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INTRODUCTION

Transnational Muslim crossings and race in Africa Introduction

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This part issue aims to re-centre the African continent in debates on the intersectionality of race and religion. Africa became a colonial laboratory for racializing religious difference in the ethnological imagination. We argue that this legacy lends a unique position to the continent, one from which the co-constitution of modern ideas about race and religion can be theorized. However, we also contend that, having failed to come to terms with this very legacy, the anthropology of Africa disengaged with race as an analytical category (Pierre 2006), hence postponing such critical contribution. In this part issue, we problematize the absence of critical race ethnography within the field of Islam in Africa, recognizing this absence as an epistemological legacy of anthropology's colonial roots. Therefore, our aim is to confront the colonial and evolutionist libraries (Mudimbe and Appiah 1993) and to make a critical contribution to the scholarship on race and Islam from the vantage point of Muslim Africa's transnational relations with Muslim communities in Black America, the Middle East and Europe.

Moreover, the vast literature on the racialization of Muslims has mainly concentrated on the Islamophobia of the post-9/11 context as a form of racism (Rana 2011; Jamal and Naber 2008).[1] In a way, the political urgency of the topic overshadowed the processes of racialization that do not fall within this analytical focus. The myriad other ways in which race has been implicated in the lives of Muslim communities on the continent and beyond remain understudied. The critical race ethnographies we bring together in this part issue expand the scope of the theoretical discussion by investigating transnational relations of Sufism and Islamic humanitarianism as racial processes unfolding in Muslim Africa. We adopt an intersectional approach to consider the ways in which Muslims reinforce, reconfigure and resist racial meanings in and through transnational relations.

Through our ethnographic studies of transnational racialization and Islam in and beyond West Africa, we ask the following questions: in what ways do the afterlives of slavery continue to inform the relationships of Muslims on both sides of the Atlantic? How does belonging to a West African Sufi brotherhood reconfigure African-American

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[1] For a critique of Islamophobia as racism, see Husain (2020).

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Muslims' diasporic subjectivities? How does Islamic humanitarianism build on the colonial legacies of racializing Islam and hierarchizing difference? How are Muslims racialized as white and Black through the affective labour of humanitarian voluntarism? What are the possibilities and limits of solidarity between Muslims within and outside the African continent in the context of ongoing racial capitalism and global white supremacy?

Races and religions of Africa and the colonial politics of comparison

The Austrian ethnologist Richard Thurnwald published two consecutive articles on the 'social systems of Africa' in *Africa* (Thurnwald 1929). The articles classified African social systems into ten types and presented them in a hierarchical order, progressing from the so-called primitive to the complex. Like most of his contemporaries, Thurnwald believed that each type represented a different stage of development, with the hunter gatherers of Southern Africa at the bottom and the rationalized monarchies of the Nile valley at the top of the evolutionary pyramid. Drawing on secondary sources, he compared 'tribes' from the east to the west, from the north to the south of the continent based on their modes of subsistence, gendered distribution of labour, political organization, technological development, housing structures, land ownership, slavery and economic exchange.

Thurnwald's classificatory and comparative study mirrors the racist thinking shared by the ethnological and colonial projects carried out in Africa throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This racism is not limited to Thurnwald's choice of tribe as a unit of analysis – a conceptual invention and imposition of colonial governance (Mafeje 1971; Nyamnjoh 2012) – nor to his use of an evolutionary framework to explain social difference. A taken-for-granted racial taxonomy undergirds Thurnwald's identification and classification of tribes. He sometimes uses race and tribe interchangeably and at other times tribes become sites of racial mixing and unmixing, purity and impurity, extinction and preservation. In Thurnwald's racialized ethnological imagination, races nested within tribes such as the Hamitic, Nilotic and Negroid bring their own languages, physical traits, natural skills, technical knowledge and institutional traditions into distinct social systems. Thurnwald's classification of tribes as camel-herding or cattle-breeding intersects not only with the nineteenth-century racial taxonomies, but equally with evolutionary hierarchies based on religion. The civilizational difference between 'Mohammedans' and others is thus articulated in racial terms in his articles.

This brief discussion provides a glimpse into colonial anthropology's deep entrenchment in racist theorizing, particularly in Africa (Harris 1968; Stocking 1968). It also reveals the compartmentalization of the African continent into three racial/civilizational areas by anthropology in tandem with the philosophy of history. In the words of the German philosopher Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 'Africa consists of three continents which are entirely separate from one another, and between which there is no contact whatsoever' (Hegel 1975: 173). These are the European Africa (north), Asian Africa (north-east) and 'Africa proper' (south of the Sahara) (*ibid.*: 173). Hegel's 'Africa proper' – or 'Africa's own Africa', as Eze (2008: 136) would call it – differs from the other two by its exclusion from world history and consciousness of freedom (Bernasconi 1998; Zambrana 2017). Since world history was nothing but the actualization of spirit for Hegel (Brown and Hodgson 2011), the racial hierarchies of humanity fully corresponded to the spiritual ones.

The 'civilizational barriers' that separated Hegel's three Africas were, therefore, not only racial (Mamdani 2001); they were also religious (Aïdi *et al.* 2020; Eze 1997). More precisely, the racial and religious were inextricably linked. Hegel relegated Africa to the childhood of humanity and relied on the representations of sorcery, magic and fetish in the travel literature to extract evidence for the childishness of African religion (Bernasconi 1998). While Hegel considered Christianity as the religion of freedom and 'Oriental religions' as restricting freedom to a few under despotism, 'African religion', with no conception of God, was classified as the religion of unfreedom. In Hegel's philosophy, Africans' participation in world history and in progress towards freedom was possible only through contact with Europeans – that is, in the form of slavery – or with 'Mohammedans'.

Hegel's hierarchization of humanity in overlapping natural and spiritual terms reflects the intertwinement of race and religion in Enlightenment thought. Thurnwald's comparison of the tribes north and south of the Sahara shows how these racialized religious divisions were inherited by colonial anthropology. Thurnwald argued that the camel-herding and cattle-breeding tribes represented two different types because 'they [were] also different in race' (1929: 352). Furthermore, he claimed that the whole structure of the North African Berber tribes' civilization was different because they were 'Mohammedans' (*ibid.*: 352). Race and religion, therefore, provided the two intersecting axes by which colonial anthropology essentialized, naturalized and hierarchized difference in Africa.

The colonial library and Islam

The implications and consequences of the conflated ideas about race and Islam in Africa went far beyond Thurnwald's ethnological classifications or Hegel's historico-philosophical speculations. Comparing and contrasting colonized Muslim communities in Africa for decades, French colonial administrators and scholars constructed *Islam noir* or 'African Islam' in contradistinction to 'Arab Islam' (Harrison 1988; Launay and Soares 1999). Describing the latter as orthodox, fanatical and thus a threat to colonial rule, they sought to separate it – analytically, politically, socially and culturally – from a so-called African Islam that was perceived to be superficial and syncretistic, thus unthreatening and co-optable by the colonial authority (Triaud 2014; 2010). The French *politique musulmane* was therefore tightly interwoven with the *politique des races.* Colonial administrators invested in measuring the doctrinal impurity of Islam practised in West Africa and in racially classifying Muslims by threat potential, ranging from an unassimilable intensity of religiosity ('*très religieux*') to a fanaticism that could be assimilated (Clozel 1913, cited in Terme 2016: 359; Harrison 1985: 332).

British colonial discourses also relied on the conflation of Islam and racial hierarchies. In *The Dual Mandate*, Lugard 'classif[ied] the people of tropical Africa into three groups, according to their social organisation – viz., the primitive tribes, the advanced communities, and the Europeanised Africans' (1922: 72). At the tribal stage, Lugard situated the 'pagans', who were deeply immersed in superstition. In contrast, the advanced communities were those who adopted an 'alien monotheistic religion':

Islam. Islam meant advancement 'because it brought with it an admixture of Aryan or Hamitic blood' (*ibid.*: 76). In northern Nigeria, Lugardian discourses justified British indirect rule by attributing racial and cultural superiority and an inherent ability to rule to the Fulani elite, who had become its colonial allies (Curtin 1964; Umar 2006; Ochonu 2017).

The idea of Islam as a 'detribalizing', hence civilizing, force in Africa travelled from the colonial library to the pan-Africanist library. Blyden's *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (1990 [1887]) illustrates how Islam promised to overcome tribal limitations in Africa (Mudimbe 1988). Blyden conceptualized 'the work of Islam [as] preliminary and preparatory' (1990 [1887]: 28) in the evolution of Africans out of paganism and towards Christianity. Race and racialization are equally central to Ali Mazrui's macro-analysis of Africa's encounter with Islam. According to Mazrui (2005), Islamization in Africa initiates the *Sudanization* of its people. By *Sudanization*, Mazrui refers to the stimulation of race consciousness without being subjected to racism. While contact with the Arab world triggers a neutral process of identity formation devoid of stigma, racism is reduced to a European problem unknown in precolonial Africa.

This brief discussion has traced the various articulations of modern ideas about race with Islam in Africa across time and space. In the next sections, we discuss how these deep-seated beliefs about race and religion continue to undergird processes of racialization in Muslim Africa and why anthropologists are uniquely equipped to examine such processes.

Epistemological legacies of the colonial library

Mudimbe and Appiah (1993) observe an epistemological discontinuity with the nineteenth-century episteme, which provided the philosophical justification for slavery and colonialism in Africa. The authors argue that the disciplines of anthropology, history and philosophy reorganized themselves in the second half of the twentieth century in a way that represented a radical rupture with and complete reversal of the past (*ibid.*). The theoretical reorganization within anthropology involved a conceptual shift from race to culture, and a paradigmatic shift from evolutionism to relativism. However, anthropologists have long criticized the paradoxical legacy of this Boasian shift in American anthropology, which was neither a radical rupture with nor a complete reversal of nineteenth-century scientific racism (Harrison 1995; Mukhopadhyay and Moses 1997; Visweswaran 1998).

Around the same time as Thurnwald published his ethnological study, Franz Boas and his students developed a liberal anti-racist critique from within American anthropology. Boasians attacked scientific racism by refuting its ideas about biological determinism and racial inferiority (Baker 1998). Insisting on a conceptual separation between race and culture, they argued that human difference must be understood in cultural and not racial terms (Anderson 2019; Pierre 2006). In the wake of the Boasian critical intervention, the discipline of anthropology became specialized in the study of culture, relinquishing race as an analytical category and assigning it to biology as an object of study (Visweswaran 1998). Yet, race continued to lurk in the shadows of the culture concept, even when the explicit engagement of evolutionary anthropology with race was replaced by Boasian anthropology's implicit engagement. After all, Boas and his students failed to completely divorce themselves from eighteenth-century racial taxonomies and nineteenth-century evolutionism, since they retained the biological definition of race and maintained the racial classification of humanity into Mongoloid, Caucasoid and Negroid (Stocking 1968; Anderson 2019).

Culture, rather, worked as a substitute for race, leaving the 'racial subtext' of the anthropological project intact while changing the terms of the discussion (Stocking 1968; Harrison 1995; Visweswaran 1998; Pierre 2006). This not only led to anthropologists reifying culture by reproducing the essentialist and deterministic understandings of human difference once produced by the race concept; it also foreclosed anthropology's critical engagement with race and racism. The paradox of the Boasian legacy – and of liberal anti-racism in general – lies, therefore, in its blindness to the social reality of race. In other words, anthropology failed to develop an agenda to interrogate the persistence of the racial inequalities it helped create and rationalize in the first place, as well as the enduring, pervasive, detrimental and insidious effects of racism on a global scale (Harrison 1995; Pierre 2006; Anderson 2019). Therefore, anthropology's contribution to the critical study of racism has been limited compared with sociology and history since its abandonment of race as an object of study post-World War Two (Mullings 2005).

When it comes to the anthropology of Africa, Pierre (2013) argues that race and racialization have, on the one hand, been understudied and undertheorized. On the other hand, Pierre's (2006) work also shows that anthropology's continued involvement in the racialization of African cultural difference and its epistemological and methodological foundations has remained under-analysed. In the absence of an explicit engagement with race, culture has operated much like race in constructing African otherness and exceptionalism in the anthropological literature (Pierre 2006). We agree with Pierre that Africanist anthropology still falls short of critically addressing the relevance of race for ethnographic practice and representation as well as for broader social, political and economic contexts.

This part issue redirects Pierre's critique of Africanist anthropology to the anthropological literature on Islam in Africa and questions the latter's reluctance to analyse contemporary processes of racialization in relation to Muslim communities. Although we acknowledge its conceptual impact, we argue that this neglect cannot be reduced to a symptom of the Boasian legacy in anthropology. The anthropological disengagement with race in Africa is rooted in the discipline's failure to confront the intersecting legacies of Hegelian philosophy of history, ethnology's classificatory and comparative racial schema, and anthropology's complicity with colonial surveillance in Africa (Kane 2022; Marsh 2020). We are, therefore, sceptical about the radicalness and completeness of Africanist anthropology's rupture with the epistemological legacies of the 'evolutionist library' or the 'colonial library'. Critical confrontation with the histories, genealogies and legacies of racial thinking in Africa is particularly important for the study of Islam given the profound conflation of race and religion discussed above.

The anthropological disengagement with race becomes more pronounced when contrasted with the burgeoning historical literature on race in Muslim Africa over the last decades. Writing African intellectual histories, scholars have explored locally situated and historically specific racial projects across Egypt (Powell 2003), the Sahel (Hall 2011), the Maghreb (El Hamel 2013), West Africa (Gomez 2018) and East Africa (Glassman 2011), and have theorized how these premodern and precolonial processes of racialization articulate with modern racism in the wake of the Atlantic slave trade and colonization (Young and Weitzberg 2022). Much of the recent discussion on race and racism in contemporary Muslim Africa has also been led by historians, with a specific focus on the *haratin* identity (former slaves and their descendants) in post-slavery societies such as Mauritania and Morocco (Esseissah 2016; McDougall 2020; 2021). Compared with the vast literature on the interlocking histories of race, Islam and slavery in Africa, anthropological explorations of race and racism in contemporary Muslim Africa have been limited (see Menin 2020).

In other words, while historical knowledge production on racialization processes has thrived over the last decades within the interdisciplinary field of Islam in Africa, anthropologists have mainly remained silent on the question of race, choosing to foreground the category of ethnicity instead (Visweswaran 1998). In this part issue, we ask why the theoretical turn towards race in African studies has not yet produced critical ethnographies of race in Muslim Africa. How can we make sense of the lack of a critical race research agenda in the study of contemporary Muslim communities in Africa while there has almost been an 'incitement to discourse' when it comes to researching race in relation to so-called Arab/Islamic slavery on the continent (Gubara 2018: 233)? This part issue aims to contribute to the emergent anthropological literature on race in Muslim Africa by expanding the scope of analysis beyond social and political relations between the descendants of enslavers and enslaved. It does so, first and foremost, by re-centring the African continent in debates on the intersectionality of race and religion. Second, it expands the scope of theoretical discussion by including transnational processes of racialization across Muslim communities.

The anthropology of Islam in Africa and the question of race

The ethnographies of racialization that are brought together in this part issue make a much needed critical intervention into the anthropological literature on transnational Islam in Africa. Before we move on to our individual contributions, this section illustrates the 'race avoidant' (Brodkin 1999: 68; Mullings 2005: 670) symptoms dominant in the field. These range from bypassing ethnographic encounters that contain important data on race and racialization to pushing the analysis of this data down to a footnote, minimizing its relevance.

Marloes Janson's monograph on the Tablighi Jama'at in the Gambia (2014) provides a fascinating account of how the Gambian Tablighis reproduce, negotiate, contest and redefine global hierarchies of modernity and Islamic orthodoxy by way of comparing Europe, Saudi Arabia, Gambia and South Asia. At the same time, it also illustrates the anthropological silence on race by leaving unexplored the extent to which these same hierarchies are imbued with racial meanings. The prevalence of racialization becomes evident early on in the book as Janson is introduced to Tablighi missionaries for the first time by her Gambian interlocutors as 'white preachers' and 'ninja from Saudi' (*ibid.*: 26). The analysis of the social and historical complexity of these racial labels and slurs remains restricted to the footnotes. The book contains rich yet unexamined data on the ways in which religious difference intersects with racial otherness in postcolonial Gambia and whiteness operates as a marker of both European modernity and Islamic purity. The description of Bachir, a Mandinka man in his thirties, whose 'skin colour lightened when he started engaging in *tabligh*, to the extent that many people thought he was European when he returned from his study tour to Pakistan', probably best illustrates the need for this kind of critical engagement with race (*ibid.*: 226).

Anthropology's 'race avoidance' is not always limited to a lack of analysis of ethnographic data on race. At times, the analysis seems to contradict the data. In her thought-provoking visual media analysis of the Ahmadiyya, Katrin Langewiesche argues that the global iconography of the caliph creates transnational social cohesion among Ahmadis 'across national borders and cultural differences' (2022: 229). This cohesion entails membership and integration in a 'well-organized, homogenous, close-knit and strong' global community. Where the author emphasizes social cohesion, collective harmony and homogenization derived from the caliph's charismatic authority, her interlocutor states otherwise: 'I don't often join the women in the mosque. I have already explained to you that it is not always easy to get along with the Pakistani women. And then it's too much to handle' (*ibid.*: 225). This quote leaves the reader wondering whether the interlocutor, assuming that she is West African, is talking about anti-Black racism within the Ahmadiyya community; if not, why doesn't she get along with the Pakistani women? And what was it that she explained to the ethnographer previously? Instead of addressing this as a structural problem of a lack of cohesion, the author relegates her interlocutor's grievances to 'organisational or individual shortcomings' (*ibid.*: 225).

Exceptions to this reluctance to analyse race and racism within the scholarship on global Islam in Africa come from scholars working within the frameworks of Muslim cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism. Mara Leichtman's *Shiʿi Cosmopolitanisms in Africa* (2015) provides a historical analysis of the formation of Lebanese identity in Senegal in the context of French colonial discourses and policies of race and Islam. The book also exposes the racialized boundaries of citizenship, belonging and Lebanese integration in postcolonial Senegal. Leichtman's ethnography of Shi'i Muslim cosmopolitanism is thus attentive to the historical and social construction of race and its intersectionality with religion, class and sexuality.

Similarly, Zachary Wright's conceptualization of 'Afropolitan Sufism' makes a race-critical intervention into the scholarship on Islam in Africa (2019). Through a global survey of the Tijaniyya, the author discusses how the material, literary and aesthetic culture of West Africa travels globally as a new form of Afropolitanism. He argues that the cosmopolitan encounter with the spiritual leadership of Black African scholars shapes the identities of Tijanis around the world, paving the way for an Afropolitan Islam. Wright's study of race, Africa and global Islam is not an anthropological one, but it reveals the importance of conducting long-term in-depth critical race ethnographies for understanding how local processes of racialization articulate with transnational and global racial projects.

This becomes evident in Wright's discussion of the Turkish Tijanis in his section on the Middle East based on the community's Facebook posts. Seeing that the community's photographs on social media include West Africans, Wright concludes that 'Afropolitanism, then, appears to have been present both at the origins of the Tijaniyya in Turkey, and in contemporary contexts, even when Tijanis insist otherwise' (2019: 67). However, Turkish Tijanis' transnational mobilities and exchanges on the African continent produce racial meanings that are radically different from Afropolitanism. Instead of learning from or receiving the *baraka* (blessing) of

African scholars, the Tijanis in Turkey see themselves as bringing humanitarian aid and true knowledge (*ilim*) to African Muslims. Nested within the broader mobilization orchestrated by the Turkish state for aiding Muslim Africa (Güner, this issue), Tijani transnationalism reproduces and naturalizes the racial inequalities inherent in (Islamic) humanitarianism as much as it celebrates *Africanité.* The Afropolitanism of Turkish Tijanis therefore diverges from the veneration of Africa as the source of sainthood and scholarship that Wright observes in other contexts. As part of the national mobilization for 'saving' Muslim Africa, Tijani transnationalism in Turkey relegates African Muslims to the position of aid recipient and eternal student.

As this brief discussion reveals, transnational Islamic movements are important sites of racialization. A critical race analysis of these movements requires attention to the racialization of Muslims as subjects and objects of *da'wa*, the reproduction of racial hierarchies within the movement, and the *longue durée* histories of race that inform their transnationalism – in short, to the intersectionality of religion and race. Below, we outline how critical race ethnographies can address this gap through our contributions.

Towards critical ethnographies of race

The first part of the issue focuses on African-American Muslims' transnational connections to *tariqas* (Sufi brotherhoods) in Senegal. Samiha Rahman's article, 'From American to Cisse: Sufism and the remaking of diasporic ties across the Atlantic', studies the relationships between diaspora Black and African Tijani disciples attending a Qur'anic school in Medina Baye. Despite coming from working-class backgrounds and receiving financial support for their education, diaspora Black disciples are perceived by their continental African peers as wealthy foreigners. Rahman shows how African–diasporic exchanges in the context of intimate and sustained relations within the Tijani *tariqa* allow disciples to transcend these racialized tropes and develop over time an understanding of their shared economic hardship as stemming from interconnected legacies of slavery, colonialism and racial capitalism.

Youssef Carter's article, 'West African Sufism and the matter of Black life', focuses on the formation of Black Muslim diasporic identities through the study of the transatlantic Mustafawiyya network. The article analyses the diasporic mobilities between a mosque situated on a former slave plantation in South Carolina and a *zawiyah* (Sufi lodge) in Thiès, Senegal. Following Rasheed from the American South to sites of pilgrimage and heritage tourism in Senegal, Carter shows how 'reversion' constructs diasporic subjectivities and transatlantic solidarities between Muslims of African descent on both sides of the ocean. His discussion of the neglected role of Islamic piety in diasporic becoming makes a critical contribution to the conceptualization of the Black Atlantic.

The second part focuses on the racial discourses and practices of Muslim humanitarians from the Middle East and Europe in Africa. Ezgi Güner's article, 'Rejoicing of the hearts: Turkish constructions of Muslim whiteness in Africa south of the Sahara', focuses on the racial framing of the humanitarian encounter between Turkish and African Muslims. Analysing the narratives of first contact circulated by Turkish humanitarians, Güner explores the centrality of affective labour to race-making. Güner's theorization of race and affect through the trope of first contact contributes to our understanding of transnational processes of racial formation across the Middle East and Africa.

Rhea Rahman's article, 'White-adjacent Muslim development: racializing British Muslim aid in Mali', situates Muslim development and humanitarian work within the intersecting contexts of global white supremacy and anti-Muslim racism through the study of Islamic Relief, a UK-based aid organization, in rural Mali. The article examines the competing and conflicting understandings of a good life and a better future as well as what is correct Islamic practice and what it means to be a good Muslim as those understandings are embraced by the aid workers and the Malian villagers. Rahman shows how Islamic Relief's failure to meaningfully engage with the shrine located on the NGO's development site is conditioned by the whiteness of the development industry, global racial capitalism and the colonial legacies of the racialization of Islam.

Transnational Muslim crossings and racialization: new directions

Historically, Africa emerged as a concept representing the radical Other of Europe (Mudimbe 1988). If the defining characteristic of the latter was reason, African otherness was characterized by myth and magic, charms and spells, witchcraft and divination (Mbembe 2001). Within this racial order founded on anthropological knowledge, Islam has fallen somewhere in-between. This introduction has shown that knowledge produced on Islam in Africa from within the colonial library has historically framed it as either a revolutionary or an evolutionary force. Evolutionist discourses framed the Islamization of Africa as a necessary step towards civilization, while, for colonial scholars, the Africanization of Islam signified the adulteration of the religion (Seesemann 2011; Ware 2014).

The co-constitution of race and religion by the historical conceptions of Africa has an enduring legacy, a legacy that continues to shape the lives of Muslims in and beyond the continent. The critical race ethnographies in this part issue aim to unpack this colonial legacy as it unfolds in the transnational contexts of the Black Muslim Atlantic and Islamic humanitarianism. Our contributions highlight the importance of paying attention to the intersectionality of race and religion in the study of transnational Islam in Africa. In contrast to the anthropological avoidance of race, this critical exploration unravels the historically and culturally specific ways in which race has been imbricated with religion in Muslim Africa and contributes to the theorization of this co-imbrication in unique ways. With this part issue, we invite anthropologists to turn to the evolutionist and colonial libraries as well as the pan-Africanist library and their enduring legacies in the discipline for developing a critical research agenda on race and racialization in Muslim Africa.

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