the tendency in government circles to associate critical researchers with sympathy for political opposition parties. Others were simply sent to teach in secondary schools. Towa’s nomination as the Rector of the University of Yaounde II was construed as a sign of the rehabilitation of critical scholarship, but his dismissal shortly afterward marked the end of that brief illusion. Marxist scholars were allowed to return home from exile, but they did not fare well in employment or publication. President Paul Biya’s commitment to the multiplicity and variety of sources of information as the only guarantee of an enlightened public (1987:54) was neither sustained in policy nor enforced in practice (see Nyamnjoh 1993, 1996; Mongo Beti 1993; Kom 1993, 1996; Eboussi Boulaga 1997). His maxim of “la vérité viens d'en haut, les rumeurs d'en bas” [truth comes from above, rumor from below] has never really allowed for competing perspectives, even in university spaces.

Nevertheless, because of an initial impression of policy change created by Biya and his regime, most intellectuals celebrated the statutory “autonomy” that was granted the University of Buea (UB) in principle. According to Decree No 93/034 of January 1993, which set up this institution, the vice chancellor (VC) was supposed to be appointed by decree from among members of “professorial rank of Anglo-Saxon training following recommendation of the Senate and Council.” Since appointments by decree are discretionary, there is a consensus in Cameroon that in the usual situation the beneficiaries tend to be lackeys of the president, motivated to maintain their posts and easily corruptible. In this case, selection by means of an interview process tended to foreground competence and allow for autonomy as

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defined by the Academic Staff Union of (Nigerian) Universities (ASUU) (with which many Anglophone Cameroonian academics are familiar) : “the democratic regulation of the internal institutions of governance to pursue and regulate research, teaching, learning, study and the production and dissemination of knowledge and related activities (CODESRIA Bulletin 1996:6). Furthermore, there was always a chance that incompetent administrators could be replaced, as tenure was limited to four years, renewable once.

Contrary to the provisions of the Decree No 93/034, the president appointed the VC without the recommendation of the Senate and council. That the first VC, Dorothy Njeuma, was a member of the Political Bureau of the CPDM (the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, the successor of the CMU) only fuelled fears that prominent among her roles was the policing of the production of critical scholarship. This fear was reinforced by Article 3 of the decree, a kind of escape clause that guaranteed academic freedom only within the context of “laws and regulations and subject to the obligations of discretion binding on all public servants.” In addition, all the other officers, such as the deans and directors of schools, were appointed, not always on the merit of their scholarship. As Francis Nyamnjoh wrote, in reality, statutory provisions notwithstanding,

The system has little regard for virtue and meritocracy, and proves to have more room for loyal mediocrity than critical excellence.... A second- or third-rate academic, for example, who provides the regime with the conceptual rhetoric it needs to justify its excesses and high-handedness, is more likely to be promoted to professor (with or without publications) and made dean, vice chancellor or even minister, and to accumulate portfolios, than his more productive but critical counterpart who is denied promotion and recognition for being a genuine intellectual. (1999:107)

Though not privy to the calculations that underlay the decision-making process, we can conjecture that the fact that the Anglophones, a minority group in this colonially bicultural state, were clamoring for the introduction of a new political order that would give them more autonomy contributed inordinately to the decision to contravene the provisions of the decree. Allowing the Anglophones a free hand over this process could
have led to the nomination of a candidate who would tolerate, if not encourage, the angry literature that Anglophone scholars such as Bate Besong (*Beasts of No Nation*, 1990) were producing at this historical moment. To paraphrase Nancy Fraser, the university, in the view of the regime, threatened to become another “parallel discursive arena where members of the subordinated social group [Anglophones] could invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identity, interests and needs” (1992:123). At the same time, the autocratic nature of the state, where those who make the law are above it or observe it only in its breach, must have also been a factor. As it turned out, one of the intended or unintended effects of these new appointments was to establish a significant age differential between this group and the rest of the staff. Whether or not the generational struggle, as Feuer has said, is even more important than the class struggle as “the driving force of history,” these appointments had a negative effect on the production of scholarship, as the older generation of African scholars is arguably less productive than the younger (if they are productive at all). Endowed with cultural capital that has enabled them to position themselves in society, they are now more preoccupied with acquiring economic capital. And only the successful enforcement of loyalty to the regime can guarantee their maintenance as managers. Commitment to this principle has caused the vice chancellor to give negative recommendations to candidates applying for scholarships for further studies. According to one informant, the applications of all lecturers who participated in strikes called by the National Union of Teachers of Higher Education (SYNES) with a view to improving their living conditions in 1999 were given a negative- re-view. In the case of one candidate who had been admitted to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale with a Fulbright Fellowship, the vice chancellor even tried to retract an earlier positive recommendation that this person had received.5

The University of Buea is located on the campus of the School of Translation and Interpretation (ASTI). Because the state was under the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program, and because the bank was not in favor of creating of new tertiary institutions, funds were not allocated for the construction of a new infrastructure. Essentially, this meant that the new institution inherited the library of ASTI, a specialized collection that was acquired to suit the needs of about seventy students. No funds were allocated either for the purchase of books or for current periodicals. Ironically, in 1998 a new library, though still not befitting a university,
was built with funding from Cooperation Française- that is, by the French interests that were using the Yaounde regime as their Trojan horse. Still lacking a budget for the purchase of books, UB depended wholly on philanthropic organizations and other sources. The university, in effect, became a cultural toxic dumping site for unwanted or obsolete literature. Its librarians had the arduous task of going through collections of discarded books in order to create a library which, in the social sciences, could easily fit into a living room of modest size. Neither does the institution have a networked computer system providing access to e-books. It has just one computer linked to the World Wide Web and it is located in the VC's office. Naturally, demand for its use is high and access is considered a privilege rather than a right. E-mail, furthermore, is saved onto a diskette by administrative assistants and delivered via electronic posting, thereby providing the VC with the potential to monitor electronic activity in general and perceived subversive activity in particular. In these circumstances collaborations that allow scholars to work with each other in virtual research laboratories or networks and thereby collapse the distinction made between the “center” and the “periphery” of knowledge production (see Russell 2001:277) are not possible. A cursory examination of citations in papers written by UB lecturers shows that most of them were written in the 1960s and 1970s. Recently, a paper submitted for publication in Britain by a lecturer in geography was returned because it did not make any reference to current literature. Colloquially, students who are concerned about the way the university is run call it a Comprehensive High School, or worse, a glorified nursery School.

The problem is exacerbated by the faculty's heavy teaching load. Each assistant lecturer is supposed to teach three courses per semester. Course assignment, it should be noted, varies from year to year and is done at the discretion of the head of department. That an individual’s specialization is hardly taken into account can be deduced from commentaries made in senate meetings by senior officials who claim that in order to be qualified to teach a course in the social sciences an instructor only has to read the assigned books in advance! The instructors' workloads have increased on a pro rata basis with the intake of students. Classes of more than three or four hundred students are not uncommon. No wonder that lecturers who teach three such classes, without the help of teaching assistants, neglect their research. Conscious of this fact, the institution rarely applies the “publish or perish” rule contained in its statutes, although it may be evoked to

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settle scores with lecturers out of favor with the administration. In the social sciences, not only are intellectuals who are perceived as radical closely policed, but their chances of getting published are also reduced by a censorship that denies them access to local journals. Among the faculty in general, the drastic reduction in their salaries has also robbed them of the motivation to carry out research. Since most of them have to moonlight in order to make ends meet, it is not uncommon to enter a taxi at night driven by a university lecturer, or to find students drinking in a bar run by their professor. In many cases, fear of being fired silences the teacher completely, especially someone with a family to support” (Shor & Freire 1987:59). Caution becomes the guiding principle here, as there is nowhere to go except the unemployment pool at a time when even traditional social support networks have completely disintegrated and transitional pathways are fraught with uncertainty.

Since disciplinary power notoriously is exercised through visibility, imposing upon its subjects a principle of compulsory visibility (see Foucault 1984:199), the University of Buea has always insisted that all lecturers be present on campus even outside of scheduled classes and office hours. Ironically, the university has such a shortage of space that as many as four lecturers often share a cubicle with two tables. In some cases, whole departments consist of not more than two such cubicles. What's more, the university insists that lecturers live in Buea. At the behest of the university, Fondo Sikod, an acclaimed economist who had taught at Yaounde before his transfer to Buea, was brought before the disciplinary board of the civil service for continuing to live in Yaounde. Sikod was spared punishment only because he produced a medical report indicating that he had to stay in Yaounde for reasons of health. In the wake of this hearing and on the strength of the report, he was transferred back to Yaounde, although the University of Buea, paradoxically, continued to invite him to give courses on a part-time basis.

One of reasons that university officials show such fervor in disciplining lecturers is simply that they are driven to maintain their own positions. Francis Nyamnjoh facetiously defines their Ph.D. degrees as “pull him down”; pulling down a non conforming colleague means that the official will not be pulled down in turn. The same reasons account for their interest in funding political activities over scholarly ones. A huge percentage of the annual budget and a large portion of the already meager resources

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are devoted to political activities such as travel and rallies. Lecturers who seek to prove their loyalty to the regime and thereby position themselves for appointments always apply for these funds with requests, for instance, “for transport and a 2-day Mission ‘Allowance to attend the PM's Goodwill Mission to Menji, Lebialem led by Hon. N. N. Mbile’” (Letter of Dec. 6, 2000, to the VC). In one instance, the amount spent for a single mission was more than one million francs CFA. It is noteworthy that the amount received in some cases is almost equivalent to the beneficiary’s salary.

Requests for funding, even just for subsidies, to attend conferences that have some scholarly or pedagogical benefit are consistently rejected.

Ironically, standard policy of the university requires that any application for aid be accompanied by just this justification. When Joseph Tahsoh was invited to lead a panel discussion at a conference in London, the university refused. The university even refuses to recommend its lecturers for academic exchange fellowships. Recently it failed to endorse an application from a lecturer for a UNESCO Pilot African Academic Exchange Fellowship. In response to UNESCO's call for applications on the subject of “peace-building,” the lecturer, who had received only positive reviews from his department and other university personnel, had submitted a proposal entitled “Perspectives on Resolving the 'Anglophone Problem' in is Cameroon.” The VC noted simply that she was unable to “endorse the slant of the proposal.” UNESCO never had the chance to consider its merits, and the lecturer was refused an opportunity to further his career and participate in an important international exchange.

Such censorship at UB is not a recent development. In 1997, the administration turned down an application by Francis Nyamnjoh for a regional conference to be hosted by the Department of Sociology, which he headed, with funding from the London-based World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). In addition to invoking the need for “prior authorisation from the Presidency of the Republic for International meetings” the VC wrote,
“We regret to inform you that the background paper on “Media Ownership and Control” as contained in document No.00111/75-4/UB/SOC of 24 March 1997 carries sensitive political overtones which are inappropriate for the University of Buea to be seen to promote at this particular time. The slant given in the paper is also at variance with the view presented by WACC on the factors which they perceive as contributing to the globalisation of poverty; the WACC document faults rich nations, international financial institutions and communication transnationals for the spread of poverty (see WACC Programme for 1997-2001).”

A year later, Nyamnjoh was denied permission to take up a six-month fellowship at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, Holland, in order to pursue a research project, “Political Change and Regionalism in Cameroon: The Anglophone Problem.” One of the reasons advanced by the administration for the refusal was that the subject and content of your research proposal advances statements which are biased, unfounded and injurious to the institutions of the State; this raises doubts on the academic value of the research you propose to carry out and is an embarrassment to the University of Buea which is State-owned.8

The pervasive academic censorship exhausts and defeats most Cameroonian scholars. Pessimistic about their ability to provide innovative and convincing answers to Cameroon's present malaise, far too many become preoccupied with upward social mobility Their ambition is fueled by the media, especially state-run print and electronic media. Political intellectuals appear on television programs such as “Dimanche Midi,” “Cameroon Calling,” and “The Debate” and have contributed enormously to the growth of what might be called a “heteronomous culture” in Cameroon-that is, a culture of expertise validated by the mass media.9 Among other payoffs of this strategy has been the selection of these sorts of people to act as “Charges de Missions” for CPDM campaign teams, positions that in turn increase in their visibility In this political space, they are enclosed in a circle of reciprocal seduction where, in an effort to sell their ideas to the masses, “they do not seek only to convince the public of the validity of their arguments, but, moreover, ... to be loved by viewers”(Calloni 1998:102). This phenomenon, incidentally, begins to explain the
absence of whole sections of the teaching staff from the university during campaign periods. And, to the extent that they are part of a university system that tends to confound an individual's political and academic legitimacy, this increased popularity is likely to redound to their credit in the university as well.

In January 1996, frustrated by a university system that has room for everything but academic excellence, Clement N. Ngwasiri, vice dean of the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences of UB, resigned “from the corps of Higher Education of the Cameroonian Public Service.” In his letter of resignation he blamed the minister of higher education (and former VC of the University of Yaounde), Peter Agbor Tabi, for a “style of management... characterised by vindictiveness, high-handedness, egoism, lust for power, disregard for the views of... close collaborators and, most important, a tendency to take irrational decisions.” In an acknowledgment of his letter, which had been transmitted through the VC of UB, the VC announced that

your resignation comes in the heat of the most savage in a series of senseless strikes by students of the University of Buea. The effective date of your departure of 1 January 1996 is also only two days before the beginning of end-of-semester examinations for which you are responsible as Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences. Curiously also, the ringleaders of the present strike action are not only in your Faculty but also in your department (Law). Some of them are those with whom you attended a subversive political meeting near the Presbyterian Church, Molyko, on 13 February 1995 which called on students to overthrow the regime.11

In certain cases an individual's preoccupation with self-validation before the regime has led to intellectual dishonesty. Recently a renowned political scientist and member of cabinet argued in the Post (Jan. 22, 2001) that “the reason we fought for African independence was because the African believed that colonialism was bad. Cameroon came into existence before the colonial masters split us into two (our emphasis). Thank God, in 1961, we came together again because what God has put together, man was not supposed to put asunder.” Though the concepts of nation and state are confounded in this argument, it has good political purchase among those who argue that Cameroon predated the colonial state. Furthermore, because of the
speaker's credentials and the fact that lie is endowed with cultural and social capital, more and more Cameroonians, especially those who are angry about the past or the present, are likely to accept this mythical version of their past (see Foucault 1984:248)—almost a colonization of consciousness. Similarly, a professor at a colloquium organized at the UB argued in the glare of television cameras that the reunited Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon was like a marriage, which is bound to sour after forty years! 12 This, in effect, turns Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as an imagined community on its head.

Nietzsche once observed that “truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are” (1954:47). Critical scholars are confronted with vigorous resistance when they attempt to challenge this kind of ignorance and dishonesty, for they threaten the circle of reciprocal seduction that exists between the state intellectuals and the masses, thus threatening the profitable dialectic between information and control. This was instanced in 1997 in the case of Ndiva Mbuu, an associate professor of education at the University of Buea who was also the national assistant secretary for finance for the Social Democratic Front (SDF), an opposition party. He had served as the campaign manager for the SDF in the South West Province during the municipal elections in March 1996. His campaign slots over the radio became very popular, and his reference to the fart that the SDF was going to flush out the CPDM with an “engine saw” (electric saw) earned him the sobriquet *Engine Saw*. In the wake of the defeat of the CPDM in the election, Mbuu was transferred to Ecole Normale Superieure Bambili in the North-West Province, the institution at which he had taught from 1980 to 1993, before he was transferred to UB at the request of the university. Mbuu saw his transfer back to Bambili as an act of political vindictiveness. Mbuu's department at UB, the Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, had acute capacity problems, and the VC, who participated in the transfer, acknowledged that the university, with its noncompetitive pay package, would have a hard time replacing such a qualified staff member. Yet Mbuu, who had already been assigned courses and had begun teaching for the semester, was transferred to Bambili to lecture “to empty amphitheatres having as his audience only the empty seats.” In a petition to the minister of education, he said that the VC had tried to persuade and cajole him to join the CPDM. The minister of education insisted that the transfer was a “normal or routine administrative action,” although he himself was a member of the CPDM campaign team in the South-West Province.13 It was

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clear to Mbua that the transfer was a matter of reprisal. He sought redress in the Administrative Bench of the Supreme Court, which ruled in his favor. The education minister, however, refused to execute the court's ruling, although his successor in the ministry did, finally demonstrating some respect for the rule of law.¹⁴

Foucault observes Chat punishment, especially when carried out in the gaze of the public, is a spectacle meant not only to reaffirm the power of decision-makers but also to serve as a deterrent for future offenders. Granting this, we would posit that the punishment meted out to Mbua was meant to silence other critical voices within the academy. Critical pluralism is discouraged in favor of docility, and others besides Mbua have suffered. Assistant lecturers in particular live in a general state of fear and insecurity, constantly being reminded that they are on probation and that contract renewal is not automatic. In September 2000 three assistant lecturers did not have their contracts renewed. This action was attributed, officially, to their failure to publish—although, as we have seen, this is rarely a criterion for promotion or nonpromotion as UB. It was widely believed instead that their participation in a strike action of the SYNES was the real cause.¹⁵ The minister of higher education, as chancellor of Cameroon State Universities, reminded the decision and posted them to the University of Douala, exacerbating the already chronic staff shortage at UB. But intervention to redress this particular situation did not mean the end of the troubles for the so-called recalcitrant staff. “SYNES members are usually not given research grants when they apply for them,” said one instructor. “They are discriminated against in terms of staff development schemes such as Commonwealth scholarships, etc., and they are frequently not given permission [research] missions both locally and internationally.” One dean convened a meeting just to celebrate the fact that he and the university administration had scuttled the promotion of a SYNES member.¹⁶ Decidedly, despite UB's popular slogan of “UB the Place to Be,” it is a university whose administration rewards docility and obedience in its staff and students rather than research, teaching, or knowledge.

Staff Development and Cooperation
As indicated above, the low salaries offered in Cameroon's university system make it difficult for universities to attract competent staff. Cameroonian graduates of European countries are extremely reluctant to return, opting instead to live and work outside the
country in places where the remuneration is better and there are fewer obstacles to scholarly work. Returning graduates prefer to enter the military or join the police, trading the higher social status of academic life for a better salary. Several years ago, in fact, there was a mass exodus of graduates who had already returned to Cameroon and then changed their minds. The cumulative effect has been the replacement of Ph.D. academics with holders of master's degrees (more than 60 percent of the faculty at the University of Buea have the lesser degree), with a serious shortage of tenured staff: that is, faculty at the level of associate professor and above. Since obtaining a master's often requires only one year of study after the bachelor's degree, it is not surprising that few of these young lecturers are interested in or qualified for scholarly research (although some, to their credit, have carried out excellent, even groundbreaking, research). Nevertheless, much of the faculty simply lacks the capacity to nurture and mentor students in the various academic disciplines.

The shortfall in tenured staff is exacerbated by logistical problems such as the absence of well-equipped laboratories and libraries, the sine qua non for instruction at the Ph.D. level. These deficits, of course, have not discouraged the institution from introducing doctoral programs, although even the assistant lecturers with master's degrees are unconvinced about their quality and rarely register for them. The most committed and ambitious ones now seek to further their education outside the country and by means of foreign grants. Against all odds, some of the staff have been recipients of foreign grants. However, nomination is not a guarantee that the university will grant them a study leave, as subterranean considerations permeate the decision-making process.
Notable among the strategies are administrative bottlenecks that are contrived rather than accidental. Letters notifying the authorities of an award and requesting permission to accept it move through the system at a snail's pace. There is no doubt that this tendency seems to be a systemic trait, to some extent; it is for good reason that most laws have provisos stipulating that failure to respond within a prescribed period of time should be seen as consent. In cases of grants, however, consent has to be explicit rather than trait, and failure to respond in time has been prejudicial to some beneficiaries. Authorities at UB have used all kinds of subterfuge or convoluted logic to deny the grantees permission to leave. In one case, they refused to sign the forms of a candidate who had been nominated for a Fulbright Grant because, they said, he did not dress with proper formality.

Rigor in scholarship was replaced, apparently, by an emphasis on sartorial rigor. Even those who are allowed to take advantage of an opportunity to work or study outside Cameroon—an opportunity, it should be emphasized, that has come their way only by dint of personal initiative—are subjected to firm regulations in matters such as scheduling and the academic calendar. Without paying any heed to the progress of their work, and probably because of the compulsory visibility considerations we discussed above, scholars usually are required to return to Cameroon on a particular date, even if it is in the middle of the semester. In 1995 when Nantang Jua was a Rockefeller Humanities Fellow at the University of Michigan, his host department received a letter of complaint about his failure to return on time, an action whose intent was either to embarrass the Fellow or cause the host institution to terminate his appointment. When Jua returned to Cameroon, he was brought before a civil service disciplinary committee on charges filed by university officials. They claimed that his prolonged absence had caused the university harm, that he was remorseless, and that he should be suspended for six months without salary: an odd recommendation, under the circumstances, since his absence was supposed to have been the crime in the first place.

When Francis Nyamnjoh was a visiting fellow at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, the VC requested that his salary from the University of Buea be stopped. In a letter to the Cameroonian minister of higher education, she complained of “absence from duty without permission of Dr. Francis Nyamnjoh” and wrote:

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“While we are still trying to know of his whereabouts, we have written to the Minister of the Economy and Finance for his salary to be suspended forthwith.” The salary was not reinstated, even after Nyamnjoh had returned and started teaching. Instead, the university recommended to the minister of higher education that he be brought before a disciplinary committee; they were deprived of the experience only because Nyamnjoh left Cameroon for the University of Botswana. Apparently in retaliation, and as a sign that human relations are privileged over science at UB, the university decided to eliminate his article, “Cameroon: A Country United by Ethnic Ambition and Difference,” from the *Journal of Social Sciences UASS* published by the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences), which already had accepted it. (The same article eventually was published in a 1999 issue of *African Affairs*, long before the inaugural issue of *JASS*, delayed by administrative bottlenecks and financial difficulties, was ever released.) Furthermore, a popular postgraduate program in development studies with which Nyamnjoh had been associated was canceled on the pretext that he had not been on campus to defend it.20

In November 2000, the university, with a view toward asserting total control over its faculty, wrote to various embassies in Cameroon asking that cooperative ventures henceforth be arranged between one institution and another, rather than between specific faculty members.21 Officials of foreign universities have always been skeptical about inter-institutional cooperation because, they argue, Third World institutions tend to send burnt out scholars who see the sabbatical as a holiday. They may not be aware that in most cases these institutions have sent such people deliberately, because the paramount concern is to suppress critical voices. Hence UB’s desire to limit direct contact between individual scholars and foreign embassies or universities. The university proposed itself as intermediary in order to cut back on the exposure of subversive knowledge and to make sure that critical voices are unable to evade their control.

Genuine cooperation between colleges and universities, such as collaborative scholarship or the reciprocal exchange of visiting faculty, always enriches the academic life of individuals and of institutions, but it is particularly beneficial to scholars and universities at the “margins.” When UB was still in its infancy and unable even to wean itself from the University of Yaounde, it worked frantically to attract foreign exchange scholars. In some cases, visiting faculty, perhaps out of benevolence or maybe just...
because of a frontier spirit, offered their services to the university pro bono. In most cases, however, their fervor was soon dampened by the realization that they were appreciated only insofar as they limited themselves to the transmission of theoretical and contextually distant knowledge. As the following case of Kai Schmidt-Soltau shows, they were not supposed to be engaged in applying this scholarship to Cameroonian reality.

Schmidt-Soltau applied to teach sociology at UB in 1997 without a salary. He received a part-time appointment, and soon became involved in writing a column, “Inspections from Outside,” in the Post, a local newspaper. His articles were extremely popular and contributed, in fact, to revivifying a waning newspaper reading culture in Anglophone Cameroon. The university generally was indifferent, but their indifference turned into rage when he began to write critically about the institution, as in articles entitled “Corruption and Development” or especially “Cage of Fools” (Schmidt-Soltau 1999:78), an attack on UB for having built a four-kilometer-long fence around the university when students and staff had neither lecture halls, a library, nor offices. The dean of the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, in a terse letter to Schmidt-Soltau, complained,

As a state owned institution of higher learning, we cannot afford to throw parochial and unverified criticisms on the government under which we work, and which pays us all the emoluments that we receive. We do not, however, refuse criticism provided that they are true and constructive. Your article has failed to show us the way forward from the corruption laden state that you have written about. . . . The article as it stands is simply a hair raising paper which only goes to denigrate the African system of governance, a position taken by some Western media for a long time. (Cited in Schmidt-Soltau 1999:75)

It should be noted, by the way, that Transparency international, certainly not an organ of the biased “Western media, “classified Cameroon in 1997 and 1998 as the most corrupt country in the world based on its “corruption perception index.”22 What was most disquieting to the authorities, however, was not Schmidt-Soltau's critique of “the African system of governance” but the fact that he mentioned that he worked at UB. It would have been necessary that you write your article without dragging in the

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University by mentioning that you are a lecturer in the University of Buea,” said the dean. “It should never be said that the University of Buea is critical of the state on issues it cannot verify and prove.” Needless to say, indication of an author's institutional affiliation is standard practice in all publications, and the university had never questioned this practice—until, that is, it disagreed with the content of the publication.

Despite his skirmishes with the administration, Schmidt-Soltau accepted invitations to participate in academic forums on campus. Invited by the UB Organization of African Unity Club to one such forum, he presented a paper entitled “Civil Society, and Conflict Resolution in Africa.” In the middle of his presentation, the chancellor and the governor walked out (Schmidt-Soltau 1999:83). The paper, which Schmidt-Soltau continued reading just the same, contained material such as the following:

   The University of Buea is building a wall around their campus. Students and lecturers complain about the vast sum of money being used for this purpose.... While students and the majority of lecturers supported by the elected mayor of Buea want to use their limited resources for an improvement of the terrible teaching facilities—for a library with books, for photocopy machines paper and some new amphitheatres—the appointed university administration wants to use their money for their needs and interests. Some people adore academic excellence, others white elephants. There are different options of conflict management existing: In a dictatorial regime, the administration would just continue with their projects till eruptions and trembling break down their walls of ignorance and burn the paper tigers. Where a civil society waxes strong, the different sides would discuss till a resolution is found. (Schmidt-Soltau 1999:72-73)

Eventually Schmidt-Soltau was dismissed from the University of Buea. Underlined in the letter of termination was the complaint that

   instead of promoting the fruitful co-operation which you indicated in your application of 1997, you have engaged not only in denigrating the authorities of Cameroon, including the Head of State, the entire nation of Cameroon and the University of Buea, but also in attempting to incite students and staff of our
institution to violence through your barrage of insulting and tendentious newspaper articles and your lectures.... We find such impudence, calumny and subversion unacceptable. We are therefore constrained to terminate your part-time appointment at the University of Buea with immediate effect .... You are also informed that you are barred from entering the campus of the University of Buea henceforth.” (Schmidt-Soltau 1999.80)

The University authorities also rebuked the student officials of the OAU for inviting Schmidt-Soltau and asked that they write letters of apology to the governor and the vice chancellor. Ironically, the posting of this decision on the Internet and the lively debate it engendered gave the university international visibility. German newspapers carried stories of the dismissal. A likely long-term consequence will be the reluctance of foreign scholars to accept appointments at this institution.

The Schmidt-Soltau affair caused the UB administration to be wary of any projects designed by foreign scholars. Even programs meant to promote the professional development of UB's faculty and staff are not approved easily: this despite the emphasis in the university's strategic plan on professional development as the path that will enable tertiary institutions in Africa to help the continent deal with the challenges of globalization (Sawyer 1998:23). Mohan Aurora, a Commonwealth Exchange Scholar who tried to organize a workshop entitled “Finance for Non-Financial Executives,” had to wait six months to get the university's approval (personal communication, Jan. 12, 2000). Finding this long waiting period exasperating, Aurora threatened to leave the university, arguing that the Commonwealth should not be paying his salary for nothing. He also threatened to inform the Commonwealth Secretariat that UB did not have any need for exchange scholars. To preempt this move while at the same time guaranteeing that Aurora work on something innocuous, the university proposed that he develop a Ph.D. program in economics. Aurora wondered about the feasibility of such a project, given that he would be at the institution for only two years, that the department was not even offering master's degrees, and that it had only one other lecturer with a Ph.D. He left ostensibly for health reasons.

Smarting from its experiences of the recent past, the university in 1998 refused to accept a Fulbright Scholar in the social sciences who had been assigned to UB, presumably
because the VC had not indicated the need for this scholar. (An assistant to the vice chancellor, however, had indeed sent out such a request and there was, furthermore, an obvious need for this scholar on a faculty, the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, that has only two associate professors. The Department of Sociology in with this professor; would have taught does not have any.) The university, clearly, is micro managed by certain individuals to the detriment of any participation or fluidity in its administration.

By trying to close itself off from the outside world, UB seems to have opted for an academic version of the Albanian solution, that is, to go it alone. Alternatively, the university is willing to accept foreign scholars in the social sciences if they are willing to submit to “tropicalization,” meaning, in this context, that they never criticize the host. Universities, however, especially research institutions, can survive and prosper only through cooperation and a sharing of resources regionally, nationally, and internationally (Sawyer 1998:24). Such activities are particularly crucial for a fledgling institution like UB, which, arguably, profits more from such programs than many of its partners. And for individuals, only through interaction with the “Other” can one “know oneself”: “a product,” according to Gramsci, “of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory” (1977:324). University campuses, more than any other institutions, are supposed to be liminal spaces, sites par excellence of a democratic culture.

The prevalence of this siege mentality at UB has contributed inordinately to the lack of transparency in its management. Opacity has crept even into sensitive realms such as promotions. Although texts outlining the requirements for promotion spell out the criteria, in practice contradictions abound. For example, for an assistant lecturer “with one incremental credit” to be promoted to the rank of lecturer, he or she has to have a Ph.D, one year of teaching experience at the University, and one publication in an academic journal. The text does not make any reference to pedagogic or administrative reports. While the former is certainly important and taken into consideration, it is really the latter that determines the candidate's fate. And because of the emphasis given the latter, most critical scholars have been denied promotion (Schmidt-Soltau 1999:82). In a recent case at UB, the dean of one of the faculties recommended that an assistant lecturer be denied promotion simply because of his militancy in SYNES. And some associate
professors have applied for promotion to the rank of full professor—and have been
approved—simply on the basis of their administrative positions. Practices such as these
make a mockery of the official requirements for promotion. They privilege mediocrity,
and nullify the idea of a university as a meritocracy. But as a hegemonic policy that is
constantly renewed and recreated, these practices become part of the institutional culture.

Conclusion

Africa's contribution to global intellectual endeavors, though already negligible,
continues to recede. The case study of Cameroon's University of Buea suggests that
several factors contribute to this trend. Notable among these are the étatization of tertiary
education, with its corollary being the absence of democratic policy-making on the part
of scholars—who are appointed by decree to administer this space. Preoccupation with the
policing of this space, a space that has played an inordinate role in contributing to the
thickening of civil society in other African countries, explains their intolerance of critical
scholarship. Any window of opportunity, no matter how slight, that could lead to the
production of this scholarship is closed. The routinization of symbolic violence—to wit
(the threat of) desalarization and Kafkaesque trials before disciplinary committees—is also
used as a deterrent. Young scholars are deprived of the chance for further training.

Besides the stick, carrots are also used. Among the latter are baits such as the promise of
appointments, whose attractiveness is enhanced by the perception that this is the only
means of upward mobility. The ultimate goal is the consolidation of a powerful
administration that devalues critical scholarship and discourages its production, with a
view to promoting social censorship. Recalcitrant academics find themselves
experiencing a kind of social death. In furtherance of this goal, institutions such as the
University of Buea seem to opt for the isolationist Albanian solution in the realm of
scholarship—and this in this age of globalization when the emphasis should be on
collaboration in order to create poles of excellence. The cumulative effect of the
foregoing is to discourage the creative tension that inspires the most important and most
creative scholarship. Most scholarship that is produced in Cameroon, on the contrary,
tends to be dead dogma, based on old, if not outmoded, constructs. Only the birth of a
democratic culture that guarantees the de facto deregularization of this realm will bring
life back into Cameroonian scholarship: a drastic change in the present climate, which

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allows only for an academic existence, not an academic life. Even as a footnote, we would also like to mention the positive correlation between Africa's marginalization, its declining geostrategic importance in world politics since the end of the Cold War, and its low purchase among publishers. Because of the shift in focus of many publishing houses, those that factor in utilitarian considerations in their decision-making process are decreasing their exposure to Africa. Manuscripts from and on Africa, and especially country studies, whatever their merits, and even those that have value added to them by Western co authorship, are considered as having a low market value.
References


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Notes

1. Kim D. Butler (2000) refers to this as the “Gramsci problem”. Since some of this theory is inappropriate, she argues that there is a need for the development of an indigenous theory.

2. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) sees student protests in France as predicated on this thesis. See also Wacquant (1993:22, 26). No doubt the unrestrained use of state violence on an episodic basis, for example the assassination of Engelbert Mveng, begins to problematize the validity of this claim.

3. Vaclav Havel (1992:167-71) points out that despite the critical position of dis-sidenses, the state does not clamp down on them because of their connections to the outside world.

4. See Calloni (1998:99). In effect, a decree introduces an unmediated relationship between ruler and subjects. This leads to despotism. For Rousseau, a despot. is not simply against the laws of his society but is also above the law itself. A despotism reduces political life to a relationship and subordinates the wills and interests of the people to that of the despot. It is plausible that the inclusion of the senate and council in the process of naming the vice chancellor was meant as a form of mediation.

5. For an explanation of generational conflict as the driving force of history, see Feuer (1969). Eboe Hutchful (1998:38) has argued that the older generation of African scholars is tired and no longer productive. But because of its control of the academy, it has constrained, if not deenergized, the youthful generation which is more committed to research and publication. For the specific case of Cameroon, where some professors have not published even an article in the past twenty-five years, see the Post, Oct. 2, 2000, p. 3.

For an explication of the dynamics by which those in power maintain their position, see Wacquant (1993).

The VC did decide eventually not to retract the Fulbright Scholar's recommendation, though it has been argued that she did so because her daughter had applied for a U.S. visa and she did not want to alienate the Americans.

6. This trend, we must observe, was more common in the early 1990s. The devalorization of the teaching profession is demonstrated by the fact that police
inspectors, most of whom have only primary school education, earn more than university lecturers. The security-conscious, state panders to the interests of the military establishment, devalorizing cultural capital and those who possess it.


9. The concept of heteronomous culture is adapted from Marina Calloni's concept or “heteronomous individuals,” that is, people who, lacking any real recognition inside their disciplines, turn to the mass media to find success. See Calloni (1998:105).


12. See Ndjana (2000). Admittedly, the use of this analogy provoked a storm in the hall. Ndjana did not, however, retract it; he contended that this was only a side comment and not the theme of his paper.


14. See interview with the vice chancellor in Cameroon Tribune, March 8, 1996, p. 8; Memorandum of Law in re Dr. Mbua v. the Minister of Higher Education, para. 7; Ndiva Mbua, letter to the Minister of Higher Education, para. 6, p. 3, Feb. 16, 1998; Ordinance 42/OBE/PCA/CE95-96, Sept. 19, 1996. Mbua in his statement to the court also pointed out (Para. 7) that “it is highly abnormal and far from routine for an administrator to post one of his functionaries to a department that clearly has no use for his services, unless the unspoken intention is to punish that functionary.”


17. That consent has to be explicit is borne out by L/N 5775/75-3/UB/WOOO of Dec. 9, 1994, from the vice chancellor to the dean of the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences. Whereas this query acknowledges the fact that the minister of higher education granted permission for Nantang Jua to travel to the University of Michigan by L/N 2342/MINESUP/DFO/A of Sept. 8, 1994, “it would seem that Dr. Jua left for the United States before this. information could be communicated to him” and long before November 1994 when he indicated he wanted to leave.” Significantly, it overlooks or covers over the fact that Jua undertook this trip during the holiday period.

18. Given our interest in the symbolism of power, this episode is particularly interesting insofar as it displays the academy as a site of opposition between the *vieux jeux* and *nouveaux jeux*. Whereas the former cling to a formal mode of dressing, the latter are more casual and relaxed or dressed down (see Bourdieu 1984). Insofar as this relationship is one of power, the *vieux jeux* intuitively, even if this be the product of a momentary reflex, make a connection between the mode of dress and scholarship. Thus they associate the *nouveaux jeux* with postmodern tendencies, and by that same token, critical scholarship.

Admittedly, the Fulbright candidate’s forms were signed later on—after the expiration of the deadline.

19. That these trials are acts of intellectual violence meant to devalue the defendant and cause him to lose all self-confidence is demonstrated by the kind of treatment the defendant receives. One is allowed to bring along a lawyer, but the climate at these long trials is positively Kafkaesque, with examiners, for example, drinking tea and eating biscuits while carrying on their interrogation. An interesting question is the extent to which such a violating experience constitutes not just punishment (or the intention to punish) but also actual evil. According to some theorists, the difference between suffering and evil has to do with the presence or absence of a responsible agent; See Connolly (1991).
20. See Letter 1020/75-3/UB/A200, September 30, 1998, Vice Chancellor to Minister of Higher Education; Letter 1021/75-3/UB/A200, September 30, 1998, Vice Chancellor to Minister of the Economy and Finance requesting suspension without delay of Nyamnjoh's salary; Decision 2277/UB/ADA/PD, August 17, 1999, by Vice Chancellor, setting up “a Disciplinary Board to examine matters of indiscipline against Dr. Francis Nyamnjoh, Lecturer in the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences.” Since the publication of the first number of \textit{JASS}, the vice chancellor has become extremely reluctant to release funding for its continuous publication. According to a staff member (personal communication, Sept. 19, 2001), her decision is predicated on the fact that most articles appearing in the journal have been extremely critical of the state. This decision is also revealing because it shows the extent of the centralization in UB, where some of the staff claim that not even basic supplies can be bought without the approval of the vice chancellor. Though \textit{JASS} has an editorial board, it is common knowledge at UB that all decisions concerning the articles to be published are made by the dean of the Department of Social and Management Sciences. And a certain opaqueness surrounds the criteria used for these decisions.

21. In L/N 3329/UB/AcA/DTTS of November 6, 2000, to the Director of Public Affairs of the U.S. Embassy in Cameroon acknowledging the nomination of Augustine Nsang and Arnold Epanty for Fulbright Awards, the Vice Chancellor stipulates that “However, the University would prefer to endorse future applications at the time that they are submitted as not to be placed in the awkward situation of refusing to support candidates already selected by the Embassy.” This exception could not fail to raise suspicion, as the procedure adopted by the embassies is meant to foster objectivity and transparency in the selection process.

22. For a more scholarly work with substantive evidence from Cameroon, see Jean Francois Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Beatrice Hibou (1999).

23. This termination came just two weeks before the end of the semester. In effect, the authorities did not consider the prejudice that this would cause the university—They also reported Schmidt-Soltau to the police. The charges against him were grave enough warrant an order that he leave Cameroonian territory within twenty-four to forty-eight hours. As a mark of disapproval, the administration also removed the pictures of Schmidt-
Soltau and Nantang Jua from the picture album of OAU day, where they would have been featured as participants in the historical development of the university.

According to Schmidt-Soltau (1999:88), “there is a Senate, but some members of the Senate tell me that everything is stage managed. They just have to raise their hands and clap and that is all. Similarly, when the deputy vice chancellor for academic affairs was asked to comment on a so-called recruitment scandal that marred the beginning of the school year, the response was that only the vice chancellor was empowered to make any official declaration to the press; see the Post, October 25, 1999, p. 7

26 Seen through another prism, Cameroon might be understood as not having embarked on the path to modernity, which Brecht in The Life of Galileo identifies with the spirit of free research which always comes in conflict with the doctrinaire and the defense of established apparatuses of power (cited in Touraine 1995:202).
27. This is not to deemphasize the importance of this thesis. Rather, as a central concern in the academy, it deserves to be studied in detail.
Nantang Jua is a Maître de Recherche at Cameroon's Ministry of Scientific Research and assistant coordinator of Ethno-NetAfrica. He has been a professor of political science and international relations at the University of Yaoundé and the University of Buea. He also has been a Fulbright Scholar and has held fellowships at the University of Michigan, Amherst College, and Leiden University. His articles have been widely published in international as well as local journals and as chapters in edited books. Currently he is working on a book on social transformations and democratization in Cameroon.

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