



RESEARCH PAPER

Communication Under Surveillance: An analysis of Decaying Lifeworld in *Home Fire*

¹Urooj Waheed*, and ²Prof. Dr. Munawar Iqbal Ahmed

1. PhD Scholar, Department of Humanities, Air University Islamabad, Pakistan
2. Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

urooj.rehman@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the decay of the lifeworld in Kamila Shamsie's novel *Home Fire* under post-9/11 surveillance and systemic pressures (financial and administrative). The recent surge in migration to Western countries due to new waves of civil unrest, such as those in Syria, has made Muslim immigrant communities more susceptible to surveillance. Using a hybrid theoretical framework rooted in Habermas' concept of lifeworld colonization and Foucault's rendition of panoptic surveillance, this article closely analyzes interpersonal communication among fictional characters to understand the connection between the perpetuation of dominant ideologies and the communicative bond necessary for interpersonal relationships. The analysis identifies a lack of cultural bonding and the pervasive administrative gaze working hand in hand. The sinister influence and insidious workings of power structures manifest tangibly in the characters' disinterest in interpersonal communication. This work might motivate future research to utilize fiction to understand chronic sociological issues faced by immigrants.

KEYWORDS Panopticon, Lifeworld, Immigration, Interpersonal Communication

Introduction

The events of 9/11 introduced Muslim immigrants to a whole new realm of physical constraints, along with psychological crises due to the highly discriminatory and racist rhetoric of the war on terror. Morley (2009) looks at the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in post 9/11 America as a tactic to submit both common Americans as well as the global public to the state generated narrative of fear. 9/11 poisoned "American socio-cultural configurations of a melting pot" with already existing yet latent residue of "racism and xenophobia" and the result homogenizes "all its 'Others' (immigrants, the national citizen offspring of immigrants, and expatriates) as 'terrorists'" (Jajja & Shaheen, 2019, p. 177). The change in the attitude of super power also brought change in the whole of the west not only affecting inter-communal relations but also intra-communal interaction. The rise in surveillance from the host society not only makes migrants vigilant of their behavior towards the state and society, but also towards their own ties with their community. The case of Muslim migrants is particularly noteworthy, as surveillance appears to operate alongside, and often beyond, financial and administrative pressures. This invites Foucault's concept of surveillance to enrich the notion of Lifeworld colonization in this context. A communicative interpersonal bond, which may already be suffering - as claimed by Habermas' Lifeworld colonization thesis - becomes even weaker when subjected to the panoptic gaze, which is vigilant for any delinquency and determined to maintain docility. The current research aims to study the struggles of immigrants' lives as depicted in Pakistani immigrant fiction, particularly focusing on administrative constraints and economic

demands as adverse influences on interpersonal communication. *Home Fire* is a novel which addresses the predicament of disintegrating immigrant families amid financial crisis, religious scrutiny and migrant centered surveillance policies. Through its fictional portrayal of some important political and historical moments of the recent past, this novel can help readers to understand the communicative pathologies migrant families are dealing with. The analysis of *Home Fire* is guided by the question: How are the perpetuation of dominant ideologies and professional aspirations intertwined and do affect interpersonal considerations? For the sake of detailed inquiry, the aforementioned question has been divided into sub-questions: How does dominant ideologies control human subjectivities through temporal and spatial control of lives? How does the system mediate familial life either in the guise of professional aspiration or survival imperatives?

Home Fire explores themes of love, loyalty, cultural clash, and the impact of politics and extremism on family dynamics. The novel opens with Isma fearing her interrogation at the airport, introducing readers to one of the members of the Pasha family dealing with extreme surveillance after the death of Adil Pasha (Isma's father) under the label of jihadist.

Isma's meeting with the male protagonist, Eamonn, not only introduces the main antagonist, Tariq Lone, but also provides a background of the hatred the Pasha family harbors for Lone due to his insensitive remark at the death of Adil Pasha. Isma's liking for Eamonn prompts her to take off her hijab and share her tragedy with the expectation that Eamonn will reciprocate with both love and sympathy. On the contrary, Eamonn shows nothing more than platonic affection and feels attracted to Aneeka's beautiful photograph instead. This chapter of Isma and Eamonn's brief encounter ends, paving the way for upcoming tumultuous events.

Before the first meeting of Eamonn and Aneeka, Isma has been deserted by Aneeka due to the former's statement to authorities about Pervaiz's visit to Syria. Aneeka starts a lustful affair with Eamonn, which develops into a genuine liking that refuses to die down even when Eamonn agrees to convince his father to let her brother come back to Britain. However, Pervaiz is killed by ISIS while trying to enter the British embassy, and the British media wastes no time branding him as an accomplice of ISIS, despite finding no explosives attached to his body.

The Pasha sisters are again under the spotlight, and this time Home Secretary Tariq Lone has to share this spotlight, despite his open contempt for anything remotely Muslim. The last part of the novel is laden with Aneeka's determination to bring her brother's dead body back to London for burial, Lone's adamant disregard for human feelings for the sake of his professional rise, and Eamonn's persistent love for Aneeka, which leads him to Pakistan and to his death.

Literature Review

Home Fire has been explored multiple times for its political relevance to the moment it was written at. By keeping mind that in the backdrop of immigrants fiction, few themes like identity crisis, cultural shock and political and social bias are repeatedly discussed, this brief section focuses on those scholarly works which try to highlight these or other themes in the context bound way, taking lead from political developments and social unrest in recent years prior to emergence of the novel. The alienation of immigrant is not a new concept, but in *Home Fire* this feeling of being cast out of mainstream society is directly associated with making immigrants stateless subjected to their political affiliations (Banerjee, 2020; & Rutkowska, 2022). The studies done so far claim that novel has the ability to listen to those whose voice is generally ignored (Chambers, 2018) thus speaks for those subalterns who are

relegated to peripheries by colonial radical mentality (Rind & Mahesar, 2022) but at the same time Shamsie's work has been criticized for overgeneralizing the plight of few to represent the larger picture. Shamsie has even been called re-orientalist for presenting an immigrant family in an utterly bleak situation (Sikanade et.al, 2022). But another scholarly insight finds novel resisting re-orientalizing of muslim immigrants by keenly reflecting on the contemporary orientalizing forces which leaves "the women-kin of the dead man" with only one "unenviable choice of either re-orientalizing or being Orientalized themselves" (Lau & Mendes, 2021, p. 55).

Though 9/11 continues to whisper through the narrative yet it was a renewal of the surveillance and biased rhetoric which make *Home Fire* a commentary on the evolution of prejudice over the period of time and its culmination with the emergence of new controversial Jihadist groups. Choudary (2020) has discussed isolation as a dominant feeling faced by immigrants for being under watch since 9/11 and thus invites the readers to think about different possible outcomes of selective surveillance. This research can make a reader think about isolating muslim immigrants not only from the mainstream host community but also from their own community members. The scholarly importance of aforementioned works cannot be denied but what is missing here is a detailed discussion about internalization of implicit control of dominant ideology and its effect on communicative connection between characters.

Methodology

Critical Theory brings "to agents' attention the distortions that block them from addressing and overcoming obstacles to emancipation" (Celikates, 2019, p. 439). In the same critical spirit, Habermas's theory of Lifeworld Colonization and Foucault's detailed discussion of disciplinary techniques to maintain surveillance help researchers question covert power hierarchies. This is qualitative research within the paradigm of critical theory, where Habermas's critique of systemic control of lifeworld, along with Foucault's concept of panoptic control, has been simultaneously consulted to study the distorted communication among immigrants in the fictional world of politically and socially inspired novels.

Lifeworld is a concept that was used by Husserl in the first half of the 20th century to refer to the feeling of consciousness of one's existence while living together (1970). Schutz made this concept more tangible by calling it a "domain of direct social experience," where "subjects encountered" (1970, p. 119). Schutz takes into account both the communicative angle of the lifeworld and the interactively built interpretive spirit when he finds subjects interacting within a "linguistic community" while building a common "stock of knowledge" (p. 132). In his theorization of the concept of Lifeworld, Habermas not only prioritizes the communicative spirit of lifeworld - as highlighted by Schutz - but also takes into account Schutz's emphasis on lifeworld's dynamic nature for its inclusion of "all modifications of attitude and alertness" (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974, p.21). This element of change is addressed by Habermas as the lifeworld engendering process of reproduction of culture, where the stock of knowledge is not only intergenerationally communicated but also challenged and reformed to accommodate novel situations (1987). Giving central importance to communication, Habermas looks at the lifeworld as a combined working of three processes (cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization), which are themselves rooted in communicative interaction.

In his second volume of *A Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas's concept of Lifeworld paves the way for understanding the systemic encroachment (an encroachment of administrative and financial systems) in a capitalist society (1987). This occurs when different areas of communication are controlled by advanced capitalist administration and when

various administrative apparatuses “invade and disfigure that space of social antagonism,” also affecting the process of free dialogue, which is the only source to reach “legitimate resolution” (Harrington, 2006, p. 341). The dictatorial encroachment of financial and administrative demands hurts by blocking lifeworld processes which results in scarcity of shared meaning, lack of social coordination and alienation (Habermas, 1987)

A literal translation of Bentham’s panopticon conveys the meaning of an “all-seeing” construction (Kroener & Neyland, 2012 p. 144). Foucault borrowed the concept of the Panopticon from Bentham and domesticated it by shifting Bentham's focus on architectural design to support external surveillance to an internalized feeling of being watched (Elmer, 2012). Scholars refer to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977) as a seminal text that (re)defines the concept of panoptic surveillance and unveils its potential to theorize a whole system of power (Elmer, 2012; Strub, 1989). Foucault focuses on the workings of power at the subjective level of humans. The subjectively internalized surveillance goes beyond mere control and pursues the goal of “cultivating a self-governance, an automatic subservience, without the need for direct monitoring and management” (Elmer, 2012, p. 24).

What makes Foucault’s deconstruction of panoptic mechanism of control relevant to Habermas’ emancipatory spirit of lifeworld colonization is that “any resistance to surveillance ultimately depends upon an informed, motivated and engaged citizenry” (Lyon, Haggerty & Ball p.3). Habermas’ cautionary note in his theorization of colonized lifeworld can enlighten readers about communicative bonds that can make people aware of the controlling forces that work through injecting fear and creating alienation. The inclusion of surveillance within the system-lifeworld interplay rests on the suppression of communication in two apparently similar situations: colonized lifeworlds and panoptic moment.

Results and Discussion

This section attempts to mark and discuss those moments and to relate humanoid servility in vertical administrative relations to the diminishing need for mutual understanding in horizontal social space. This section focuses on characters of Lone, Isma, Aneeka, and Pervaiz when they either submissively and at times unknowingly get recruited to a process that places them in the "analytical space" (Foucault, p. 142) where they are classified "according to skill and speed" and reduced to recruited individuals to a "particular agent" who is watched for their productivity (Foucault, 1975, p.145)

The characters of Lone and Isma seem to be really suitable locales for studying the interaction of conflicting ideologies. They often appear to be more complicit recruits of the system, and their life histories also exemplify the 'temporal continuum of individuality genesis,' where the gradual inculcation of servility is performed through drills for financial survival and social acceptance (Foucault, 1975, p.161). What they gain and lose during their uphill maneuvering is quite explicit in the narrative. The following discussion looks at their lives in terms of different stages of receding interpersonal connection in the wake of success-driven strategies

Lone’s awareness of his financial standing and limitations begins with a comparison to his affluent relatives. His aspiration to attain what these wealthy family members possess obscures his interpersonal connection with them. The realization of living in a “cramped flat” with only one table serving as a 'kitchen counter, dining table, and workspace for his seamstress mother' somehow eclipses the presence of a hardworking mother who is religious enough to hang a photograph of the Kaaba (Shamsie, 2017, p. 60). In Lone’s memories and the ones his son receives from him, his mother’s profession stands out more vividly than her

role as a mother, and the mediation of money appears to be at work, playing with Lone's subjectivity. From the early phase of his life, the little room left by financial demands kept him awake at night. A success-driven, goal-oriented approach leaves no room for religious and familial connections as coping mechanisms to deal with everyday challenges. The goals are largely designed by the very system that places him in the lower stratum of society and demands striding away from religious tradition as a step to avoid scrutiny. Lone prefers to be addressed as "from a Muslim background" and not as a Muslim himself (Shamsie, 2017, p, 33). The system requires a tamed agent working unquestionably to overcome survival hurdles, not an idealist looking at abstract interpretative patterns in the guise of religious beliefs to cope with the difficulties of life. This tamed agent seems to act upon the 'nonnormative regulation of individual decisions that extends beyond the actors' consciousness' (Habermas, 1987, p. 117). Lone refers to traditional Muslim dressing as 'outdated codes of behavior' and strongly suggests that they give up their traditional ways for the sake of a 'multiethnic, multireligious, multitudinous' society (Shamsie, 2017, p. 80). In his speech, Lone appears to employ a mitigating strategy to downplay the prominence of his Muslim origin in a society where the dominant narrative portrays Muslims as outdated. In doing so, he severs his intersubjective link with the potential Muslim audience. He seems to ignore the fact that the nuances of traditions, which members of any community receive on a daily basis from intra-communal interactions and through generational links, may resist being totalized or systematized under a singular ideology.

Lone's strategic action to achieve his goal to be accepted by his conservative party and native British population secures him a success in short run. His preemptive comments about the gender segregation of mosques, in particular, earn him the title of "LONE CRUSADER taking on the backwardness of British Muslims" (Shamsie, p. 35). He kills two birds with one stone when he not only alienates himself from being a Muslim but also expresses his disapproval of the Muslim community's norm of gender segregation, which is often targeted by the state. The narrative juxtaposes Lone's success-oriented strategies against his deliberate ignorance of his community's collective regard for the mosque and depicts the success-driven bureaucratic system as rooted in the negation of consensus-oriented communicative gestures of the lifeworld: 'Karamat Lone had precisely calculated the short-term losses and long-term gains of showing such contempt for the conventions of a mosque. Lone's emphasis is on the system's material rewards. 'There is nothing this country won't allow you to achieve' (Shamsie, 2017, p. 87), a statement which seems like orchestrated behavior when analyzed with the connection of class disparity Lone has observed or made to observe during the early phase of his life. First, the desire to learn the techniques to get rich or to achieve system-designed goals is inculcated, and then the very apprenticeship "induces modes of behavior, and the acquisition of skills is inextricably linked with the establishment of power relations" and as a result "submissive subjects are produced" (Foucault, 1975, p. 295). The success oriented vigor in Lone's attitude shows that disciplinary techniques when exercised upon the body can have "a double effect: a 'soul' to be known and a subjection to be maintained" (Faoucault, 1975, p. 296).

Lone's learned survival instinct makes him view his children from the same outlook that the system opts to look at him: a calculated one. He dotes on his son, knowing that Eamonn's lack of materialistic aggressiveness may keep him behind in the race of life. Lone considers him a "Poor fellow,... considering the gap in abilities and achievements between Eamonn and his younger sister" (Shamsie, 2017, p. 213). His wish to have a son like Emily mixes up his love for Eamonn with a sense of pity for a lost cause. He even has a strategic desire to wed his daughter with one of his supportive political ally James. It is interesting to notice how meticulously his strategic outlook for rising in his professional domain encroaches on his children's personal quarters. Eamonn imbibes a sense of pride akin to his father's success, and his inability to catch up with his father's success also makes him a little

contemptuous of those who are far behind his father: “a shrug that encompassed the mediocrity of everything.

While Lone’s character functions as an instrumental tool in the larger framework of power, both supporting it and being controlled by it, Isma’s character seems to emerge in a gray area where it is often difficult for readers to categorize her either as a resilient member of the lifeworld or a passive humanoid instrument working for survival and success. The next section attempts to unravel the mystery of Isma’s character.

Foucault, in his discussion of disciplinary techniques in the 18th century, connects “permanent coercions” and “indefinitely progressive forms of training” to “automatic docility” (Foucault, 1975, p. 169), Isma’s internalization of docility in the early phase of her life, expected from a suspected daughter of a Jihadi, and her meticulous submissiveness to the role of a low wager in the later phase, shows that the system knows how to extract accurate work from the ‘cogs of a machine’ (Foucault, 1975, p. 169).

Lancaster method, the complex clockwork of the mutual improvement school was built up cog by cog: first the oldest pupils were entrusted with tasks involving simple supervision, then of checking work, then of teaching; in the end, all the time of all the pupils was occupied either with teaching or with being taught. (Foucault, 1975, p. 165)

An overview of Isma’s conversation with Aneeka hints at her being a trained agent of the system who bypasses not only her siblings but also the consensus-oriented conventions of the lifeworld by reporting authorities about her brother’s departure:

“It was you,” her sister said.

“Parvaiz?” her own voice strange with sleep and fear.

“You were the one who told the police what he’d done.”

One kind of panic ending, another beginning. “Who told you that?” (p. 42)

The middle part of the conversation hints at Isma’s internalization of state surveillance, which mostly operates through fear rather than actual manifestation. The voice oriented toward the fear of surveillance ignores the voices oriented toward the possibility that Pervaiz might have been trapped. Aneeka’s consciousness, although seemingly oriented to the state’s inculcated fear, also entertains the aspect of its unjust rule. She continues to communicate with Pervaiz, and her interpersonal interactions – not mediated by economic pressures like the ones Pervaiz had with Isma – link her consciousness with the predicament of Pervaiz, which cannot be explicated by the sweeping judgmental state narrative:

“They would have found out anyway.”

“You don’t know that.”

Her sister’s voice all hurt and confusion.

“They might not have. And then he could have come home. He could just have turned around the moment he knew he’d made a mistake and come home. You’ve made him not able to come home.” (p. 42)

Isma's response once again positions her as a mouthpiece of a single-voiced state narrative, merely informing people about what is lawful or unlawful without considering the context of apparent right and wrong:

" listen to me. People in the neighborhood knew.

The police would have found out. There was nothing I could do for him, so I did what I could for you, for us." "For me?" "We're in no position to let the state question our loyalties. Don't you understand that? If you cooperate, it makes a difference. I wasn't going to let him make you suffer for the choices he'd made." (p.42)

Words like "Loyalties" and "Cooperation" make Isma stand out as the "oldest pupil" among her unruly siblings. She distances herself with the one who goes against law and complies with the system by truthfully reporting on Pervaiz without first knowing the truth from him, as claimed by Aneeka.

Why doesn't Pervaiz confide in Isma before leaving for Raqqa, Syria, and why doesn't he share his wish to return to London with her? Isma's decision to rent out their house without taking Pervaiz into confidence, along with her insistence that he abandon his passion for making music, shows a weak intersubjective link between brother and sister. Isma fails to take into account the sense of failure Pervaiz feels for not securing a scholarship, coupled with his discomfort in getting out of his comfort zone.

"Discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (Foucault, 1975, p. 141) . Foucault's commentary on 18th century disciplinary technique of "partitioning" foreshadows the following analysis of textual chunks:

Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, ... to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. (Foucault, 1975, p. 143)

The system watches Pasha's family closely for an extended period. It knows how to separate the younglings to cause the unlinking of chains (a feeling that Pervaiz experiences after having been left behind in the academic race), and where to place each sibling to ensure future surveillance along with expected complicity. This echoes the "systematic classification" discussed by Foucault in the context of supervision and ultimate monitoring rooted in the separation of the given subjects to facilitate "twin operations in which the two elements - distribution and analysis, supervision and intelligibility" which "are inextricably bound up" (Foucault, 1975, p. 148). Even Aneeka, the rebel, is monitored through her registration form, through its 'inclusive' and 'diverse' boxes,"(Shamsie, 2017, p. 132). By ticking, she has been let in, and by not ticking, she would not only be barred from pursuing academic goals but might also come under an even tighter radar. Administrative procedures of academia start the categorization process for easy control and possible future surveillance even at the time of admission.

Isma - a good cop- has always been a favorite of the system. She seems to dutifully imbibe surveilling system's regulations for breaking "dangerous communication" (pp.143). After Pervaiz and Aneeka logout from skype, she feels "released of the day's burdens" and safe from being caught in any non-sanctioned interaction (Shamsie, 2017, p. 31). She often looks at Pervaiz from an outlook filtered by financial demands: "she didn't believe he was good enough to find work doing what he loved, didn't see that his sound reel was as much an investment in the future as Aneeka's law degree was" (Shamsie, 2017, p.119). She

measures Pervaiz's utility against hers : "I gave up my life to work in a dry-cleaning store and put food on this table; now it's your turn. If you can't get yourself a scholarship, at least pay some bills" (Shamsie, p. 165). Her comparison of two siblings seems to be motivated by Isma's internalization of disciplinary rules of the society where members continuously strive for salvation (here salvation means success and survival), and it develops into a "permanent competition of individuals" who are "classified in relation to one another" (Foucault, 1975, p.161). Pervaiz is left behind in this survival race and Isma - being a passive receptor of rules of the financial system- typifies Pervaiz in the category of invalid. The communicative action exhibits a distortion:

Structural violence is exercised by way of systemic restrictions on communication; distortion is anchored in the formal conditions of communicative action in such a way that the interrelation of the objective, social, and subjective worlds gets prejudged for participants in a typical fashion (Habermas, 1987, p. 137).

Isma does not ask for her brother's opinion regarding her plan of renting out her house. Financial constraints leave no room for any discussion leading to consensus based on intersubjective understanding. Isma's survival instinct follows the solution offered by economic constraints and Pervaiz feels "the blade of being omitted from the conversation" and it gets even worse when Aneeka agrees with Isma (Shamsie, 2017, p.120). He experiences "one of those terrifying moments in which a person you thought you knew reveals a new aspect of their character that has taken hold while you weren't looking." (p. 120). Why is Pervaiz left out from communication? As feelings are not considered important when discussing strategies to survive within a system. Aneeka and Isma seem to be more apt instruments of a larger system that allows only those to speak who walk the line. Isma pre-judges Pervaiz's incompetency to give any reliable advice, as he does not comply with the financial imperatives due to his lack of productivity.

While Aneeka somehow manages to escape surveillance by playing a trick of keeping perfect silence at any query about his father, Pervaiz comes under the radar the day police sees his father's photograph in his bedroom with a note: One day you'll join me in jihad. Concerned officer finds this photograph an object to allow a child to "idolize the father who fought with Britain's enemies" (p. 201). No apparent involvement can be seen in Pervaiz's inability to get scholarship, but remarks shared about his death shows that was always considered a weak link. For an adult Pervaiz the presence of a state representative in his bedroom and removal of his Father's photographs was an unjustified intrusion of his private space and his most intimate memories. Letting Aneeka study law can also be analyzed as strategic placing of a lawbreaker's daughter in the quarters of those who not only learn state approved law but also manipulate facts for the enforcement of that law. But it is Isma who appears to be the real beneficiary of the system for being docile. In Isma's case, her visibility to the system is enhanced by her shaping of her time according to financial demands.

Conclusion

The selected theoretical lenses are the ones interested in the most personal recesses of human lives where interpersonal intersubjectivity takes shape and subtle involvement of surveilling machinery through disciplinary techniques. The relational void that emerges when Isma starts to stay away from her siblings for her job as a manager at the laundry becomes a chasm when financial imperatives and a thirst for success compel her to move her siblings out of their comfort zone. A moment of communication disoriented from twins' emotions separates Pasha's siblings forever. Where Isma embraces submissive docility after being long under the influence of the disciplinary mechanism of a watchful system, the character of Tariq Lone tries to use the system for his own strategic goals by intentionally

becoming a part of the system, not just the one that system remotely controls. In the pursuit of his strategic goal he pushed the limits of a human inside him who has generational and familial connections. In making an attempt to satisfy the demands of the administrative system he was part of and severing the bonds with those who are under the systemic radar, he loses his only son and the hand “who would hold his” hand in his last moment”.

The character of Pervaiz, whose rotten dead body set drop scene, is like an alert against the disregard of the system for human feelings, longings and shortcomings. Family is the first immediate social group Pervaiz interacts with, and he could not find himself playing any legitimate role as a male in this group, and consequently, in society. He cannot identify himself with the strength of his father as depicted in his photograph and with the figure of his grandfather who was the provider of the family. When Isma and Aneeka do not invite his opinion during a supposedly intimate sibling discussion, the bullied manhood of Pervaiz finds sanctuary in a terrorist recruiter who forged a fake lifeworld horizon based on untrue commonalities to build a fake communicative link with Pervaiz and which leads to a tragedy of family disintegration.

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