

Hegemonic Masculinity in Martin a Ramos's *The Way of The Machete*: a Masculinity Study

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ABSTRACT

The exploration of hegemonic masculinity in literature is a critical area of study for understanding the roots of gender oppression and social inequality. This study analyzes the representation of hegemonic masculinity in Martin A. Ramos's short story, *The Way of The Machete*, which depicts the complex struggles of men in fulfilling rigid societal standards of manliness. The primary issue addressed is how hegemonic masculinity sets unattainable standards that often result in subordination and systemic violence. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing the framework of hegemonic masculinity proposed by Connell and Messerschmidt to deconstruct the power relations presented in the narrative. The analysis focuses on how certain characters navigate their dominant positions and the subsequent impact on subordinate individuals. The results reveal two distinct forms of hegemonic masculinity: internal and external. Internally, it is manifested among workers in the public sphere, where physical prowess and professional dominance are prioritized to maintain status. Externally, it is observed within the family structure, where the male figure exerts authoritative power over domestic members. The study finds that dominant characters frequently exploit their power through various forms of violence to sustain their hierarchy. Ultimately, this research concludes that the practice of hegemonic masculinity in the story serves as a tool for maintaining gender inequality, reinforcing toxic standards that negatively affect both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Key Words: *masculinity, hegemonic, violence*

ABSTRAK

Eksplorasi maskulinitas hegemonik dalam sastra adalah bidang studi penting untuk memahami akar penindasan gender dan ketidaksetaraan sosial. Studi ini menganalisis representasi maskulinitas hegemonik dalam cerita pendek Martin A. Ramos, *The Way of The Ghete*, yang menggambarkan perjuangan kompleks laki-laki dalam memenuhi standar kejantanan masyarakat yang kaku. Masalah utama yang dibahas adalah bagaimana maskulinitas hegemonik menetapkan standar yang tidak dapat dicapai yang sering mengakibatkan subordinasi dan kekerasan sistemik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif, memanfaatkan kerangka maskulinitas hegemonik yang diusulkan oleh Connell dan Messerschmidt untuk mendekonstruksi relasi kekuasaan yang disajikan dalam narasi. Analisis berfokus

pada bagaimana karakter tertentu menavigasi posisi dominan mereka dan dampak selanjutnya pada individu bawahan. Hasilnya mengungkapkan dua bentuk maskulinitas hegemonik yang berbeda: internal dan eksternal. Secara internal, hal itu diwujudkan di kalangan pekerja di ruang publik, di mana kehebatan fisik dan dominasi profesional diprioritaskan untuk mempertahankan status. Secara eksternal, itu diamati dalam struktur keluarga, di mana sosok laki-laki mengerahkan kekuasaan otoritatif atas anggota rumah tangga. Studi ini menemukan bahwa karakter dominan sering mengeksploitasi kekuasaan mereka melalui berbagai bentuk kekerasan untuk mempertahankan hierarki mereka. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa praktik maskulinitas hegemonik dalam cerita berfungsi sebagai alat untuk menjaga ketidaksetaraan gender, memperkuat standar beracun yang berdampak negatif pada penindas dan tertindas.

Kata Kunci: *maskulinitas, hegemonis, kekerasan*

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a key dimension in personal, social, and cultural life. It is an area where there are many difficult practical issues related to identity, justice, and even survival. Gender is also a topic fraught with prejudice and blatant lies. Many people imagine masculinity, femininity, and gender relations only in the context of their own local gender systems. Gender issues are not only related to women, but also to men. Currently, there is a great deal of research and public debate on masculinity, fatherhood, men's movements, and male violence (Connell, 2009). Furthermore, gender is always relational, and the construction of masculinity is socially determined, unlike some real or hypothetical constructions of femininity (Alam, 2020).

In social science, the context of masculinity is represented by the idea that a man can be considered masculine if he consistently adheres to the boundaries set by the traits or characteristics considered appropriate for his gender (Reeser, 2015). It means that masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or individual personality traits. Masculinity is a configuration of practices embodied in social actions and, therefore, can differ according to gender relations in specific social contexts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is also in line with the concept of masculinity, which is logically based on the dichotomy between biological sex and cultural gender, thereby marginalizing or normalizing the body (Donaldson, 1993). Masculinity is an attitude and behavior assigned by society in relation to the

biological aspects of men. Men are not born with masculinity. The masculinity that a man naturally possesses from childhood will develop in accordance with the culture in which he grows up (Pratiwi et al., 2022). However, masculinity tends to exhibit certain recurring characteristics, such as homophobia, power, and domination over women (Reeser, 2015).

Hegemonic masculinity is the main cause of gender oppression associated with power hierarchies that can directly lead to violence. Practices of this masculinity occur in every aspect of life, including in work environments where the majority of workers are male and in the family. The negative impact of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is strict ideals of masculinity set almost impossible demands for men to fulfill, which can potentially have negative effects on men themselves (Yassar, 2020). Hegemonic masculinity is the highest form of masculinity that we often find in heroic characters in fantasy. Men who represent this model must exhibit five essential Trujillo characteristics such as, physical strength, professional achievement, patriarchy, adventurousness, and heterosexuality. A person's masculinity is acquired through the display of these characteristics, one of which is demonstrating strength by displaying masculinity (Valsecchi et al., 2023). Masculine domination can be seen through status, performance, outlook, sexuality, profession, and behavior and global (Alam, 2020). The desire to dominate and be in power is central to hegemonic masculinity and refers to the need for men to control others in order to achieve status for themselves and in society (Smith et al., 2015).

There have been previous researchers who have analyzed hegemonic masculinity. Most have analyzed hegemonic masculinity in relation to other genders, namely the domination of women by men. In study Yassar (2020), hegemonic masculinity in novel Okky Madasari's *Bound* can occur in male school environments. Senior students become the dominant group towards the transgender character, Sassa, who exhibited feminine traits or what can be called subordinate masculinity that did not conform to masculinity standards. They engage in violent bullying to maintain their power and considered males who are different from them to be weak. In addition, this is considered normal by the school there. Furthermore,

Sassa is required to be like other boys in general by entering the school. The phenomenon between dominant male students and subordinate male students illustrates internal hegemony.

Furthermore, Alsyouf (2018) has analyzed hegemonic masculinity towards women in Archetypal African Novels. Hegemonic masculinity in this study is represented by male characters, namely Okonkwo and Wad Rayyes, who dominate other genders or women. They use their power by committing acts of violence, oppression, and exploitation against women to maintain male power. In addition, Kusumaningrum (2025) have researched hegemonic masculinity construction in Riau's Folktales. In this study, hegemonic masculinity is represented by several principles, namely that every man must maintain his masculinity through courage and dominance, does not tolerate feminine attitudes, courage as a symbol of honor, and always upholds self-esteem and maintains power through status over women.

Kasih et al., (2022) have researched hegemonic masculinity in Guy de Maupassant's three short stories. This study describes hegemonic masculinity by men in society as depicted through courage, power, and resistance as standards of masculinity. Furthermore, women are portrayed as the cause of men fulfilling masculinity standards, not as objects of hegemony and Wardani et al., (2023) also have analyzed that in novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, hegemonic masculinity is represented through male domination over women using culture and tradition. Power, rituals, and economic control form the basis of this hegemony. However, hegemonic masculinity in this novel is depicted as difficult to eradicate despite resistance from women.

Subrayan & Yahya (2016) have analyzed the hegemonic masculinity in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* novel. The study examines the hegemonic masculinity is represented by the male protagonist, Walter Morel, in his gendered relationship. Then, Kit & Yahya, (2015) have analyzed the hegemonic masculinity in Kathleen Winter's *Annabel* novel. The study describes the hegemonic masculinity and its effect on two male characters, Wayne Blake and Treadway Blake. In addition, Hamid & Malik (2025) have analyzed hegemonic masculinity within the

framework of 20th-century American war literature, focusing on the novels by Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, and Tim O'Brien.

Literature can reveal aspects of masculinity that do not appear or are not visible in everyday life and essentially produces unique representations of masculinity, one of which is hegemonic masculinity (Reeser, 2015). Based on the previous studies above, the issue of hegemonic masculinity is indeed very interesting to discuss because many literary works capture this theme in their works. They are Okky Madasari's *Bound* novel, D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* novel, Kathleen Winter's *Annabel* novel, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel, Archetypal African Novels, the novels by Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, and Tim O'Brien in American war literature, Guy de Maupassant's three short stories, and Riau's Folktales.

One literary work that discusses hegemonic masculinity is the short story *The Way of The Machete*. In the short story, this phenomenon explicitly reveals how society demands that men always fulfill masculinity through courage and violence and how men use their power to dominate over women. The objective of this study is focused on the hegemonic masculinity in the short story *The Way of the Machete*. This study focuses on the main male characters, Josué and Scipio to ensure depth of analysis and consistency of focus on the phenomenon. The character is chosen based on his high relevance in representing how hegemonic masculinity over other men or women.

The Way of The Machete short story is chosen because previous researchers have mostly analyzed hegemonic masculinity in novels but rarely in short stories. In addition, they only analyzed one type of hegemonic masculinity, namely male domination over women. Therefore, to fill the gap in previous researches, this study focuses on analyzing two types of hegemonic masculinity, such as male domination over men and women that occur in a single literary work particularly in a short story. Furthermore, this short story has not been analyzed by previous researchers, so it is necessary to be conducted because it is a novelty in gender and literary studies, especially regarding the study of masculinity.

This study uses Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity regarding the dominant position of men in society. This is also the main cause of gender oppression related to the hierarchy of power, which inevitably leads to violence. Hegemonic masculinity was first defined as a practice that legitimizes male's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, and other marginalized ways of being a man (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). There are two forms of hegemony in masculinity such as, internal and external. Internal hegemony refers to the social domination of one group of men over all other groups of men. Meanwhile, external hegemony refers to the domination of women by men.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, which is chosen because the focus of the study is to understand how hegemonic masculinity is applied and represented in the short story *The Way of the Machete* in a contextual and in-depth manner. The main source of data in this study is a short story entitled *The Way of Machete* by Martin A. Ramos in the book *One World: A Global Anthology of Short Stories*. This short story was chosen because it contains narrative elements such as conflict, character structure, and social background, which are the main focus, where the theme of male relationships and the dynamics of masculinity are clearly visible and highly relevant to this analysis. Meanwhile, the supporting data sources used include scientific articles and books discussing masculinity, hegemonic masculinity theory, and masculinity as a theoretical basis to support the analysis of the main text.

The techniques used in this study include reading the short story text thoroughly to understand the content and context of the story, then identifying text elements relevant to the theme of masculinity, such as character behavior, interactions between men, and symbols of power. Next, the researcher records important findings to make it easier for the researcher to analyze and find patterns of hegemonic masculinity in the text. The next stage is to analyze the text data using

a close reading approach so that the researcher can systematically interpret the implicit and explicit meanings contained in the short story (Miles & Saldaña, 2014).

Data analysis used the concept of hegemonic masculinity developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). The selection of quotes in this study was interpreted by analyzing how male characters displayed dominant, authoritative, and courageous traits, as well as their use of violence in their interactions with other characters. The researchers then grouped the results of the study into various forms of hegemonic masculinity, particularly those that are internal (male domination over other men) and external (male domination over women). Through this process, each quote was analyzed by linking the story description to existing theories, thereby explaining how dominant masculinity is formed, maintained, and displayed in the social relationships described in the short stories.

With this methodology, this study is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the practice of hegemonic masculinity in interactions between men, as described in the short story. This study tries to find the portrayal of hegemonic masculinity through main characters.

DISCUSSION

As explained in the introduction, this study aims to reveal the application of hegemonic masculinity in the short story *The Way of the Machete*. Therefore, this section will discuss the forms of hegemonic masculinity that emerge through violence, hierarchy, and social pressure represented by the main character in the story.

Data 1

Scipio Armenteros towered over everyone in town, was the strongest worker and hardest drinker. Tales were told about this man; for example, Scipio could drive nails through a board with his bare hands. He could lift a young bull on his shoulders and drink rum all day without losing consciousness. He could whip anybody in a fistfight - at arm wrestling, rum drinking or in a machete duel. There was talk that Scipio Armenteros had killed a man - served time in prison for it, too. On the day that bully came to La Cuchilla, bad luck tagged along, slouching like a cowering dog (The Way of The Machete, p. 27).

In the quotation above, Scipio is portrayed as a dominant masculine figure through repeated descriptions of physical strength and toughness, such as “towered over everyone in town,” “the strongest worker,” and “He could whip anybody in a fistfight.” These expressions construct an image of masculinity that is closely associated with physical superiority and the ability to defeat other men.

Rather than merely describing personal abilities, these representations function as symbols of masculine power that establish Scipio’s position above other men in the community. His reputation as someone who can overpower others in physical competition reinforces a hierarchy among male characters. This portrayal reflects the concept of hegemonic masculinity, in which one type of masculinity becomes socially dominant and legitimizes the superiority of certain men over others.

This phenomenon is in line with Connell & Messerschmidt’s (2005) statement that the form of internal hegemonic masculinity is represented through one type of man who is considered the most superior and who determines the gender hierarchy, mainly through physical strength, aggressive nature, and dominance over other men. Therefore, Scipio’s characterization illustrates internal hegemonic masculinity, where dominance is constructed through the ability to intimidate and surpass other men physically, positioning him as the most powerful masculine figure in La Cuchilla.

Data 2

He recognized one voice, clearly above the rest: a deep, guttural basso - Scipio's voice. The boy hesitated. He had never seen the big man up close, remaining content to gaze at him from a distance, admiring the way Scipio cut cane, observant of every scythe-like swoosh and measured stroke of his machete.

Always Juanito had imagined the man looming as tall as a mountain, sweat-stained, imposing, dangerous. Someone to reckon with, consider and fear. More than a match for anyone, especially the cane cutters of La Cuchilla.

(The Way of The Machete, p. 28).

In the quotation above, Scipio is depicted as a dominant male through the perceptions of the other characters. Juanito’s admiration as he watched “the way Scipio cut cane” and “every scythe-like swoosh and measured stroke of his machete”

serves to illustrate that dominant masculinity is often perceived as a product of physical strength and competence at manual work. These are characteristics that position Scipio as a personification of idealistic masculinity that is appreciated within the larger community.

Furthermore, the use of superlatives such as “looming as tall as a mountain” is intended to highlight the fact that Scipio’s masculinity is perceived as being responsible for the terror it invokes in another person. This is an example of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, whereby masculinity is defined as being dominant and the standard for other men that is called as internal hegemony. This is in line with Connell & Messerchmidt’s (2005) statement that internal hegemony, represented by the domination of men over other men, can be formed through the recognition of other men.

Data 3

"I've seen you around. You're Josué Villafuerte's son, aren't you?"

"S-sí," Juanito said, his voice a flutter.

"I want you to tell your papa you met me in town. Know who I am, boy?"

"S--Scipio A--Armenteros." He pronounced the name, head bowed.

"True. Tell your papa the cane cutters have told me about his reputation. Tell him I am good with the machete. The best. Tell him I want to see him, and that if he doesn't come to the colmado today, I'll tell the men he is a coward."

(The Way of The Machete, p. 30).

The above utterance reflects the operation of hegemonic masculinity through verbal intimidation and the control of masculine reputation. When Scipio states, “Tell him I am good with the machete. The best,” he asserts his superiority by emphasizing his physical skill. In that context, the proficiency of the machete becomes an emblem of masculine power and is employed as a criterion of assessing the status of men in the community.

The threat uttered by Scipio, “if he doesn’t come to the colmado today, I’ll tell the men he is a coward,” also reveals how masculinity is being managed through social assessment. By calling another male in the community a “coward,” Scipio seeks to undermine the masculine power of his rival in front of the male community. This reveals that masculine power is not just being maintained through physical

power but also through the power of controlling how other men are perceived within the male community. This is a manifestation of Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) theory that a figure of hegemonic masculinity shapes the ideal standard of masculinity for other men so that they conform to that standard.

Data 4

In the hamlet the machete was both a tool and a weapon, and there was always the rumor of a fight

(The Way of The Machete, p. 31)

The above quotation is a clear manifestation of the way violence is incorporated into masculinity within the community. The quotation that "the machete was both a tool and a weapon" is a clear manifestation that a common tool for work is a symbol of masculinity. In this case, masculinity is a symbol of violence that defines relationships among men.

The quotation "there was always the rumor of a fight" is a clear manifestation that violence is closely related to masculinity within the community. This is in line with the statement by Connell & Messerschmidt (2005), that there are several factors that create the concept of hegemonic masculinity among men, namely aggression, physicality, and culture in a society.

Data 5

From the amount of blood staining the ground next to the body, and because his torso lay splayed as if in crucifixion, Juanito concluded that the braggart died first. Wounds and slashes were cut like roads deep into his flesh. Both of Scipio's ears, his nose and his left hand were severed. Even his head had come close to decapitation. The "O" of his mouth, filling with flies, appeared frozen in awe, and the lifeless eyes - their intense glow now extinguished - stared vacantly at the fading sky.

The weapon, Scipio's machete (plaintive and supplicant, pointing outward), rested next to his body.

(The Way of The Machete, p. 34).

This quotation illustrates the total destruction of the body of hegemonic masculinity, Scipio through words such as "Wounds and slashes were cut like roads deep into his flesh" and the loss of several of his limbs, such as his chin, nose, and ears. This physical damage clearly shows that the type of hero he built, one who relied on violence and physical strength, is ultimately destroyed by that very

violence. Even the machete, which has been a symbol of Scipio's power, is now described as "plaintive and supplicant," as if it has lost its authority.

This is in line with Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) theory that hegemonic masculinity is not permanent or easily replaced when the power that supports male domination collapses or weakens. In Scipio's case, his body, which had previously been the basis for his superiority, became proof that hegemonic power is not eternal. Once his physical strength was gone, his masculine status collapsed with it.

Data 6

Inside the colmado the revelry increased like a crescendo. Juanito thought about returning home – now. But if he did, what could he tell Josué? His mother needed the groceries to prepare the Sunday meal. That was a fact. She would surely punish him, for if Juanito failed to do this simple task, then the boy's father must go to the colmado. Josué would accept no excuses. And another fact, equally as important: Josué would not accept cowardice.

(The Way of The Machete, p. 28).

The quote "Josué would accept no excuses. And another fact, equally as important: Josué would not accept cowardice" indicates that Josué, as a father, has the power to determine the standards of masculinity for his son through his status within the family. Josué imposes rules on his son to be brave in facing every problem he encounters, and Juanito must fulfill the demands because being a coward is a form of masculine failure. It can be concluded that Josué represents male domination over his son. It is in line with the statement of Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) that one of the type of hegemonic masculinity is internal hegemony, which is represented by male domination over other man through the usage of power.

Data 7

No hint of nerves showing, Josué looked sternly at his wife. "He challenged me, the fool. He wanted to test my courage. The cane cutters have bragged about me, told him I can fight. They always brag."

"You mean that man, Scipio Armenteros?" Josué nodded.

"Surely you won't fight him?"

Josué straightened. "We had words. There were men there, braceros and other field hands, some of the landowners as well. Scipio said if I didn't

fight him I wasn't macho. I told him I could fight him and win. No brag; it's a fact."

He paused, breathed. "Dolores, I'm no coward."

(The Way of The Machete, p. 31).

From the utterance above, it can be seen how the hegemony of masculinity is displayed through the direct recognition of Josué by the community there. This can be seen from the use of the word "brag" in the utterance "The cane cutters have bragged about me, saying that I can fight." This word is a form of how society directly recognizes Josué as dominant masculinity in terms of fighting in front of Scipio rather than others male cane cutters in La Cuchilla. This is in line with Connell & Messerschmidt's (2005) statement that society can legitimize the dominant position of men in society itself. And the male domination over men in society is the form of internal hegemony.

Data 8

Josué Villafuerte had been compelled to fight against impossible odds. So that only a fighter with raw nerve, metal fiber and undaunted courage could have finished Scipio off, or died trying.

Juanito's father was such a man.

(The Way of The Machete, p. 34).

The quotation "Josué Villafuerte had been compelled to fight against impossible odds" illustrates that Josué fights Scipio not because he wanted to, but because of societal pressure that judges men by their courage and violence. In addition, these two characteristics are used by the cane cutters there as a way to establish a hegemonic masculinity among themselves. So, Josué who has succeed to do it, he becomes a role of hegemonic masculinity among the male cane cutters by using violence through his fighting skills with Scipio, It is in line with the statement of Connel & Messerschmidt (2005) that social domination of one man over other men refers to internal hegemony, whether through violence or power. In addition, society can legitimize the dominant position of men in society itself.

Data 9

Dolores's eyes moistened. She wiped them with the back of her hand. When she spoke, her words were pregnant with apprehension.

You'll fight this man? He's bigger and stronger. Folks in town say Scipio killed a man. He'll kill you, Josué."

"Maybe. But maybe I can kill him first. He has never seen me wield the machete. If I kill him it will be in self-defense."

*“How will we live without you?” Dolores protested. “The zafra will start soon. Who will cut the cane? Who will put food on the table?”
Josué placed a hand on her shoulder. “Juanito’s almost a man. He’s strong, reliable and hard-working. He will cut the cane.”
“Don’t worry, mujer. I’ll be all right.”
Before Dolores could answer, the boy came lugging his father’s machete and a spade. He gave each to his father, and waited.
(The Way of The Machete, p. 32).*

In this utterance, Dolores tries to convey her opinion as a wife so that Josué does not accept the challenge to fight with machete from a role of hegemonic masculinity in the town, Scipio. However, in this situation, Josué rejects his wife’s opinion and Dolores must accept his decision to continue fighting. This illustrates that Dolores acknowledges that Josué is in control and dominant in her family. It can be concluded that Josué is represented as hegemonic masculinity in his family. This phenomenon is a form of external hegemony because Josué, as a man, dominates woman, his wife. It is in line the statement of Connel & Messerschmidt (2005) that external hegemony in masculinity which is represented the domination men over other women.

In addition, the utterance “How will we live without you?” Dolores protested. “The zafra will start soon. Who will cut the cane? Who will put food on the table?” illustrates that Josué is represented as the breadwinner by being a cane cutter. He feeds his family through this job, and Dolores still depends on Josué’s presence and role. This is in line with the statement of Messerschmidt, J. W. (2018) that women believe men should be in control and dominant and financially support family members. This means women contribute to the formation of hegemonic masculinity through their consent.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Way of the Machete* depicts the main characters' hegemonic masculinity among the working class or among men or internal hegemony and men toward women within the family or external hegemony. In addition, abuse of power is used by the hegemonic role to force others to meet the standards of masculinity that are imposed and to use it to marginalize others. In this

phenomenon, physical violence is a form of masculinity that is unhealthy and recognized by society.

Furthermore, this study found that male characters who are at the dominant level tend to use violence and power to maintain the hierarchical structure between genders. However, it is not only female characters who are harmed by hegemonic masculinity, but also male characters who must adapt to new standards of masculinity in society. In addition, the results of this study are in line with previous studies. Most of them discuss external hegemonic masculinity, namely male domination over women. For example, the relationship between Josué and Dolores reinforces the findings of Alsyouf (2018) and Wardani et al. (2023), namely that men are often the decision-makers and center of control in the family. In conclusion, this study supports the general pattern in which male domination over women has become a social norm that repeatedly appears in various literary stories.

However, this study also found a form of internal hegemonic masculinity, namely male dominance over other men, which has rarely been discussed in previous studies. The competition between Scipio, Josue, and the cane cutters to prove who is the best illustrates that being a macho man does not only apply to relationships with women, but also manifests itself through competition and pressure among men. Since this study illustrates both sides of domination over women and domination among men, knowledge about gender becomes more complete and can be used to examine how men are portrayed in various other stories. It is hoped that this study will contribute to supporting the gender theory and masculinity study in literary studies. This research provides opportunities for future research to expand the study with other approaches, such as psychoanalytic.

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