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“The accident of the accent”: satiric reflections of contemporary Nigeria in Wole Soyinka’s *Alapata Apata*

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Abstract: The accident of the accent is the hilarious and artistic device Wole Soyinka employs to portray the societal failings and ways to ameliorate them in *Alapata Apata* as a writer of national consciousness and global realities. Previous critical studies on this text have focused on the avalanche of satirical elements and their societal manifests in the play with little or no consideration for the accentual mistake (the accident of the accent) and its satirical implications. This is the critical lacuna that this study attempts to fill. The primary text shall be Wole Soyinka’s *Alapata Apata* which will be subjected to critical textual analysis. Inspirations are drawn from Gerard Genette’s model of Narratology as the theoretical framework to allow for the investigation of the intrinsic visual and auditory images in the text and to undergird the analysis of the findings. It is discovered that there are three prominent strands of accentual representations and their corresponding interpretations of *Alapata Apata*: *Alapata Apata* (the butcher on the rock), *Alapata Apata* (rock splitter) and *Alapata Apata* (the ruler of the rock domain). This paper concludes that Soyinka’s artistic talent in the play lies largely in the presentation of Yoruba, his mother tongue accent marks to sift out the socio-political faults in his society and by extension in the entire nation of the world.

Keywords: *Accentual accident; satire; national consciousness; societal failings; Soyinka.*

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1. Introduction

Satire is a canonical and phenomenal form of literature as a field of study whose focus is to reinforce the practice and impartation of moral values to members of human society in order to make the society a better place to live. Fundamentally, satire exposes the excesses and anomalies of people at the upper class and bourgeoisie in a bid to ameliorate them. Satirists globally are succinctly saddled with the onus of how to make their geographical domiciles an ideal and better place to live through the social and moral sanitizations that are artistically inherent in their writings. Chris Baldick (2001) opines that satire deals mainly with institutions and leadership. He sees satire as a mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions or societies especially members of the upper class to ridicule and scorn (228). This assertion by Baldick is apt because the outcome of satire is to refine the mode or type of societal institutions and leadership to produce good governance and euphonic atmosphere socially and politically.

Dovetailing from the concept of satire above, it will be pertinent to observe the luculent functions of satire in human society as it has become a veritable source of inspiration for satirists throughout the ages. Rosenberg (1960) identifies two prominent roles of satire which he categorizes as social and psychological functions. According to him, the social function entails its ability to provide an effective source to understand the vice and follies perpetrated by members especially leaders of a particular society and its therapeutic tendency to eradicate them. Knight (2004) corroborates Rosenberg's social function of satire by elucidating that since social study societally embraces leading figures, norms and imitable values, then, satire will satisfy the popular need to debunk and ridicule the erring leading figures in politics, economy, religion and other prominent realms of power. Psychological function of satire based on Rosenberg's view provides the keenest insights into a group's collective psyche to reveal its deepest values and tastes. Szabari's (2009) explication that satire psychologically provides a satiric impulse and ritualized expression to resolve social tension lends irrefutable credence to Rosenberg's functional categorization of satire. Szabari further explains that the psychological function is achievable by giving expression to the anti-social tendencies, representing a safety valve which re-establishes equilibrium and health in the collective imaginary, which are jeopardized by the repressive aspects of society (88). Expediently, Soyinka whose one of his works will serve as the data for this study has cauterized and galvanized the two functions of satire x-rayed by Rosenberg, Knight and Szabari above. Soyinka has harmonized their views into effective stimulants that synergise the thematic preoccupations of his *Alapata Apata*.

Concise conceptualization and function of satire have been explicitly discussed above, it will be thoughtful to highlight the instrument or mechanism which satire employs to carry out its lustrous functions or roles in human society. Majorly, satire thrives with the instrumentality of humour or hilarity in every society and clime. It is the level, height or density of humour or hilarity in a satire that determines its type (Osanyemi, 2017). A closer perusal of nature and instrumentality of satire in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* will afford this study the opportunity to identify the very side the playwright is leaning and the source of his fascination and artistic talents. It is known from time immemorial that there are two prominent types of satire which are Horatian and Juvenalian satires. Horatian satire is named after a Roman satirist, Horace (65-8 BCE) who playfully criticizes some vices and follies in his society through gentle, mild and light-hearted humour. Horatian satire directs wit, exaggeration and self-depreciating humour toward what it identifies as folly, rather than evil (Dasylva, 2004). Compendiously, it has sympathetic tone and is very common in modern society. Juvenalian satire on the other hand, is named after Roman satirist, Juvenal who lived between late 1st century and early 2nd century. His satire is crystally more scornful and abrasive than the Horatian. Characteristically, Juvenalian satire is identified by the use of scratchy irony, sarcasm and derogatory invective with less emphasis on humour (Oripeloye). At this juncture, it will be scholarly significant to examine the particular nature or type of satire that foregrounds Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* in order to sift out his thematic inclinations. It is arguably safe to encode that Soyinka's involvement of Yoruba, his mother tongue phonological accents as a device to scathingly expose the failings of contemporary Nigerian society has shown the depth of his artistic dexterity because it behooves the fusion or mixture of conformity and departure from the traditional Horatian and Juvenalian satires.

2. Review of Related Literature

The appalling and ignominious contemporary Nigerian society has become the motivating factor that informed the artistic talent of Soyinka in giving birth to the primary text. However, before textual engagement, it will be pertinent and insightful to compendiously observe the extant views on *Alapata Apata*, our primary text. Osisanwo and Adekunle (2018) examine the mode of expressions of political consciousness in Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*. They are of the opinion that the playwright is influenced by the context and the style through which he articulates his concerns for socio-political issues. They conclude that Soyinka's language is:

inundated with representation of political consciousness and redress, reference to social disorder/imbalance and the attempt to reconstruct it, socio-political satire and adequate justification for the need for socio-political correctness (540).

The submission of Osisanwo and Adekunle is apt and this current study will align with them but will differ since their study is on pragmatic and stylistic analyses of the text. Our focus goes beyond the experimentation of playwright's language and style by extending to the interrogation of the satiric implications orchestrated from artistic use of accent marks.

In congruence with Osisanwo and Adekunle's submission on pragmatic and stylistic analyses of *Alapata Apata* is Oladimeji's (2017) study. Notably, Oladimeji assiduously works on the use of metaphoric geographical atlas and globe as descriptive tool or mechanism to navigate the condemnation of the global quagmire that has penetrated the entire mankind as a result of operation of capitalism and quest for acquisition of material wealth. To him, the prominent artistic talent in the text is the use of 'atlas' and 'globe' as metaphor and symbol concurrently to portray the lasciviousness, restlessness and corruptive tendencies in the entire universe because men have failed to see the transparency, permanency and orderliness in the geographical atlas and globe. Oladimeji's concentration on metaphor and symbol is tenable as they are necessary ingredients to drive home a satirical writing. Ajeluorou (2014) examines the gross abuse of power by political leaders in *Alapata Apata*. However, this work is sociological in approach but is thematically significant because he portrays the unscrupulousness of the political leaders that is evident in gross abuse of power as the harbinger of socio-political discombobulation and stasis in Nigerian society. Like Oladimeji, Ajeluorou aligns with the use of symbols and metaphors in the text to describe the obnoxious features of corruption and abuse of power with the presentation of characters like Daanielebo and General.

In addition, Akande (2014) lays claim on the universality of corruption, individual and communal aggrandizement in the play. She opines that the playwright has overtly revealed the root cause of global hullabaloo, terrorism and political annihilation as the official misuse of resources and avarice displayed by the ruling class in all places and throughout the ages. Akande's scholarly engagement concentrates mainly on the advocacy for proper and even utilization of resources for the development of entire mankind. As plausible as this may sound, yet, it is still on sociological and thematic inclination of the text. Koutchade (2019) investigates a linguistic analysis of Soyinka's *Alapata Apata*. He argues that the play is influenced by the playwright's culture and mother tongue. His view is culture-based as he concludes that the title, setting, character's selection and norm of the communication show the way communication functions within the cultural and situational context of Wole Soyinka's literary artifact (131). Koutchade's view is considerably appropriate and worthy; nevertheless, it is ethnographic and linguistic in outlook.

Olusegun (2018) explores one of the hallmarks of satire which is humour in *Alapata Apata*. Accordingly, he sees the deployment of humour as synonymous to the popular Yoruba low comedy known as *awada*, a phenomenal satirical jesting whose player or practitioner is called *alawada*. He concludes that the text situates within the literary and theatrical explication of humour in the Nigerian context showing that 'that which is comic' resonates as a universal human phenomenon irrespective of language (118). This view is significant to the formation of the text because the playwright has dedicated it to an *awada* maestro, late Moses Olaiya who is popularly known as Baba Sala. The playwright describes him as inimitable *alawada* in the dedication page. It is highly imperative to observe that Olusegun's focus is only on hilarious scenes and characters. Again, to buttress the hilarious expedition of the play, Alimi (2018) emphasizes that the play's satirical interest is anchored on the cartographic symbol of the 'globe' and by implication the playwright is attempting to achieve a tragic vision of the human condition globally (1). Succinctly, Alimi identifies satirical elements such as witticism, paradox, humour, irony, etc. as the dramatic devices to aesthetically dramatize universal human objectionable conducts in the text (19).

From the above review, the linguistic, stylistic and sociological tilts of *Alapata Apata* have been investigated, however, the relative newness, expansiveness and malleability of accidental accent as the patent dramatic device to showcase societal failings seems to remain unexplored by critics and probably literary scholars. This is the critical lacuna that the current study seeks to fill. As such, accidental accent or simply 'the accident of the accent' according to the playwright (182), deserves more critical attention in this connection than it enjoys hitherto.

3. Theoretical Background

This study is premised on Gerard Genette's theory of narratology. According to Barry (2009), narratology is a branch of structuralism that shows the systemic and internal patterns and structures of a text. Genette (1972) identifies two narrative modes in the theory of narratology which are mimesis and diegesis. Mimetic mode deals with dramatized or scenic way of presenting a story while diegetic mode presents a story in rapid and panoramic manners (162). This study will employ Genette's diegesis as a model of narratology. The essence of this is to undergird the analysis of the findings and to allow for the investigation of the intrinsic visual and auditory images in the primary text since the crux of the paper has to do with accentual mistake and damage and their satirical implications on the contemporary Nigerian society. Our data and primary text is Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* will be subjected to critical textual analysis while the research instrument will be library both the conventional and the internet. The choice of *Alapata Apata* is apt because thematically it focuses on the contemporary Nigerian socio-political realities and it is recently published.

4. Analysis

The synopsis of the play begins with Alaba, Alapata, the butcher and the protagonist who decides to retire peacefully from butchery. He adopts that habit of solitary living and sitting on a rock (apata) located in front of his house. He is semi-illiterate. Alaba's habitual sitting on the rock and his butchery experience prompt his friend, the Teacher to devise a means of appreciating him for his tactfulness in butchery. The Teacher wants the whole world to celebrate him. This leads him and his friend into constructing a new signboard carrying an inscription of "Aba Alaba Alapata Rtd. Butcher Emeritus, etc". Subsequently, the signboard is produced by one of the students of the Teacher but due to his (the student) inadequate knowledge in Yoruba accent mark, Alapata Apata is mistakenly accented. Thus, this invariably utters the meaning from Alapata Apata, (skilled butcher on the rock), to Alapata Apata, the ruler or owner of Apata (the rock). Unknowingly to Alapata Apata (the butcher on the rock), the rock where he used to sit all day long harbours mineral resources that are needed for the industrial growth and economic advancement of his society. The capitalists, industrialists and political leaders are looking for how to explore these resources from the rock. This brings another accentual confusion in the play as Alapata the butcher is mistaken for Alapata, 'the rock splitter'. The conflict in the play is centred on the accentual inflections (the accident of the accent) on the phrase, 'alapata apata'.

Having seen the background that informs the accident of the accent in the text, the thrust of this study will be on the three accentual representations of the phrase, 'alapata apata' and their satiric reflections in contemporary Nigerian society.

Alapata Apata (Butcher on the Rock):

The protagonist, Alaba, a retired local butcher is a symbolic character that satirically brings the eruption of many ignominious social vices and follies which are prevalent among people of the ruling class and bourgeoisies in Nigeria and by extension, entire nations of the world. His solitary presence on the rock signifies the state of forlornness and resentment which characterized the lives of masses in Nigeria in spite of the abundant natural wealth deposited in the geographical enclave called Nigeria (the rock in the text). His complacency orchestrated by the life of solitude on the rock further heightens the simplicity and satisfaction of a man that is not tilted by greed, aggrandizement and inordinate ambition unlike Nigerian leaders. The butcher expresses his satisfaction, "I never left this spot but, really, I feel I have already encountered the whole wide world. The world came here to find me (57). Here, Alapata, the butcher is presented as an ideal and contented man who sticks firmly with nature's dictates.

Succinctly, it can be said that the butcher refuses to be influenced by the rapacity, lust for materialism and vainglory which are unhidden traits of Nigerian political leaders as he prefers asceticism. When the Teacher comes and fantasizes him with the world of illusion and utopian dream, the butcher, though confused, but he maintains unperturbed position as it can be seen below:

TEACHER: That's what we're trained for. I've already set it up. A new signboard for your first Thirty Days Out of Office. I've assigned the best of my Art Class to do it- I call him Baby Picasso. He'll do the job. (*Gets more excited*). We'll even change this staid, unimaginative design. Modernize it.

ALABA: (*Dreamily*) Alaba Alapata. R-T-D. It almost sounds like university degree. I've told my son he must work hard and make up for the one his father never got (58-59)

From the above, it is crystally obvious that the Teacher is living in fantasy. He thinks more than the reality. He represents the politicians and propagandists that preach what they cannot practice. This a direct sarcasm and scorn on the political leaders that flaunt around during political campaigns with lofty promises that they will never fulfill, politicians that flaunt around with white elephant projects and politicians that are hypocritical. They cajole the electorates with sweet talks so that they can be voted for and after the election they will renege their promises while masses or electorates become disillusioned. The playwright is satirically advising the political leaders to be exact, straight forward and responsive to the plight of the masses.

Another satirical reflection from the encounter of Alapata, the butcher with the Teacher and the idea of honorary "Butcher Emeritus" is that of self-aggrandizement displayed by the Teacher. Two germane questions to be asked are what is the benefit or gain of the award and what is the motive behind it? The answer anchors on the vivacious ambition of the Teacher to be seen as an enigmatic, industrious and brilliant pathfinder. The Teacher wants to be adored and worshipped by colleagues, subordinates and superiors. It is glaring that the Teacher is egoistic, seeking fame to himself. It is indisputably shown that the Teacher wants to acquire recognition; several boastful statements from the teacher confirm this:

It's a winner. (*takes out his camera-phone and takes pictures*) I'll transmit it to all the media as soon as I get to school. I'll bring you the papers tomorrow morning. (*Going, stops*). Now, to let you into what is known as the piece de resistance ... no. No, no, first, let me get the headmaster to agree. Secure his cooperation. Wait. Do me a favour.....(89).

It's all for the cause, Butcherus, all for the cause. Operation Re-Brand Our Village. The Vision Plenty-Plenty- until I think of a better name. the vision that made me leap out of bed and shout – just like Archimedes – Eureka!... Take it from me Queen Victoria Secondary – with you as Symbol – is about to make world headlines (89)

... Thank you, Butcherus, thank you. I'm off. All that is left is to get the headmaster to agree to turn the school upside down, then I'll turn the entire crossroads inside out for the Grand Transformation Project! (90).

The underlying fact from the excerpt above is that the Teacher here is a replica of politicians that are engrossed and obsessed with the gratification of their selfish desires without considering others. All he wants is the fame and perhaps monetary gratification from the construction of the signboard. Even when Alapata, the butcher is confused about what will be the gain from the signboard, the Teacher refuses to soothe the butcher's confusion. This makes the butcher see him as a difficult man, "sometimes, Teacher is a difficult man. His head is working overtime all the time, no wonder his pupils call him Supercharge" (90).

The playwright is bemoaning political leaders that often make much ado about nothing. The leaders that cannot embark on any project without personal gain (bribe) from the contractors. Leaders that influence projects that are in their wards or districts while they disdain projects meant for other wards and districts.

From the accentual coinage of Alapata Apata (Butcher on the Rock), the playwright has artistically satirized the hypocrisy, callousness and avarice of the political leaders in Nigeria and by extension, the world who take the ignorance, innocence and complacency of the masses as political instrument to perpetrate his inordinate desires and ambitions.

Alapata (the Rock Splitter):

With this accentual coinage, playwright ridicules, lampoons and interrogates issues of corruption, abuse of power, terrorism and lust for materialism in Nigeria. Soyinka comically presents the political and military leaders in their unfathomable rush for power and acquisition of wealth. There are military characters in the text, General and Major who are hunting for mineral deposits that are in the rock where Alapata, the butcher lives. The conversation between Major and General reveals the greedy and callous expedition of the leaders:

GENERAL: Just what is this place? What are you doing here Major? Why have you directed me here?

MAJOR: Operation Longatroat, Sir. Orders carried out to the letter. We secured the place overnight, took positions, sent back sitrep to Headquarters and awaited orders of assault.

GENERAL: Assault? Where?

MAJOR: All set to pulverize the rock. We can bring down the entire works in a matter of minutes. Then, we move in as per instructions in simulated assault, putting the enemy to flight (92).

From the above excerpt, the reason for the military brutal search for mineral resources is sarcastically satirized as "operation longatroat" which is a bromidic "long throat" and it symbolizes covetousness or greed. The enemy to assault then is not Alapata, the butcher but alapatas (rock splitters) which can be interpreted as miners and workers at the depots of mineral deposits. Soyinka has aesthetically brought accentual pronunciation of alapata, the rock splitter to satirically showcase issues of insecurity of lives and properties. He has vividly shown that the interior cause of terrorism in Nigeria and the world at large is greed, this can be religious greed, economic greed, political greed, etc. The artistic purpose derivable from the playwright's accentual variation is to show the intensity of his national consciousness. This artistic purpose coincides with Akhmemokhan's (2014) view that Nigerian writings provide the required forceful rhetoric that fires nation-ness in the minds of the nation-people of Nigeria and also in the minds of numerous non-Nigerians (65).

The operation of the accident of the accent becomes functional in the satirical mispronounced Alapata, the butcher as Alapata, the rock splitter as the soldiers left Alapata, the butcher without any havoc for a hectic search for unknown "Aba Alapata" (where they split rock):

ALABA: This place? The signboard is there – Aba Alapata (butcher's hamlet). Are you lost? Many people take the wrong turning, but everyone knows Aba Alapata (butcher's hamlet)

MAJOR: Position confirmed sah

GENERAL: Confirmed? Confirmed? Which position? Your own? That is what you call confirmed? You fool, you are off course by at least fifteen kilometers point five, and you tell me position confirmed. This is Aba Alapata (butcher's hamlet), not Aba Alapata, Alapata.Alapata (where they split rock). Two different places you tone-deaf baboon! One is Butcher's hamlet; the other is where they split rocks! Your destination was the quarry, which you were ordered to secure (96). (*The emphases in parenthesis are mine*)

It is arguably clear that with the use of accentual variation or tone, some brutal killings and beatings which should have been unleashed on Alaba, Alapata, the butcher and his community are perverted. This is a satirical way of preserving the societal valuable material from encroachment and for future use.

Alapata (the Ruler of Apata):

In the a la mode of satire, Alapata, Apata (the Ruler of Apata) is a new tonal or accentual representation of Alapata Apata, (the butcher on the rock). It is to complement the accident of the accent in the text that Baby Picasso one of the Teacher's students has unknowingly committed. The Teacher considers this accentual mistake as a costly one because it has negated the original purpose of his design and construct of the signboard to eulogize and celebrate Alaba Alapata, the butcher. Consequently, the mistake has added a complimentary title to the

butcher as he will be addressed and known henceforth as Alaba, Alapata Apata meaning Alaba, the Ruler of Apata domain.

Soyinka employs this accentual humor to expose the folly inherent in the desire of Nigerian political elites to be addressed or identified with chieftaincy titles like Otunba, Asiwaju, High Chief, His/ Her Imperial Majesty, Alhaji, etc. Some Nigerian political leaders will even take it as insult, if they are not addressed with these frivolous titles and accolades. In the text, since the inscription on the signboard is accentually interpreted as Alapata Apata (the ruler of Apata domain), the king and chiefs of that community become jittery and offended feeling that Alapata, the butcher has disrespected the throne and decimated the chieftaincy institution (161) and as it were, he must be punished accordingly. His offence is echoed by Oluwo an emissary from the king:

You are living in the domain of our Royal Father Amuletira. That rock, that apata is within his royal domain.

Nobody can become chief over any portion of it without his authority. Do you understand that? (166)

Here is an innocent and simple man who wants to be addressed merely as Alapata, the butcher because of his skillful experience in butchery but his society makes a mistake whereby he is seen to be ambitious and to be addressed as chief or ruler. This is a direct satire that the society must look inwardly and outwardly before conferring a chieftaincy title on any member or citizen of that society.

The indelible accentual mistake in the signboard is aesthetically employed to ridicule the level of decadence in the educational system in the contemporary Nigerian society. The Teacher that claims to possess all the accoutrement of knowledge (58) in the text fails to discover the simple error of accent mark in the signboard he masterminds before its erection. To humiliate his pride, the playwright creates a female and semi-illiterate trader who attempts to notify him about his inadequacy:

TEACHER: A new, all-African artistic movement. Home-grown. With him as Presiding Muse, we shall inaugurate – The Alapata School of Painting!

TRADER: (*Shouting?*) And what of the Alapata School of Spelling?

TEACHER: I beg your pardon, madam

TRADER: And so you should. We've been trying to get your attention for the past hour – that word is misspelt

TEACHER: (*Grandly*) Excuse me madame, I don't want to sound patronizing, but just what do you know of orthographic matters?

TRADER: Take a good look, before you make a fool of yourself.

TEACHER: (*Alarmed, he takes a quick glance. Then, relieved*) So? No wonder my friend says the world is gone askew, when fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

TRADER: We pay you to teach our children and what do you do? I have a mind to remove my daughter from your school, and you'll see if members of our parents' association won't follow suit.

TEACHER: (*Stunned*) O-oh, my goodness. I missed that oh, oh, disaster. I've photographed it already. All the photos have gone to the media ... (104-105).

This excerpt places a strong signal that pride as a vice in the society must be abhorred. Also, it reprimands that Nigerian educational system needs a radical overhaul in order to prevent the production of half-baked graduates that cannot withstand competition at the labour markets.

With the new title of Alapata Apata (Ruler of Apata), the playwright thematically preaches the reward of hardwork and humility. The Teacher endeavours to celebrate his friend Alapata, the butcher but the motive behind the celebration is to selfishly hoist his flag of artistic exuberance. Alaba Alapata, the butcher, in his simple manner prefers to be seen as retired butcher only, he does not want any accolade or fame. He admits his fate, "I never left this spot but, really, I feel I have already encountered the whole wide world. The world came here to find me" (57). The playwright employs foreshadow here to compliment the importance of being humble and assiduous. This is because the title Alapata, the butcher does not solicit for eventually becomes his at the end. His new elevation is thus heralded by a community chief, Oluwo:

... the rock is now his. As a token of royal remorse, the king has (this very day) conferred on you this very chieftaincy title. Your domain is now official – the Alapata of Apata (the Ruler of Apata domain) (182)

(*Emphases in parenthesis are mine*).

This is a direct reprimand that Nigerian political leaders should jettison the idea of involving in political manipulations, political thuggery and electoral frauds to attain political offices and positions. They should allow the wish of the people to always prevail.

5. Conclusion

This paper has critically explored the artistic use of an accentual mistake which the playwright tagged "the accident of the accent" in the text to depict Soyinka's dramaturgy and idiosyncrasy. It has also shown the strands of failings, follies and vices in the contemporary Nigerian society that must be lampooned and decried, if the society wants to thrive and to be recognized in the comity of enlightened nations. This study has also justified the satirical tendencies in the play, *Alapata Apata*. Soyinka's artistic talent in the play examined in this work lies largely in the presentation of Yoruba, his mother tongue accent marks to sift out the political faults in his society

and by extension in the entire nation of the world. This text can, therefore, be adjudged as a compendium of the display of national socio-political consciousness and global political realities.

Stylistically, Soyinka's literary uniqueness has been brought to the glare in his exploration of fusion of the feature of traditional satire and the employment of his mother tongue's tonemes to interrogate societal anomalies.

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