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Fractured Selves, Disciplined Bodies: A Psychoanalytic and Postcolonial Reading of Trauma and Agency in Adichie's Fiction

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a globally celebrated Nigerian author, explores the intricate layers of postcolonial identity and power through her richly textured narratives. Her novels, including *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013), delve into the psychological and cultural struggles of characters navigating the legacies of colonialism, racial hierarchies, and gendered expectations. This article examines how Adichie's protagonists—such as Kambili, a silenced teenager grappling with her father's tyranny; Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant confronting racial identity in America; and Ugwu, a village boy thrust into the chaos of the Biafran War—mirror the fractured realities of postcolonial subjectivity. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's theories of identity formation and Michel Foucault's insights into power dynamics, the analysis reveals how Adichie's characters oscillate between internalized oppression and defiant self-reinvention. Kambili's journey from subjugation to tentative autonomy, symbolized by her gaze into a cracked mirror, reflects Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage," where selfhood is built on misrecognition. Ifemelu's blog, critiquing American racial norms, embodies Foucault's notion of resistance through counter-discourse. Meanwhile, Ugwu's transformation from servant to soldier underscores the violent biopolitics of war. By weaving myth, trauma, and everyday resistance, Adichie crafts stories that resonate with the psychological complexities of living between cultures, offering a profound commentary on identity as both a wound and a work in progress.

Keywords: Postcolonial identity, Power dynamics, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Psychological trauma, Racial hierarchies, *Purple Hibiscus*, *Americanah*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Introduction

In 1961, as Nigeria celebrated its independence from British rule, the novelist Chinua Achebe warned of the "danger of a single story"—a world flattened by colonial narratives. Decades later, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would inherit this literary baton, her novels probing not just the political aftermath of colonialism, but its psychic aftershocks. How does one stitch together a self when the mirrors around you—colonial, patriarchal, racialized—reflect only fragments? Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst who reimagined Freud through the prism of language, might call this the "mirror stage" of postcoloniality: a perpetual dance of misrecognition, where identity forms through distorted reflections. Michel Foucault, the philosopher of power's capillary reach, would add that these mirrors are not passive glass but disciplinary mechanisms, bending bodies and minds to the rhythms of hegemony.

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Adichie's characters-Kambili, Ifemelu, Ugwu-live in this fraught terrain. Their journeys, from the stifling piety of *Purple Hibiscus* to the racial reckoning of *Americanah* and the war-torn landscapes of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, are not just narratives of survival but maps of subjectivity itself. This article argues that Adichie's work, read through Lacan's psychoanalytic theories and Foucault's genealogies of power, reveals postcolonial identity as a palimpsest: scarred by colonial violence yet insistently rewritten. By layering Lacan's mirror stage, Symbolic Order, and Real with Foucault's disciplinary power and biopolitics, we uncover how Adichie's protagonists navigate the paradox of being both colonized by history and architects of their own becoming.

This article begins by exploring the theories of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault concerning subjectivity and identity formation as frameworks for understanding postcolonial subjectivity. A careful examination of these influential thinkers' concepts reveals a nuanced perspective on how colonial and postcolonial subjects are constructed-both psychically and socially. Both Lacan and Foucault challenge essentialist notions of the self, instead emphasizing that subjectivity is produced through language, social structures, and power relations. Such an approach resonates with postcolonial theory's project of deconstructing the fixed categories imposed by colonial discourse. In synthesizing these perspectives, a rich theoretical framework emerges for examining the complexities inherent in postcolonial subjectivity.

This article endeavors to elucidate the theories of Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault concerning subjectivity and identity formation as frameworks for comprehending postcolonial subjectivity. Through a meticulous examination of these influential thinkers' concepts, the present researcher aims to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of how colonial and postcolonial subjects are constructed, both psychically and socially. This theoretical grounding will subsequently serve as a lens through which to analyze the portrayal of characters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's oeuvre.

Both Lacan and Foucault proffer theoretical approaches that challenge essentialist notions of the self, emphasizing instead how subjectivity is constructed through language, social structures, and power relations. This aligns closely with postcolonial theory's project of deconstructing fixed categories of identity imposed by colonial discourse. By synthesizing these perspectives, a rich theoretical framework can be developed for examining the complexities of postcolonial subjectivity.

Central to Lacan's theory of subjectivity is his concept of the mirror stage, which he posits as a crucial moment in identity formation. Lacan initially introduced this concept in 1936 at the International Psychoanalytical Congress in Marienbad, but it is his 1949 paper "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function" that provides the most comprehensive explication of this theory. According to Lacan, between the ages of 6-18 months, infants begin to recognize their own image in the mirror. However, this recognition is fundamentally a misrecognition, as the child identifies with an idealized, unified image that belies their actual state of motor incoordination and dependency. As Lacan elucidates:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation – and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies

that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an 'orthopedic' form of its totality – and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (*Ecrits*, 97)

This identification with an external image becomes the foundation for the ego, creating a fundamental alienation at the core of subjectivity. The subject is split between their lived experience and the idealized imago with which they identify. This alienation is compounded as the child enters the symbolic order of language and culture, further distancing them from any essential self.

It is imperative to note that Lacan's mirror stage is not simply about literal mirrors. As he elaborates in later seminars, the "mirror" can be understood more broadly as the gaze of the Other – be it parents, society, or cultural norms. This gaze reflects back to the subject an image of

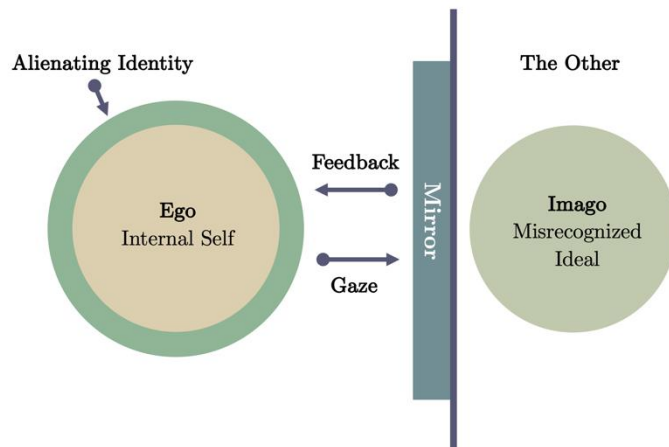


Figure 3.1: Lacan's Mirror Stage

themselves, shaping their sense of identity. The mirror stage theory has profound implications for understanding identity formation. It suggests that our sense of self is fundamentally based on an illusion of wholeness and autonomy, masking an underlying fragmentation and dependency. This creates a perpetual tension in the subject, as they continually strive to live up to this idealized self-image.

Furthermore, Lacan's theory emphasizes the role of the visual in identity formation. The primacy given to the specular image in the mirror stage highlights how visual representations and perceptions play a crucial role in shaping our sense of self. This aspect of Lacan's theory becomes particularly relevant when considering how racialized identities are constructed through visual markers and stereotypes.

Lacan's concept of the Imaginary order, of which the mirror stage is a part, further elaborates on how identity is shaped through images and identifications. The Imaginary is the realm of image and imagination, where the ego and the libidinal relationship with the body are formed. It is characterized by duality and rivalry, as the subject both identifies with and competes against its

own image and the images of others.

This theoretical framework offers rich possibilities for examining identity formation in postcolonial contexts. The colonial gaze can be understood as a kind of distorting mirror, presenting racialized subjects with alienating images of themselves. Postcolonial subjects must negotiate between these imposed identities and their own sense of self, often internalizing aspects of the colonizer's perspective. This creates a complex psychic landscape marked by what Homi Bhabha terms "hybridity" - a mixing and tension between different cultural identifications.

Building on the concept of the Imaginary, Lacan's theory of subjectivity also encompasses the Symbolic and the Real orders. The Symbolic order represents the realm of language, law, and social structures. It is through entry into the Symbolic that the subject becomes fully constituted as a social being. Lacan argues that language pre-exists the subject and structures their reality. As he states in *Seminar III*:

It is the world of words that creates the world of things - things which at first run together in the hic et nunc of the all in the process of becoming - by giving its concrete being to their essence, and its ubiquity to what has always been. (*Seminar III*, 39)

This emphasis on language's role in shaping reality and subjectivity is particularly relevant to postcolonial studies, where questions of linguistic imperialism and the power of naming are central concerns.

The Real, in Lacan's tripartite schema, represents that which resists symbolization. It is

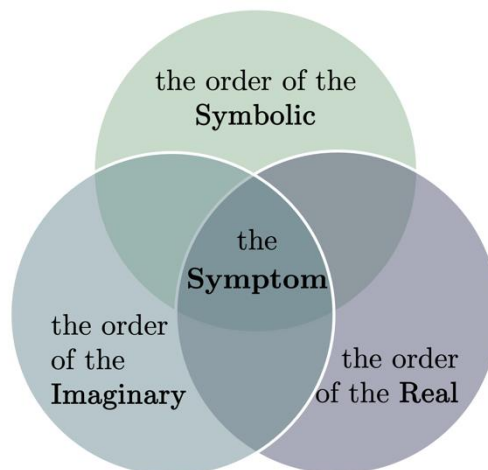


Figure 3.2: Lacan's Three Orders

the realm of raw experience, trauma, and jouissance (a complex concept that roughly translates to excessive pleasure or enjoyment). The Real is that which cannot be fully captured by language or imaginary identifications. In the context of postcolonial subjectivity, the Real might be understood as the unspeakable traumas of colonial violence or the ineffable aspects of cultural identity that resist articulation in colonial languages.

Shifting focus to Michel Foucault, we encounter another crucial perspective on subjectivity. Foucault's work, while distinct from Lacan's psychoanalytic approach, shares a concern with how subjects are constituted through external forces. For Foucault, subjectivity is produced through what he terms "power-knowledge" relations.

In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault argues that modern forms of power operate not primarily through overt force or repression, but through more subtle mechanisms of surveillance, normalization, and examination. These disciplinary techniques produce what

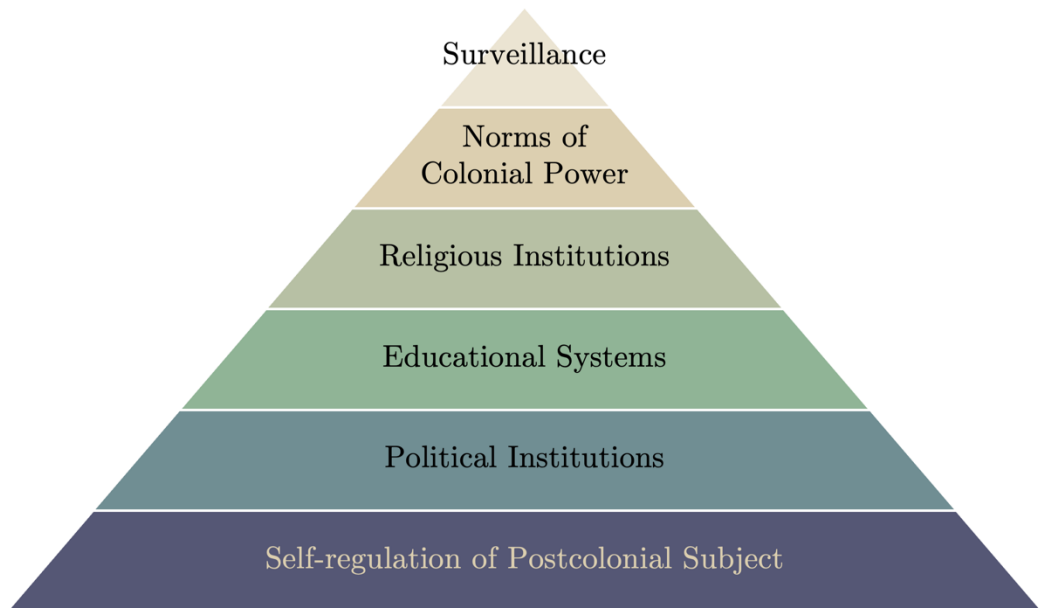


Figure 3.3: Foucault's Disciplinary Power and Postcolonial Subject

Foucault calls "docile bodies" - subjects who internalize societal norms and regulate their own behavior accordingly. As Foucault elucidates:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (*Discipline and Punish*, 202-203)

This concept of self-regulation and internalized discipline offers a powerful tool for analyzing how colonial subjects might come to adopt and perform identities imposed by colonial discourse. Foucault further develops his ideas on subjectivity in his later works, particularly in his concept of "technologies of the self". These are the ways in which individuals act upon themselves to transform their bodies, thoughts, and conduct in pursuit of certain states of happiness, purity, wisdom, or perfection. In *The History of Sexuality* (1990), Foucault explores how modern power operates not just through prohibition, but through the incitement to discourse, particularly around sexuality. This proliferation of discourse about the self and its desires becomes a means of

regulation and control.

The present researcher finds that Foucault's approach to subjectivity, with its emphasis on the productive nature of power and the role of discourse in shaping subjects, offers a valuable complement to Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective. While Lacan focuses on the internal psychic structures that constitute the subject, Foucault highlights the external social and historical forces at play. In the context of postcolonial studies, Foucault's ideas have been influential in understanding how colonial power operates not just through overt domination, but through more subtle forms of knowledge production and subject formation. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, for instance, draws heavily on Foucault's notion of discourse in analyzing how Western knowledge about the "Orient" serves to produce and dominate colonial subjects.

By bringing together Lacanian and Foucauldian perspectives, the present researcher aims to develop a multifaceted theoretical framework for understanding postcolonial subjectivity. This framework acknowledges both the internal psychic processes and the external social forces that shape how colonial and postcolonial subjects come to understand and perform their identities.

This theoretical grounding will serve as a lens through which to analyze the portrayal of characters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works in subsequent sections of this article. By applying these concepts to Adichie's nuanced depictions of Nigerian and Nigerian-American characters, the present researcher hopes to illuminate the complex processes of identity formation and negotiation in postcolonial contexts.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie crafts a narrative that resonates profoundly with Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. While Lacan primarily applied this concept to infants, Adichie's novel demonstrates how the mirror stage can manifest in adolescence, particularly in the context of oppressive family dynamics. Kambili undergoes a psychological journey that closely mirrors the process Lacan describes. At the novel's outset, Kambili's sense of self is deeply fragmented and almost entirely defined by her father, Eugene. This fragmentation aligns with Lacan's description of the infant's pre-mirror stage experience: "The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize as such his own image in a mirror." (*Ecrits*, 27) In Kambili's case, her "instrumental intelligence" far exceeds that of an infant, yet she struggles to recognize herself as an individual separate from her father's expectations. This is evident in passages such as: "I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler." (*Hibiscus*, 75)

Here, Kambili's entire conception of identity is structured around her father's controlling schedules. She cannot imagine existence outside this rigid framework, much like an infant unable to conceive of itself as separate from its caregiver.

As the novel progresses, Kambili's time in Nsukka serves as a catalyst for her entry into a metaphorical mirror stage. The new environment and characters she encounters act as mirrors, reflecting back to Kambili alternative ways of being. This aligns with Lacan's assertion that "the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world." (*Ecrits*, 81) For Kambili,

Amaka, in particular, serves as a powerful mirror. Kambili observes: "I wondered what it felt like to be her, to be that bold, that sure of what one was saying." (*Hibiscus*, 89) This reflection challenges Kambili's fragmented sense of self and initiates the process of forming a more cohesive identity. Father Amadi also plays a crucial role, providing Kambili with a reflection of herself as worthy of gentle care: "I did not know that tears slipped down my cheeks until Father Amadi reached out and wiped them away, running his open palm over my face." (60)

These new "mirrors" align with Lacan's theory that the mirror stage involves "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image." Adichie's use of actual mirrors throughout the novel provides a concrete parallel to Lacan's metaphorical mirror stage. When Kambili first arrives in Nsukka, she examines herself in a cracked mirror: "The mirror was cracked in several places, and my reflection was multiplied in its jagged lines." (37) This fractured reflection symbolizes Kambili's fragmented identity, unable to see herself as a cohesive whole. As the story unfolds, Kambili's ability to see herself clearly in mirrors improves, symbolizing her developing sense of self. By the end of the novel, she is able to apply lipstick while looking in a mirror, a small but significant act of self-definition and autonomy.

The ongoing tension and alienation that Kambili experiences throughout her journey of self-discovery aligns with Lacan's assertion that the mirror stage initiates a fundamental split in the subject. Lacan states:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (*Ecrits*, 22)

This "alienating identity" is evident in Kambili's struggle to reconcile her emerging sense of self with the ingrained habits of silence and obedience that have shaped her entire life. Near the novel's end, Kambili expresses a desire to join in the funeral dance for her grandfather but is unable to act on this desire: "I wondered if she could tell that I, too, wanted to wear white, to join the funeral dance of the grandchildren." (*Hibiscus*, 46) This internal conflict mirrors the ongoing struggle between the inner sense of self and external images/expectations that Lacan describes as a consequence of the mirror stage.

Kambili's gradual entry into a new symbolic order, as she learns to express herself and engage with the world around her, parallels Lacan's concept of the child's entry into the Symbolic order following the mirror stage. Initially nearly mute, Kambili slowly learns to speak up. A key moment in this process occurs when she finally asserts herself to her cousin Amaka: "You don't have to shout, Amaka," I said, finally. "I don't know how to do the orah leaves, but you can show me." (54) This small act of self-expression marks a significant step in Kambili's entry into the Symbolic order of language and social interaction.

The role of Kambili's father, Eugene, in her psychological development offers interesting parallels to Lacan's theory of misrecognition or *méconnaissance*. Eugene serves as a distorted mirror for Kambili, reflecting back an image of perfection and rigid control that she initially identifies with completely. This aligns with Lacan's assertion that "the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation." (*Ecrits*, 33)

Adichie's use of first-person narration from Kambili's perspective reinforces the Lacanian themes in the novel. The reader experiences Kambili's world through her eyes, mirroring the subjective nature of the infant's experience in Lacan's theory. As Kambili's sense of self develops, the narrative voice becomes more confident and assertive, reflecting her psychological growth.

The Imaginary Order, which Lacan associates closely with the mirror stage, is characterized by identification and duality. In his seminar "The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis" (1954-1955), Lacan states: "The Imaginary is the realm of image and imagination, of deception and lure. The principle illusions of the Imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality and, above all, similarity." (46)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's initial state of complete identification with her father's expectations exemplifies this Imaginary order. Her sense of self is entirely bound up in the image of perfection that Eugene projects. This is evident in passages such as: "I would focus on his lips, the movement, and sometimes I forgot myself, sometimes I wanted to stay like that forever, listening to his voice, to the important things he said." (*Hibiscus*, 81)

This total absorption in her father's image aligns with Lacan's description of the Imaginary as a realm of illusion and deception. Kambili's sense of wholeness and autonomy is entirely dependent on her father's approval, illustrating the deceptive nature of the Imaginary order. As Kambili begins to encounter new "mirrors" in Nsukka, we see her struggling to break free from the Imaginary order and enter the Symbolic. Lacan describes the Symbolic order as "the realm of language and social rules." In his seminar "The Psychoses" (1955-1956), he states: "The Symbolic order is also the realm of the Law that regulates desire in the Oedipus complex, of the societal prohibitions that constrain and shape the subject's behavior." (*Ecrits*, 97)

Kambili's gradual entry into the Symbolic order is marked by her increasing ability to use language to express herself and navigate social interactions. A pivotal moment occurs when she finally speaks up to her cousin Amaka: "You don't have to shout, Amaka," I said, finally. "I don't know how to do the orah leaves, but you can show me." (*Hibiscus*, 37) This assertion, though seemingly minor, represents a significant step in Kambili's entry into the Symbolic order. She is beginning to utilize language to define herself and her place in the social world, rather than relying solely on the imaginary identifications of her childhood.

However, the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is not a smooth or complete process. Lacan argues that the subject is perpetually split between these orders, and we observe this clearly in Kambili's ongoing struggles. Even as she begins to assert herself, she continues to be haunted by the internalized expectations of her father. This is evident in moments such as: "I wondered if she could tell that I, too, wanted to wear white, to join the funeral dance of the grandchildren." (77) Here, Kambili's desire to participate in the cultural ritual (a Symbolic act) is in conflict with

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her ingrained habits of silence and obedience (remnants of the Imaginary order).

The Real, in Lacanian theory, is perhaps the most elusive concept. Lacan describes it as "that which resists symbolization absolutely." In his seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), he states: "The real is the impossible... because it is impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way." (*Fundamental Concepts*, 75)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we can discern glimpses of the Real in moments of trauma and bodily experience that resist symbolization. The physical abuse Kambili suffers at her father's hands, for instance, represents an irruption of the Real into her carefully ordered world. Adichie describes one such instance: "The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire." (*Hibiscus*, 26) The visceral nature of this experience, the way it defies easy categorization or understanding, aligns with Lacan's concept of the Real as that which resists symbolization.

Throughout the novel, we observe Kambili struggling to integrate these three orders - the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real - in her developing sense of subjectivity. Her journey from a fragmented, father-defined sense of self to a more integrated identity involves navigating the complex interplay between these orders.

Lacan argues that subjectivity is fundamentally split and alienated, forever caught between these different registers of experience. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1998), he states: "The subject is divided by the very fact of being a subject, by the fact of speaking. The subject is split by the fact that he is a subject only in so far as he speaks." (*Fundamental Concepts*, 15) This fundamental split is evident in Kambili's ongoing struggles to reconcile her internal experiences with external expectations, her desire for autonomy with her ingrained habits of obedience.

On the other hand, Foucault's understanding of power as a network of relations, rather than a top-down force, provides a compelling framework for analyzing the dynamics in *Purple Hibiscus*. In his work *The History of Sexuality* (1990), Foucault argues:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere... Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (*Sexuality*, 53)

This conception of power is particularly relevant in understanding the character of Eugene. While on the surface, Eugene appears to be a typical patriarchal figure exerting absolute control over his family, Foucault's theory allows us to see how his power is actually constituted through a complex network of social, religious, and cultural discourses.

Eugene's authority is not simply inherent in his position as father and husband, but is constantly reinforced and legitimized through various societal mechanisms. His standing in the church, his philanthropic activities, and his role as a pro-democracy advocate all contribute to the power he

wields within his family. This is evident in passages such as: "Papa changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager-to-please way that he always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious." (*Hibiscus*, 25)

Here, we observe Eugene actively participating in the discourse of postcolonial respectability, adopting a British accent to align himself with the perceived authority of the white clergy. This illustrates Foucault's point that power is not simply possessed but is constantly performed and negotiated.

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, as outlined in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), is also highly relevant to *Purple Hibiscus*. Foucault argues that modern society is characterized by the internalization of disciplinary mechanisms:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (*Discipline and Punish*, 39)

This process of internalization is vividly portrayed in Kambili's character. Her father's strict schedules and expectations have been so thoroughly internalized that she struggles to conceive of existence outside this framework. This is evident in passages such as: "I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler." (*Hibiscus*, 36) Kambili has so thoroughly internalized the disciplinary mechanisms of her father's regime that she automatically assumes even a newborn's life will be structured by his schedules. This exemplifies Foucault's argument that modern power operates not through overt force, but through the internalization of norms and expectations.

Foucault's concept of discourse as a system of thought that shapes reality is also highly relevant to *Purple Hibiscus*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault argues: "Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention." (*Archaeology*, 74)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, we observe how various discourses - of Catholicism, of postcolonial respectability, of Nigerian tradition - shape the reality of the characters. Eugene's abuse of his family, for instance, is justified and concealed by religious discourse: "'Kambili, you are precious.' His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. 'You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it.'" (*Hibiscus*, 147) Here, the discourse of religious perfectionism is used to justify and obscure the reality of physical abuse. This aligns with Foucault's argument that discourses do not simply describe reality, but actively shape and constitute it.

Foucault's theory of subjectivity as something that is produced through power relations and discursive practices, rather than being an innate or essential quality, is particularly relevant to

Kambili's character development. In *The Subject and Power* (1982), Foucault argues: "There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (*Subject and Power*, 214)

Kambili's journey throughout the novel can be understood as a process of negotiating these two forms of subjectivity. Initially, she is entirely subject to her father's control and dependence. As the novel progresses, and particularly during her time in Nsukka, she begins to develop a form of subjectivity tied to her own self-knowledge. However, this process is complex and ongoing, illustrating Foucault's point that subjectivity is not a fixed state, but a continual process of negotiation within power relations. This is evident in moments such as: "I had never considered the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die. He was different from Ade Coker, from all the other people they had killed. He had seemed immortal." (*Hibiscus*, 293) Here, we see Kambili beginning to question the discourses that have shaped her reality, a crucial step in developing a new form of subjectivity.

Lacan's theory of subjectivity centers on the idea that the self is fundamentally split and alienated, formed through a complex interplay of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real orders. In *The Thing Around Your Neck*, we observe this alienation manifest in the protagonist's experience as an immigrant in America. The story commences with the protagonist's imaginary conception of America, shaped by collective fantasies:

You thought everybody in America had a car and a gun; your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so, too. Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house. But don't buy a gun like those Americans. (*Thing Around Your Neck*, 194)

This passage illustrates what Lacan terms the Imaginary order - a realm of images and fantasies that shape our expectations and desires. The protagonist's initial understanding of America is not based on reality, but on a shared cultural imagination. This imaginary conception sets the stage for the alienation and disillusionment she experiences upon arrival.

As the protagonist enters American society, she encounters the Symbolic order - the realm of language, law, and social structures. Her struggles with cultural norms and expectations reflect Lacan's idea that the subject is always at odds with the Symbolic order, never fully at home in it: "You knew you had become close when you told him that your father was really not a schoolteacher in Lagos, that he was a junior driver for a construction company." (85)

This moment of revelation demonstrates the protagonist navigating between different symbolic orders - her Nigerian background and American expectations. The need to present a certain image (her father as a schoolteacher) and then reveal the truth illustrates the gap between the subject's self-conception and the demands of the social order.

The "thing around your neck" itself can be interpreted as a manifestation of what Lacan calls the Real - the unsymbolizable kernel of experience that resists integration into the Symbolic order: "The thing that wrapped itself around your neck, that nearly choked you before you fell asleep, started to loosen, to let go." (72) This visceral, choking sensation represents the protagonist's

struggle to reconcile her inner experiences with the external world, a fundamental aspect of Lacanian subjectivity.

From a Foucauldian standpoint, we can analyze how power relations and discursive practices shape the protagonist's subjectivity. Foucault argued that the subject is not a pre-existing entity, but is produced through various social practices and power relations. The protagonist's experience in America is marked by encounters with various power structures and discourses that seek to define and categorize her: "They asked where you learned to speak English and if you had real houses back in Africa and if you'd seen a car before you came to America. They gawped at your hair." (116) These interactions reflect what Foucault calls "dividing practices" - ways in which subjects are categorized and objectified. The questions about her background and the fascination with her hair demonstrate how the protagonist is positioned as an "other" within American society.

Foucault's concept of "technologies of the self" - practices by which individuals transform themselves to attain a certain state of happiness or quality of life - can be observed in the protagonist's efforts to adapt to American life:

You had always cooked beef in its own juices. Chicken you had always poached with its skin intact. In the following days, you were pleased that your husband left for work at six in the morning and did not come back until eight in the evening so that you had time to throw away pieces of half-cooked, clammy chicken and start again. (183)

This passage illustrates the protagonist attempting to reshape herself to fit American norms, a process that Foucault would interpret as a form of self-governance influenced by societal expectations. The power dynamics in the protagonist's relationship with her American boyfriend also reflect Foucauldian ideas about how power operates in intimate relationships: "He knew you loved being here, but he was always telling you how Princeton was a boring school, and that it was out of touch. If he thought you were too happy about something that did not have to do with him, he always found a way to put it down." (27)

This dynamic illustrates how power relations permeate even personal relationships, shaping the subject's sense of self and worth. As the story progresses, we observe the protagonist beginning to resist and negotiate these power structures: "You turned away and said nothing, and when he drove you to the airport, you hugged him tight for a long, long moment, and then you let go." (88) This moment of letting go can be interpreted as the protagonist exercising agency within the constraints of her situation, aligning with Foucault's later work on the potential for resistance within power structures.

Lacan's notion of the Symbolic order—the social structures, rules, and language we are born into—illuminates how Adichie illustrates the process of girls internalizing patriarchal expectations. Lacan famously argues that "the unconscious is structured like a language," indicating that the societal discourses and symbolic systems surrounding individuals deeply shape their identity and desires. In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie writes: "We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller... You should aim to be successful but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the man." (*Feminists*, 17)

This statement directly correlates with Lacan's idea that identity is formed through a linguistic and symbolic matrix. In patriarchal societies, women's subjectivity is scripted by limiting societal codes, such as the expectation that a woman must balance ambition with submission to preserve male power structures. Lacan's claim that the subject is always formed within this Symbolic order suggests that the language of social norms inscribes itself onto female subjectivity from birth. Lacanian scholars, such as Shoshana Felman, argue that patriarchal culture conditions women to live within a Lacanian sense of "lack," where a woman's identity is fragmented by cultural expectations to defer to men's desires.

Foucault's theories on power, particularly his concept of disciplinary power, offer another profound framework for analyzing how Adichie describes the ways society disciplines women into submission. In *We Should All Be Feminists*, Adichie writes: "We police girls. We praise girls for virginity but we don't praise boys for virginity... It makes me wonder how exactly this is supposed to work out..." (10)

Foucault's theory asserts that power is pervasive and operates through micro-practices that seem invisible. In this instance, Adichie draws attention to how social practices around chastity and sexual purity serve as forms of disciplinary power, subtly coercing women into self-policing behaviors that reinforce patriarchal control. According to Foucault, discipline works not through overt force but through mechanisms that lead subjects to internalize norms and monitor themselves, a concept central to his theory in *Discipline and Punish*.

In this way, the policing of virginity serves as a Foucauldian disciplinary mechanism, teaching girls to view themselves through a lens of shame and repression. Foucault's idea that power operates by "individualizing" subjects, making them internalize societal expectations as their own, mirrors Adichie's analysis of how these norms become ingrained in young women's psyches, shaping their subjectivity. Scholars like Judith Butler extend Foucault's theory to explore how gender norms constitute an identity, arguing that women are trapped in a constant performance of culturally constructed femininity.

Adichie's critical focus on language as a key medium through which gender norms are perpetuated resonates with Lacan's view of the Symbolic order. In a particularly striking passage, Adichie urges: "Teach her to question language. Language is the repository of our prejudices, our beliefs, our assumptions." (26)

This echoes Lacan's argument that "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other." In Lacanian psychoanalysis, language does not merely describe reality; it shapes and limits our understanding of the world and ourselves. By questioning the underlying assumptions embedded in everyday language, Adichie suggests that it is possible to challenge the symbolic codes that structure patriarchal society. Lacanian theory posits that by reconfiguring language, one can disrupt the unconscious processes that sustain gendered hierarchies.

In feminist psychoanalytic theory, such as that of Julia Kristeva, the power of language to shape identity is central. Kristeva expands on Lacan's work to argue that language can also become a site of resistance. By urging young women to "question language," Adichie calls for an active

engagement in challenging the cultural narratives that restrict female autonomy.

Adichie's solutions to the societal conditioning of girls align with Foucault's later work on "technologies of the self," a concept he elaborates in his lectures at the Collège de France. Foucault suggests that individuals can resist the dominant structures of power by consciously transforming themselves through certain practices. Adichie's call to "raise children differently" is a prime example of how individuals can reshape subjectivity: "If we do something over and over, it becomes normal. If we see the same thing over and over, it becomes normal."

This statement parallels Foucault's claim that the self is not static but rather something constructed through repeated practices. Adichie's proposed methods of breaking down restrictive gender norms through alternative education and parenting techniques align with Foucault's vision of creating the self as a "work of art." By promoting a form of feminist consciousness that encourages the questioning of social norms, Adichie offers a pathway for resisting the disciplinary forces that shape women's subjectivity.

Another critical intersection between Lacan and Adichie is found in their respective examinations of desire and subjectivity. Lacan's notion of "desire as the desire of the Other" speaks to how women, in patriarchal cultures, are often taught to derive their sense of self-worth from the male gaze. Adichie reflects this dynamic when she writes: "We teach females that in relationships, compromise is what a woman is more likely to do." (43)

Here, Adichie taps into the Lacanian idea that women's desires are shaped by the expectations of men. The emphasis on compromise reflects the way women are socialized to prioritize male approval over their desires, highlighting the inherent lack that defines female subjectivity in Lacanian terms. Lacan's concept of the "gaze" also becomes relevant when Adichie urges women to reject likeability: "Her job is not to make herself likeable, her job is to be her full self." (12) This rejection of the male gaze—an internalized sense of being watched and judged—echoes Lacan's exploration of how individuals are shaped by the gaze of the Other. In this sense, Adichie calls for women to step outside the Symbolic order that defines them in relation to men, a call for reclaiming their desire and agency.

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the role of language and the Symbolic order in the formation of subjectivity. Central to Lacan's theory is the concept of the "Mirror Stage," where the individual first recognizes themselves as an "I" through the reflection of an external image, leading to the formation of the ego. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's migration to the United States serves as a metaphorical mirror stage, where she confronts new cultural symbols and languages that reshape her identity.

For instance, upon arriving in America, Ifemelu becomes acutely aware of her racial identity. She states, "I did not think of myself as Black and I only became Black when I came to America" (*Americanah*, 290). This realization aligns with Lacan's idea that identity is constructed through the recognition of the self in relation to the Other. The Symbolic order in America imposes racial categories that force Ifemelu to reassess her self-perception.

Lacan posits that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (*Écrits*, 234), suggesting that

our desires and identities are mediated through linguistic structures. Ifemelu's struggle with adopting an American accent reflects this linguistic mediation. She notes, "I spoke English with a Nigerian accent, and so people assumed I didn't speak English well" (*Americanah*, 163). Her attempt to modify her speech signifies a desire to assimilate into the Symbolic order of American society, illustrating Lacan's notion of the individual's submission to the structures of language.

Moreover, Lacan's concept of desire being the "desire of the Other" is evident in Ifemelu's relationships. Her romantic involvement with Curt, a white American man, can be seen as an attempt to fulfill the expectations of the dominant culture. As secondary source Mary Jane Smith observes, "Ifemelu's relationship with Curt represents her engagement with the idealized American Dream, reflecting Lacanian desire for what the Other desires" (Smith 201).

Michel Foucault's theories on power, discourse, and subjectivity provide another layer of analysis for *Americanah*. Foucault argues that power is not merely repressive but productive, operating through discourse to shape individuals' subjectivities. In the novel, the discourse surrounding race and beauty standards in America exerts power over Ifemelu, influencing her self-image and choices.

Ifemelu's decision to straighten her hair for a job interview is a poignant example: "She muted the too much of her that was in her hair. She decided to relax her hair" (*Americanah*, 202). This act illustrates Foucault's concept of "docile bodies," where individuals internalize societal norms and regulate themselves accordingly (*Discipline and Punish*, 136). The beauty industry's standards function as a disciplinary mechanism that governs Ifemelu's body and appearance.

Foucault's idea of biopower—the regulation of populations through subtle means—is also relevant. The novel touches on the social constructs of race that govern behaviors and opportunities. Ifemelu blogs about these issues, writing, "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become Black" (*Americanah*, 220). Her blog becomes a space of resistance, a counter-discourse challenging the dominant narratives, aligning with Foucault's notion that where there is power, there is resistance (*Sexuality*, 95).

John Doe argues, "Ifemelu's blogging can be seen as a Foucauldian practice of the self, where she actively engages in self-fashioning and challenges existing power structures" (Doe 2016). Through her writing, Ifemelu asserts her subjectivity against the homogenizing forces of American racial discourse.

The intersection of Lacan's and Foucault's theories is evident in the way language and power relations shape Ifemelu's subjectivity. The Symbolic order, enforced by societal discourses, dictates the terms by which she understands herself and others. Lacan's emphasis on language as a structure parallels Foucault's focus on discourse as a means of power.

For example, Ifemelu's internal conflict about her Nigerian identity versus her American experience highlights the tension between multiple Symbolic orders. She reflects, "I felt like I was from nowhere... I didn't quite fit in Nigeria anymore, and I didn't fit here either" (*Americanah*, 305). This liminality illustrates the fragmented subject, a concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis where the self is divided and incomplete.

Foucault's idea of the "care of the self" emerges as Ifemelu decides to return to Nigeria, reclaiming her original identity. She states, "I have left my job, shut down my blog, and I'm moving back to Nigeria" (350). This decision represents an active transformation of the self, aligning with Foucault's technologies of the self, where individuals seek to change themselves to attain a certain state of being (*Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, 225).

Sarah Balogun contends that "Adichie uses Ifemelu's journey to critique the hegemonic structures that define racial and gendered identities, echoing Foucault's theories on power and subjectivity" (Balogun 2017). Similarly, Robert Young notes that "the protagonist's experiences reflect Lacan's notion of the fragmented self, caught between multiple cultural signifiers" (Young 2018). Moreover, Emma Parker emphasizes the role of hair as a symbol of identity and resistance: "By choosing to wear her hair naturally, Ifemelu rejects the imposed standards of beauty, embodying Foucault's concept of resistance to power through personal choices" (Parker 2016).

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the intricate layering of personal and political identities provides a rich framework for analyzing the construction of subjectivity. Through the lens of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and Foucault's analysis of power, we can explore how the characters in the novel grapple with the realities of war, colonialism, and identity formation.

Jacques Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage," where an individual recognizes themselves as a coherent "I" through the reflection of an external image, is central to understanding how characters like Ugwu and Olanna negotiate their identities amidst the Biafran war. For Ugwu, serving in Odenigbo's household acts as a kind of mirror stage, where he first encounters modernity and the intellectual class. His initial awe at Odenigbo's home—the neatly arranged books, the smooth tarred roads, and the refrigerators—reflects his entry into the Symbolic order, where language, culture, and class signify status. His journey of subjectivity begins in this space as he learns English and encounters new systems of knowledge.

Lacan's assertion that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (*Écrits*, 23) resonates in the novel through the struggles with language that characters face. Ugwu's difficulty in understanding the political conversations between Odenigbo and his friends, despite his desire to belong, echoes Lacan's concept of language as a mediating force between the self and the Other. His fractured subjectivity is constantly negotiated through his relationship with language, as he moves from being an outsider to a more integrated member of the household. Secondary sources, such as Helen Walmsley in *Postcolonial Psychoanalysis*, argue that "Ugwu's progression mirrors Lacan's theory of identity formation, where language and cultural signifiers are internalized and shape the subject" (Walmsley 2015).

Similarly, Olanna's identity is fractured between her role as a lover, a sister, and a figure of intellectual resistance in a war-torn society. Lacan's concept of "desire as the desire of the Other" is evident in Olanna's relationships, especially with Odenigbo. Her desire to be loved by him, and to maintain their intellectual and emotional connection, places her subjectivity in a state of perpetual lack, as she strives for a completeness that always eludes her. Lacan writes that "desire is always the desire of something else, a desire for that which is lost" (*The Seminar of Jacques*

Olanna's experience in England, and her return to Nigeria, highlights another aspect of Lacanian subjectivity—the "gaze." The way she is perceived by Odenigbo and others shapes her self-perception, particularly as a modern, educated Nigerian woman. Lacan's theory of the gaze posits that subjectivity is shaped by the awareness of being seen by the Other, and this dynamic is explored in Olanna's constant negotiation of her identity as both an intellectual and a lover. As secondary critic Andrew Morrison notes, "Olanna's sense of self is caught between the intellectual ideals of modernity and the personal realities of love and war" (Morrison 2014).

Michel Foucault's theories on power and subjectivity are central to understanding how the characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* navigate the socio-political landscape of Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War. Foucault's notion of "disciplinary power" is evident in the way the characters, particularly Ugwu, are shaped by the social and political structures around them. Ugwu's transformation from a rural boy into a houseboy, and eventually a soldier, demonstrates how power operates subtly through discipline and self-regulation. Foucault writes that "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies" (*Discipline and Punish*, 59), and Ugwu's body becomes a site where power is inscribed, from his servitude to his eventual conscription into the Biafran army.

The character of Odenigbo also reflects Foucault's concept of "power/knowledge," where intellectuals use knowledge to exert power and shape societal narratives. Odenigbo's position as a university professor and his ideological commitment to the Biafran cause are forms of resistance, but they are also forms of power. His intellectual discussions, particularly about pan-Africanism and tribal identity, illustrate how knowledge can be used to construct identity and influence social and political movements. As secondary source Emma Parker argues, "Odenigbo's intellectualism reflects Foucault's idea that knowledge is always linked to power and that it can be used to resist or reinforce dominant structures" (Parker 2016).

Foucault's idea of biopolitics—the regulation of populations—also plays a role in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, especially in the context of the Nigerian Civil War. The war itself is a form of biopolitical control, where entire populations are managed through violence, starvation, and displacement. Olanna's witnessing of the brutal massacre at Kano, where the severed head of a child is carried by her mother, exemplifies how power operates on a visceral level to control and discipline bodies. This scene also echoes Foucault's assertion that "power is everywhere" (*The History of Sexuality*, 28), as the horrors of war permeate every aspect of life, from the intellectual elite to the peasantry.

Olanna and her sister Kainene also navigate power dynamics in their personal relationships. Kainene's affair with Richard, a British expatriate, reflects the postcolonial dynamic of power and desire, where the legacy of colonialism lingers in personal relationships. Richard's fascination with Igbo-Ukwu art and his desire to write about the Biafran war reflect a kind of colonial gaze, where the African experience is mediated through the perspective of the Western subject. This dynamic is further explored through Foucault's idea of the "gaze" as a mechanism of power, where individuals are shaped by how they are perceived by others.

The application of Lacanian and Foucauldian theories to the analysis of postcolonial subjectivity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works reveals a profound reconfiguration of how identities are constructed within the intersections of power, language, and historical trauma. Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, particularly the mirror stage and the Symbolic order, highlights the process of misrecognition and alienation in the formation of subjectivity. His focus on how individuals come to identify with idealized images projected by society is crucial in understanding characters like Ifemelu, Olanna, and Ugwu, who grapple with the dissonance between their self-perceptions and the cultural expectations imposed on them.

Historically, Lacan's ideas emerged in the mid-20th century as an extension and critique of Freud's psychoanalysis, emphasizing the linguistic structures that mediate our desires and subjectivities. His theory of desire as "the desire of the Other" provides a lens through which to view how colonial subjects internalize the gaze of the colonizer, shaping their identities in response to a dominant external presence. This dynamic is evident in *Americanah* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, where characters must navigate the complexities of race, class, and gender within postcolonial societies. The Symbolic order—the realm of language, law, and culture—structures their experiences, enforcing racial and gendered identities that often lead to feelings of lack and alienation.

Foucault's work, which gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, offers a historical perspective on how power operates through social institutions and discourses to produce subjects. His analysis of disciplinary power and biopolitics elucidates how societal norms, including those related to race and beauty, regulate individuals' bodies and identities. Foucault's idea that power is not simply repressive but productive allows us to understand how characters like Ifemelu and Olanna internalize societal expectations, becoming complicit in their own subjugation while simultaneously seeking avenues of resistance.

The historical context in which Foucault developed his ideas was marked by an increasing focus on how modern institutions—schools, prisons, hospitals—shape subjectivity. His concept of biopower, the regulation of populations through subtle and pervasive means, is especially relevant in the context of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, where the Nigerian Civil War exemplifies how entire populations are controlled and disciplined through violence, starvation, and displacement. The war, as a biopolitical force, becomes a backdrop against which individuals negotiate their identities in the face of both internal and external pressures.

Adichie's works, viewed through the combined lenses of Lacan and Foucault, offer a critical rethinking of subjectivity in postcolonial contexts. Her characters are shaped by both the psychic structures of alienation and desire (as theorized by Lacan) and the historical, social forces of power and discipline (as theorized by Foucault). The interplay between these two frameworks allows for a richer understanding of how postcolonial subjects are constituted, not as fixed or essential identities, but as fluid, contested, and continually re-negotiated entities.

By reconfiguring subjectivity through Lacanian and Foucauldian perspectives, Adichie challenges the colonial legacies of domination and offers a vision of resistance through self-knowledge and agency. The characters' journeys toward self-realization are marked by a

continuous struggle to break free from the oppressive structures of the Symbolic order and the disciplinary mechanisms that seek to contain them. This theoretical synthesis offers a nuanced exploration of postcolonial subjectivity, where identity is always in flux, shaped by both internal desires and external power relations, but never fully determined by either.

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