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ARTICLE

Queens of the Mother City: A Queer Investigation into the Roots of Cape Town's Royals

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Abstract

What political imaginaries have existed beyond the nation-state? What might the misfitting (queer?) materials of the past—those unamenable to inclusion in narratives of national resistance—teach us about colonial and apartheid pasts? What alternatives to the colony and its contemporary forms might we imagine now? To respond to these questions, this essay assembles an archive of twentieth-century Capetonian queenliness, placing the historical Queen Elizabeth in proximity with textual renderings of the queer queens of apartheid Cape Town. A fictional, tongue-in-cheek, book review, published in *Drum* magazine in 1977, figures as a paradigmatic text of a mid-century popular textual genre that is animated by the sensibility that I call "camp royalist." The critical impetus that animates camp royalism provokes us to reconstruct how we represent colonial and apartheid pasts and invites us to think about possible future, nonnational, political collectivities and critiques.

Keywords: apartheid; camp; Cape Town; colonialism; critique; *Drum* magazine; Jacki Heyns; nationalism; Richard Rive; queer

Queens, historical and imagined, queer and not, pervade Cape Town. Queen Victoria's name adheres to the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront and to Victoria Road, among a plethora of other Capetonian places. British monarchy is ubiquitous among central city toponyms still—Queen, Princess, Duke, Coronation, Victoria, and more, proliferate. Still figuratively present in the urban landscape, until recently the Queen also possessed a political presence in Cape Town as head of the British Commonwealth. Post-apartheid South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth in April 1994, the very month the first democratic elections were held. The following year Queen Elizabeth arrived in Cape Town for the first of two post-apartheid state visits.

For much of the past two centuries, Britain has been ruled by "the Queen," first by Victoria (1837–1901), then by Elizabeth II (1952–2022). The "Mother-Queen" ruled over the Empire at its apex; Queen Elizabeth's reign encompassed the era of national independences and the growth of the Commonwealth.[1] As the embodiment of British sovereignty and global union, "the Queen" was a significant figure in the African hinterlands of Empire-and-Commonwealth during the age of high imperialism, as well as in the latter half of the twentieth century. During Victoria's reign, Africans made claims to equality within the Empire; during Elizabeth's, Black South Africans called upon and recalled promises of nonracial equality and land ownership.[2] Queenliness proliferates in Cape Town still—appearing not only in street names, but also in colloquialisms, nicknames, beauty pageants,[3] and a heterogenous cornucopia of texts.

Capetonian queenliness warrants our attention because it can help us to reflect on crucial questions that go far beyond Cape Town and South Africa. What critical political imaginaries have existed beyond the nation-state, the form that became ascendant with formal decolonization? What might the misfitting (queer?) materials of the past—those difficult to classify because they are not easily situated within discourses of identity, nation-statehood, or resistance—teach us about how we narrate the colonial and apartheid pasts?[4] And what alternatives to the colony and its contemporary forms might we imagine now?

To approach these questions, this essay assembles an archive of twentieth-century Capetonian queenliness: the Queen-to-be's birthday speech of 1947; Richard Rive's 1979 short story about the self-styled Queen of Table Mountain;

[1] Most contemporary Commonwealth nations were once part of the British Empire. Today's Commonwealth traces its inception to the Imperial Conference of 1926, attended by leaders of the dominions (among them South Africa), and came into legal existence in 1931. At the time of writing in 2024, the 56 Commonwealth members are independent states that recognize the British sovereign as head of the Commonwealth. Fourteen of those member states are also Commonwealth realms: nations that acknowledge the British sovereign as both their monarch and their head of state.

[2] See, for example, H. I. E. Dhlomo's poetic (and strategic) interpellation of the monarch during the Royal Family's 1947 visit to Southern Africa, analyzed in Hilary Sapire, "African Loyalism and Its Discontents: The Royal Tour of South Africa, 1947," *The Historical Journal* 54.1 (2011): 215–218. Post-apartheid land restitution claim applications have referenced "Crown land," and elderly interlocutors of colour have evoked the Union period with nostalgia (see Cullen Goldblatt, *Beyond Collective Memory: Structural Complicity and Future Freedoms in Senegalese and South African Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2020)). John Lambert discusses the royalist sentiment surrounding the 1947 tour among English-speaking white South Africans ("'Welcome Home': White English-speaking South Africans and the Royal Visit of 1947," *South African Historical Journal* 69.1 (2017): 101–120).

[3] On contemporary Cape Town beauty pageants, see the special issue of the journal *Safundi* ("Sequins, Self, and Struggle," eds Nadia Davids and Bryce Lyse, 18.2 (2017)) which focuses on two of the largest and most well-known: Spring Queen, a pageant of garment industry workers, and Miss Gay Western Cape. Siona O'Connell, who was also a lead researcher on the larger project of the same name, and contributed to the special issue, has curated exhibits on Spring Queen and maintains an online archive of materials relating to both these major pageants (http://archive.sequins-self-and-struggle.com/).

[4] Ruth Ramsden-Karelse's recent work with a queer Capetonian photographic archive represents an interesting intervention into how we conceive of the queer South African past. See "A Precarious Archive: Using Photography to Enable Liveable Lives in District Six, Cape Town," *Gender, Place & Culture* 31.9 (2024): 1253–1273.

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popular reportage of the Mau Mau Queen's 1953 coronation and the Cape Moffie Queen elections of 1970; and Jackie Heyns's history of the "Hottie Moffie"[5] aristocracy, as rendered in *Drum* magazine in 1977.[6] By placing the historical 1947 speech in proximity with textual renderings of the queer queens of apartheid Cape Town, the essay invites reflection on the political imagination that has animated African allusions to "the Queen" and to queens. Heyns's "Moffie Manuscripts" figures as a paradigmatic text of a mid-century popular textual genre—what I call "moffie writing"—and of the sensibility that animated it—what I name "camp royalist"—that should provoke us to reconsider how we write about colonial and apartheid pasts, and how we imagine a postcolonial future.

In thinking about this essay's discussion of camp royalist sensibility, Raymond Williams' notion of structures of feeling may be useful. "Structure of feeling" refers to collective social experience that has not taken a formalized, quasi-fixed, form—as, for example, an ideology or institution—and that may find expression in new styles or literary conventions. A structure of feeling is also "in solution," emergent: with hindsight, one can detect the ideology or institution that subsequently emerged from it.[7] Like a structure of feeling, a camp royalist sensibility was part of shared social experience and found novel aesthetic form (in the genre of moffie writing). In a departure from Williams' notion, camp royalism was not emergent: it did not become, say, a queer royalist movement. Yet, with its social and inchoate character, and its close connection to aesthetic innovation, structure of feeling alludes to key elements of camp royalism.

This essay invites readers to reconsider how we might write in ways that are deeply attentive to the complexity of the past and the present. It does not aim to uncover how mid-century queer Capetonians truly lived or viewed themselves. To the extent that this essay constitutes a project of recovery, its object is not a category of person nor a "voice," but rather the camp royalist critical sensibility that Heyns's tongue-in-cheek history of the "moffie" aristocracy epitomizes. I suggest that attention to non-nation-state nationalist political critiques—and especially to faux historical recoveries of queer aristocracy!—can help us to denaturalize nation-state nationalism. Such attention might also provoke us to further explore forms other than the nation-state—with its constituent majority

[5] "Hottie" is derived from "Hottentot," a derogatory (colonial and apartheid) appellation for Khoi people; from Heyns's pen, "Hottie" is clearly affectionate (and intended to please the ear in its pairing with "moffie").

[6] Richard Rive, "Riva," *Advance, Retreat* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983) 60–72; "A Speech by the Queen on her 21st Birthday," Cape Town, April 21, 1947, https://www.royal.uk/21st-birthday-speech-21-april-1947; "Women of the Mau Mau," *Africa!* 17 (July 1955): 13–15; Jackie Heyns, "The Moffie Manuscripts," *Drum* (July 1977), 46–7. Riva" was originally published in the March 1979 issue of the South African apartheid-era literary and cultural journal *Staffrider* (1978–1993). The story reappeared four years later, with slight modifications, in a collection of Rive's short stories; I cite that second, more widely circulating, edition of "Riva" in this essay.

[7] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 126–135.

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and minorities[8]—through which African people have imagined political collectivities and articulated political critique.

To respond to questions about colonialism and its aftermath by examining a Capetonian archive allows us to challenge the notions of exceptionalism that still surround scholarly and popular conceptions of South Africa and its oldest city. Cape Town is an African city, and apartheid was in many ways an extension of the colonial form of rule.[9] Critical thinking about colonial pasts and genuinely postcolonial futures can be valuably rooted in the texts and imaginaries of twentieth-century Cape Town; and investigations of South African pasts and texts benefit from the full reinsertion of South African places into the histories and critical imaginaries of the continent.

Cape Town, South Africa's so-called Mother City, has long been associated not only with "the Queen," but also with male-bodied gender and sexual variation, of which "the moffie" remains the principal figure.[10] The word's first mention is found in a 1929 dictionary of seamen's slang.[11] Today "moffie" is a South African slang term that denotes a male homosexual; the word is particularly associated with male-bodied feminine gender performance and especially evokes Coloured Cape Town.[12] For this writer at least, the moniker "Mother City" rings queerly.

[8] See Mahmood Mamdani's *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*, which argues that the nation-state and the colonial state created one another, and that intrinsic to both is the formation of a national majority and its minorities. For Mamdani, postcolonial state violence will continue as long as the nation-state form remains. Frederick Cooper's *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) discusses how some mid-twentieth century colonial French African politician-intellectuals advocated for the creation of a confederated polity: an imagined future alternative both to empire and to a divided Africa composed of nation-states. Both works inform this essay's orientation towards political critiques that invite us to look beyond the nation-state.

[9] See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[10] Derogatory in many contexts, "moffie" is playful and affectionate in others, the latter especially when those contexts are populated by gay and gender diverse people. It is in the spirit of camp defiance, which I so associate with Heyns's "Moffie Manuscripts," that I use the word here. Regarding the connotations of "moffie," see also Shaun De Waal's "etymological note" devoted to the epithet, which prefaces *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994), the foundational South African gay and lesbian anthology. De Waal writes that "homosexuals and transvestites" have recently reappropriated "moffie," partly in an "ironic camp" mode and partly due to a reclamatory political impulse which, he asserts, is "analogous to the way in which homosexual activists in England America have taken over the word 'queer' (as in the pressure group Queer Nation)" (x).

[11] Shaun DeWaal, "An Etymological Note" in *Defiant Desire*, x and Jimmy Pieterse, "Dictionaries and Discourses of Deviance: Changing Lexical Representations of 'Moffie' and the Reorganisation of Sexual Categories among Afrikaans Speakers during the Second Half of the Twentieth Century," *South African Historical Journal* 65.4 (2013): 618–637.

[12] Apartheid legislation, and colonial racial taxonomies that predated apartheid, constructed "Coloured people" as the products of racial mixing, thereby casting the categories of "Native"/Black and "European"/White as pure and stable. "Coloured" remains a post-apartheid state racial category and part of the lay/popular national racial taxonomy. Today, people self-defining as Coloured make up the most numerous racial group in Cape Town (42%), according to the most recent available online census data (2011, see https://www.statssa.gov.za).

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Despite its parentage—"Mother City" was a coining of Cape Town's first marketing board, part of the early twentieth century, Union-era, invention of a new white supremacist, Afrikaner-and-English national identity[13]—despite those origins, "Mother City" summons queer queens and mothers: the Mother City Queer Project[14]; the Queen Mother and the Mother-Queen; Riva, Rive's fictional Queen of Table Mountain; and the queens of Cape Town's historical "moffie pageants."

A moment in the mid-twentieth century suggests the historically close relationship between Cape Town and queenliness. In early 1947, the Royal Family, including a young Princess Elizabeth, arrived in Cape Town. The Family was to tour Britain's Southern African possessions: present-day Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Eswatini, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It was the first time a reigning monarch had visited the continent, and it remains the only occasion that the British royal family has made a state visit in Africa. George VI was then "King of Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Dominions" and "Emperor of India." By the end of the same year, his title would be reduced: the tour took place in a politically precarious moment for both the major European empires—right on the cusp of many independences, at a time when Britain, like France, viewed the retention of its imperial territories as crucial to its continued global power.

The royal itinerary and its media coverage were carefully orchestrated to impress multiple audiences: the crew of the (newly created) BBC television accompanied the family on the ship and the family's packed program was filmed, photographed, and broadcast on radio and television. Moreover, in the new age of air travel, both the means of travel and the arrival city were chosen not for reasons of efficiency but because they symbolically resurrected the imperial links that were, still, to tie (British) Southern Africa to Britain. On February 17, the family debarked HMS *Vanguard* in Cape Town's harbor. (This already archaic arrival scene would be rehearsed almost fifty years later when Queen Elizabeth returned in 1995; she and Prince Philip flew into Cape Town's airport, only to arrive a second time in Cape Town's harbor on the *Britannia*, which had been docked, waiting for them, in nearby Simonstown.)

The Tour's "culminating moment"[15] occurred three days before the royal departure on April 24: the young Elizabeth's dedication as future queen. Delivered on the occasion of her twenty-first birthday, Princess Elizabeth's radio address to the British imperial family was broadcast from the garden of Cape Town's Government House. The event was also filmed[16]; Elizabeth wears a

[13] Vivian Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 174–176.

[14] The Mother City Queer Project (MCQP) is Cape Town's annual drag and costume party, founded in 1994 to celebrate South Africa's new constitution; its beginnings appear in fictional form in Ashraf Jamal's novel *Love Themes in the Wilderness* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1996).

[15] The speech is recurrently referenced as the tour's "culminating moment" or "climax"; see, for example, Sapire ("African Loyalism and Its Discontents," 225) and Edward Owens, *The Family Firm: Monarchy, Mass Media, and the British Public, 1932–53* (London: University of London Press, Institute of Historical Research), 287.

[16] Original footage of the tour, much of it in colour (including brief segments of the birthday speech), makes up a large part of the second episode ("Love and Duty") of the BBC television

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light-colored silk dress, her hair is swept back from her face, and her only jewelry is a string of pearls. Demure yet forceful, she begins by addressing "all the peoples of the British Commonwealth and Empire, wherever they live, whatever race they come from, and whatever language they speak."[17] The composure is regal and the wealth evident, albeit in a mode distant from the ornate era of Queen and Empress Victoria. The style befits a royal touring the colonies during a time of postwar austerity: Elizabeth is a modern monarch (to-be) heralding a renewed, modern, imperial order. In that order, Cape Town occupies a special rhetorical place:

> As I speak to you today from Cape Town I am six thousand miles from the country where I was born. But I am certainly not six thousand miles from home. [...] That is the great privilege belonging to our place in the world-wide commonwealth - that there are homes ready to welcome us in every continent of the earth.

The princess's Cape Town location occasions the assertion of British global unity and positions the monarchy as an institution that transcends specificities of time and place. Distinctions and distance are no obstacle to British imperial sovereignty and unity; the empire and the commonwealth compose a single family and a single home. The future queen goes on to evoke age-old bonds, even as she suggests the modernity of the monarchy and the worldwide polity it rules:

> There is a motto that has been borne by many of my ancestors—a noble motto, "I serve." Those words were an inspiration to many bygone heirs to the Throne when they made their knightly dedication as they came to manhood. I cannot do quite as they did.
>
> But through the inventions of science I can do what was not possible for any of them. I can make my solemn act of dedication with a whole Empire listening. I should like to make that dedication now. It is very simple.

Inventions of science—the radio, specifically—step in where the feminine gender, or perhaps ancestral custom, falls short. The assertion of an ancient-yet-contemporary monarchy precipitates Elizabeth's famous dedication as a future sovereign. Elizabeth's reign, although anchored in timeless tradition, is bound to modernity. She will be a monarch for the age of progress: "I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong." The speech concludes with an invitation to her listeners to join her: "God help me to make my vow and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it."

documentary, *The Royal House of Windsor* (2017); the black and white footage of the speech is part of the British Pathé archive (at the time of writing, it is also available on YouTube.)

[17] "Twenty First Birthday Speech," April 21, 1947, Cape Town. https://www.royal.uk/21st-birthday-speech-21-april-1947.

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Interestingly, in his biography of Queen Elizabeth, Robert Hardman reports that the broadcast speech was not actually given live in Cape Town; rather, it was recorded several days earlier at Victoria Falls, in present-day Zimbabwe.[18] If true, the insistent misrepresentation of the location of the speech—particularly given the important rhetorical position of Cape Town within the speech itself—emphasizes the symbolic significance of the connection between the Queen and Cape Town, the Empire and the Mother City. It is Cape Town that stands in for all the Empire and Commonwealth, Cape Town, the city that figures as the future queen's home-in-all-of-Empire.

From her Cape Town "home," Princess Elizabeth publicly committed herself to the shared imperial family. Five years later, she was visiting colonial Kenya, another member of that "family," when, upon her father's death, she succeeded him to the throne. The following year, in 1953, her coronation gown was embroidered with the symbol of each Commonwealth nation. This African-and-imperial geography—from the anticipation of rule in Cape Town to the ascendance to the throne in colonial Kenya—suggests that queenliness, in its twentieth-century imperial iteration, has been not only a British institution but also an African—and perhaps particularly Capetonian—one.

Richard Rive (1930–1989) was a Capetonian writer. He was also gay, although not publicly so, and classified as "Coloured" by the apartheid regime. Riva, Rive's literary invention, is an apt figure with which to begin this exploration of queer Capetonian queenliness because she is a (fictional) queer queen who bears a definite, if also oblique, relationship both to historical Cape Town and to the anti-apartheid critical impetus of the eponymous short story.[19] Riva declares herself the Queen of Table Mountain; the story repeatedly returns to Riva's (playful) pronouncement and to the narrator/protagonist's refusal to recognize her as any sort of queen. Why to make of this literary attention to (mock) queenliness?

First published in 1979, and set in 1950s Cape Town, "Riva" is framed as a recollection; an older Rive-like narrator, Paul, recounts his two brief encounters with Riva, which took place some twenty years prior. Paul's initial, chance, meeting with her occurs when he, then a young college student, hikes with friends—all "so-called coloured," like him[20]—up Cape Town's Table Mountain. There, they meet fellow hiker, Riva—white, Jewish, older, a masculine woman—who introduces herself as the Queen of Table Mountain, an epithet that she and Paul's companions will repeat, but which Paul will ostentatiously—albeit silently—reject: "This was absurd, I could not imagine anything less regal, more incongruous. Riva, queen?"[21] Despite his professed disdain for Riva and the brevity of their meeting on the mountain, three months later Paul goes in search of Riva and accepts her invitation to tea. The story ends before tea is served, with an inexplicably panicked Paul fleeing Riva's small flat. From their first exchange to his flight from her rooms, Paul is intensely ambivalent about Riva. He seeks

[18] See Robert Hardman, *Queen of the World: The Global Biography* (London: Arrow Books, 2019), 116–118.

[19] Richard Rive, "Riva," *Advance, Retreat* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983), 60–72.

[20] Rive, "Riva," 60.

[21] Rive, "Riva," 68.

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her out (and twenty years later puts his memories to paper and gives them her name), but he can only report that he finds her "ridiculous,"[22] as well as "incongruous" and "unattractive," her queenliness "absurd."[23]

While socially speaking, Paul's scorn and skepticism are correct (a working-class Jewish mountaineer, a queen, her dominion, a mountain?), Riva's queenliness is, in a broader sense, historically apt—and available to be read as (implicit) anti-apartheid critique. Early apartheid South Africa was a self-governing British dominion and a Commonwealth nation (1948–1961)[24]—legislatively independent yet ruled by the British monarch. Faux queenliness suits the time; in the 1950s—as in 1979, the year of the story's publication—one did not need to reach far for a reference to the English Queen or for the fictional possibility of a queen. In both eras, the nostalgic invocation of English queenliness was available to function as an anti-apartheid gesture: British Empire—not the Afrikaner, apartheid, regime that would withdraw the white-supremacist "Republic" of South Africa from the Commonwealth—appeared as relatively egalitarian and benign.

Riva's queenliness is also available to be read as queer: Riva is indeed a queen, if by queen we mean a person possessed of a dramatically crafted, performatively epicene, regal persona. She is verbally, if not sartorially, flamboyant. The exchanges between the Queen and the Professor, as Riva coins herself and Paul, are joint performances of linguistic and social artifice. Paul then, with his wry wit, arch tone, and fraught preoccupation with Riva, is equally a queen. In "Riva," queer queenliness—and a camp sensibility more often associated with Oscar Wilde or Susan Sontag's seminal text[25] than with a Capetonian writer—is a significant, if subterranean, critical, anti-apartheid, force. It joins two characters who are, in apartheid state-assigned race and gender, so distant from one another; it enacts similarity and proximity where the apartheid state—white supremacist, Christian, patriarchal, and heteronormative—saw and legislated only difference and the necessity of separation.

In their shared camp queenliness, Riva and Paul also stand in for the queer queens of Cape Town who never appeared explicitly in Rive's fictional iterations of the city.[26] Riva's queenliness, paired with Paul's own, summons, if obliquely, the gender-bending queen culture which was such a central part of the city that was the setting of the author's life and much of his literary production.[27] And,

[22] Rive, "Riva," 64.

[23] Rive, "Riva," 68.

[24] Apartheid began in 1948; the apartheid "Republic" of South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1961.

[25] See Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 2001 (1966), 275–292, New York, Picador.

[26] See Brenna Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and Shaun Viljoen, *Richard Rive: A Partial Biography* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013). Both authors make this point in their analyses of "Riva;" both also discuss Rive's oblique presence in the text.

[27] Cape Town—and certain Capetonian settings in particular (the dingy flat on Long Street, the streets of District Six, the aspirational Coloured home in Walmer Estate, the Parade, the bioscopes)—feature prominently in Rive's fiction.

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while Rive himself, with his carefully crafted anglophile Oxbridge persona and private penchant for "the boys," was the very antithesis of a "moffie queen" (*what could be more absurd?*), given the close resemblance of "Riva" to "Rive," and the biographical resemblance between the fictional young Paul and the youthful author, the camp queenliness that joins Riva and Paul also evokes their creator.[28]

At times, queens and anti-apartheid critique also slipped together into the mid- and late-twentieth-century popular press for Black readers. In July 1955, the front cover of the short-lived magazine *Africa!* enticed readers with the promise to reveal "the women of the Mau Mau," the peasant-led anti-colonial movement in what was then British Kenya. Surprisingly, considering the magazine's ownership and the context of publication, the cover story presents Mau Mau women —albeit with some vacillation—as impressively powerful. The ultimate evidence of Mau Mau women's political power in this text—which also functions as implicit proof of the legitimacy of the Mau Mau movement—is the 1953 coronation of the "Queen of Mau Mau." The event's timing reinforces the political implication; the coronation of the African queen coincides exactly with the coronation of the queen in England:

> On Coronation Day, just as Queen Elizabeth the Second was being crowned in England, this young Kikuyu girl was also crowned the Queen of Mau Mau," a coronet of banana leaves ceremoniously placed on her head. Nor was it in name only that she was a "queen." She was in effective charge of the Mau Mau parliament in her area, and was vested with every authority she needed.[29]

The simultaneity of the two coronations, in conjunction with the author's explanation that the Mau Mau Queen is vested "with every authority she needed," establishes parity between the two sovereigns and their respective polities, drawing Kenya and Britain into a relationship of equality. The "Queen of Mau Mau" appears as a counterpart to, rather than a mock or inferior version of, the English queen: she too is sovereign of a territory and heads a government possessed of a parliament and courts. Through reference to this African queen, we glimpse an anti-colonial impetus in a text and publication in which overt and unambiguous anti-colonial critique is rare.

Such oblique political critiques characterized other writings in *Africa* and its fellow Jim Bailey-owned publications as well, among them, Cape Town's *Golden City Post* and *Drum*—the longest-running English-language magazine in Africa, founded in 1951 (and today published only online). Employing Black writers and intended for Black readers, *Drum* and its sibling publications were broadly anti-communist, as was Bailey, son of mining magnate Abe Bailey. The publications largely reproduced patriarchal understandings of gender (each monthly issue of

[28] For a more extended analysis of "Riva," see the works by Munro and Viljoen referenced above, as well as Goldblatt, *Beyond Collective Memory*, 114–118. For an expanded discussion of queenliness, specifically, in "Riva," see Cullen Goldblatt, "Beyond the 'Memory' of Apartheid: Richard Rive and the Jewish Mock-Monarchs of Cape Town," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53.4 (2017): 454–468.

[29] "Women of the Mau Mau," *Africa!* (July 1955) 17: 13–15, 14.

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Drum famously sported a cover girl), and nationalist ideas of race and nationhood. News reports and regular columns, as well as advertisements, illustrations, and the Miss *Drum* beauty contests, participated in internationally legible discourses of Black identity and binary gender. Notable Black figures, from South African intellectuals, such as J. T. Jabavu, to Diasporic musicians, such as Miles Davis, received regular attention in biographical profiles, news reports, and interviews. Yet important exceptions to this anti-racist, nation-state nationalist, and capitalist political vision are found in the heterogenous mixture of writing that these periodicals contained: there was the overtly political beside the ostensibly apolitical, somber reportage alongside works of fiction, sports coverage, and the obviously low-brow. Whereas explicitly political texts tended to condemn racism (and communism) and to celebrate African and Diasporic cultural, sporting, and political figures and achievements, some writing—such as what I will call "moffie writing"—that purported to be informative or merely entertaining posed more complex, if also somewhat opaque, critiques.

Queens—"Moffie Queens" specifically—were a central preoccupation: Cape Town's flaming royalty was a staple of *Drum* and the *Golden City Post*. Moffie queen electoral campaigning and performing of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were widely covered, in image and text, and the exploits of particular local figures were avidly reported. Much space was devoted to the drama surrounding the moffie queen elections: the elegance of the campaign to-dos, the ostensibly fierce rivalries, and the energetically contested election results.

Such writing was not necessarily, as some scholars have asserted, voyeuristic, scornful, or objectifying. While some reportage was indeed denigrating, other pieces—those which I term "moffie writing"—positioned themselves as a part of the culture they purportedly only described. Moffie writing deployed irony, innuendo, melodrama, and hyperbole, and sometimes indulged in what Dhianaraj Chetty calls "the camp horror genre"—as when a "white Cape housewife" alleged that her husband has been kidnapped by the moffies.[30] Presumptively cis-male heterosexual writers partook of the publicly performed sensibilities of their aristocratic moffie subjects, thereby also obliquely critiquing heteropatriarchal apartheid society. Relayed self-dramatization also allowed reportage to stage explicit critiques of gender- and sexuality-based prejudice: for example, in one 1956 *Post* interview titled "Moffies cry 'shame' at critics," "Gina," declares: "I am completely shocked. I am aghast that they should condemn us. Just who do they think they are? Saint with a shotgun? [...] These people who condemn us are the thorn bushes in our path; they are the cruel wind ravaging our twilight world; they should be destroyed and not us."[31] Amidst a sensationalist, sometimes objectifying textual milieu, moffie writing stands out, in tone and politics.

This era's "moffie writing" constitutes its own, often critical, genre, I suggest. It is *moffie* writing not because of the identities of its (publicly cis-straight male) authors, nor because it is "about 'moffies,'" but because it partakes of the camp sensibilities of its subjects. The drama and humor of these texts—melodramatic,

[30] Dhianaraj R. Chetty, "A drag at Madame Costello's: Cape moffie life and the popular press in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Defiant Desire*, eds Gevisser and Cameron, 1994, 115–27, 119.

[31] "'Moffies' Cry Shame at Critics," *Golden City Post*, November 4, 1956, np.

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knowing, self-parodying—seem, on occasion, inseparable from that of their self-dramatizing protagonists. Furthermore, not only did *Drum* and *Post* writers at times collude with (and invent?) the attitudes and exploits of their subjects; the publications themselves were partially responsible for creating the fabulous moffie events that they covered: in the 1950s, and well into the 1960s, the *Post* organized the annual Moffie Queen competition in Athlone[32]; and *Drum* sponsored the private drag party which gives Chetty's essay its name—Madame Costello's Drag was then covered (with ample photographs) in both the magazine and the *Post.*[33] Rather than observing people and events from a remove, these publications, and presumably some of their writers, participated in the creation of the social world that they putatively merely documented.

The collaborative character of these public Moffie Queen performances suggests the complexity of the relationship between presumptively heterosexual writers (and the rags they wrote for), and their flagrantly nonheterosexual subject matter. Among these writers was Jackie Heyns: long-time *Drum* and *Golden City Post* writer-reporter, the Aunt Sammy behind the *Post*'s long-running "Aunt Sammy" column and, as we shall see, the self-appointed critic and publicist of the (entirely imaginary) *Moffie Manuscripts.*

"It's Moffie election time in the Cape," Heyns announces in the *Post*, in early 1970:

> Once again this phenomena, unique to Cape Town, is gathering momentum for a fantastic series of public appearances and variety concerts to end in the election to choose the Cape Moffie Queen of 1970.
>
> The last election was held in 1968 when nearly 50 sex non-conformists stepped forward to claim the bizarre crown. It was won by the exotic, sari-shrouded "Farah Dibah."[34]

The description is striking, in part because the tone, despite the extravagant gathering of adjectives, is difficult to identify. Are the preelection goings-on fantastic in the sense of impressive? And is "exotic, sari-shrouded" an accurate transmission of Farah's self-styling? Or are the "sex non-conformists" fantastic in the sense of bizarre, and the characterization of Farah, the author's exoticizing imposition? How, readers might wonder, is Heyns asking us to view the Moffie Queen contestants?

The final sentence suggests an answer: "[Moffie Queen elections] are carried through with a crash programme of champagne parties and election manoeuvres that are the envy of the local political world." By implying that the politicians of apartheid South Africa have reason to be jealous of both the elegance and the strategy of their aristocratic moffie counterparts, this concluding sentence valorizes the fantastic world of moffie queen campaigns, and dismisses

[32] Chetty, "A Drag," 119.
[33] Chetty, "A Drag," 120.
[34] Jackie Heyns, "It's Moffie Election Time in the Cape," *Golden City Post*, March 22, 1970, np.

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apartheid's drab technicians on what seem to be both aesthetic and substantive grounds.

Anti-apartheid critique has arrived obliquely, in the guise of light-hearted, entertaining, local news. While poor style appears to be the principal sin of South Africa's politicians—whether they be of the ruling National party or of the nominal legal (white) opposition—we are to understand that a dearth of fabulousness in South African national politics in fact signals a less visible, but more fundamental, flaw. This notion takes a more pointed form in the caption to the adjacent photograph:

> Moffies Patti, Farah Diba and Kewpie Doll have a glass of champagne after the last hectic election campaign. They say the General Elections in the country on April 22 will have nothing on the moffie election campaign. Like the General Election there is a power struggle. But unlike in the national election campaigns, there are no "verkramptes."[35]

The General Elections of 1970 were the first South African national elections in which no Black people had any political representation, and the 1970s were the heyday of forced removal for people classified as "Coloured" and "Indian" in Cape Town; many neighborhoods, most famously District Six, were declared white in the 1960s and, through the 1970s and beyond, their occupants forcibly removed to segregated peripheral townships.

The final statement is therefore ridiculously redundant and touching at once, as it goes without saying that there are few "verkramptes"—particularly rigid, far right, proponents of apartheid—among the campaigning queens of color. The two elections cannot be compared—yet Heyns makes the comparison, suggesting the importance of the moffie queens and the absurdity of the apartheid republic's façade of democracy.

A review for a multiauthored work of historical scholarship that did not exist, Heyns's "Moffie Manuscripts" critiques apartheid and its historical narratives. For contemporary readers, the piece still poses a pleasurable challenge to accounts of Capetonian (and South African, and African) past and present:

> The Moffie Manuscripts are about to be published. The remarkable findings of this new historical research group have been completed and negotiations are under way for printing and distribution.
>
> The research, carried out by leading members of the Cape's twilight world of undecided sex, is certain to raise the eyebrows of the local academics who may find the contents an extremely unusual account of the early Cape.
>
> Privileged people who have seen the papers say that it will have instant appeal to a public seeking the extraordinary in literature. "It is certainly queer," they said.

[35] Heyns, "It's Moffie Election Time in the Cape," *Post*, March 22, 1970, np.

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> The spokesman for the co-authors of the work—there are eleven—is petite Carmen ("no real surnames, please.") who says the group does not expect a literary prize nor do they envisage a bestseller. "But we are convinced that this research is long overdue and that our findings will fill background gaps in the history of the Cape."
>
> Carmen, a studious transvestite who suffers no delusions about his group's non-conformist image in society, says the work was prompted by the longstanding difference of opinion as to how and who pioneered the gay scene on the shores of Table Bay.
>
> It was no easy task, says Carmen. We spent weeks in the city libraries and the archives taking volumes of notes, dates and data. You will understand that this was our first venture into history research and although it was tiresome at times we treated the effort like a love affair, anticipating the inevitable satisfaction in the end.[36]

From the faux-somber inception through the series of playful references to gender and sexual non-conformity (twilight world of undecided sex, gay scene on the shores of Table Bay, extremely unusual, extraordinary, queer), Heyns displays the camp sensibility so associated with his (moffie) subjects: euphemism, hyperbole, and, finally, in relaying Carmen's words, sexual innuendo. Heyns not only positions himself beside the Cape's moffies via sensibility and verbal dexterity, but he also becomes, by way of imaginative implication, a variety of moffie author himself, one more among the *Manuscripts*' many (imaginary) coauthors. After all, in relaying the findings of (faux) moffie historical research, as he will go on to do, Heyns is himself writing that (fictional) history; it is Heyns who embodies and ventriloquizes all eleven moffie authors.

Curious readers are invited into the debates dividing this twilight world's denizens. (Who else, after all, would harbor a "longstanding difference of opinion as to how and who pioneered" the southernmost cradle of queerdom?) What is more, we are obliquely promised, via Carmen's relayed words, the same pleasure that awaits diligent researchers and patient lovers. And, contrary to Carmen's modest disclaimers, the *Moffie Manuscripts*—as Heyns relays their contents—appears thoroughly researched, compellingly written, as well as packed with innuendo.

Although the (fictional) research team began by investigating life in the Company's fort during Van Riebeeck's tenure, it did not take long for the researchers to turn to an earlier historical moment and cast of characters: to the return of Khore, a "Hottentot leader," whom the British East India Company had kidnapped and taken to England.[37] Having observed local customs, Khore

[36] Heyns, "Moffie Manuscripts," 46.

[37] "Khore" has also been spelled "Coree," "Core," and "Xhore." J.A. Cope's work of popular history, *The King of the Hottentots* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1967), still the only book-length work devoted to this historical figure, may have been a source for Heyns. See also Shula Marks, "A KhoiSan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *The Journal of African History* 13.1 (1972): 55–80.

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returns home with information about European gentility which was quickly assimilated: "[His listeners] were mesmerised by his tales of the lah-de-dah to assume such character and thus establish the Hottie moffie fraternity in the Cape."[38] Khore's compatriots, especially the newly formed "Hottie moffies," began trading with, and entertaining, the Company's soldiers, and the Hottie moffies' signature trait—a marked penchant for aristocratic titles and dress—rapidly developed. A local penchant for sartorial elegance and prominent names, developed through a series of historical encounters—the final one, with English nobility, play the key, culminating, role—leading to the full establishment of Cape moffiedom. Yet only with the advent of titles and royal drag would the moffie be "near-complete."[39]

> The Cape's trail of moffie infamy was widened with the arrival of the French fleet under Commodore Pierre Andre de Suffren on April 16, 1781. Their continental charm and Parisian courtesy introduced quality to the already gay Table Bay, and the growing fraternity were grateful. They learned all the tricks of the trade under the tricolor flag and for many years after the French departure their habit of scent-soaked underwear remained a status symbol that was worn with pride by the pansies of Papandorp. Further impetus was given to the moffie movement with the advent of British rule. The English nobility really nailed the moffies of the early Cape to the boards of fame.[40]

Suggestive suggestions—(homo)sexual, political, relentlessly playful—jostle against one another. Word plays and pleasurable sound patterns multiply: the already gay Table Bay; the double-entendre of trade, bolstered by alliteration —"tricks of the trade under the tricolor flag"; *Papandorp* is home to *pansies* who wear scent-soaked underwear with *pride.* And there is—even at this early date!—a "moffie movement." Like moffie movements, moffie queens, Heyns takes pains to emphasize, are made, not born. His playful and absurd account of origins suggests the absurdity of naturalizing accounts of collective identities and origins.

Heyns's fictive review of a nonexistent manuscript is not only a celebration of the Mother City's "twilight world of undecided sex," it is also a work of revisionist South African history—albeit a parodic one, grounded firmly in hearsay and fantasy, that situates aristocratically inclined "Hottie" moffies at the very dawn of the interactions that would lead to the establishment of Cape Town. Yet Heyns does not simply make Hottie moffies crucial to the historical world he invents, he also gives them historiographical significance; their queer penchant for royal outfits suggests (at the least sartorial) continuities with the imperial regime that preceded and overlapped with apartheid. Like the tracing of the inception of Cape Moffiedom to Khore's return—rather than to Jan van Riebeeck's arrival, which was the conventional (colonial and apartheid) starting point of local and

[38] Heyns, "Moffie Manuscripts," 46.
[39] Heyns, "Moffie Manuscripts," 47.
[40] Heyns, "Moffie Manuscripts," 46–47.

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national history—the seemingly whimsical attention to moffie queenliness is also a historiographical intervention.

Moreover, Heyns's text intervenes in its (and our own) present, by centrally positioning "Hottie moffies" in the time and place of its publication. In matter-of-factly referencing a longstanding difference of opinion regarding the origins of local moffie society, Heyns presents Cape moffie life as a historical and contemporary social fact that readers should take for granted. The queer world is not, or not only, situated on the titillating twilight outskirts: it is the central starting point of a research project, and a place of intense historical debate, as well as of carnal pleasures. In this way, Heyns's "Moffie Manuscripts" evokes a contemporary world that, in the Cape Town of 1977, assuredly did not (yet) exist—one where a multivolume work on local moffie history, authored by no fewer than eleven committed Cape non-conformists, would come to fruition, and find a publisher, a distributor, and a review in the pages of *Drum.*

Nor does that world exist in 2024. Moreover, it is impossible to imagine something akin to Heyns's text appearing today in the South African popular press. Thus, "The Moffie Manuscripts," in the context of this essay, pushes up against still-commonplace notions about apartheid and its post: against the idea that the present is a time of freedom, that the freeing of the nation has meant an —albeit perhaps slow and partial—freeing of the queers, and that we in the present have little to learn from oppositional political imaginaries that never took form in national movements.

National (and proto-national) resistance remains central to many popular and scholarly discourses about African pasts, including queer South African pasts; resistant lives, movements, and creative production are recovered, examined, and sometimes celebrated. Political and cultural projects that did not advocate for nation-state independence have received comparatively attention.[41] (Camp commentary, like historical royalism—however strategic or codedly critical—is often passed over.)

Given this, it would be easy to think that other apartheid-era critical political imaginaries had not existed at all. The still-small body of scholarship on Cape Town's lavender history draws on mid-century print media representations of gender and sexual diversity, yet insists on the limitations of those representations as sources of authentic knowledge about Cape Town's historical gay community. The moffie writing of *Drum* and the *Post* do not, it seems, show queer life as it truly was, in the voices of its (resistant) participants and, for that reason, are, for some scholars, less than ideal additions to a gay Capetonian

[41] Although mentions of mid- and late twentieth century royalism are ubiquitous in oral histories and in conversation with elderly Capetonians, they are rare in the historical scholarship on this period, which tends to focus on collective anti-apartheid resistance or on other areas of social history that are often cast as sites of resistance or proto-resistance, such as working-class social life, identity, and leisure culture. The sole scholarly mention of mid-twentieth century Capetonian royalism—in the form of nostalgia for the Union-era days of relative freedom that I have located—cites a work of fiction, Richard Rive's 1986 novel, *"Buckingham Palace," District Six* (Vivian Bickford-Smith, "Writing About English-ness: South Africa's Forgotten Nationalism," in *Empire and After: Englishness in Post-colonial Perspective*, eds Graham McPhee and Prem Poddar, (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 62–3).

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historical archive. In his pioneering essay on Cape Town's New Year's carnival, Shamil Jeppie writes, "In available documentary for the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties the voices of the 'moffies' are never heard; they are always spoken about (derisively), represented, judged, but never allowed the privilege of discourse."[42] Chetty, in his previously cited essay, "A Drag at Madame Costello's," frames the archival presence of moffie queens as an inadvertent and ironic outcome of tabloid-like papers seeking only to present the scandalously salacious to a homophobic readership.[43] He describes the *Drum* and *Post* coverage as universally prejudiced, if also varied in tone—"writing registers a range of attitudes-from poorly concealed voyeurism and vitriol to paternalistic empathy"—and explains that "the freakishness of homosexuality was set against an image of what men and women really should be."[44] (Indeed, *Drum* and its sibling publications exhibit a deep investment in normative Euro-American understanding of gender and sexuality; Lindsay Clowes's work[45] is especially interesting in this regard.)

This essay has, however, taken a different approach to this archival presence, viewing its texts as necessarily mediated and crafted—and as at times enacting implicit or oblique political critique—rather than seeing them as offering us inauthentic representations, or flawed or incomplete historical evidence. Some texts, those that I have considered "moffie writing," we might understand to constitute important artifacts of (queenly) queer political sensibility and critique.

Moffie writing invites us to contemplate the possibility that queer lives, and camp royalist critique, might have thrived under apartheid. In constituting, for readers today, an artifact of apartheid, moffie writing provides a stimulating counterpoint to our neglect of the complexity of life under apartheid and colonial rule, and to the continued emphasis on the spectacular, rather than on the everyday, legal, and structural character of apartheid and colonial violence.[46] Apartheid, like colonial rule, was neither (only) a temporally bounded regime nor (always) spectacular in its violence. Heterogeneous, unequal, South Africans lived varied lives—and articulated a multiplicity of, sometimes, oblique—political critiques within a violent structure.

[42] Shamil Jeppie, "Popular Culture and Carnival in Cape Town: The 1940s and 1950s" in *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, eds Shamil Jeppie and Crain Soudien, 67–87 (Cape Town: Buchu Books 1990), 80.

[43] Chetty, "A Drag," 116.

[44] Chetty, "A Drag," 118.

[45] See Lindsay Clowes, "'Are You Going to be MISS (or MR) Africa? Contesting Masculinity in *Drum* Magazine 1951–1953," *Gender & History* 13.1(2001): 1–20 and "Masculinity, Matrimony, and Generation: Reconfiguring Patriarchy in *Drum* 1951–1983," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34.1 (2008): 179–192.

[46] Njabulo Ndebele's much-referenced essay, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa," (*Journal of Southern African Studies* 12.2 (1986): 143–57) inaugurated a preoccupation among South African literary scholars with "the ordinary" and with the challenge of theorizing and representing the everyday, unspectacular, elements of life under apartheid. In a similar vein, this essay draws attention to the often-overlooked complexity of apartheid-era (camp) political critique and representations of queer social experience.

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What might a new historical narrative of apartheid-era political critique be? In its evocation of alternative pre-apartheid pasts, Heyns's "Moffie Manuscripts" offers one model of what such a (Capetonian, South African, African) history might do: propose an alternative origin moment, while poking fun at the notion of ahistorical identities and collective origin stories; insist on the historical importance of Coloured queer ("Hottie Moffie") experience and on the continuities between ostensibly discreet political regimes; ventriloquize, relay, fib flagrantly and relish in the tongue-in-cheek and in the spaces between author, subject, and readers.

If we attend to the presence of evoked and imagined queens, historical British royals and the "Hottie Moffie" aristocracy in Cape Town, the present appears less national, and more imperial than it habitually does, and the current world of nation-states does not seem to be the inevitable telos of history. After all, the British royal family visited Cape Town in 1947 because they recognized competing possible political futures; among them, the complete independence of their territories, full retention of those territories, or some intermediary form of hierarchical association, such as the "commonwealth of nations."

This history usefully reminds us that there are, today, political possibilities beyond the nation-state, just as there are multiple ways of articulating political critique and of narrating the past. I suggest it is fruitful to recall empire and monarchy because such recollection can denaturalize the present of nation-states and prompt us to investigate historical, non-nation-state-oriented, forms of political critique—not because empire and monarchy should be emulated or resuscitated, far from it. By looking back at historical failures and at works of what may at first seem to be anachronistic or irrelevant imagination, we can resist the temptation to see the present as the telos of the past, to see the nation-state as the best or only political form in which to live, and to tell histories in which proto/national resistance figures as the primary protagonist. Attention to non-nation-state nationalist political critiques, and perhaps especially to faux historical recoveries of queer aristocracy, can help us to denaturalize nation-state nationalism, and to explore other ways—ways other than the nation-state, with its constituent majority and minorities—that African people have created political community and articulated political critique.[47]

The enduring presence of the Queen and queens in Cape Town—like the Hottie Moffie history that Heyns invents—might serve as an antidote to nation-state nationalism and to historical narratives that naturalize the contemporary order, and position it as in all ways better and freer than a uniformly oppressive past.[48] Rather than make the present appear inevitable and the past self-evident, Cape Town's queer royals offer us a window onto the complexity—political and intellectual, raced, gendered, and sexed—of the colonial and apartheid past. These

[47] As I suggest in the introduction, my understanding of the limits of the postcolonial state form and of nation-state nationalism owes much to the analyses of Frederick Cooper and Mahmood Mamdani, in particular to, respectively, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation* (2014) and *Neither Settler nor Native* (2020).

[48] In the introduction to *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009), Jacob Dlamini offers a concise critique of post-apartheid South African triumphalist nationalist narratives.

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glimpses of mid- and late-twentieth-century Cape Town do not, as is commonplace, produce the apartheid-era city as an exceptional place in an exceptional country bound to an exceptional political regime. Cape Town appears as African, imperial, and queer; life under apartheid is characterized not only by spectacular violence and collective resistance, but also by difficult-to-classify critiques and pleasures.

Competing interest. None.

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