CHAPTER 7

Hinterlands of Extraction, Climate Change, and South African Energy Companies

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Introduction: Cecil John Rhodes in the Company Gardens

In the tranquility of Cape Town's Company Gardens on a secondary axis of the Iziko South African Museum, a statue of Cecil John Rhodes has (for now) evaded both removal and decapitation.[1] The statue features a full body replica of Rhodes, his left hand raised and pointing north. Erected in 1908, the bronze of Rhodes's heat-crumpled three-piece suit has oxidized. The statue thus reminds passers-by of his legacy in shades of Verdigris, the natural patina formed by weathered copper, brass, or bronze that appears to the human eye as "a soft hue somewhere between green and blue … a colour made from change" (Kelleher 2020). Besides the color, there is another striking detail. Carved on the granite block beneath Rhodes's feet is an inscription that puts the following words in his mouth:

[1] In 2016, however, there was an attempt to saw off the statue's leg with an angle grinder.

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P. Gupta et al. (eds.), *Planetary Hinterlands*, Palgrave Studies in Globalization, Culture and Society,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24243-4_7

"Your hinterland is there." Bringing these elements together, the statue represents more than the imperial history of a mining magnate: it is also a reminder of "the colonial dream of climate control" (Mahony and Endfield 2018, 27), linking imperialism and climate change. Climate, after all, constitutes one of the world's most successful imperial projects in its capacity to colonize the deepest recesses of the human mind—"whether determining wealth, war, or well-being, climate has long been called upon to do serious explanatory work" (Livingstone 2015, 937).

The importance of climate to imperial expansion is illustrated by the entanglement of the minerals revolution and colonial forestry in the Cape Colony around the time that Rhodes began his political career in South Africa. Brett Bennett and Fred Kruger detail how the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley during the 1870s "thrust forestry into the foreground of the rural economy" (2015, 29) and intensified the cultivation and extraction of timber on the coast. Less discussed is how this process was imbricated with the need to understand coastal climate to produce sufficient timber to be sent from the coast to the hinterland for use on the diamond and gold fields. Between 1876 and 1891 (Rhodes joined the Cape House of Assembly in 1877[2]), the Cape Agriculture Ministry shaped the future of tree planting and climate knowledge in the colony. State-sponsored scientific programs such as veterinary science and irrigation were motivated by the need to support both the colony's growing population and ambitious economy, resulting in vastly different imperatives—from taming the climate to trying to "fit the tree to the climate"—guiding forestry policy. By the 1900s, foresters had accumulated significant empirical information on species and sites from experimental trials in the decades before. The imperative to plant forests of exotic trees successfully was at once a response to the demand for wood from the mines and a fixation on mastering the climate cost-effectively. In the process, Cape foresters gathered "detailed observations of rainfall patterns, temperature ranges, climatic cycles, and soil types of the colony" (Bennett and Kruger 2015, 49), and thus contributed to early climate science in the colony.

Meanwhile, in his dual capacity as politician and mining tycoon, Rhodes instituted formal and informal policies that facilitated apartheid and continental expansion. Panashe Chigumadzi (2021) summarizes this well when describing how the nineteenth century's minerals revolution dispossessed

[2] "Cecil John Rhodes | South African History Online." https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/cecil-john-rhodes

Black people in southern Africa as gold became the foundation of the global economic system:

> one of the world's most dramatic social and industrial transformations produced the dynastic wealth that made "Randlords" of white men like Cecil John Rhodes and the dispossession that made chibaro—slave labour—of the peoples of the last independent African polities. *Rhodes' feverish imperial dream was Africa's furious inferno.*

This chapter is concerned less with Rhodes than with the inferno identified by Chigumadzi and with how the concept of the hinterland might help think through the afterlives of imperial dreams. The statue is a starting point for exploring how the time-space of the hinterland—a chronotope entangled with colonial and other violent histories of exploitation and extraction—relates to contemporary realities of climate change on the continent. As shown by the intertwining of colonial forestry, climate, and extractive industry, hinterland thinking helps to expose how climate underlies the development of all imperialisms. It also demonstrates how imperialism may have started on coasts with the creation of port cities like Cape Town, but also advanced inland because of the demands of commercial interests and associated industry like the gold and diamond fields.

The first half of the chapter emphasizes the value of using the hinterland's *metaphorical* association with that which lies beyond the visible or known (instead of only its literal meaning of a peripheralized place) by reflecting on the COP26 United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference and the historical relationship between imperialism and climate change. The second half analyses *actual* hinterlands of extraction, focusing analysis on coal-fired power in South Africa, but also referencing other industries such as agriculture. The two approaches are intended as mutually reenforcing to point to the existence and legacy of both historic and enduring hinterlands.

The Hinterland of COP26

To demonstrate the potential of using the hinterland concept metaphorically with respect to climate change, a reflection on COP26 is illustrative. Hosted in Glasgow, COP26 took place from 31 October to 12 November 2021 and was delivered across two sites: the Scottish Events Campus (the Blue Zone) and the Glasgow Science Centre (the Green Zone). The Blue

Zone was a UN-managed space, where delegates from 197 negotiating parties and observer organizations congregated. This Blue Zone was where the key negotiations between world leaders took place; only those accredited by the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) could access this space. Thus, the delegates negotiating the collective future of the planet—many of whom are either directly within the employ of fossil fuel companies or in that of government departments working with such companies—were tucked away in a highly securitized cordoned-off area. Brendan Montague (2021) describes the Blue Zone as "a military encampment" with towering fences, while the publicly accessible Green Zone was dominated by corporations like Unilever and Microsoft. According to the roster of registered attendees, corporate delegations were often listed as attending as part of the cohort of "non-governmental organizations" so that they could still participate in or observe the negotiations in this zone.[3]

The Green Zone was managed by the United Kingdom Government and offered a platform for the general public, civil society, academia, and others. As Swedish telecommunications equipment manufacturer Ericsson candidly stated on their blog, "Beyond the Blue Zone is the Green Zone … where organizations that can afford it will have their own pavilion, exhibition, or event, to show what they're doing about climate change" (Öhlander 2021). This emphasizes how even the Green Zone was dominated by corporate entities. The not-so-subtle message was that corporations are the solution to climate change, and that, while civil society was represented, they were "both *physically and metaphorically cast into the hinterland* in venues scattered across the living center of the city of Glasgow" (Montague 2021, emphasis added). This example shows how epistemologies and ontologies of hinterland can shed much-needed light on the bizarre reality of public exclusion and sponsorship by fossil fuel companies.

Richard Heede (2014) explains that the international legal framework established in 1992 to prevent "dangerous anthropogenic interference" with the climate system has focused attention on the role of the nation-state, suggesting a shift in perspective from states to corporate entities—both investor and state-owned companies. His analysis of the historic fossil

[3] For example, the delegation from Pepsi had four listed attendees under three different organizations: US sustainability non-profit Ceres, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (Shendruk and Yanofsky 2021).

fuel and cement production records of 90 leading producers of oil, natural gas, coal, and cement between 1854 and 2010 reveal them to be "the primary sources of anthropogenic greenhouse gases that are driving and will continue to drive climate change" (Heede 2014, 238). Findings like this, together with the irony of power companies responsible for historical emissions bankrolling and dominating the climate conferences, demand a rethink of responsibility for climate change beyond the nation-state.

To return to Rhodes's statue in the Company Gardens: putting scholarship on climate imperialism in conversation with post-apartheid corporate expansion from South Africa to the rest of the continent is an opportunity to investigate the climate change implications of what the popular media has referred to as the "'South Africanisation' of the African economy" (Daniel and Lutchman 2004). In the next section, the intertwined histories of climate and imperialism are discussed in relation to the notion of hermeneutic injustice, followed by a more specific focus on actual hinterlands of extraction by looking at two South African energy companies and their operations in Africa.

The Relationship Between Imperialism and Climate Change: A Hermeneutic Injustice?

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh states:

> [i]n accounts of the Anthropocene, and of the present climate crisis, capitalism is very often the pivot on which the narrative turns. … However, I believe that this narrative often overlooks an aspect of the Anthropocene that is of equal importance: empire and imperialism. (2016, 87)

Addressing this gap, Fabien Locher and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz show how the topic of climate was used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a matrix to "reflect upon people, objects, and processes" (Locher and Fressoz 2012, 598). Their genealogy of climate as a category of environmental and political action shaped by imperial agendas is further confirmed by Georgina Endfield and Martin Mahony's survey of historical scholarship examining everyday practices of settlers and administrators, as they tried to make sense of the new climates in which they dwelled (Mahony and Endfield 2018, 2). This work of tracing the many ways in which empire was intimately bound up with ideas of climate—from the spread of European meteorological techniques to colonial settings to the

institutionalization of meteorology in the colonies as one of the first sciences—affirms Montesquieu's observation that "the empire of the climate is the first, the most powerful of all empires" (quoted in Livingstone 2012, 91). Climate shaped colonial enterprises in material ways, as well as informing imperial ideologies and historical changes in conceptualizations of climate. This reveals climate to be an "exploitable hermeneutic resource" (Livingstone 2000, 9).

Of interest here is how this climate-imperialism history relates to contemporary climate change considerations, like the claim by the meteorologists Theodore G. Shepherd and Adam H. Sobel that it is difficult to think about climate change at the local scale. They describe how

> cities established through colonialism have been largely sited on coasts, in defiance of threats from tropical cyclones and coastal flooding, indeed often on landfills. The localness of climate change is perhaps most salient in these vulnerable and exposed places. Yet climate science takes the scale of the global as normative and the local as accidental. It has thereby "detached knowledge from meaning" and enacts forms of what the philosopher Miranda Fricker has called "hermeneutic injustice." (Shepherd and Sobel 2020, 7)

Fricker's (2007) work on epistemic justice proposes two forms: testimonial injustice, which occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word (i.e. the police do not believe you because you are Black); and hermeneutic injustice, which is caused by a gap in collective hermeneutic or interpretive frameworks for understanding a particular phenomenon (i.e. you experience sexual harassment in a culture that does not have a critical concept for it). Elizabeth Allison (2015) explains that one way hermeneutic injustice occurs in climate change research is when the dominant research paradigm (ostensibly objective and driven by climate modeling) lacks an interpretive framework for studying and analyzing subjective responses to climate change. Discussing the spiritual significance of glaciers in an age of climate change, she uses the example of how the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change identifies the difficulties of including nonmarket impacts in the valuation of projected consequences of climate change, and how the absence of these hermeneutic frameworks means that most policy discussions exclude them:

> Without appropriate conceptual tools for capturing the significance of non-market values, most research and policy responses have worked as if subjective responses are insignificant—if scientists can get the science right, then governments can develop the right policies, and industry can provide the right technology, allowing us to mitigate and adapt to climate change. (Allison 2015, 49)

I propose to think of historical continuities between climate, empire, and climate change as being riddled by similar epistemic gaps. This is especially true in climate change research on Africa, which is plagued by the streetlight effect. Also known as the drunkard's search, this is a type of observational bias that arises when researchers focus on particular questions, cases, and variables for reasons of convenience or data availability rather than broader relevance, policy import, or construct validity.

Cullen S. Hendrix (2017) investigates the extent to which the streetlight effect conditions the state of knowledge about climate change in Africa, finding evidence that scholarly attention is shaped not by African countries' physical exposure to climate effects or adaptive capacity, but rather by factors that affect the convenience or capacity to conduct research, such as language and political stability. This is where the concept of the hinterland might be a helpful addition to other interpretive frameworks. How might the hinterland contribute to addressing the epistemic gaps in climate change research in and about African countries as a result of colonial and imperial continuities? Is there a hinterland of climate knowledge? Can the hinterland provide the hermeneutic resources needed for thinking about the afterlives of imperialism as represented by the power of companies and corporations in contemporary climate politics? Does the hinterland point to research routes capable of redressing the hermeneutic injustice of imperialism and climate science as it relates to Africa? In an attempt to respond to these questions, the next section looks at South African corporate expansion through the lens of the hinterland.

South African Corporations in the Hinterland

Lesley Green (2015) looks to the moment when colonization commenced at the Cape in 1652 to demonstrate how the discovery of diamond-bearing rock in the northern Karoo in 1869 "propelled the Empire into inventing new aspects of the technosphere," subsequently "giving humans who owned machines mastery over geological matter." Bringing Rhodes back

into the picture, the profits from the sale of these diamonds "fed the formation of cities, corporations, and institutions in England and her Cape," as Rhodes employed the personal fortune he amassed during the diamond rush (Green 2015). This imperial expansion led to the legal and social infrastructure that established race-based disenfranchisement, "sowing the bitter seeds of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid," as well as to the aggressive pursuit of energy autonomy by the newly independent Republic of South Africa, led by an aggrieved Afrikaner minority (Green 2015). The legacy of this—coal-fired power stations in one of the highest per capita carbon emitters in the world—endures. The most recent assessment by the Climate Transparency Report, the world's most comprehensive annual review of G20 countries' climate action and their transition to a net-zero emissions economy, revealed that fossil fuels make up around 90% of South Africa's energy mix, among the G20's highest. Eighty-seven percent of the country's electricity in 2020 was produced from coal (The Climate Transparency Report 2021).

While South Africa did not explicitly agree to phase out coal at COP26, it was one of 197 countries that committed to "phasing down" fossil fuel. South Africa's pavilion in the Blue Zone was sponsored by coal giants Exxaro, Eskom, and Sasol (Barnett and Collett-White 2021). State-owned power utility Eskom and petrochemicals giant Sasol have been heavily criticized for their coal-dependent operations and found to be responsible for over half of all of the country's emissions (Van Diemen 2021; Phillips and Bega 2021). Critical and popular attention to government policy and action is growing; three civil society organizations recently launched a constitutional lawsuit against the South African government, arguing that its energy policy, in particular plans to build new coal-fired power stations, are incompatible with the national constitution.[4] The lawsuit is backed by research by the University of Cape Town, showing that the coal plans are not compatible with South Africa meeting its climate commitments (Merven, Burton and Lehmann-Grube 2021). While this is an important action, given that South African taxpayers are essentially forced by government policy to fund fossil fuels through state subsidies given to both state-owned enterprises (like Eskom) and private companies (like Sasol), criticism is predominantly directed at the state rather than at what

[4] "Youth-Led #CancelCoal Climate Case Launched against Government's Plans for New Coal-Fired Power | African Climate Alliance." https://africanclimatealliance.org/2021/11/17/youth-led-cancelcoal-climate-case-launched-against-governments-plans-for-new-coal-fired-power/

criminologist Ronald Kramer (2020) calls "carbon criminals" like Eskom and Sasol. Furthermore, the activities of South African companies outside the country's borders are less likely to attract the same public scrutiny.

Historically, "successive South African governments assumed a proprietorial and interventionist attitude towards the African hinterland" (Daniel et al. 2003, 368), with exports heavily skewed to the Southern African Development Community (SADC).[5] According to Gregory Mthembu-Salter (2013), referring to Rhodes's "Your hinterland is there" statement:

> Companies are being lured north by higher growth rates than South Africa's own. By "your", Rhodes had meant white people in general and the British state in particular. In that sense, Rhodes's dream is dead, but the idea that Africa is South Africa's hinterland lives on in South Africa, given new life since 1994 by the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

For many on the continent, South African post-apartheid expansion was perceived as parasitic and opportunistic, often resulting in profits being extracted from host country markets to South Africa or overseas. The "African Renaissance" heralded by the ANC government in the late 1990s and enthusiastically endorsed by northward-looking South African corporations was negatively viewed as "an ideological excuse for white business' return to its former colonial-era stomping" (Miller et al. 2008, 5). While this widespread perception of South African domination over African countries playing host to the country's corporate expansion does not fully capture the diversity of trade relations between South Africa and other African countries, research into this is a useful starting point for better understanding the continental implications of South Africa's corporate expansion and status as the highest carbon emitter in Africa. For instance, Patrick Bond's focus on South Africa in his investigation of the BRICS bloc (Brazil, India, China and South Africa) as "anti-imperialist" or "sub-imperialist," that is, as playing "deputy sheriff duty for global corporation" in their respective regions (2013, 266), reveals much about post-apartheid corporate expansionism and contextualizes some of the climate change considerations thereof. Bond observes how South Africa's formal entry into BRICS in 2012 was accompanied by pro-business

[5] The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC). 2021. South Africa Profile. https://oec.world/en/profile/country/zaf

statements for deeper regional economic penetration and exhortations to change impressions of the country as a regional bully.

Yet it also produced tensions as

> local elite interests conflicted most with those of the hinterland (as well as of most South Africans) when it came to climate management, given Pretoria's role, first in maintaining extremely high "emissions levels" on behalf of the country's "Minerals–energy complex", and, second, with respect to sabotaging global climate talks by destroying the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen in 2009 and again in Durban in 2011. (Bond 2013, 263)

Miller et al. (2008) note how the historical geography of capital accumulation in Southern Africa has placed South African capital, through its multinational corporations, at the center of regional accumulation processes, in keeping with discussions of how sub-imperialism manifests as a continuation of heavy investment in extractive industries at home, while simultaneously increasingly searching for investment opportunities in other markets. Specific to agriculture, Ruth Hall's (2012) study of major land acquisitions by South African farmers and agribusinesses elsewhere in Africa, and the processes through which these have occurred and are occurring, suggests that South African-based companies are acting as arteries of global capital, and in doing so precipitate "processes of accumulation by dispossession within their broader spheres of influence" (Böhm et al. 2012, 1629). This study is important for offering nuance to the history of South African post-apartheid business expansion on the continent, which Hall describes as "a web of interlocking strategies: diversification, building of political alliances, extension of value chains, sourcing of patronage, and the consolidation of a greater global market share" (2012, 827).

A brief consideration of the spheres of influence of South African energy companies illustrates the afterlives of climate imperialism. The well-known woes of Eskom, responsible for the bulk of South African emissions, dominates local news as the power utility fails to deliver electricity, plagued by a longstanding legacy of chronic mismanagement and rampant corruption. Less critical attention, however, is paid to the continental operations of Eskom Enterprises, a wholly owned subsidiary of Eskom, expected to serve as Eskom's vehicle to expand in Africa. Steven Greenberg (2009) details how Eskom Enterprises's forays into Africa included everything from transmission lines for magnesium mining in Congo Brazzaville and

the distribution and sale of natural gas in Mozambique to operation and maintenance of hydro stations in Uganda, and numerous subsidiaries with activities in Tunisia, Nigeria, Swaziland, Namibia, Mali, and more. Despite being superficially presented as offering a pan-African electricity grid and telecommunications infrastructure, closer analysis of Eskom Enterprises's continental relations reveals particular development patterns: privatization of state assets or outsourcing of public services to global corporations (Greenberg 2009, 92).

Other South African energy companies active or influential on the continent include Sasol, the world's biggest producer of petrol and diesel from coal, which recently sold its interests in Nigeria to US company Chevron (Steyn 2020), and Engen Petroleum, which is active across seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Ocean Islands. Close consideration of other non-energy but emission-intensive companies from South Africa—for example, cement producer PPC Africa, which has operations in South Africa, Botswana, DRC, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe—is beyond the scope of this chapter, but important for future research.

Powerplays in Climate Action

In much the same way that Rhodes shaped both policy and commerce outcomes, energy companies in South Africa exert significant influence over climate policy. Britta Rennkamp (2019) examines the power relations, coalitions, and conflicts that drive and hinder institutional change in South African climate policy by analyzing discursive coalitions either favoring or opposing specific climate policy interventions. She finds that in the lead-up to the implementation of the Carbon Tax Act, which came into effect on 1 June 2019 and compels companies to pay for their contributions to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, Sasol, Eskom, and business associations like the Energy Intensive User Group (EIUG), which represents 31 firms which consume about half of the country's electricity, were unsurprisingly the strongest opponents. As the carbon tax directly threatened Sasol's coal-to-liquid operations, it led the opposition and wielded significantly more financial and human resources than the coalition proposing the tax—Sasol's climate change team counted seven full-time experts compared to a team of one full-time and one part-time position in charge of the carbon tax in the National Treasury. The company's power in this process was additionally underpinned by the fact that it has had a

representative on the South African government's delegation to the UNFCCC for years (Rennkamp 2019, 764). While the tax was ultimately passed, Sasol and its lobbies significantly delayed the process. South Africa's Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) was similarly delayed by a coalition against renewable energy led by Eskom and other actors interested in sustaining large electricity infrastructure (Rennkamp 2019, 764).

The two examples of Sasol's organized opposition to the carbon tax and Eskom's lack of commitment to the renewable energy program demonstrate the power of energy companies interested in maintaining both fossil-fueled business operations and a center-hinterland structure to capitalism. The implications of this can be seen in another recent conference: the inaugural Africa Energy Week, which took place between 9 and 12 November 2021 in Cape Town, one week after South Africa agreed to phase down coal at COP26. At the conference, which seeks to unite energy stakeholders on the continent and drive industry growth and development, South African Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe called on African nations to urgently form a united front to resist global pressure to rapidly abandon fossil fuels (Steyn 2021). Subsequently, minister after minister repeated that the region is not ready to shift from fossil fuel energy, a claim based perhaps on perceptions of Africa being a colonial hinterland, lagging behind industrialized former colonizers and economically forced to "bear the brunt for heavy polluters" (Zali 2021).

While former colonizers are certainly not without culpability, a return to the aforementioned research by Heede (2014) reminds us that developed countries are not the only heavy polluters, and that powerhouses like Eskom and Sasol also need to be held accountable. José Santiago Fernández-Vázquez (2021) offers a useful tool for analyzing how large corporations deal with climate change issues on their webpages in order to disassociate themselves from their image as environmentally harmful businesses. Employing his multimodal method of analyzing companies' levels of engagement with climate change reveals that Eskom's Sustainable Development webpage[6] offers no specific reference to climate change, only offering formal reports that need to be downloaded by users, signifying lackluster engagement with both climate change and

[6] https://www.eskom.co.za/about-eskom/sustainable-development/

nonspecialized audiences. Conversely, Sasol's sustainability webpage[7] leads to a separate climate change webpage detailing a clear example of the compelling "smart growth reformer story" which "defends that capitalism and market solutions can stop climate change from becoming a catastrophe" (Fernández-Vázquez 2021, 2699). Visual analysis of images on the two sustainability websites following Vázquez's method of distinguishing between depictions of nature, technology, and people, moreover, reveals that on both sites a central role is given to technology, over both nature and people, with the exception of one repeated (and somewhat out of place) image of a young woman on Sasol's website.

Conclusion

My brief consideration of the spheres of influence of two South African energy companies, Eskom and Sasol, has demonstrated some climate change considerations of post-apartheid expansion of South African corporations and illustrated the importance of new approaches to thinking through the afterlives of climate imperialism. The concept of hinterland was employed to expand existing interpretive frameworks for studying and analyzing climate change and aimed to put scholarship on climate colonialism in conversation with contemporary climate change considerations, specifically focused on two South African energy companies. The discussion of Sasol's organized opposition to the carbon tax and Eskom's lack of commitment to the renewable energy program demonstrated the power of energy companies, and exploratory analysis of their sustainability websites offered insights into the avoidance of climate change and greenwashing practices, both of which contribute to maintaining fossil-fueled business operations and a center-hinterland structure to capitalism.

The prominence of the Rhodes statue in the Company Gardens not only affirms the entanglements between climate, extractives, and climate change discussed in this chapter but also points to both historic and enduring hinterlands, and how these continue to be reaffirmed as hinterlands by the activities of the energy companies discussed. Much like the statue continues to turn green through oxidization, large energy companies like Sasol and Eskom attempt to ignore or greenwash their activities, while continuing to pollute in the less visible hinterlands scattered across the continent. Future research on historical continuities between climate,

[7] https://www.sasol.com/sustainability/climate-action

empire, and climate change would benefit from closer attention to how these, and other, companies capitalize on the status of Africa as a hinterland and also create new hinterlands within the continent where extraction and pollution can go on largely unseen.

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